

A Probe into the Poetry Translation Ideas of Wang Baotong

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ABSTRACT

As a renowned scholar of English poetry and an expert in poetry translation in China, Wang Baotong puts forward a series of valuable academic ideas in poetry translation. His main ideas include: translating poetry with poetry, to translate the artistic conception and poetic flavor of the original poem, and to translate the musical beauty of the poem; trying to use the most widely accepted traditional poetic styles and rhythm forms in English, and making their overall aesthetic value as close as possible to the original work; focusing on the most expressive commonly used words when translating literary works; taking the path of nationalization in the translation of poetry; translating ancient Chinese mythology in ballad metre, etc. His ideas on poetry translation are highly enlightening and practical.

KEYWORDS

research; poetry translation; ideas; Wang Baotong

1 Introduction

Mr. Wang Baotong is a renowned scholar of English poetry and an expert in poetry translation in China. He has been compiled into the 17th edition of *"The Genealogy of Achievers"* by Cambridge International Biography Centre, UK. His works include *Round the Realms of Gold—A Poetry Textbook*, *Sound O'er the Realms of Gold—How Poetry Rings*, *Out the Realms of Gold—How Poetry Lasts*, *100 Wang Wei's Poems in English Verse*, *The Triword Primer & The Kiloword (in English)*, *Ten Chinese Myths on the Making of the World (in English)*, *On the Rhythm and Translation of English and Chinese Poetry*, *Take the Path of Nationalization in the Translation of Poetry*, *Translating Ancient Chinese Mythology in Ballad Metre*, etc. Concerning poetry translation, he has put forward some very creative ideas. To conduct a comprehensive study on Mr. Wang Baotong's ideas of poetry translation is a meaningful topic.

2 Poetry Translation Ideas of Mr. Wang Baotong

Mr. Wang Baotong points out in the preface of *100 Wang Wei's Poems in English Verse*: "In poetry translation, I advocate translating poetry with poetry, to translate the artistic conception and poetic flavor of the original poem, and to translate the musical beauty of the poem. If the original poem has a clear rhythm, the translated poem should also have a clear rhythm; if the original poem has rich rhyme and sound, the translated poem should also have rich rhyme and sound" (Wang, 2005, p.2). Mr. Wang Baotong writes in his paper "On the Rhythm and Translation of English and Chinese Poetry" that "Chinese poetry has a strong musicality, which is mainly manifested in the four tone changes, rhythm, and rhyme usage. English poetry also has a strong musicality, which is mainly manifested in rhythm and rhyme usage (Wang, 1993, pp. 33-38). According to Wang Baotong,

musical quality makes one of the characteristics of poetry. There are two broad ways by which the poet achieves musical quality: by the choice and arrangement of songs and by the arrangement of accents. In terms of rhyme together with the words used for translation, Professor Wang Baotong points out in his paper "Reflections on the English Translation of *Standards for Being a Good Kid*" that "when translating Chinese poetry into English poetry, one should try to use the most widely accepted traditional poetic styles and rhythm forms in English, and make their overall aesthetic value as close as possible to the original work... Chinese poetry has more rhymes and are easy to rhyme, while English poetry has fewer rhymes and are difficult to rhyme. The rhythm of English poetry is colorful, while the rhythm of Chinese poetry is relatively fixed. The obvious aesthetic characteristics of Chinese and Western poetry can complement each other in translation, so that the overall aesthetic value of the original poem is generally not reduced... When we read English and American literary works, we often feel that the words used by the writers seem to be easily picked up, yet they can create timeless masterpieces; They didn't use many unfamiliar and obscure words. In that case, when translating literary works, we should also focus on the most expressive commonly used words." (Wang, 2010, pp.8-10)

Mr. Wang Baotong (1998) points out that rhyme has the following five kinds of functions: Rhyme links separate lines into larger metrical units; Rhyme emphasizes the concluding cadence of the line: it increases our consciousness of the line-ending, thereby reinforces the metrical pattern; If there is a regular pattern of rhymes in a poem, this may give us a sense of order being imposed on experience: meter and formal rhyme-schemes are a means of exercising control of the feelings, subjecting emotion to the discipline of form; Rhyme gives pleasure by the correspondence of similar sounds; Rhyme adds to the musical quality of poetry as a whole. According to R. M. Alden, poetry is the art of representing human experience, in so far as they are of lasting or universal interest, in metrical language, usually with chief reference to the emotions and by means of imagination. Based on this definition, Wang Baotong (1993) adds new ideas about the definition of poetry, making the definition of poetry more comprehensive. In his eyes, poetry is not the only art of representing human experience, yet poetry distinguishes itself in its representation being a most concentrated one, and in its greatest possible capacity of words used; Though all English poetry is in verse, not all verse is poetry. It is nearly possible to put any writing in verse, but the glorious name of "poetry" is given only to verses recognizable as artistic creation with imaginative quality; Emotion and imagination do not serve poetry alone. But there is a greater demand for them in poetry. They are its characteristic features. Besides, the way emotion is expressed in poetry is often more direct than in prose. Even so, we should also mind a phenomenon: there is a certain type of verse in which reason overshadows emotion and imagination, while no other requisite for poetry is missing.

Wang Baotong (2000) proposes four guidelines for poetry translation: Translate poetry, impart its taste; Translate poetry, convey its "three beauties—beauty in sense, beauty in sound and beauty in form; Poetry translation is a recreation of the original work of art. The translator should be careful in reading between the lines, then represent them in the way the poet has done in the original; Freedom for translators is limited. He can wield his freedom only within the limit of the original poem. Wang Baotong concludes that the ultimate aim of poetry is to recreate the beauty or charm of the original poem, or to make this beauty or charm shine in its full in another language.

Wang Baotong (1996) points out that the path of nationalization should be taken in the translation of poetry. Firstly, the nationalization of translated poetry has two meanings: translators should strive to be faithful to the content and style of the original poem, so that the translated work has an exotic and unique temperament, that is, the translated content should be westernized or exotic; Using the poetic language and form of the target language to make the translated work accepted and loved by the general public. Secondly, translating poetry should start with appreciating poetry, not only appreciating the content and style of the original poem, but also

appreciating the aesthetic value of the original poem in terms of language, rhyme, rhythm, style, etc., and generating a strong desire to express it in another language. It has been proven that translating poetry from one language into another may not necessarily result in poetry as well; Only by mastering the characteristics of poetry in both the starting language and the target language can poetry be introduced from one ethnic group to another through translation. Thirdly, the translation of English poetry into Chinese should focus on nationalization, and the translation of Chinese poetry into English should also emphasize nationalization, that is to say, the translated works should be Chinese poetry that is loved by the Chinese people; When translating Chinese poetry into English, the translated works should be English poetry that is loved by the English speaking people. Fourthly, the beauty of Chinese poetry lies mainly in its sound and rhyme, while the beauty of English poetry lies mainly in its rhythm. To translate English poetry into Chinese poetry, the beauty of rhythm in English poetry should be replaced by the beauty of sound and rhyme in Chinese poetry; To translate Chinese poetry into English, we need to replace the beauty of sound and rhyme with the beauty of rhythm in English poetry.

3 Poetry Translation Practice of Mr. Wang Baotong

In translating Wang Wei's Chinese poetry into English, Wang Baotong adopts the best suitable sound patterns. In his translation practice, rhyme schemes "can be kept, modified, or completely rearranged into traditional English patterns to suit the translator's needs".

Let's first take his translation of Wang Wei's poem "*On Double Ninth Day Thinking of My Brothers at Home*" as an example:

A lonely stranger in a strange land I'm cast,
Sore sick for my dears on every festive day.
By now my brothers must some heights have passed,
But a cornel wearer missing'll damp the play. (Wang, 2005, p.180)

The original poem consists of four lines and seven characters. It rhymes in lines 2 and 4. The translated poem not only rhymes in lines 2 and 4, but also in lines 1 and 3, which is more in line with the taste of English speaking readers. It takes into account both domestication and foreignization, replacing the phonological beauty of Chinese poetry with the rhythmic beauty of English poetry.

Wang Baotong's translation of Wang Wei's poem "*Farewell*" is as follows:

Dismounting, I asked you to have a draught,
"And where to, my friend?" I inquired.
"My hopes are shattered," you bitterly laughed,
"To the southern hills. I'm retired."
"Then go ahead, say no more, my dear.
The fleecy clouds have endless cheer." (Wang, 2005, p.35)

The original poem consists of six lines and five characters, with a relatively free rhyme structure (abbbcb) and a more obvious oral style. The translation uses the flexible common measure, followed by a tetrameter coupling and dialogue to add rhyme. Thus, we can say that the translated poem not only preserves the style of the original poem to the greatest extent possible, but also makes some modifications to make the rhyme of the translated text more suitable to the needs of the native English readers.

In his translation of another poem of Wang Wei's titled "*Written on the Qi River*", we can also see his exact use of rhyme:

And here, on the river, is where I hide,
With a plain to the east that opens wide.

When behind the mulberries sets the sun,
 The glow will on house and water run.
 Herdboys to the village go,
 And hunters, with their hounds in tow.
 But what am I to do? All right
 I'll close my gate before it's night. (Wang, 2005, p.87)

The original poem consists of eight lines and five characters, with a rhyme scheme of *a b c b d b e b*, which is suitable to the reading habit of the Chinese readers. In the translated poem, the rhyme scheme has been turned into *terameter couplet*, a traditional English pattern, to suit the reading habit of the native English readers. This arrangement conforms to the poetic cultural tradition of English speaking countries. The translator is striving to practice his own proposition of translating poetry into poetry. The translated poem not only has a catchy rhythm, but also presents the characteristics of the original poem, where where poetry and picture intertwine and blend together.

"*Viewing the Hanjiang River*" is also such kind of poem. The original poem also consists of eight lines and five characters, with a rhyme scheme of *a b c b d b e b*, which is in line with the poetic cultural tradition of Chinese nation. The rhyme scheme of the translated poem is also rearranged into *terameter couplet*:

And thus it joins the frontiers of Chu with Xiang,
 And all nine branches through the great Chang Jiang.
 The torrents seem beyond the world to flow,
 The distant hills more fade away than show.
 The neighbouring cities all on billows ride,
 The massive waves are surging far and wide.
 What lovely weather here in Xiangyang! Well,
 Let's stay and find a park and drink like hell! (Wang, 2005, p.105)

Though the translated poem is modified in rhyme scheme, yet the translator strives to preserve the style and artistic conception of the original poem, taking domestication and foreignization into consideration to achieve the best translation effect.

From the translated poem "*A Farewell Song*", we can feel the
 A morning rain has kept the town's roads clean.
 The inn's bright blue 'mong willows' freshly-washed green.
 And here, dear friend, dry up this other cup!
 Why, west of Sun-pass none will cheer you up. (Wang, 2005, p.187)

The original poem consists of four lines and seven characters, with a rhyme scheme of *a b c a*. In translation, the translator makes some modifications, using iambic pentameter and turning the rhyme scheme into *a a b b* to suit the reading habit of English native speakers. Through the rhythm and cadence of the translated poem, one can feel its musicality. This translated poem not only conveys the meaning of the original poem, but also is catchy.

In his treatise "*Translating Ancient Chinese Mythology in Ballad Metre*", Wang Baotong proposes that the ballad can be a form in translating Chinese poetry into English. His attempts include: employing the quatrain as the principal stanzaic form but allowing some flexibility in metre and rhyme; natural speech flow; enhancement of dramatic effects through colloquialism and terse but figurative language loaded with emotion; necessary omission of unnecessary details; modeling on well-known pieces of English poetry in such measures as poetical inversion, archaism, dialects, repetition, internal rhyme, parallelism and borrowing of words or ready-made words or phrases. (Wang, 1996, pp.47-53)

When translating the creation myth poem *Gumia*, the translator creatively chooses the Ballad meter. Based on its popular and concise four-line verse style, the translator successfully conveys its

inherent flavor using the most expressive common words:

"The rhino's hide, so smooth and wide,
Was spread above for a Sky;
Its glossy horns were painted and 'dornedn
With colourful Clouds on high.
The rhino's eyes, both clear and bright,
Were turned to Stars- blinking;
Then, quick as thought, the stars were wrought
Into countless others winking! "
"The rhino's hair, so thick and fair,
Became the fragrant Plants
And various Woods that vigorous stood
On hills and mountain slants."
"Now what's to be done if Sky should fall
Or Earth o'erturn -- in case?
Gumia and his sons they thought and thought
For one and twenty days."

In this translated poem, we can see not only the common metre in English poetry but also such traditional expressive methods in ballad as internal rhyme, repetition, etc. The skillful comprehensive use of poetic rhyme schemes makes this translated poem both in line with the reading habits of English speaking readers and retains the national characteristics of the original poem, making it quite charming.

Mr. Wang Baotong points out: "Poetry translation is to translate poetry into poetry, and translating Chinese poetry into English is to translate Chinese poetry into English poetry. Since poetry is translated into poetry, it is necessary to repeatedly ponder the quality of poetry, including striving to showcase the rhythmic beauty of English poetry." (Wang, 2005, 205) It shows that it is necessary to take the path of nationalization in the translation of poetry and this is one of the main proposals of Mr. Wang Baotong in poetry translation.

In the translation of the above poems, he tries to focus on the most expressive words which are most commonly used. His translation of Wang Wei's poems is a kind of recreation by using the most expressive rhymes and words familiar to the native English speakers.

4 Conclusion

Through a series of works and treatises, Wang Baotong puts forward a series of proposals in poetry translation: translating poetry with poetry, to translate the artistic conception and poetic flavor of the original poem, and to translate the musical beauty of the poem; making use of the most widely accepted traditional poetic styles and rhythm forms in English, and make their overall aesthetic value as close as possible to the original work; focusing on the most expressive commonly used words when translating literary works; taking the path of nationalization in the translation of poetry; translating ancient Chinese mythology in ballad metre, etc. These creative ideas and his effective practices in poetry translation are highly forward-looking, enlightening and practical.

In the process of translating Chinese poems into English, Wang Baotong practices his translation philosophy.

His English translation is elegant, rhythmic, and poetic, not only accurately conveying the meaning of the original poem, but also fully preserving its rhythm and artistic conception. When readers read the English translation, they will be able to deeply feel the beauty of poetic art.

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