

On the Translation of the Image in the Classical Chinese Poetry Based on the Reception Theory

Sai Ma^{1,a,*}

¹School of Foreign Languages, Dalian Neusoft University of Information, Da Lian, Liao Ning, China

^amasai@neusoft.edu.cn

*correspondence author

Keywords: *Reception Theory, Classical Chinese Poetry, poetic image, imagery translation*

Abstract: This article tries to discuss the translation methods of the imagery in the Classical Chinese Poetry based on the Reception Theory, including three parts, the introduction, the main body and the conclusion. Based on the theory, the meaning of a translated text must be concretized in the process of the target reader's reading which eventually brings the finalization of the text. With the aim of overcoming the linguistic and cultural disparities between two languages while translating, the article analyzes the translation process from the first reception of the translator and the second reception of the target readers, during which the translator receives the original text, makes response and then tries to communicate with the target readers by the translated works. In this process, translator should deal with differences in language and culture flexibly according to the specific context. Therefore, the article makes a comprehensive and contrastive analysis of different versions of imagery translation, and puts forward flexible translation methods, including preserving, substituting, omitting and supplementing the original images in the source language based on different imagery categories in order to satisfy the need of the translator and the target readers, thus bringing enlightenment to the imagery translation and achieving cross-cultural intercourse among different countries.

1. Introduction

As one of the literary criticism theories, the Reception Theory is a judgment from the perspective of the recipients and the core is that readers' reading activities and reception play critical roles in the meaning and value of literary work. Some basic ideas of the theory provide the theoretical basis for establishment of the new translation criteria. Firstly, the translator is also a reader, whose role will not be ignored in translation. Then, the translator should pay attention to the pre-understanding and reconstructing his or her horizons of expectation with the original literary works. Thirdly, English reader's reception should be the focus during the whole translation process.^[1] Therefore, the primary concern of this article is to introduce some of the ideas of the Reception Theory into translation study, especially to the image translation in the Classical Chinese Poetry, in the hope of looking at translation from a different angle, namely, the receptor-oriented perspective. Based on this theory, the article will develop specific methods on how to translate the poetic images in order to achieve the best reception of the target readers and realize cross-cultural communication.

2. The Main Body of This Paper

2.1. About the Reception Theory

The Reception Theory, or Reception Aesthetics, is a literary aesthetics and criticism theory originated in the 60th of the 20th century. In the beginning of the 1970's, the Reception Theory was developed rapidly, and was widely accepted. At the Constance University in German, the founders and best-known representative figures are Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. Reception Theory has cast light on the way we look at translation, namely the focus of translation study on the translated text should to some extent be diverted to readers' reception.^[1] According to Reception Theory, every

literary work does not have determined meaning. The meaning of a literary work is a dynamic production that is produced in the progress of the reader's reading. Different readers will have different explanations towards the same literary work, however there is still stability and certainty based on the writer's explanations concealed within the text. The translator is a reader at first, who has to do one more thing that is to use another language to explain the language of the literary work. Between these two languages, there must be a kind power to reflect the contradiction and the distance. When the translator goes into the literary work with his or her past horizons, he or she needs to analyze, judge and summarize until to reconstruct his or her past horizons of expectation. Therefore, a translator is the reader of the original work as well as the author of the translated work, who serves as valuable evidence — the evidence of the literary text and of reader-response. ^[1]

There is an important concept in Jauss's Reception Theory — the horizon of expectation. It refers to the disparity between the given horizon of expectation and the appearance of a new work. Jauss believes that the aesthetic value of literary works is not objective, but has very close relationship with the reader's experience and values. ^[2] A reader reads the text with the expectations that can be changed, redirected, realized or stimulated again in the process of reading. Previous expectations become the past experiences and give rise to new expectation or imaginations. In this way, the reading process becomes dynamic and moves forward consistently.

In all, the first reception of a work by the reader includes a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with the works already read. The understanding of the first reader will be sustained and enriched in a chain of receptions from generation to generation. According to the Reception Theory, a literary work is meaningless without reader's participation. Likewise, as a literary text by itself, a translated text cannot produce an independent meaning by its existence. ^[2] That is to say, the meaning of a translated text must be concretized in the process of the target reader's reading which eventually brings about the finalization of the text. As the target reader plays a significant part in the actualization of translated text, it follows that a translator should attach high priority to the target reader in the course of translation instead of focusing on the source text only.

2.2. Inspiration of Reception Theory on Translation of Poetic Image

Based on Reception Theory, receptors or readers in CCP (Classical Chinese Poetry) are classified into two kinds: One is translator itself, while the other is English target reader. The theory can be used to explain the production of different versions in the two receptions.

2.2.1. The First Reception

From the perspective of Reception Theory, the poetic images in CCP provide wide space for the translator's imagination because of elusive artistic conception which is hard to grasp. So in the translating procession, the translators concretize them according to their own pre-understanding, thus creating different versions. Example of this sort might be quoted in hundreds. In the poetry, “春眠不觉晓，处处闻啼鸟”，“闻啼鸟” can be translated in “Everywhere round me the singing of birds” or “Now awake till I hear birds crying”. ^[3] This is a poem about spring scene full of many sound images, and in the first version, birds are “singing” while in the second birds are “crying”. Through different sound images these versions present various basic tones — cheerful or melancholy. Those subtle differences give rise to different artistic concept and project a different image in the readers' mind. Concretization of literary text is the recreation of translator according to his or her interpretation.

2.2.2. The Second Reception

During the process of translating poetry, a translator continuously lets English target readers carry out dialogic communications with the text. In fact, this reception is one in which the translator anticipates readers' need, their receptive capacity and their horizon of expectation so as to take different translating methods.

According to Reception Theory, readers' reading experience constitutes his horizon of expectation and will affect his reception of the translated work. A reader is in a process of adjusting the historical and realistic perspective by the translated work. ^[2] The change of reader's horizon of expectations grants the translator license in coping with poems, and an appropriate rendering also contributes to a

shift of expectations of English target readers.

For example, “卧看牵牛织女星” can be translated into “To watch the spinning Damsel from the Herd Boy far apart”.^[3] If the reader is regarded as a passive receptor, the following questions will be put up: “What does spinning Damsel represent? What is the connection between spinning Damsel and the Herd Boy?” But if the target reader is regarded as an active receptor, they will understand the association of the Damsel and the Herd Boy by their horizon of expectation, such as knowledge about Chinese mythological legends.

In the poem, “寥落古行宫，宫花寂寞红”，it depicts the lonely life of the old maid in the imperial palace. The English target readers don't know the history of the Tang Dynasty, so they by no means feel the implicit meaning hidden in the cultural image of the original poem. The translator added “An Emperor's flame” to make the readers relive the gloom and loneliness implied in the cultural image.^[3] However, with the increase of the number of Chinese literary works translated into foreign languages, western readers' understanding of Chinese culture also deepens. It is no use adding the explanatory notes, and English target readers have almost the same association with the Chinese readers. This poem can be translated into “Empty and falling down is the ancient traveling palace”^[3] without losing the artistic value of the original version.

2.3. Application of Reception Theory to Translation of Poetic Image

Poetic images are the most important part of poetry and even “an image is in itself a poem” said by Ezra Pound^[2], so how to reproduce images when translating poetry is a big concern. According to different imagery categories in CCP, this article tries to explore four translating methods based on the theory of Reception Theory.

2.3.1. Preservation

There are some images in both languages carrying the same association. This part of images should be preserved while translating. For example, “花间一壶酒”，“花”，“酒” are all non-figurative images and should be kept without any changes and omission. Some images are difficult to understand or may even cause misapprehension but of key importance to the poem thus they can't be omitted. One solution to this dilemma is to preserve the image with annotation. In the following line, “春风不度玉门关”，the image of “玉门关” may mean little to an English reader. With the help of the annotation “a military stronghold in northwest China with a large number of troops garrisoned there in Tang Dynasty”，^[4] it can be easily drawn forth the same emotions as in a Chinese reader.

2.3.2. Substitution

If the images in the source language cannot draw forth the same association in the readers of the target language or even may cause misunderstanding, they should be transferred into a different one in the target language. This method in translation is called substitution or adaptation. Several examples will illustrate this point: In the line “醉卧沙场君莫笑”，“沙场” originally refers to “a stretch of sands”，but is often used to imply “battlefield” or “frontier”. The image of “沙” has gradually disappeared, therefore it is not appropriate to translate in “sand”，but is preferred to be “battle ground”，^[5] which is more readable for the target English readers.

2.3.3. Omission

There are a lot of common proper names of people or places in CCP. Sometimes, images carried by the proper names are essential to the understanding and appreciation of the whole poem, then they should be kept with annotation; but some images are of little importance and can be left out because too much annotation would totally destroy the beauty and wholeness of the poem. For example, “岱宗夫如何，齐鲁青未了”，here “岱宗” (another name of Mount Tai) and “齐鲁” (names for the land of Shan Dong) are omitted in the translated version “To what shall I compare the Sacred Mount that stands, A balk of green that hath no end, Betwixt two lands!”^[5] The target English readers may have a better understanding of the poem without obstacles of the unnecessary proper names.

2.3.4. Supplement

Generally speaking, the translator is not entitled to supplement images to the original poem.

However, for the sake of equivalent effect in the translated version, the translator may add some images according to the context, so the reader of the target language can enjoy the aesthetic effect and the original meaning is preserved. Take the line “细雨人不闻，北风吹裙带” as an example, the original poem depicts the subtle psychological condition of a young girl who is praying for her lover. If we translate in this way “If I speak in a low voice no one will hear me. Ah! The chilly north wind is blowing.”^[5] This version doesn’t convey the implied meaning by adding the image of “chilly wind” while omitting another important image “裙带”. But in the translated line, “My whispered prayer might not be heard of men. The North wind’s fingers at my girdle tore”,^[5] the translator adds the image of “fingers” that personifies the north wind. This not only adds more artistic appeals to the poem, but gives better reflections of the young girl’s mental state. But the supplement of images aims to bring the suggested images of the original to surface, or to make the translated text more vivid, so a serious translator is not supposed to supplement images freely.

3. Conclusion

Chinese poetry can evoke a whole landscape in a single line with elegant simplicity achieved by the employment of images, which adds the challenges of the translation. This article tries to introduce the Reception Theory into the translation of the images in the Classical Chinese Poetry. By this theory, the reading progress is where the reader reconstructs his or her pre-existed horizons of expectation according to the horizons of expectation the literary work shows, and the meaning of a literary work is a dynamic production that is produced in the progress of the reader’s reading. The poetic images are difficult to translate because they are full of many cultural implications and there are linguistic and cultural barriers between two different languages. Borrowing the basic ideas of the theory, this article tries to overcome the translating barriers of poetic images by adopting flexible translation methods, including preserving, substituting, omitting and supplementing the original images in the source language based on different imagery categories. Only in this way can we focus on the receptive capacity of the target readers and pass the Chinese culture in order to attain the goal of cultural communication.

Acknowledgment

This article makes contributions to the image study of both western and Chinese literary critics, and it is also helpful to further research and application of the Reception Theory, thus raising its value. Through retaining and delivering the Chinese national cultural essence, this article contributes to diminishing the cultural communication barriers among different nations and strengthening cross-cultural intercourse among different countries.

References

- [1] Holub, Robert C, “*Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*”, Methuen Inc. 1984.
- [2] Catford, J.C., “*A Linguistic Theory of Translation [M]*”, Oxford University Press. 1965.
- [3] Iser, Wolfgang, “*The Act of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response [M]*”, the John Hopkins Univ. Press. 1978.
- [4] James Y. Liu, “*The Art of Poetry [M]*”, The University of Chicago Press. 1962.
- [5] Newmark, Peter, “*Approaches to Translation [M]*”, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. 2001.