An Analysis of Ezra's Cathy from the Perspective of Functionalist Approach to Translation

Yanan He

Foreign Languages School
Henan University
Kaifeng, China 475001
E-mail: heyanan2006@sohu.com

Abstract—**This paper analyzes Ezra Pound's creativeness in his translation *Cathy* of classical Chinese poems by an elaborated analysis from the perspective of functionalist approach. Under the great influence of classical Chinese poetry, Pound launches his career as a translator of Chinese poetry and publishes *Cathy* which has assumed a unique position in the history of English translation of classical Chinese poems. Aiming at a better appreciation of *Cathy*, this paper is to investigate what factors have influenced Pound and how his creativeness in translating classical Chinese poetry has been fully manifested from a perspective of functionalist translation approach.**

Keywords—Cathy; Pound; skopos; classical poetry; translation

I. INTRODUCTION

Ezra Weston Loomis Pound (1885-1972) , founder of the Anglo-American Imagism and a pioneer of Western Modernism, New Poetry and New Criticism, is one of the most important literary giants in the world and also as a poet, translator, critic, yet is also one of the most influential and controversial figures. A case in point is his *Cathay*, the publication of which in the spring of 1915 stirs the world of poetry and translation. "The poems in Cathay are things of supreme beauty," Ford Madox Hueffer exclaims in *Outlook* on 19 June 1915, "What poetry should be, that they are. And if a new breath of imagery and of handling can do anything for our poetry, that new breath these poems bring." (Ford, 1915, qtd from Xie Ming, 1999: 6) T. S. Eliot remarks that "Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry (through the translation of *Cathay*)" (ibid). Yet when translating *Cathay*, Pound is totally ignorant of Chinese language, and his work is based upon Fenollosa's manuscripts. However, through his literary sensibility and insight, Pound works out his masterpiece *Cathay*.

For this fine and slim volume of Cathay, Hugh Kenner, the modern Dean of Pound Studies, agreed that he was thankful that the task of inventing such poetry had not fallen to "some random modernist but to a master" (Kenner, 1971: 65). Ford Madox Ford, one of the early supporters of Pound's literary rebellion, gave high praise upon Pound: "The poems of Cathay are things of supreme beauty. Cathay was the most beautiful book in the world. What poetry should be, they are" (Ford, qtd

from Nolde, 1996: 22).Ford Hueffer wrote in Outlook in 1915: "We are accustomed to think of the Chinese as arbitrary or uniform in sentiment, but these poems (in Cathay) reveal them as being just ourselves." (Homberger, 1972: 108)

Although Cathay has enjoyed enormous popularity in the West, many Chinese scholars and translators believe it is not qualified to be a translation. As when translating Cathy, Pound was ignorant of Chinese, and what he mainly depended upon

was Fenollosa's notes while studying Chinese. Owing to numerous inaccuracies and errors resulting from Pound's ignorance of the Chinese language and his free creations, Cathy has been severely criticized since its publication.

Roy Earle, a sinologist, in a study of Ernest Fenollosa's English translations of Chinese poetry, attacked the Fenollosa-Pound approach, though he did admit that Pound was superior to other translators because these poems were, as Eliot had said, "translucensies." George Kennedy in Yale Literary Review (December, 1958: 24-36) underlined Pound's ignorance of the Chinese language, and Achilles Fang in the Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies listed without comment the numerous linguistic errors in Cathay. Wai-lim Yip, in his Ezra Pound's Cathay, pointed out Pound's mistakes word for word. Shigeyoshi Obata re-translated Li Bai's poems, criticizing what he thought to be Pound's method of translation in Cathay and calling it "devious and extremely hazardous." (Wai-lim, Yip, 1969: 10). All such praise and comments indicate the impact of Pound's Cathay across home abroad.

Aiming at giving a comprehensive appraisal on Pound's Cathay, this thesis examines Pound's creative translation methods in terms of the historical context and literary trends. A new perspective, the German Functionalist Translation Theory, especially the Skopos theory, is adopted to analyze and re-evaluate Cathay.

II. SKOPOS RULE

The functionalist translation theory is first put forward by Katharina Reiss in the early 1970s in Germany, improved and added by Hans J. Vermeer, Justa Holz-Manttari, summed up and developed by Christiane Nord. Taking purpose as its prime rule, this theory stresses that the translation is an integral and intercultural communicative activity. Furthermore, it emphasizes the function of the translation, however, "the

function of the target text is not arrived at automatically from an analysis of the source text, but is pragmatically defined by the purpose of the intercultural communication", which is the foundation of the purpose of the target text, or the translation, especially the literary text. (Nord, 2001: 9)

Skopos is a Greek word for "purpose". According to *Skopostherie* (the theory that applies the notion of *skopos* to translation), the prime principle determining any translation process is the purpose (*skopos*) of the overall translational action.

Usually there are three possible kinds of purpose in the field of translation: the general purpose aimed at by the translator in the translation process, the communicative purpose aimed at by the target text in the target situation and the purpose aimed at by a particular translation strategy or procedure. Nevertheless, the term adopted by Vermeer usually refers to the purpose of the target text. Vermeer explains the skopos rule as follows:

Each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose. The *skopos* rule thus reads as follows: translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function. (Nord, 2001: 29)

Most translational actions allow a variety of skopoi, which may be related to each other in a hierarchical order. The translator should be able to justify their choice of a particular skopos in a given translational situation.

This rule is intended to solve the eternal dilemma of free vs. faithful translation, dynamic vs. formal equivalence, good interpreters vs. slavish translators and so on. It means that the skopos of a particular translation task may require a "free" or a "faithful' translation, or anything between these two extremes, depending on the purpose for which the translation is needed.

To sum up, according to the functionalist theory, translating means producing a functional text in a linguaculture target text, this is needed for specific communicative purposes by processing the information given in a previous text in a different linguacultuere source text.

III.   THE ANALYSIS OF CATHY FORM THE PRESPECTIVE OF SKOPOS THEORY

A. *The Choice of the Source Material*
    According to the *Skopos theory*, the skopos rule is overwhelming. In the process of translation, in order to realize the translation skopos, the translator can employ any corresponding strategies or methods, whether violently or not. As argued by Christiane Nord, translation is a purposeful activity in which the translator and the author, and the source language and the target language interact with each other under the guidance of the translation purpose. It is the purpose that determines the ultimate quality of translation.

What is Pound's *skopos*? What factors have prompted him to employ atrocities in the translations and to manipulate the source language?

There are two reasons that promote Pound to turn to the East and begin to translate classical Chinese poetry which leading to the birth of *Cathy*.

First, as we all know, *Cathay* was published in 1915 when the Europe was in the midst of the First World War. The cruel war deeply shocked the intelligentsia's mind, smashed their beliefs of the western civilization and made them upset and lost. People were tortured by tough war affairs, forced departure and misery of death. Soldiers traveled far away to defend the glory of their nations, sometimes in vain, leaving their beloved depressed and desperate. The sense of estrangement and disillusion prevailed. Under this circumstance, Pound received Fenollosa's notes. Pound's acumen of the war-worn people helped set the tone of sadness for the anthology of *Cathay*.

Second, Pound finds support for his Imagist ideas in the treasure of Chinese poems, and he resorts to resolve the conflict between abstraction and immediate experience by direct treatment of the thing and the superposition of images. By translating the classical Chinese poetry, he hopes to make it clear that the presentation of individual image and the superposition of images can help readers to regain immediate experience. So the Imagist poetics has greatly influenced him, making him manipulate translations to serve his purpose of poetic innovations.

B. *Pound's Strategies in Translating Linguistic Elements—Grammar and Syntax*
    To construct vivid images, Chinese poets tend to juxtapose nouns with allegorical images. Unlike Chinese ones, English poems teem with abstract nouns with allegorical and generalizing effect, which is diametrically opposite to Pound's Imagist principles. For that reason, with no hesitance, he assimilates some characteristics of Chinese grammar to perfect his Imagist poetry.

Lament of the Frontier Guard can be a good example to illustrate how Pound imitates Chinese grammar.

三十六万人，   Three hundred and sixty thousand,

哀哀泪如雨。   and sorrow sorrow like rain.

且悲就行役，   Sorrow to go, and sorrow, sorrow returning.

安得营农圃.   Desolate, desolate fields

The version is definitely a breakaway from the traditional English grammar. The four lines have no resemblance with traditional English usage in poetry. However, the dense repetition of "sorrow" adds force to touch the readers' emotion. "Sorrow to go, and sorrow, sorrow returning" reveals the sadness and the frontier guards' reluctance to be involved in the war.

As we know, in classical Chinese poems, the lines are mostly end-stopped and enjambment is unusual. While in English, enjambment is a common practice, with the lines sometimes running on throughout the page. Pound, when necessary, cuts one Chinese line into several lines or reorganize the order of lines based on his understanding. Taking *Lament of the Frontier Guard* as an example:

借问谁凌虐？　Who is the aggressor? Let me ask.

天骄毒威武。　The barbarians' malicious martial move.

赫怒我圣皇，　Has brought the emperor's flaming anger.

劳师事鞞鼓。He ordered the army to beat the war drums.

—by Wai-lim Yip

借问谁凌虐？　Who brought this to pass?

天骄毒威武。Who has brought the flaming imperial anger?

赫怒我圣皇，　Who has brought the army with drums and with kettle-drums?

劳师事鞞鼓。　Barbarous kings.

— by Ezra Pound

(Wai-lim Yip, 1969: 205)

Wai-lim Yip's translation, regarding syntax, is close to the original, while Pound tremendously changes the syntactic order. Though not as faithful as Yip's version, Pound's translation achieves extra effects by paralleling three questions, which are like irritated reproach by the soldiers. The imitation of some Chinese grammar and abandoning of some Chinese syntax can by no means be at random. It is done for the sake of central effect and emotional intensity and is consistent with Pound's poetic upholding and his Imagist principles.

C. Rhetorical Devices

Chinese classical poetry can be taken as storage of rhetorical devices, such as antithesis, reduplication, onomatopoeia, etc. Many translators strive to preserve these devices in translation but result in awkward versions. Due to his principles mentioned above, Pound makes little effort to keep them. He either abandons them totally or makes some compensation by employing other devices.

Take *Leave-Taking Near Shuku* as an example:

山从人面起，The walls rise in a man's face,

云傍马头生。Clouds grow out of the hill

at his horse's bridle.

芳树笼秦栈，Sweet trees are on the paved way of the Shin, their trunks burst through the paving

春流绕蜀城。And freshets are bursting their ice in a mist of Shoku, a proud city.

The original Chinese has a high level of symmetry with "山" to "云", "从" to "傍", and "人面" to "马头". However, the four tightly parallel lines are broken up by Pound into seven short and long lines of no recognizable parallel structure. The rhetorical devices are utterly eradicated with only the meaning conveyed. These examples are too numerous to be listed here.

Being aware of the impossibility and unnessicity of keeping some of rhetorical devices peculiar to Chinese, Pound courageously deletes them and tries to rebuild the effect within the English language. Yet as to other rhetorical devices, which

are all popular with both Chinese and English, he, with no hesitance, preserves them in translation, for example, simile, personification, metaphor and hyperbole, etc. All in all, to Pound, the rhetorical devices are not used for their own sake, but for the sake of the poem as a whole. Whether to preserve them or not depends on the usage of English and the central effect of the poem.

D. Pound's Strategies in Translating Poetic Elements
1) Juxtaposition and Superposition of Images
In classical Chinese poetry, language could covey ideas and feelings in fewer words through its images and metaphors, and the poetic style is terse and telegraphic. One of the characteristics in classical Chinese poetry is the juxtaposition of images, which means putting at least two seemingly irrelevant images together without grammatical linkage to achieve aesthetic effect.

How about Pound's disposal with such a juxtaposition of the images—the quite common versification in classical Chinese poetry? Let us first look at the two lines from *Taking Leave of a Friend*. The original reads:

浮云游子意, 落日故人情。

Apparently the two lines are in a paratactic relation. Between "浮云" and "游子意", "落日"and "故人情", there are various possible connectives that one can insert, but they are absent in the original — such as the introduction of the verbs and the word like (thus making it a simile); And the syntactic order of the two images in each line may also be reversed in one's contemplation. However, no reader will fail to find the ephemeral and fugacious quality associating with the floating clouds with the wanderer's thought and the resemblance of the old friend's feeling to the reluctance of the setting sun. Pound gives us his version:

Mind like a floating wide cloud,

Sunset like the parting of old acquaintances.

Wai-lim Yip comments on Pound's treatment, "The original juxtaposition of the two relatively concrete images is skillfully changed. Here an abstract idea is placed against a concrete image, forming an interest no less poetic than the original one." Nevertheless, Yip also points out "the visual order is not to be violated, for it is in the body of the wanderer that the thought (mood) is revealed and we actually see the floating clouds and the wanderer (and the state of mind he is in) simultaneously." (Wai-lim Yip, 1969: 58)

Borrowing a term from Sergei Eisentstein, Yip describes such a resemblance induced by a simultaneous presence of two objects as a kind of cinematic technique of montage.

Pound favors this peculiar quality and even coins a word for such a poetical use of the language — superposition, which means that the "tenor image" and the "vehicle image" are linked without any connectives like "to be, like, as", etc. Pound assumes that the "one image poem" is a form of superposition, that is to say, it is one idea set on top of another and regards this skill as the true essence of Imagism.

Owing to his infatuation with the ingenious method practiced commonly in classical Chinese poems, Pound attempts to follow Chinese syntactic structure in English. Let us see some experiments by Pound. Take the line from Lament of the Frontier Guard (《古风其十四·胡关饶风沙》).The original reads: 荒城空大漠 , and this line means that the ruined castle stands vacant in the great desert. The visual objects — "荒城" and "大漠"— suggest the desolation of the frontiers' environment. Pound renders the line into

Desolate castle, the sky, the wide desert.

Here one may easily argue against Pound for making a philological mistake—having read the Chinese character "空" (vacant in this context) for sky in another context. However, Wai-lim Yip argues that Pound's deviation on this line aims at deepening the atmosphere of desolation and loneliness by "projecting the desolate castle (a point) upon the wide desert (an endless stretch ending in a circle) and below the sky (another endless stretch ending in a circle)."（Wai-lim Yip, 1969: 34）By practicing the method of juxtaposition, Pound intends to let the images stand out sharply and distinctly to suggest themselves.

2) The Chinese "Example" of Vers Libre

T. S. Eliot, in his introduction to *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, writes that "Mr. Pound is more responsible for the XXth Century revolution than is any other individual" (Eliot, 1979: xi). The "revolution in poetry" to which Eliot refers to was a turning from the iambic pentameter, the rhyming lines, and the vague abstractions of Victorian verse towards a new poetry form of "free verse" (*vers libre*, as the Imagists called it), in which "meter and rhyme were in the phrase, even in the larger ideas of the poem itself" (Nolde, 1979: 13).

The imagist poetry *vers libre* shook off the conventional meters and emphasized the use of common speech, new rhythms and clear images.

Pound put in early 1912: "I have no especial interest in rhyme. It tends to draw away the artist's attention from forty to ninety percent of his syllables and concentrate it on the admittedly more prominent remainder. It tends to draw him into prolixity and pull him away from the thing." (Pound, 1950: 16) Thus, Pound strived to work free of the iambic pentameter, as he recalled in Canto LXXXI: "To break the pentameter, that was the first heave"(Xie Ming, 1999: 212).

At first we may probe into Pound's practice of *vers libre* by analyzing his translation *The City of Choan* (《登金陵凤凰台》）

凤凰台上凤凰游，　　The phoenix are at play on their terrace.

凤去台空江自流。　　The phoenix are gone, the river flows on alone.

吴宫花草埋幽径。　　Flowers and grass

Cover over the dark path where lay the dynamistic house of the Go.

晋代衣冠成古丘。　　The bright cloths and bright caps of Shin

Are now the base of old hills.

三山半落青天外，　　The Three Mountains fall through the far heaven

一水中分白鹭洲。　　The isle of White Heron

Splits the two streams apart

总为浮云能蔽日，　　Now the high clouds cover the sun

长安不见使人愁。　　And I cannot see Choan afar

And I am sad.

This original poem is composed of eight lines with seven characters in each line; however, Pound renders it into seven lines with diverse words in each line. The third line is separately translated into three lines, each of which presents readers various images. Apart from not sticking to the original form, Pound pays little heed to the rhymes of the original poems. As we know, classical Chinese poems are strict with rhymes especially the end-rhyme. Li Bai composes the poem with perfect end-rhyme "游 you" "流 liu" and "丘 qiu", but Pound just employs free verse.

In order to find support for his Imagist ideas and show his sympathy for the war-worn people, Pound rendered the Chinese poems into English creatively, and won the attention of world and realizes his aims.

IV. Conclusion

It is hoped that the analysis of *Cathay* from the perspective of the functionalist approach, may shed light upon the evaluation and criticism of poetry translation.

Firstly, poetry translation, in essence, is a form of literary criticism. The translator, after receiving the source text, in order to fulfill the intended translation brief, have to decide which part of the source text ought to be translated and preserved and which to be under-translated or even removed. Different treatment of the same source text reflects the essence of literary criticism involved in translating activity. A poetry translator, in the first place, is a poetry critic, whose literary critical insight tells "where the treasure lies" and how to "dig out" the treasure.

Secondly, to evaluate a translated text, a wide range of factors should be taken into consideration; the most important one is the target text's adequacy to translation brief. Suppose a translated text realizes the translation brief set beforehand and fulfills the intended text functions, we may justifiably say it is an adequate and successful translation.

Thirdly, poetry translation is a tough job and the elements of source text, such as language-specific rhythm patterns, cultural-bond terms, and images, etc, cannot be fully rendered into another language without any loss. The evaluation of a translation shouldn't be judged according to it is faithful or not to the source text. *Cathy,* a creative translation, may be labeled as a successful translation as its translator Pound took on this

job to fulfill his imagist movement and to rebel the bondage of Victorian poetics, and therefore, in this sense, Pound's *Cathy* is a successful one studied from the perspective of the skopos theory

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