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## On Translation of Song Ci From the Perspective of Translation Aesthetics

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### Abstract

Song Ci is one of the highest peaks of Chinese literature achievements and so the English translation and the study of the translation have very important academic value, application value and popularization meaning. This paper analyzes the beauty representation of Song lyrics from the perspective of modern translation aesthetics theory. The beauty of the original can be realized from four aspects: sound, lexis, style and emotion. The beauty of sound is mainly represented by the compensatory means of rhythm; lexical beauty by the accurate and beautiful selection of words; the stylistic beauty through the addition of words; the emotional beauty by changing sentence patterns and extending semantics.

**Key words:** Translation aesthetics; English translation of Song lyrics; Aesthetic representation

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### INTRODUCTION

Chinese culture is broad and profound, and the peak of classical literature appeared in the Tang and Song

Dynasties. The great achievements of Tang poetry and Song Ci have left a bright color on the history picture of Chinese culture. Therefore, it is of great historical and practical significance to study the English translation of Chinese classics. Song Ci is exquisite both in the formal system (including sound, lexis and verse) and non-formal system (including image, style and emotion). On the foundation of Chinese culture, translation aesthetics theory is put forward by Chinese scholars, which not only explores the aesthetic information of the external and internal beauty of Chinese and English, but also studies how the translation reproduces the aesthetic elements of the original. The “marriage” between translation aesthetics and the translation of Song lyrics will guide the target language to reproduce the aesthetic information and aesthetic value contained in Chinese classics, which can better conduce to the publicity and spread of the culture and the spirits of Chinese nation.

## 1. TRANSLATION AESTHETICS AND SONG CI TRANSLATION

### 1.1 Translation Aesthetics

Domestically, the term “translation aesthetics” was first put forward by the famous aesthetic master Zhu Guangqian in the early 1980s. Then his student Liu Miqing further elaborated the theory in *The Basic Theoretical Conception on Translation Aesthetics* (1986), in which he defined translation aesthetic as well as the category and the task of it, and discussed the aesthetic object and subject and general rules of aesthetic experience in translation. Liu brought forward an innovative concept of the aesthetic subject and object, which exerts a great influence in the translation field and change the mode of thinking. Then Fu Zhongxuan published *Practical Translation Aesthetics*, in which he interpreted the beauty of form and content of the original and the translation, combined translation aesthetics with linguistics, and expounded

translation aesthetic activity: “it is to explore the deep structure from the surface structure of a language (the original), and to transfer the deep structure into another language’s surface structure (the translation)” (1993, p.4). In 1995, the publication of *An Introduction to Translation Aesthetics* received a warm response. Liu Miqing not only absorbed the research achievements of predecessors, but also combed the history of Chinese and western aesthetic cultures, and elaborated a series of problems in translation aesthetics. “Based on the basic principles of modern aesthetics, this book analyzes the operation mechanism of translation, constructs the basic framework of modern translation aesthetics, discusses the scientific nature, artistry, aesthetic object, aesthetic subject and aesthetic consciousness of translation, putting forward the aesthetic standards and countermeasures of different translation styles” (Mao, 2005, p.16). Compared with Liu’s systematical theory framework, Mao Ronggui’s *Translation Aesthetics* lays more emphasis on its practical significance. He interprets the beauty of both English and Chinese, focusing on the fuzzy language and hazy beauty. “Fuzzy language mobilizes the aesthetic subject and enlarges the aesthetic object, so as to expand the art space and increase the reading aesthetic feeling” (Mao, 2005, P.231). Brilliant scholars have contributed themselves to the Chinese translation cause and opened up a new route for translation study.

## 1.2 The English Translation of Song Ci

Although Tang poetry and Song Ci are of the equal status in literature circle, the English translation of Song Ci starts later than that of Tang poetry, with its remarkable flourish emerging in the 1950s, and Professor Xu Yuanchong is one of the pioneers and has contributed excellent English version of Song Ci. His translation standard of “three beauties” is in line with the aesthetic elements of Song Ci, as Song lyrics is beauty in sound, form and artistic conception. Zhuo Zhenying has also made indefatigable study on the translation of Song Ci, and his *Selected Ci-Poems of The Song Dynasty* has reproduced the artistic quality of Song Ci to a large extent. Since its emergence, translation aesthetics has been applied to the study of literary translation, such as that of prose and poetry. The first one combining Song Ci with translation aesthetics in China is Professor Wang Ping. He first traces the origin and development of Song lyrics, and then discusses the representation of its beauty from four aspects: image, artistic conception, emotion and style. He stresses that the aesthetic feeling of Song Ci should be represented. “In the process of translation, the translator should have a deep understanding of the writer’s thought and artistic personality, grasp the artistic style and rhetorical features of the original work, and strive to reproduce it accurately in its translation” (2015, p.14). According to the data of Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure, the study on the translation of Song Ci appeared in 1994,

and the number of the papers increases year by year, which means it still has much room for further efforts. Besides, most studies concentrate on the translation strategies and methods, neglecting or dismissing the representation of its aesthetic quality. Based on the theory of translation aesthetics, this paper makes a tentative study on the English translation of Song lyrics from four aspects: sound, lexis, style and emotion, exploring how to reproduce the beauty and aesthetic value of classical Chinese in the English translation of classics.

## 2. AESTHETIC REPRESENTATION IN THE TRANSLATION OF SONG CI

Song Ci prevailed later than Tang Poetry, while the literary achievement of the former can juxtapose with that of the latter. The rules and form of the Tang poetry composition is stricter; Song Ci, a kind of music literature, is more flexible in its rhyme and feet. Secondly, ancient Chinese literati are exquisite in diction and there are many instructive anecdotes about it, such as “僧敲月下门” and “身轻一鸟过”. Thirdly, Song Ci is unique in the choice of image and the creation of artistic conception. Distinguished from Tang poetry, the images of Song Ci are more delicate. Finally, as to the style, there are two main schools in Song Ci: the Hao Fang school (bold and unconstrained school) and the Wan Yue school (graceful and restrained school), whose styles are utterly different. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator should not only heed the beauty of sound and lexis but also the emotion and style of the original, endeavoring to represent the aesthetic elements of the source language.

### 2.1 The Beauty of Sound

“The sound beauty of languages is the natural expression of the author’s true sentiments” (Mao, 2005, P.126). Rhythmical language often conveys aesthetic feelings to the readers and can arouse their emotional resonance: the rhythm of cadence often makes people passionate; deep and sad ones induce sorrow and depression. Phonology is one of the basic elements of the external structure of aesthetic objects, and different languages have different forms of phonology. In English, alliteration, the use of several words together that begin with the same sound or letter in order to make a special effect, takes up half of English rhymes, which makes sentences catchy. Reduplicated words, basically composed of monosyllabic characters, play the similar role in Chinese, which is a special feature of Chinese phonetic beauty and a major difficulty in translation. Besides, the end rhyme is also a prominent trait, often with a rhyme dominating a stanza or the whole poem or Ci. Hence, in the translation of classics, the translator should pursue the sound beauty correspondence between the translation and the source language.

**The original:** 蝶恋花·欧阳修

庭院深深深几许，杨柳堆烟，帘幕无重数。玉勒雕鞍游冶处，楼高不见章台路。

雨横风狂三月暮，门掩黄昏，无计留春住。泪眼问花花不语，乱红飞过秋千去。

**Zhuo's Translation:** The Butterfly Fluttering around the Flowers

Vast is the big courtyard, but how vast?  
Poplars and willows stretch far like haze,  
And screens and curtains are beyond cast.  
Where's his jade bridle? After I gaze:  
Tall as th'tower is, invisible Zhangtai stays.

Late the third month, rains lash and wind rise.  
As there is not a way to stay spring,  
I have all gates clos'd. Tears in my eyes,  
The plants to a talk I try to bring,  
Which keep silent, their petals flying o'er the swing.

**Xu's Translation:** Butterflies in Love with Flowers  
Deep, deep the courtyard where he is, so deep.  
It's veiled by smokelike willows heap on heap,  
By curtain on curtain and screen on screen.  
Leaving his saddle and bridle, there he has been  
Merry-making. From my tower his trace can't be seen.

The third moon now, the wind and rain are raging late;  
At dusk I bar the gate,  
But I can't bar in spring.  
My tearful eyes ask flowers, but they fail to bring  
An answer, I see red blooms fly over the swing.

**Analysis:** Ouyang Xiu, one of the Eight Masters of the Tang and Song Dynasties, has made great achievements in prose and Song Ci. This Song lyric is elegant and beautiful in language, vivid and visual in image, subtle and delicate in the expression of a lonely housewife's melancholic emotion. Three reiterative characters “深深深” in the first line resemble a woman's sigh, enhancing the metrical sense of this piece of Ci. Both the upper stanza and lower stanza of this poem are rhymed in the form of ABAAA. “As this kind of unique rhythm in Chinese poetry cannot be directly translated into English, we can only rely on the compensatory means of prosody, trying to preserve its sound beauty as far as possible” (Liu, 2005, P.73). Both Zhuo Zhenying's and Xu Yuancong's translations have represented the beauty of the end rhyme, and the forms are close to the original. The rhyme form of Zhuo's translation is ABABB (for instance: /æst/ /ez/ /æst/ /ez/ /ez/), and Xu's translation is AABBB (/ip/ /ip/ /in/ /in/ /in/). The two translators adopt different methods to translate the three “深深深”: Xu uses two “deep” at the beginning of the line, echoed with the “deep” at the end, consistent with the original. In Zhuo's translations, two “vast” appear at the two ends of the line, which also has a strong sense of rhythm and is clearer than Xu's version in the aspect of meaning. Besides, there are many phrases

like “heap on heap”, “curtain on curtain”, “screen on screen” in Xu's translation, which repeat in pronunciation, enhancing the rhythm and emotion. Moreover, “saddle and bridle” has a harmonic rhyme. The assonance strengthens both the visual and auditory sense, mobilizing the reader's emotion and resonance. In a word, Xu's translation is better in terms of the goodness of sound.

## 2.2 The Beauty of Lexis

“Another basic unit that can carry aesthetic information in language is lexis, which is also the most important basic unit” (Liu, 2012, P.92). “A beautiful prose first impresses people by its elegant writing, which must be reflected in the writer's choice of words and sentences, as well as in the rhyme and rhythm. These are the so-called ‘forms of the physical existence of beauty’ in the original text” (Liu, 1986, p.19). This rule is also true of the translation of poetry. The beautiful word does not refer to flowery words, but that can convey to the readers a sense of inner pleasure and comfort, as if being personally in the scene and personally experiencing the author's feelings. Moreover, the word of beauty can be terse, needing no long elaboration. Wang Anshi, one of the leaders in the literary field of the Song Dynasty, is exquisite in the diction. His “春风又绿江南岸” is a model of the beauty of words.

**The original:** 泊船瓜洲·王安石

京口瓜洲一水间，钟山只隔数重山。  
春风又绿江南岸，明月何时照我还？

**Xu's Translation:** Moored at Melon Islet

A river severs Northern shore and Southern land;  
Between my home and me but a few mountains stand.  
The vernal wind has greened the Southern shore again.  
When will the moon shine bright on my return? O  
when?

**Analysis:** Wang Anshi is a famous thinker, statesman, writer and reformer in the Northern Song Dynasty. His works are concise in writing and sincere in emotion, unique in the literature circle. *Moored at Melon Islet* is one of the works in his late years. The whole poem takes advantage of the scene to express the author's longing for his hometown during his long journey. The third verse is a famous one through the ages. The writer has changed a dozen words and finally chosen the character “绿”, which integrates motion with stillness, as “绿” can be a verb and an adjective. When it is used as a verb; “motion” refers to the spring breeze blowing over the southern regions of the Yangtze River and injecting vigor and vitality into it. When it is used as an adjective; “stillness” means the color of the region, full of green plants. Chinese literati emphasize the concise and vivid of lexis: “No redundant chapters in texts, no redundant sentences in chapters, and no redundant words in sentences” (Liu, 2002, p.140) In the translation, the

translator chooses the word “green”, which is similar to the original text and can bring visual beauty to the readers. “一水间” in the first verse shows that there is only a river between Jingkou and Guazhou. The noun “一水间” has been translated into a verb “sever”, unveiling a scene that the Yangtze River has relentlessly separated Guazhou and Jingkou for the readers, and thus the author’s reluctance to parting his hometown has been incarnated. The translator has not only translated the original semantics, but also translated the feelings and mood, which is largely due to the translator’s deep understanding of the original text and the accurate translation of the words.

### 2.3 The Beauty of Style

The ancient literati believed “Tang poetry is solemn, while Song Ci is florid”: Tang poetry is rigorous and magnificent, while Song Ci is graceful and restrained. Song Ci falls into two schools—Hao Fang school (powerful and free school) and Wan Yue school (graceful and restrained school). The former, whose representatives are Su Shi and Xin Qiji, is characterized by flexible rhythm, broad creative vision, straightforward expression, and solemn and magnificent style. The latter focuses more contents on love stories, with clear and well-knit structure, melodious and harmonious rhythm, elegant and beautiful language. The representative figures of the Wan Yue school, such as Yan Shu and Yan Jidao, are adept at depicting love. Their short lyrics (a kind of Song lyric) is implicit and graceful in style, while compared to his father Yan Shu, Yan Jidao is even better. Wang Guowei comments: “the insipid language of his works is attractive, and the plain one is expressive.” (2007, P.15) When translating such texts, the translator should take the cultural background and the writer’s personal style into consideration.

**The original:** 思远人·晏几道

红叶黄花秋意晚，千里念行客。飞云过尽，归鸿无信，何处寄书得？

泪弹不尽临窗滴。就砚旋研墨。渐写到别来，此情深处，红笺为无色。

**Xu’s Translation:** Thinking of the Far-off One

Red leaves and yellow blooms fall, late autumn is done,

I think of my far-rovin one.

Gazing on clouds blown away by the breeze

And messageless wild geese,

Where can I send him word under the sun?

My endless tears drip down by window side

And blend with ink when they’re undried.

I write down the farewell we bade;

My deep love impearled throws a shade

On rosy papers and they fade.

**Analysis:** *Thinking of the Far-off One* is a lyric about the heroine missing the wanderer in the distance. The

upper stanza mainly portrays the scene: it is late autumn, with maple leaves turning red and chrysanthemum in full bloom, and the lady is missing her lover far away. Where should I send a message when geese return with no letter? The lower stanza turns from the distant view to the nearby one: in the boudoir, the lonely woman is sitting by the window, tears trickling down her face and dropping into the inkstone, and then she grinds ink with the tear to write a letter. When recalling the encounter and parting between her and her lover, tears stream down like rain, fading the red paper. In Xu’s translation, the first verse “Red leaves and yellow blooms fall, late autumn is done” creates a bleak and desolate atmosphere in the late autumn. In the second verse, the translator adds the present participle “gazing” and the phrase “under the sun”. “Gazing” shows the action and the expression of the woman—looking into the distance; “under the sun” means anywhere in the world. “The world is so big, but I don’t know where to send the letter”, which reflects the woman’s deep helplessness. In the lower stanza, “此情深处，红笺为无色” is translated into “My deep love impearled throws a shade on rosy papers and they fade”, which is not only elegant in lexis but also romantic in style. “Impearled” modifies the tears, echoed with “endless tears”. Besides, “a shade” means that the paper is wetted by her tears, and “rosy paper” enables the readers to associate with rose, which is the symbol of love. Xu Yuanchong is in pursuit of the representation of the original beauty, and the words chosen by him are quite similar to the original text, which represents the scene of a woman missing her lover who is far away. All in all, Xu’s translation is beautiful in lexis and lucid in meaning, and the style of the original text has been reproduced.

### 2.4 The Beauty of Emotion

“The beauty of imagery and artistic conception in Song lyrics contains deep emotional experience of the writers, expressing a kind of emotional beauty.” (Wang, 2015, P.105) Chinese traditional poetics has always emphasized that poetry aims to express one’s aspiration. Therefore, where there is injustice, there is outcry. Compared with passionate Tang poetry, Song lyrics are inclined to being more sentimental. As emotion is the soul of literary works, translators should first read the original work with full emotion, feel the ups and downs of the author’s psychology from the tone and rhythm of the works, and carefully taste the emotional meaning contained in the original text, so as to be in harmony with the author’s spirit. Only when the translation reproduces the emotional beauty of the original, will the resonance of the target language readers be aroused.

**The original:** 沁园春·题潮阳张许二公庙·文天祥

为子死孝，为臣死忠，死又何妨。

自光岳气分，士无全节；君臣义缺，谁负刚肠。



.....  
人生翕歔云亡。  
好烈烈轰轰做一场。

.....  
邮亭下，有奸雄过此，仔细思量。

**Xu's Translation:** Spring in a Pleasure Garden  
Written in the Temple of Zhang Xun and Xu Yuan

If sons should die for filial piety  
And ministers for loyalty,  
What matters for us to be dead?  
Our sacred land is torn in shreds,  
No patriot could feel at ease,  
Have loyal subjects done what they ought to?  
How could my righteous wrath appease?  
...  
A man should work, shine or rain,  
With all his might and main.  
...  
Should a traitor pass by,  
Let him open his eye!

**Analysis:** Wen Tianxiang is an outstanding patriotic Ci writer in the late Song Dynasty and a famous general in the fighting against the Yuan. His prose and poetry are solemn and vigorous, reflecting a strong patriotic sentiment and the courage to sacrifice. When Wen Tianxiang stationed troops in Chaoyang, he visited Zhang Xu temple (built in memory of Zhang Xun and Xu Yuan, martyrs in the rebellion of An Lushan and Shi Siming). The visit generated in his mind an urge to write down this lyric. The first verse expresses his view on life and death: it is worthy to die for loyalty and filial piety. Then the author criticizes the loss of loyalism in troubled times, sighing that there are no martyrs comparable to Zhang Xun and Xu Yuan. Then the writer appeals to people to devote themselves to the course of country with the elapse of time. If Zhang and Xu were traitors and surrendered, they would only be reviled by others now, and when those traitors pass by here, they should reflect on themselves. In the translation, Xu adopts an interrogative sentence "What matters for us to be dead?" which enhances the tone and conveys the author's willingness to die for loyalty and justice. The translator adds an adjectival possessive pronoun "our" in the translation of "光岳气分", so that readers can better understand the writer's indignation and deplore for the splitting of the country. The translator uses two questions to translate "君臣义缺，谁负刚肠". The two "H"s (Have and How) structures strengthen the visual and aural impact, enabling the readers to feel the anger and helplessness of the writer. In the lower stanza, "shine or rain" and "might and main" reproduce the determination and perseverance of Wen Tianxiang to fight against the enemy. In the last verse, the translator chooses

"open his eye" to express "仔细思量", which is different from the original meaning, but satirized the treacherous court officials blinded by power and money, exhorting them to amend their way. In short, the image of the patriotic general is vivid, and the translation reproduces the emotional beauty of the original.

## CONCLUSION

Song Ci, one of the pearls in Chinese literature treasury, plays an important role in presenting and introducing Chinese culture. From the perspective of translation aesthetics, this paper makes a tentative study on the English translation of Song lyrics, analyzing the methods of reproducing the original beauty on four levels: sound, lexis, style and emotion. Translators should not only explore the beauty of both Chinese and English, but also use aesthetic ideas to realize the transformation of aesthetic elements and qualities in the process of translation, endeavoring to be the excellent disseminators of traditional Chinese culture.

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