



The Comparison of the English Versions of Poem *Lu Zhai* -Taking G.W. Robinson and Xu Yuanchong's Versions as Examples

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Abstract: Chinese classical poetry, a treasure of Chinese culture, has always attracted numerous translators. Translating classical poetry not only requires accurately conveying the artistic conception and expression of the original work, but also requires flexible application of translation techniques to adapt to different language and cultural backgrounds. Poetry translation is a difficult point in translating literary works and poetry is known as “literature in literature”. Its form is brief, but its meaning is profound, “words are here, and meaning is there, words are full, and meaning is infinite”. This article will take the classic Chinese classical poem *Lu Zhai* as an example and use the literature review method to collect and analyze G.W. Translated versions by two translators, G.W. Robinson and Xu Yuanchong. Firstly, a comprehensive reading and understanding of the two versions were conducted. Secondly, by comparing the translation styles of the two versions, the paper compared rhyme, image, sentence and arrangement. Through these comparisons, the article concludes about the different stylistic characteristics of the two translators. This study is significant in revealing translators’ understanding and expression of classical poetry.

Keywords: *Lu Zhai*, poetry translation, English Versions, G.W. Robinson, Xu Yuanchong

Introduction

Poetry is a relatively particular literary genre, with its concise language, rich. The appearance and beautiful rhyme have become the highest form of language art as much as possible. It is not easy to preserve these characteristics of the original text and do an excellent job in poetry translation, but poetry is about something other than poetry. This article compares and appreciates the two English translations, appreciates the beauty of the translation of poetry, analyzes the three beauties of Xu Yuanchong, and compares with G.W. Robinson's. This article will conduct a comparative analysis of two typical English translations from the perspective of translator subjectivity. Specifically, this article explores the translator's interpretation of the original poem under the influence of the translator's subjectivity. The so-called translator subjectivity refers to the subjective initiative exhibited in translation activities that must be based on respecting the translation object in order to achieve the translation purpose. Its primary characteristics are the subject's human nature, aesthetic creation, and cultural consciousness. The author chooses G.W. There are two reasons for comparing the translations of *Lu Zhai* by two translators, Robinson and Xu Yuanchong. Firstly, the two translators have a unique perspective at the micro level. G.W. Robinson pioneered innovative intertextual features by annotating some of the poems themselves or allusions within them. When commenting, multiple references are made to the research findings of David Hawkes and Arthur Waley et al. Hawkes and Willie are well-known experts in translating classical Chinese poetry in the West, and their translated works have a certain level of popularity. Quoting these authoritative viewpoints can resonate with ordinary readers. Robinson's translation is generally faithful to the original text and has strong readability. Xu Yuanchong, who devoted his whole life to literary translation, as a master of the English translation of ancient Chinese poetry, put forward the theory of “three beauties” of poetry translation, that is, the beauty of sound, the beauty of form and beauty of beautiful meaning. This article takes different English translations of *Lu Zhai* as an example. It uses the “Three Beauties” theory to analyze and intensely discuss how translators can maximize the preservation of the original artistic conception, phonology, and form when translating poetry, secondly, from a macro perspective. One important reason why American readers prefer Wang Wei's poetry is that it contains artistic and Zen elements, which are in line with the cultural trends reflected in the two anti-traditional poetry reform movements in the United States. The first time was the New Poetry Movement in the early 20th century, which marked the beginning of modern American poetry^[1]. During this period, Imagist poets discovered fresh poetic expressions in Chinese poetry.

Literature Review

For over 1000 years, this poem has been widely read and sung by generation after generation of Chinese people and spread overseas. Until now, more than ten English translations have appeared both domestically and internationally, with four influential scholars: Chang Yinnan and Lewis Calvin Walmsley's Wang Wei's Poems (1958), Wai Lim Yip's Cang Tian Xia: Wang Wei's Poems (1972), and Robinson's Wang Wei's Poems (1973), Cheng Hsi and Henry W. Wells' The Artistic Meaning of Wang Wei's Poetry (1974) ^[2]. Wang Wei's poems have a vast influence in overseas Confucian cultural circles and are also widely spread in European and American artistic circles. Wang Wei dominates a curious position in twentieth-century Chinese and Western literary scholarship. First of all, he is regarded as one of the prominent poets in the Tang Dynasty(618-907), the period of greatest poetic florescence in China. He has been the subject of few extensive critical studies in any language. There are several possible reasons for this relative lack of secondary materials. In the first place, his poems possess a surface simplicity, the immediate appeal of apparently precise visual imagery, and a calm appreciation of

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nature, which seem to leave little for the readers to interpret. However, paradoxically, on second glance, his work reveals disturbingly elusive philosophical underpinnings, grounded in Buddhist metaphysics; the difficulty of grappling with these concepts and relating them to his poetry may have discouraged critical analysis. Secondly, the quite immense size of his corpus—approximately four hundred poems—may be one of the vital failings of translation. The research on Wang Wei abroad is plentiful. Some of his symbolic poems have more versions of English translations.

The 1960s are indeed boom years of research on Wang Wei. Wai-lim, Yip (1937-) issued “Wang Wei and the Aesthetic of Pure Experience” in 1972. “The Art of Wang Wei’s Poetry” by Marsha Lynn Wagner in University of California, Berkeley; 1976. “A Study of the Nature Poetry of Wang Wei in the Perspective of Comparative Literature” by Thomas Yutong Luk at the University of Michigan; 1976, “The Poetry of Wang Wei” by James Vincent Feierman at Yale University. Marsha Lynn Wagner even published *Wang Wei* in 1981 based on his own research, which was listed in the TWAYNE World Series. Pauline Pu came out with “The poetry of Wang Wei” in 1980 at Indiana University in Bloomington. “The 19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei” was published by Eilot Weinberger and Octavio Paz in 1987. “The Poetry and Prose of Wang Wei” by De Gruyter was printed in 2020. The research on Wang Wei at home is exclusively rare. In 1993, only 28 theses about Wang Wei can be found. In 2010, the number increased to 126. Especially in 2023, the number, exceeding 500 for the first time, reached an amazing 846. Several reasons could be adduced to explain this phenomenon. Its revitalization is ascribed to literature Research Association of the Tang Dynasty founded in 1982 and Wang Wei Research Association founded in 1991. In consequence, much more scholars pay more attention to the study of Wang Wei. Among *Luzhai* he ranked 7th place in the most studied list. This essay is a response to both translation version of *Luzhai* from Xu Yuan Chong and Robison, an aim to fill the critical gap and to provide a comprehensive view of Wang Wei’s poetry.

1. Overview of Poetry

Poetry was primarily a stylized form of social discourse practiced mainly in count cycles. By the end of the eighth century, poetry, while retaining its function as social discourse, had also become a conscious art form serving a variety of endings and practised by a wide range of literate Chinese.^[3] It is not easy to preserve these characteristics of the original text and do a good job in poetry translation, but it is not about poetry. This article compares and appreciates the two English translations, appreciates the beauty of the translation of poetry, analyzes the three beauties of Xu Yuanchong, and compares with G.W. Robison’s.

Source Text:

鹿柴
空山不见人，但闻人语响。
返景入深林，复照青苔上。

Target Text One:

The Deer Enclosure-Xu Yuanchong
In pathless hills no man’s in sight,
But I still hear echoing sound.
In gloomy forest peeps no light,
But sunbeams slant on mossy ground.

Target Text Two:

Deer Park -G.W. Robison
Hills empty, no one to be seen
We hear only voices echoed--
With light coming back into the deep
wood
The top of the green moss is lit again.

This poem, written by Wang Wei, depicts the nearby Lu Zhai sunset, the quiet scenery in the deep forest of the empty mountains. “空山不见人” describes the uninhabited deep forest scene and expresses the emptiness and clearness of the mountain. This poem seems ordinary, but the following sentence “但闻人语响”, is full of wit because the sound transmission of the empty valley is more lining the empty valley, and the silence of the empty mountain is even more visible. “返景入深林，复照青苔上。” is the description of “color” from the “sound” in the above two lines. From the empty mountain to the deep forest, the moss under the tree highlights the lack of sunlight in the deep woods. From this poem, readers can appreciate how Wang Wei, as a poet, painter and musician, relied on his sensitivity to color and sound to express the unique quiet realm of the moment when the voice of the empty mountain and the deep forest are reflected. Incisively, the reader oneself is like being on the scene; you can deeply feel the tranquillity and beauty of nature.

2. Introduction of Lu Zhai

Lu Zhai is a poem written by Wang Wei, a famous pastoral poet of the Tang Dynasty in China. *Lu Chai* also known as *Lu Zhai*, or *Lu Quan*, refers to the location of a large house where Wang Wei lived in the dense forest during his later years of seclusion. Wang Wei is versatile and knowledgeable, exceptionally skilled in poetry, music, and painting. In this short poem, he makes us feel as if we have heard the faint chatter of passersby in the quiet valley, contrasting the vast silence of the deep mountains by depicting the scattered afterglow of the sunset. Wang Wei was dissatisfied with the politics at the time and hid himself in seclusion. For him, this quiet environment was the most ideal. Lu Zhai, “On an empty mountain, no one can be seen, but one can hear people’s voices. Returning to the scenery, one can see the deep forest and the green moss.” Song Dynasty poet Su Shi commented on this poem as follows^[2]: “This poem is both a poem and a painting.” Tasting poetry, we vaguely see the poet sitting in the open mountains surrounded by dense forests, feeling the picturesque scene of several days without anyone in the mountains. This quiet atmosphere is only broken by the occasional sounds of passersby, and after these sounds disappear, the mountains and forests become even more silent. Due to the mountains and forests covering the head, there is almost no sunlight daily, so the ground is covered with moss. Only when the sun sets, the afterglow slants through the dense forest on the moss.

3. Introduction of Translators

G.W. Robinson

Robinson was British and studied Old Chinese, East Asian history, and literature after World War II. Later, He taught Japanese history at the University of London and moved to France in the late 1950s. In the early 1970s, Penguin Publishing Company in the UK organized staffing to write books on Eastern culture. Renowned sinologist G.W. Robinson was selected to compile and translate the text “Wang Wei’s Poetry”. The main reason why Robinson’s translation of Wang Wei’s Poetry has unique charm and is popular among readers because of its innovative intertextual features. The concept of “intertextuality” was proposed by French semiotics scholar Julia Christina in her book *Semiotics*. “The text of any work is composed like many inlays of writing, and any text is the absorption and transformation of other texts.”.

Xu Yuanchong

As a master of the English translation of ancient Chinese poetry, Mr. Xu Yuanchong put forward the theory of “three beauties” of poetry translation, that is, the beauty of sound, the beauty of form and beauty of beautiful meaning. This article takes different English translations of “Lu Zhai” as an example. It uses the “Three Beauties” theory to analyze and explore how translators can maximize the preservation of the original artistic conception, phonology, and form when translating poetry.

4. The Comparison of Lexical Translation

From the perspective of cultural translation, the difficulties in translating ancient Chinese poetry include, firstly, the reproduction of poetic charm; secondly, the translation of artistic conception. On the lexical level, the difficulties in translating “Lu Zhai” into English are nothing more than the translation of phonetics and imagery. Therefore, comparing the translation strategies translators adopt when dealing with such word translations can reveal their translator’s style. The excellence of the poem “The Deer Enclosure” by Xu Yuanchong has been recognized as the most elegant translation edition in China. It is, however, against this very background that I make hold to strike up a different chord: the originality of the poem, if taken for granted by some Chinese scholars. My argument is backed up by the striking difference between the two pieces in the title. Furthermore, I hope the following comparison will help throw a new light upon the essential significance of the originality of the poem as well as from an author’s point of view. First of all, let’s see the title of this poem. Version One translates the title as “The Deer Enclosure” wood is equal to stockaded village, which refers to a fence surrounded by trees, where the deer are kept in the literal sense. The translator added the word “deep” to express the meaning of the deep and peaceful place. But “enclosure” is easy for foreign readers to associate with the 14th and 15th centuries. The British enclosure movement broke the originality of this poem. Version two translates the title as “The Deep Park” by G.W. Robinson. “Luchai” is Wang Wei’s secluded villa in Chechuan. Most ancient people chose to live in seclusion in the countryside, away from the court, in an open place close to forests, mountains or rivers. Still, the word “park” refers to the artificial park in the city, which is completely different from the secluded place “Luchai” referred to in the original poem. The “empty” word in the first sentence of the poem, version one is translated into “pathless”, and the “empty” word of “empty mountain” is translated into a place rarely visited by people, reproducing the original intention of the author. Version two is translated into “empty”, which means nothing. But the author wants to express that there is a remote mountain, so the translation of version two is not accurate. The “但闻” word in the second sentence of the poem, version one, translated into “only”, which expresses the original meaning of “just hear”. But version two translated into “but” that is a mistranslation; the original poem does not have the meaning of the transition. In the translation of “renyu xiang”, both version one and version two are used “echo”, vividly shows the solitude of human voice reverberating in the empty valley, contrasting the empty and deep environment. As for the translation of “shen lin” in the third line of this poem, version one excels at version two. Version Two translated into “deep wood”. The word “deep” expresses the depth of the mountain. However, “wood” means a small forest, which is different from the scene created by the original text of the remote mountains and forests. Version One describes the forest with the word “gloomy”, which expresses the gloom, solitude, and desolation, which is in line with the author’s intention. In the fourth sentence of the poem, the author did not mention the sunset in the original poem. Still, after consulting the relevant information, it is known that the background of his creation is the empty mountains and deep forests in the evening. The second version of “The top of the Green Moss seems only to reach the top of the moss. The verb “peep” and the verb “slant in version one so vivid to show the dynamic feeling of evening sunshine.

4.1 The Comparison of Rhyme Translation

“Rhyme translation” is a complete translation of ancient and modern literature, which requires accurate transmission of the meaning of the work, while also conveying the flavour of the original text as much as possible - the rhythm, and essential characteristics of the original text. Version Two is translated by G.W. Robinson. There is no rhyme, and the verse of the original poem is lost rhythm. Poetry becomes like writing a few sentences to narrate a story. The first version is translated by Xu Yuanchong, in which the last words of the first and third sentences in the lines are interpreted into sight and light, respectively, and the rhyme is “t”. The last words of the second and fourth lines are translated into sound and ground respectively. The rhyme is “d”, forming The metric of “abab” is in line with the rhythm of the original poem. As far as the title 鹿柴 is concerned, version two uses a seemingly literal translation method to translate it into Deer Park, which is

actually a mistranslation. “Lu Zhai” means that Wang Wei prefers to live in seclusion away from the outskirts of the court, away from forests, mountains or it is an open land close to the river, and the term “park” refers to the artificial place constructed by citizens. However, the park translated by G.W. Robinson is completely inconsistent with the reclusive place “Lu Zhai” in the original poem. Contrary to version two, Xu Yuanchong translated the title into translated the title into “the deep enclosure”. In this way the meaning of tranquility is expressed. By comparison, version two breaks the artistic beauty of the original text.

Finally, in the first sentence of the poem, the word “空” in version two is translated as “empty”, that is, empty means nothing, and the author wants to express that this is inaccessible the mountains. Therefore, the translation of the second version is not faithful to the original one. The first version is translated into “pathless”, then the word “空山” is translated in the real sense. On top of that, in the translation of “空山不见人”, both version 1 and version 2 are used “echo” vividly to show the loneliness of human voices echoing in the empty valley.

4.2 The Comparison of Image Translation

Both Chinese and English poetry contain imagery. “Imagery” is a manifestation of poetic aesthetics, but there are different opinions on understanding “imagery”. Pound believed that “an image presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.”. Pound’s definition highlights the intuition and composition of imagery. His definition needs to be broad and specific, failing to touch on the connection between reason and emotion, as well as how humans perceive imagery. Cong Zhang believes that the term “image” originated in China. Image is the ideal image, a unique image created by the poet’s emotional activities through objective things. It is a concrete artistic image that gives more subjective colors and is different from the original state of life and can be perceived by people.

In this poem, the last sentence, “青苔”, refers to the plant moss, a type of plant that grows on the surface of soil, rocks, and tree trunks. Its main characteristics are small size, evergreen, and strong vitality. The most tremendous symbolic significance of moss is courage and spiritual strength. Moss requires a long period of growth to take root on hard surfaces such as stones, so it represents courage. At the same time, it requires tenacious perseverance to survive in harsh environments, representing spiritual strength. Version the one and two adopt the literal method, translating “青苔” into “mossy ground” and “the green moss” respectively.

4.3 The Comparison of Syntax Translation

Chinese speech composition is more inductive, while English is deductive. In deductive reasoning, speakers usually start with an overall statement and then mobilize arguments and examples to support it. However, in inductive reasoning, the example in Chinese, we are exposed to details, different examples and backgrounds of a topic or situation and from those, the speaker concludes a general rule. Therefore, it is like navigating a maze, sometimes interpreters do not know where the destination is until the very last minute.

Chinese	English
implicit	explicit
less logic	logic
inductive	deductive
parataxis	hypotaxis

Due to the inductive reasoning in Chinese, logic links are not obvious in the source language, Xu’s version highlights the logics in his translation, so “but” are employed. However, G.W. Robinson didn’t embody the logic explicitly. In the first version, the two sentences connected by “but” vividly express the poet’s movements, light and darkness, and seem to disrupt the tranquil and elegant scene between the beginning and end. The reader’s “perspective” is forcefully separated from the “perspective” that the poet wants to

present. Parataxis and hypotaxis are a criterion of syntax and style, especially in the old English poetry. In the last sentence, “on the moss” translates as the “top green moss” seems to be different from “up”, the original poem refers to “light on the moss”, rather than the translation of the position. In short, from the analysis of syntax, Robinson’s version is in line with hypotaxis and the author tried to maintain the original five-character quatrains, from the quatrains, to similar words, at least his translation can make the target language readers understand that this is a poem with Chinese characteristics. As for Xu’s version, the author uses the two verbs words to bring out the dynamic feeling of evening sunshine which tallys with parataxis. In the first sentence, Xu’s version accurately conveys the serenity of the remote mountains. But in Robinson’s version just expresses the literal sense without artistic beauty that accords with hypotaxis.

4.4 The Comparison of Discourse Arrangement

The quatrain is one of the important styles of ancient Chinese poetry. According to the number of characters, they can be divided into quatrains with five-character lines and quatrains with seven-character lines. A quatrain with four five-character lines has 20 characters, while a quatrain with four seven-character lines contains 28 characters. *Lu Zhai* preserves the format of five-character quatrains^[3].

Firstly, as a native English translator, he strives to maintain the original format of five character quatrains, from the form of a four line poem to similar word counts. At least his translation can help target language readers understand that this is a

poem with Chinese characteristics. Secondly, his choice of words is also as simple as possible, in line with the original text, striving to express profound meanings through simple words and forms. Then, this is the difference between Chinese and English, so Robinson's version may serve as a stepping stone for foreign readers to understand ancient Chinese poetry, but it cannot meet the needs of in-depth learning and research.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, translation process is not only word-for-word translation, especially literature translation, it is a more complicated task based on various factors, such as cultural context, social background, diverse ideology, and so forth. In this paper, Mr. Xu Yuanchong adopts the translation strategy of free translation in this poem, while Mr. G.W. Robinson adopts a literal translation strategy. By the comparison of the two versions, Mr. Xu Yuanchong's version is more acceptable for target readers.

Artistic conception and rhythm of the text give the ancient poems unique charm. It is not easy to dig out and reproduce the charm, which also brings the English translation of ancient Chinese poems difficulties. The "Three Beauties" theory put forward by Mr. Xu Yuanchong for the translation of Chinese poetry made an important contribution. After in-depth analysis of different translations, it is generally understood that translating poetry must be deeply understood based on the original poem's thoughts and emotions.

Based on comparative analysis, the author uses G. W. Robinson and Xu Yuanchong's version as an example; they translated the classical Chinese poem "Deer and Chai". In both versions, both translators demonstrated unique translation styles. G. W. Robinson's translation focuses on preserving the classical atmosphere and rhythm of the original work. He used complex classical Chinese language and sentence structures and tried to accurately convey the artistic conception and expression of the original poem. Although sometimes it may lead to unclear words, it is more faithful to the original work and gives readers a classical and solemn feeling. However, Xu Yuanchong's version focuses more on expressing himself in modern Chinese, transforming classical poetry into the form of contemporary poetry. He uses concise and clear language while translators emphasize emotional expression, making it easier for readers to understand and resonate. His translation style is closer to modern poetry and gives people a sense of closeness and liveliness.

By comparing these two versions, it is tangible that different translators have different styles and focuses when translators translate Chinese classical poetry. Whether it emphasizes the preservation of the classical atmosphere and rhythm of the original work, or expresses emotions in modern Chinese, it provides readers with different reading experiences.

On one hand, this paper is to fill the critical gap and provide a more comprehensive view of Wang Wei's poetry. Thus my first chapter suggests a comparative framework for interpreting his work as a whole, and the introduction offers some details of his work and translators. At the same time, I have aimed to present a broader sampling of his poems that has been translated into English and to allow his works to stand as much as possible. I hope that this study will trigger readers' interest in Western and Chinese poetry. More importantly, much more scholars will attach great importance to Wang Wei's poetry and carry out studies. On the other hand, this paper intends to study the differences in translation between the two translators. This paper doesn't attempt to appraise the two translations to determine which one is better, but to compare them to make a better understanding of translators' strategies. Wang Wei believes in Buddhism, so Buddhism exerts a strong influence on his works. In *Luzhai*, Wang Wei vividly integrates the emptiness of Buddhism into the void of rural life. In future research, scholars can analyze *Luzhai* under the scope of Buddhism.

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