

The Reproduction of the Beauty of Chinese Classical Artistic Essays from the Perspective of Translation Aesthetics: A Case Study of *Yue Yang Lou Ji*

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Abstract: *Yueyang Pavilion*, as a masterpiece of classic prose, has its unique beauty in formartistic conception and language. Based on Liu Miqing's theory of translation aesthetics, this paper takes two translation versions of *Yueyang Pavilion* by Yang Xianyi and Luo Jingguo as examples, makes a comparative analysis of the aesthetic composition of the original text and the aesthetic reproduction in two versions. Then it discusses the methods used in the translation to reproduce the aesthetic value. In order to reproduce the beauty of the original text, the translator does not only need to adopt appropriate translation strategies, but also combines his emotions with cognitive ideas.

Key words: translation aesthetics; aesthetic composition; aesthetic reproduction

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1. Introduction

Translation aesthetics is a combination of translation practice and aesthetic theory, taking “translation” as its body and “aesthetics” as its supplement. Literature contains a wealth of beauty and enables readers to enjoy it, so the theory of translation aesthetics plays a great guiding role in literary translation. So far, the study of translation aesthetics has been widely used in literary translation. Prose is a flexible genre of literature. It is beautiful in content, concise in language and diverse in form. In prose, various artistic techniques are used to create a certain artistic conception. Prose has a long history, but the study of translation in poetry and fiction is far more extensive and longer than that in prose. However, with the development of Chinese literature in the world, prose has been spread overseas. Up to now, the majority of scholars have begun to apply all kinds of theories to the translation of prose, especially the theory of translation aesthetics. The translation of prose harmonizes the form and verve flexibly, and conveys the beauty of original language, emotion and artistic conception to the target readers with the help of aesthetic theory.

In Chinese literature, prose is a special literary form. Its biggest characteristic is the shape dispersing but spirit

concentrating. A beautiful essay is often subtle in language and sincere in feeling. In the translation of prose, the translator needs to depict the original content and ideas, and reproduce the aesthetic effect to the greatest extent. As a combination of translation theory and aesthetics, the translation aesthetics can be regarded as a new perspective for the study of prose translation. In addition, the research on the aesthetic representation of prose translation will not only provide a reference for translation practice in the future, but also transfer Chinese unique cultural connotation and aesthetic value to a great number of English readers.

2. The Aesthetic Representation of the Formal System in *Yueyang Pavilion*

Yueyang Pavilion is a classic prose written by the writer Fan Zhongyan from the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127 A.D.) to commemorate the rebuilding of Yueyang Tower at the invitation of his friend Teng Zijing. The author depicted the scenery of Yueyang Tower as well as two.

different reactions and emotions when people saw different natural landscapes of Yueyang Tower at different times. In this way, the author expressed his broad-minded mood that “never be happy or sad because of other things

and yourself” and the political aspiration “be the first to worry about state affairs and the last to enjoy oneself” whatever his circumstances. As a masterpiece which is passed down through generations, *Yueyang Pavilion* has been translated into multiple versions. The aesthetic composition of original text is the basis to show aesthetic value. Aesthetic composition refers to the aesthetic elements that represent the characteristics of the text, including the beauty of language form and non-form. The formal beauty of translation does not only rely on the content and style of the original, but is also reflected in the overall aesthetic value of the target language.

2.1 Beauty of Sound

Chinese classic prose is similar to poetry, it does not only focus on the expression of its cultural connotation and mood, but also emphasizes the beauty of rhythm. There are a lot of Chinese rhyming words, which are easy to form the beauty of end rhyme, so that readers can have an aesthetic sense of rhythm. The reduplicated words are widely used, which gives people a hazy sense. The beauty of rhyme is also reflected in the mimetic words. The dynamic aesthetic feeling of prose is described to convey the aesthetic information of sound to readers through the description of mimetic words. English is the same as Chinese, with a long history of the beauty of rhyme. The alliteration and the end rhyme are the most widely used in English, because they can give people a sense of overlapping beats and make readers involuntarily immersive.

Example 1: 阴风怒号；虎啸猿啼《岳阳楼记》

Louring winds bellow angrily; the roars of tigers and howls of monkeys (杨宪益、戴乃迭译, 1998).

Chilly winds howl; the roaring of tigers and the cry of monkeys (罗经国译, 2005).

In the original text, the author uses the mimetic words “怒号”, “啸” and “啼” to describe the rainy season and the dimness of Dongting Lake. Meanwhile he also represents the beauty of Chinese sound. Yang Xianyi uses the verb “bellow” which means “to shout in a loud deep voice when you are angry”, which expresses the literal meaning, but the artistic conception of the original doesn’t be reflected. Luo Jingguo uses the word “howl” which means “to blow hard and make a long loud voice”. “Howl” is better than “bellow” because “howl” reminds readers of how terrible the wind is. Then the words “roar” and “cry” all mean “to make a loud deep noise”. They all show the depression and sadness of the natural scenery,

and perfectly reproduce a strong sense of picture.

2.2 Beauty of Lexis

As far as the characters are concerned, the structure of Chinese characters can make people understand its meaning easily and quickly, and enjoy the atmosphere brought by the characters. Compared with English, Chinese characters can better convey the aesthetic connotation of the article to readers. At the level of vocabulary, it is the combination of form, meaning and sound, so it has a strong bearing capacity of aesthetic information. In prose translation, the beauty of wording is also an indispensable and important factor. In order to make the prose translation achieve the highest level, “the target language can’t lose its natural and true characteristics under the rhetoric of the translator” (赵秀明, 2010). The lexis with aesthetic value usually possesses three characteristics: appropriateness, beauty and compactness. In the translation of prose, especially in classic prose, words should be concise and full of charm, so as to reproduce the beauty of the original words.

Example 1: 衔远山，吞长江。《岳阳楼记》

nibbling at the distant hills and gulping down the Yangtze River (杨宪益、戴乃迭译, 1998).

which holds the mountain ranges in the distance and swallows the water of the Yangtze River (罗经国译, 2005).

In this sentence, the characters “衔” and “吞” use personification and exaggerated rhetoric devices to animate “远山” and “长江”. In Yang Xianyi’s translation, “nibble” means “to take small bites of something” and “gulp” means “to swallow large amounts of food or drink quickly”, which are in line with the meanings of “衔” and “吞”. The words “nibble” and “gulp” all describe the beauty of personification, and depict the magnificent scenery of Dongting Lake. “Hold” and “swallow” used by Luo Jingguo also show the beauty of rhetoric and the spectacular scenery of the original text.

Example 2: 皓月千里《岳阳楼记》

bright moon casts its light a thousand li (杨宪益、戴乃迭译, 1998).

the glorious moon shines over the vast land (罗经国译, 2005).

In the original sentence, the word “千里” describes a beautiful picture that the moon shines brightly on the earth, and the word “里” means a unit of length. Yang Xianyi’s translation adopts the method of transliteration

“li”, which does not only accord with the linguistic form of the original, but also expresses its meaning. Although Luo Jingguo’s “the vast land” literally conveys the meaning of the original text, it cannot fully depict the spectacular beauty of the vast expanse of bright moonlight. At present, transliteration words have been involved in English dictionaries. Yang Xianyi’s translation shows the beauty of Chinese traditional cultural words and also contributes to the understanding of foreign readers.

2.3 Beauty of Syntax

Syntax is an essential part of an article. The sentences of prose vary in length: long sentences are complex in structure, profound in meaning and thought-provoking; short sentences are simple in structure, concise in meaning and have a sense of rhythm. In prose, the sentences must be both long and short to reflect its rhythmic beauty. However, due to the differences between Chinese and western sentence structures, the translator should find the similarities between two kinds of sentences and analyze the content and form in order to translate the beauty of the original sentences. In prose, especially the classic prose, the rhetoric devices of antithesis, parallelism and repetition are always used in the sentences. English sentences have the same features as Chinese. Therefore, the translator needs to master certain translation skills to reproduce the beauty of the content and structures when translating a sentence.

Example 1: 乃重修岳阳楼，增其旧制，刻唐贤今人诗赋于其上。属予作文以记之。《岳阳楼记》

Then he restored *Yueyang Pavilion*, adding new splendor to the original structure and having inscribed on it poems by famous men of the Tang Dynasty as well as the present time. And he asked me to write an essay to commemorate this (杨宪益、戴乃迭译, 1998).

The Yueyang Tower was renovated and enlarged, and inscribed on its wall were the poetry and the rhymed prose of learned men of the Tang and the present dynasty. I was invited to record this restoration effort in writing (罗经国译, 2005).

There are four short sentences in this paragraph and none of them contains a subject. Yang Xianyi adopts the method of linear translation and retains the sentence structure of the original text. He adds the subject “he” at the beginning of the sentence, that is Teng Zijing, so that the subject of four short sentences is Teng Zijing. However, what Teng Zijing did personally is only the last

invitation, so Yang Xianyi’s translation retains the form of the sentence but fails to reach its meaning. The translator Lefevere believed that translation was a rewriting process that reflected the ideology of the world (Lefevere, 1992). Luo Jingguo’s translation adopts a strategy of rewriting and reconstruction, which changes the language structure and changes the active sentence into the passive sentence. So he omits the translation of the subject, avoids the problem of four different subjects, and brings readers infinite imaginary space.

Example 2: 居庙堂之高则忧其民；处江湖之远则忧其君。《岳阳楼记》

When such men are high in the government or at court, their first concern is for the people; when they retire to distant streams and lakes, their first concern is for their sovereign (杨宪益、戴乃迭译, 1998).

When they were in high positions at court, they were concerned about people. When they were in remote places, they were concerned about their emperor (罗经国译, 2005).

The two original sentences parallel with each other neatly. They are short and the meaning is profound. In two translation versions, the translators all use the adverbial clause of time at the beginning of the sentence to imitate the original sentence pattern. The structure of two translated sentences is relatively balanced. They all have a distinct sense of rhythm, and describe the author’s patriotic sentiments and are faithful to the beauty of original emotion and rhythm.

3. The Aesthetic Representation of the Non-formal System in *Yueyang Pavilion*

Non-formal beauty is immaterial and means the non-natural perceptual components that cannot be inferred by intuition. The non-formal system mainly includes the artistic conception, emotion, culture and so on. These elements are crucial to the aesthetic value of an article. This part mainly discusses the aesthetic representation in two translation versions of *Yueyang Pavilion* from the non-formal aspects of artistic conception and culture.

3.1 Beauty of Artistic Conception

Generally speaking, the translation of original images affects the delivery of artistic conception. An article can create an atmosphere of artistic conception through the fusion of scene and emotion. Image is a kind of symbol. It has a fixed profound meaning and can cause readers to think deeply. The translator should not only observe the

aesthetic value of images, but also combine all the scenes together to arouse readers' infinite imagination and realize the beauty of artistic conception. In the translation of artistic conception, the translator's subjectivity is gradually revealed (Theo Hermans, 1996). First of all, the translator should deeply analyze and understand the original image, and then use some translation strategies, such as literal translation, free translation and alienation, to show the emotion expressed by the image in the translation.

Example 1: 若夫淫雨霏霏；阴风怒号，浊浪排空；
檣倾楫摧；薄暮冥冥。《岳阳楼记》

During a period of incessant rain; when louring winds bellow angrily, tumultuous waves hurl themselves against the sky; masts collapse and oars splinter; the day darkens (杨宪益、戴乃迭译, 1998).

In the rainy season; Chilly winds howl and turbid waves surge sky high; the masts of the ships have collapsed and their oars broken; it is dark towards evening (罗经国译, 2005).

Through a series of objects, such as “阴风”, “浊浪”, “淫雨霏霏”, “檣倾” and “薄暮”, the original text depicts a turbulent and sinister picture, giving people a feeling of sadness. Luo Jingguo and Yang Xianyi's phrases “louring winds” and “Chilly winds”, “the day darkens” and “it is dark towards evening”, all depict the depressed and dim weather of Dongting Lake, and express author's sad and dreary mood.

Example 2: 长烟一空，皓月千里，浮光跃金，静影沉璧。《岳阳楼记》

when dusk falls over this vast expanse and bright moon casts its light a thousand li, when the rolling waves glitter like gold and silent shadows in the water glimmer like jade (杨宪益、戴乃迭译, 1998).

when the mist over the Lake vanishes, the glorious moon shines over the vast land, its brightness glistening with golden light on the lake. The reflection of the moon is like a piece of jade in the depths of the water (罗经国译, 2005).

The original author describes the night scene of Dongting Lake, combining the static scene with the dynamic scene. According to the scenes of “长烟”, “皓月”, “浮光” and “静影”, the author depicts a clear and refreshing picture which expresses the author's pleasant and cheerful feelings. Yang Xianyi's “the rolling waves” and “silent shadows” are the combination of dynamic and static state, which reflects the sentence structure of the

original text and expresses the author's joyfulness. Luo Jingguo's version also reproduces the author's emotion, but the word “brightness” does not accord with the dynamic beauty of “浮光”, and fails to fully reflect the artistic conception of the original. Therefore, Yang Xianyi's translation is better here and he paints a beautiful picture of dynamic and static state.

3.2 Beauty of Culture

Translation refers to a cross-cultural communication activity which transforms one language into another. Therefore, the key to success in the translation is whether it can adapt to the cultural style of target language. Peter Newmark once proposed the concept of “cultural equivalence”, that is, “translating the original cultural words into similar target words” (Newmark, 2001). The readers of target language enjoy the aesthetic experience of the translation based on their culture. Therefore, in different cultural backgrounds, translators should have a cross-cultural vision and analyze how to recreate original cultural words, on the basis of westerners' incapacity to understand Chinese traditional culture and the ways of expression.

Example 1: 庆历四年春，滕子京谪守巴陵郡。《岳阳楼记》

In the spring of the fourth year of the reign of Qingli, Teng Zijing was banished from the capital to be governor of Baling Prefecture (杨宪益、戴乃迭译, 1998).

In the spring of the fourth year of Qingli (1), Teng Zijing (2) was exiled to Baling Prefecture (3) to be the prefect there.

(1) Qingli was the title of Emperor Renzong's reign of the Song Dynasty.

(3) Baling Prefecture was Yuezhou Prefecture, now Yueyang City in Hunan Province where the Yueyang Tower is located (罗经国译, 2005).

“庆历四年” refers to the fourth year in Renzong's period of the Song Dynasty, namely 1044 A.D.; “巴陵郡” now is Yueyang city in Hunan province. The two phrases, one represents the year of Song Dynasty and the other is the name of Chinese ancient place. They all illustrate the complexity of Chinese traditional culture. Yang Xianyi's translation literally translates the time and place; Luo Jingguo's translation is annotated to explain Chinese culture in details and easier for readers to understand. Therefore, Luo Jingguo's translation reflects more cultural beauty of the original.

Example 2: 居庙堂之高; 处江湖之远。《岳阳楼记》

When such men are high in the government or at court; when they retire to distant streams and lakes (杨宪益、戴乃迭译, 1998).

When they were in high positions at court; When they were in remote places (罗经国译, 2005).

The two words “庙堂” and “江湖” use the rhetorical device of metaphor in the original text. The former refers to being an official in the imperial court, while the latter refers to being far away from the imperial court and government affairs. In Yang Xianyi's translation, the translator adopts the techniques of partial restoration and partial literal translation to retain the use of metaphor of the original text. However, “江湖” does not refer to a real lake, so Yang Xianyi's translation fails to express the true meaning of the original text. Mr. Luo's translation uses free translation to translate the real meaning of the words, but fails to retain the formal beauty of the original metaphor. Therefore, due to the cultural differences between Chinese and English, the two translators have their own advantages and disadvantages, one focuses on the beauty of the original form, the other pays attention to the beauty of the original cultural connotation.

3.3 The Loss of Some Aesthetic Information

Translation is a process of information conversion between two languages. In the process of translation, the collision between different ideologies inevitably leads to the loss of some source culture in the target language. As Jeremy pointed out, due to the constraints of the original author's creation background and original structure, the translation cannot fully pursue its aesthetic form (Jeremy, 2001). In the previous section, we mainly discuss the representation of aesthetic information at different levels in two translation versions of *Yueyang Pavilion*. Next, we will briefly discuss the loss of some aesthetic information in two translations and the reasons.

Example 1: 若夫淫雨霏霏。《岳阳楼记》

During a period of incessant rain (杨宪益、戴乃迭译, 1998).

In the rainy season (罗经国译, 2005).

Chinese characters have their unique features, so that readers often understand the meaning immediately. In the original text, each character of “淫雨霏霏” includes the part of “雨” or the part of “霏” and readers can invoke the scene of continuous rain. However, English words are composed of letters, so that they do not have this feature

and English readers can't have such a subtle experience.

Example 2: The aspect of artistic conception 朝晖夕阴, 气象万千。《岳阳楼记》

Dazzling in the morning sun and fading in the gray evening mist, it affords a myriad of scenes (罗经国译, 2005).

In the original text, the two words “朝晖” and “夕阴” correspond, among them, “朝” refers to the morning, “晖” is the sunshine, “夕” refers to the evening, “阴” is the cloudy weather. Luo Jingguo uses three words: “dazzle” which means “the sun is so bright that you can't see for a short time”, “fade” which means “to make something become less bright”, and “myriad” which means “an extremely large number of”. The literal meaning is represented, but the variable and ever-changing climate fails to express in the whole sentence. As a result of different culture and historical background, people's inner thoughts and emotions are different.

The reasons for the loss of aesthetic information can also be divided into two categories: the limitation of the original translatability and the limitation of translator's aesthetic cognitive ability. The two examples above belong to the limitation of the translatability. At the levels of formal beauty, the translator needs to grasp the aesthetic information of the original text and reproduce it with some strategies. In the aspect of non-formal beauty, the translator should be integrated into the original text and the translation to understand the aesthetic information of two languages and think about how to express it. The most important is that the translator should have aesthetic appreciation and cognitive ability. As Mona Baker once proposed that the translator's style is gradually embodied in the translations (Mona Baker, 2000). If a translator does not have one of the above, it will inevitably cause the loss of aesthetic information.

Due to the inevitable differences between languages and culture, some original aesthetic elements cannot be reproduced in the translation. Although this aesthetic information cannot be completely displayed in the translation, the translator is supposed to grasp the aesthetic value of the original text as a whole and integrate this part into the whole article, so as to reproduce the overall aesthetic elements of the article.

4. Reflection on the Aesthetics of Two Translations

The aesthetic representation means that the translator

uses some ways to keep the aesthetic elements in the translation to the greatest extent when he transforms one language into another, so as to ensure that the translation is highly similar to the original text. In this study, the aesthetic information of *Yueyang Pavilion* is mainly reflected in the following aspects. First, at the phonetic level, the beauty of rhythm should be retained. Second, the level of lexis can reproduce the meaning and form of original words. At the third syntactic level, the structure and form of the original sentences should be represented. Fourth, the artistic conception level. Finally, at the cultural level, the cultural background of the target language is combined to retain the connotation of Chinese traditional culture.

After a comprehensive analysis and comparison of two translation versions, it can be found that the two translators have their own advantages and disadvantages in their respective translations. Luo Jingguo's translation is more faithful to the original, and is able to depict the artistic conception of the original. But Yang Xianyi's article is more in line with the expression of target language. In general, based on the comprehensive comparison between two English versions, the two translators have adopted the following translation strategies to maximize the representation of aesthetics. In the formal system, one is the level of sound. The translator should imitate the rhythm of original text according to the linguistic background of target language. Second, in the aspect of lexis, the translator can use the methods of amplification and choosing words repeatedly to fully express the meaning of the original text. The third is syntactic level, rewriting and reconstruction can be adopted to describe the meaning of original sentences and conform to the structural features

of the translated text. Then in the non-formal aspect, the translator can use annotation method to supplement the original beauty in cultural translation, so as to make it more concise and easy to understand. In terms of artistic conception, the translator should have a good aesthetic attitude and fully mobilize the aesthetic consciousness.

5. Conclusion

Prose is a beautiful art, and the aesthetic representation is an inevitable trend in prose translation. However, with the time goes on, cross-cultural integration is approaching step by step. Therefore, in the future translation, translators should enhance their capability of aesthetic cognition and appreciation and make continuous efforts to improve and perfect the translation of prose.

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