

A Comparative Study of Two English Versions of *The Mountain Gales* from the Perspective of “Faithful in Meaning and Vivid in Description” Theory

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Abstract: Wang Rongpei proposed the translation theory of “Faithful in Meaning and Vivid in Description” in which “sense-conveying” is the basic and “spirit-transmitting” is the essence. “Sense-conveying” aims to convey the original faithfully, including the meaning of words and metaphors. “Spirit-transmitting” is intended to transmit the spirit of the original, that is, to be in line with the original style and spiritual connotation. This translation theory regards the original artistic conception as the criterion and highlights the interpretation of the deep meaning and the transmission of the original spirit, which is especially important in poetry translation. By employing “Faithful in Meaning and Vivid in Description” as the translation concept, this paper launches a comparative analysis of two English versions of *The Mountain Gales* translated by Wang Rongpei and James Legge respectively from four aspects: “word meaning”, “metaphor meaning”, “formal similarity”, and “spiritual similarity”. It finds that Wang Rongpei’s version is more suitable for the communication and transmission of Chinese traditional culture, reflecting the importance and necessity of the theory for poetry translation.

Key words: faithful in meaning and vivid in description; *The Mountain Gales*; two English versions; comparative study

中图分类号: H315.9; I046 文献标识码: A 文章编号: 2832-9317 (2023) 01-0019-06

DOI: 10.12424/HA.2023.004 本文链接: <https://www.oc-press.com/HA-03-019.html>

1. Introduction

With an increasing demand for cultural exchanges abroad, the government has implemented the strategy of “going global” for Chinese culture. As a method to achieve international communication, the translation of Chinese poetry has emerged in the translation field. Based on his rich translation practice, Wang Rongpei combined the “sense-conveying” in traditional Chinese philosophy and the “spirit-transmitting” in traditional Chinese painting theory, putting forward the translation theory of “Faithful in Meaning and Vivid in Description” that has been considered a successful interdisciplinary innovation and applied to poetry translation. Likewise, the connotation of “sense-conveying” and “spirit-transmitting”, and Chinese translation theory have been improved in this way. The

translation theory has significantly promoted cultural exchanges towards the world and provided a translation concept for poetry translation (Li Zhengshuan & Ren Ting, 2017).

The Mountain Gales, a poem telling a deserted woman whining about her husband’s inconstancy, belongs to the Book of Songs. As the husband starts to embrace a new lover, the woman is evicted from the home. This diligent and unsophisticated woman, from misery to resentment and helplessness, desires her husband’s coming back, which shows her miserable life in the past. The English version of *The Mountain Gales* in the Book of Songs translated by Wang Rongpei was published in 2008. And James Legge’s first version, Gu Feng in The She King, was published in 1871.

Based on the theory of “word meaning”, “metaphor meaning”, “formal similarity” and “spiritual similarity”, the paper makes a comparison between the two English versions, to reflect the importance and necessity of “Faithful in Meaning and Vivid in Description” theory in poetry translation (Zhao Mingmin, 2012).

2. Overview of the “Faithful in Meaning and Vivid in Description” Theory

Wang Rongpei held that “spirit-transmitting” aims to convey the spirit of the original, including form, tone, imagery, and rhetoric, while “sense-conveying” is aimed at expressing the original meaning, especially the deeper meaning. Meanwhile, the translator should try to take care of the surface meaning. “Spirit-transmitting” is not equal to “sense-conveying”, but the adverbial of “sense-conveying”, that is, to convey meaning spiritually (Wang Rongpei, 1997). “Sense-conveying”, the first requirement of poetry translation, is divided into “word meaning” and “metaphor meaning”. It means that the translator should accurately understand the correct information in the original, and then faithfully convey its content and thoughts to readers. “Spirit-transmitting” is divided into “formal similarity” and “spiritual similarity” which require a translation to be loyal to the original style, including both its external form and internal affection (Wang Rongpei, 2007). In other words, the translator should study the source text carefully and then interpret it spiritually based on the correct understanding. “Sense-conveying” is “faithfulness” and “spirit-transmitting” is “sublimation”, both of which are clearly distinguished from each other but unified into a complete theoretical body. In an excellent translation, “sense-conveying” and “spirit-transmitting” are not the two ends, nor from one end to the other, but the relationship between content and form in a unity. In poetry translation, “sense-conveying” can be considered as the starting point of translation, and “spirit-transmitting” is the ending point. The translation theory of “Faithful in Meaning and Vivid in Description” is Wang Rongpei’s philosophy of translation and can be utilized as a specific strategy. It is derived not only from traditional Chinese philosophy and painting but also from the development of traditional translation theory. Its foundation is not the deduction of the theory itself,

but the translator’s great wealth of translation experience (Wang Rongpei, 2009).

3. A comparative study of the two English versions of *The Mountain Gales*

The Mountain Gales, translated by Wang Rongpei under the theory of “Faithful in Meaning and Vivid in Description”, is analyzed and compared with James Legge’s version from four aspects: “word meaning”, “metaphor meaning”, “formal similarity” and “spiritual similarity”.

3.1 Word meaning

In translation, comprehending the real meaning of words is very important to convey the original content. As poetic language has a long history, the ancient meaning of a word may be different from its modern meaning. And due to different contexts, the meaning of a word may also change greatly. The “word meaning” is not to translate the original word by word, but to convey the real meaning based on the original so as to make foreign readers understand it with ease. It may seem to be unfaithful to the source text, but it is more faithful.

Example 1

Source Text: 行道迟迟，中心有违。

Wang Rongpei’s version: *My steps drag from the house; I loathe leaving my spouse* (Wang Rongpei, 2008:59).

James Legge’s version: *I go along the road slowly, slowly, In my inmost heart reluctant* (James Legge, 2016:31).

This sentence describes the deserted woman, unwilling to leave, is being driven out of the house by her husband. She staggers away from home while hoping that her husband would keep her. This scene shows the state of the protagonist’s inner conflict when she leaves her husband. In Wang Rongpei’s version, the word “drag” is a verb that means pulling something or somebody along with effort and difficulty, vividly reflecting the inner state of the deserted woman. It is conceivable that the deserted woman is walking with a drag, reluctant to leave her husband. James Legge literally translates “道” as “road” and “迟迟”

as “slowly”, which may blur the poet’s original expression, failing to be faithful to the original text. Comparatively speaking, although Wang Rongpei’s version adjusts word order, it vividly highlights the inner emotions of the protagonist. By following the concept of “word meaning”, Wang Rongpei’s version is more accurate in conveying the real meaning of the original. The word, as the basic unit of a sentence, is used to construct sentences, images, and emotions. An adjusted and reorganized sentence may seem unfaithful, but it is rather faithful. Therefore, the translator should carefully study the deep meaning of words in the source text.

Example 2

Source Text: 凡民有丧，匍匐救之。

Wang Rongpei’s version: *Whenever my neighbours are in need, I’ll offer help in word and deed* (Wang Rongpei, 2008:61).

James Legge’s version: *When among others there was a death, I crawled on my knees to help them* (James Legge, 2016:33).

This sentence means that as long as neighbors are in distress, the deserted woman always tries her best to offer them help. The word “民” in ancient Chinese means “neighborhood” and Wang Rongpei translates it as “neighbours” which is faithful to the original text. And the word “丧” is a noun here that means “disaster or trouble” not “death” nowadays, so he translates it into “are in need”, achieving the principle of “word meaning”. The word “匍匐” in ancient times means “trying one’s best” which he translates into “in word and deed”, making it the same length as the first half of the sentence and forming a rhyme with the word “need”. Besides, Wang Rongpei’s version can appropriately convey the real meaning to foreign language readers, successfully showing the full character of the deserted woman. In James Legge’s version, it translates “民” literally as “others”, “丧” as “death”, and “匍匐” as “crawled on my knees”. It is because he does not make out the real meaning of these words in translation practice. Therefore, in order to attain faithfulness, the translator should figure out the real meaning of words by

all means when meeting the indefinite meaning of words. It can be concluded that Wang Rongpei’s version is able to distinguish the real meaning of these words, conforming to the requirement of “word meaning”. Although James Legge’s version grasps the overall idea in translation, some words are still open to question.

3.2 Metaphor meaning

In poetry translation, the literal meaning of words is far from expressing the implied content of the original. Literary works often employ metaphorical expressions, and poetry language is even more so. Ancient poets are skilled in using rhetoric to convey their thoughts and emotions euphemistically. Therefore, based on the whole original context, the translator needs to reveal its implied meaning to foreign readers. In other words, when translators deal with metaphors in the original, they should make readers know what content the poet wants to convey and what emotions the poet intends to express.

Example 3

Source Text: 宴尔新昏，如兄如弟。

Wang Rongpei’s version: *Since you took your second wife, You’ve started a happy life* (Wang Rongpei, 2008:59)..

James Legge’s version: *You feast with your new wife, (Loving) as brothers* (James Legge, 2016:31).

This sentence describes a scene that the ruthless husband and his new wife are enjoying their happy married life, while the deserted woman, lonely and forlorn, is abandoned aside. Taking into account the reader’s acceptability, Wang Rongpei employs free translation and converts the sentence pattern, translating “如兄如弟” into “You’ve started a happy life” to reveal its hidden meaning. The husband’s new married life is in sharp contrast to the protagonist’s sadness, which not only achieves the metaphorical expression but also improves the reader’s acceptability without changing the original content. Therefore, it can be said that proper conversion can play a role in helping the reader understand the original’s implication more deeply, successfully achieving the principle of “metaphor meaning”. If translated into “as

brothers”, foreign readers may misunderstand it, which does not correspond with their reading habits. Although the literal meaning is conveyed, James Legge’s version does not conform to the poet’s real intention. English readers may be confused as they could not understand the deserted woman’s inner emotions.

Example 4

Source Text: 既生既育，比予于毒。

Wang Rongpei’s version: *Now that I have borne you sons, I’m valued less than anyone* (Wang Rongpei, 2008:61)..

James Legge’s version: *Now, when your means are abundant, You compare me to poison* (James Legge, 2016:33).

Judging from the whole poem, the husband was a poor farmer once. After this couple got married, they worked hard together to improve their quality of life. The deserted woman used to help her husband a lot when he was in a difficult situation. However, the husband who was in the same boat as her changed his mind. The word “毒” in Chinese is not “poison”, but “poisonous insects” which is a kind of harmful and disgusting creature. Wang Rongpei freely translates “比予于毒” into “I’m valued less than anyone” which adds a subject and changes the sentence pattern. It signifies that the husband no longer cares for the deserted woman, showing his dislike and hatred of her wife. The deserted woman seeks hope in disappointment, presenting an image of a wretched woman. Wang Rongpei adjusts the sentence structure according to the original content and conveys the hidden meaning in translation to foreign readers as faithfully as possible. At the same time, he also tries to avoid ambiguity so as to minimize the probability of misunderstanding Chinese culture, achieving the principle of “metaphor meaning”. James Legge literally translates it into “You compare me to poison”, which only conveys the literal meaning and fails to reveal its implicit meaning. In terms of “sense-conveying”, James Legge’s version usually translates the source text literally, which may lead to ambiguity because of the differences between Eastern and Western culture. Instead, Wang Rongpei’s

version is able to convey the real meaning of the source text, passing the Chinese culture to foreign readers as much as possible to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding.

3.3 Formal similarity

“Formal similarity” is mainly aimed at the translation of ancient poems, emphasizing “translating poetry in a poetic way”. “Formal similarity” and “spiritual similarity” are closely linked and interdependent. “Formal similarity” refers to the external characteristics of artistic works, that is, the external forms of poetry, including the length, number, rhyme, rhythm, and sentence pattern. All of them belong to the form category that expresses the content of poetry to a certain extent. It can be said that “formal similarity” in translation can deliver half of the original content, so it has great significance for the English translation of poetry.

Example 5

Source Text: 就其深矣，方之舟之。就其浅矣。泳之游之。何有何亡，黽勉求之。凡民有丧，匍匐救之。

Wang Rongpei’s version: *When river water’s deep and wide, I’ll take a boat upon the tide. Where river water’s low and slow, I’ll swim or wade across the flow. Whether I have or whether I’ve not, I’ll give and take what I have got. Whenever my neighbours are in need, I’ll offer help in word and deed* (Wang Rongpei, 2008:61).

James Legge’s version: *Where the water was deep, I crossed it by a raft or a boat. Where it was shallow, I dived or swam across it. Whether we had plenty or not, I exerted myself to be getting. When among others there was a death, I crawled on my knees to help them* (James Legge, 2016:33).

Wang Rongpei is a master of rhythm and rhyme, so the “formal similarity” can be seen everywhere in this poem. As English poetry attaches great importance to rhythm and rhyme, he strives to create them to enhance the reader’s sensory effect. Following the concept of “formal similarity”, Wang Rongpei arranges the rhyme of this stanza, that is, aa bb cc dd. At the same time, “formal similarity” reflects the combination of meaning and rhythm, which arouses the reader’s sympathy for the

deserted woman and creates a sorrowful occasion. For example, the diphthong /ai/ in the words “wide” and “tide” is pronounced with an open mouth and a loud voice when the deserted woman is complaining about her past life. This pronunciation is exactly in line with her inner cries in the poem. James Legge’s version pays no attention to the “formal similarity”, and fails to transmit the poet’s implicated intentions. Similarly, both of them use “I”s four times in succession, which not only allows readers to understand its logic but also forms an impressive parallel structure, showing the deserted woman’s determination to leave her husband. It can be concluded that by fully displaying the principle of “formal similarity” in translation, the original content can be faithfully conveyed to a great extent.

3.4 Spiritual similarity

Translation in poetry should pursue both the form and spirit of the original. Wang Rongpei borrowed “spirit-transmitting” from Chinese painting theory and applied it to translation practice. “Spirit-transmitting” emphasizes the spiritual similarity between the translated version and the original work to convey the poet’s spiritual connotation. It highlights that the art form of the original should be reproduced on the basis of “sense-conveying”. Sometimes in order to achieve the principle of “spiritual similarity”, the translator may sacrifice individual words.

Example 6

Source Text: 德音莫违, “及尔同死。”

Wang Rongpei’s version: *Your sweet words fill my ears: “We’ll stay a hundred years* (Wang Rongpei, 2008:59).”

James Legge’s version: *While I do nothing contrary to my good name, I should live with you till our death* (James Legge, 2016:31).

The scene in this sentence is where the deserted woman is crying about her husband’s inconsistency, as the husband forgets the sweet words that he spoke before. First of all, Wang Rongpei’s version achieves the concept of “formal similarity”, with the same length and neatness as the original. Besides, the word “德音”, translated as “sweet

words”, is a noun that refers to the husband’s good words to the deserted woman, which is easy to understand for foreign readers. The phrase “fill my ears” means that the deserted woman’s ears are full of sweet words, displaying the husband’s character of liking the new and hating the old. And the phrase “stay a hundred years” refers to the vow that the husband would never abandon the woman. From these verb phrases, the reader can imagine a vivid scene of the description in the poem. Even when the husband becomes cold, the woman still tries to persuade him to change his mind. The use of these verb phrases, regarded as the punchline in the poem, is a dynamic transmission of the protagonist’s emotions, expressing her nostalgia for those past happy days. Therefore, it can be said that Wang Rongpei’s version flexibly chooses magical verbs to convey the protagonist’s inner emotions instead of being confined to the original. James Legge’s version fails to present the logical subject of the first half of the sentence. And translating “德音” as “good name” can not achieve the principle of “word meaning”. In the second half of the sentence, James Legge’s version translates it literally, which is less spiritual and emotional than Wang Rongpei’s.

Example 7

Source Text: 有洸有溃, 既诒我肆。

Wang Rongpei’s version: *You deal hard blows; you shout and yell: Day in, day out, I live in hell* (Wang Rongpei, 2008:63).

James Legge’s version: *Cavalierly and angrily you treat me; You give me only pain* (James Legge, 2016:33).

This sentence creates a scene in which the husband brutally beats and scolds the deserted woman and imposes heavy work on her in daily life. The idiom “有洸有溃” in Chinese refers to the turbulent flow, which metaphorically shows the husband’s cruelty to the woman. A series of actions, such as “deal hard blows”, “shout”, and “yell”, vividly reflect the poet’s emotions, arousing readers’ imagination as if the husband’s rough treatment is taking place in front of readers’ eyes. The plural word “blows” shows that the husband gives so many fists to the

deserted woman, which achieves the principle of “spirit-transmitting”. In the original sentence, the idiom “既 诒 我 肄” means that all hard work is given to the woman. Wang Rongpei’s version chooses to add “day in, day out” to make the sentence consistent with the first half of the sentence in length, in order to emphasize the woman’s past miserable life. The phrase “live in hell” expresses the woman’s complaint and resentment toward her husband, being equivalent to the original and making the translation more vivid by following the principle of “spiritual similarity”. Although James Legge’s version is able to achieve the principle of “word meaning”, the emotional ups and downs are relatively flat, which is less vivid and impressive than Wang Rongpei’s. Comparatively speaking, in terms of “spirit-transmitting”, Wang Rongpei’s version pays more attention to the inner emotions of the original, while James Legge’s version does not.

4. Conclusion

From the above analysis, it can be found that the theory of “Faithful in Meaning and Vivid in Description” attaches great importance to “spirit-transmitting” based on “sense-conveying”. Wang Rongpei’s translation work, *The Mountain Gales*, is a combination of sound, form, meaning, and spirit, giving readers a wonderful reproduction of the original poem. His version has many remarkable characteristics. First, the style of the original poem can be reproduced based on faithfulness. Second, it can grasp the poem’s spiritual essence, offering readers a vivid and realistic impression. Third, it can vividly convey the inner emotions of ancient Chinese poetry and has

profound significance for foreign cultural exchanges.

This paper proves that the concept of “Faithful in Meaning and Vivid in Description” is applicable to poetry translation, and it would be valuable for international cultural exchanges. However, the translation theory is not systematic enough. In order to form a dialogue with the foreign translation circle, the theory needs to be further improved and then integrated into the international translation system. Therefore, translation scholars can do systematic research of this theory and its scope of application as a future research direction. Against a backdrop of tradition and innovation, the “Faithful in Meaning and Vivid in Description” theory will continuously contribute new forces to poetry translation.

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