TRANSLATING SHE KING, TOWARDS A HOLISTIC APPROACH

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Abstract: Through the translations of William Jones and Ezra Pound et al, She King or Poems, has become a supermeme in English and American literatures. However, their translations only make an imperfect reflex of the Chinese art due to their neglect of proper form and content. This paper, based on the analysis of their translations, argues what makes a poem a poem is not semantic content alone. Form and content make an inseparable dyad, and form itself is a sign, signifying the entity of poetry. Sir John Denham's dictum: "Not Language into Language but Poesie into Poesie" is a basic requirement for verse translation. However, an analysis of their rhymed versions shows that translation of "poesie into poesie" is not yet enough. A translation should be faithful in style as well, so "style into style" is another criterion. Still, we have to consider the real value of a classic, hence the criterion of "classic into classic". So besides the consideration of semantic content, poesie into poesie, style into style, and classic into classic are necessary, if not sufficient, conditions for a holistic translation. In verse translation, there are no fixed principles but a very flexible maxim, that is, rendering the original as it is into a foreign language text, that is, a translation should be as close as is possible to the original with the consideration of the above criteria, a guarantee of the proposed holistic approach.

I. Introduction

She King 詩經 or Poems, one of earliest Chinese classics known to the Western world through its translations, is a collection of 305 earliest poems in Chinese history, about 2500 years ago; it is a tetrad consisting of Airs of the States, Psalms Minor, Psalms Major and Chants. Airs of the States is a treasure of 160 folk songs, namely airs collected from the 15 vassal states of Chough, Palms Major and Psalms Minor include 74 and 31 psalms respectively, sung by nobles at court or at table, and Chants include 40 chants sung to gods or ancestors during sacrifice.

She King unrolls a panorama of Chinese life at that time, i.e. 6th century BC. Some of these folk songs describe the love and hatred, aspirations and frustrations of people from different classes of the society, some report social events, warfare, and state affairs, and some depict the wonder and harmony of nature. It shows a repository of flora and fauna: about a hundred kinds of plants and trees, ninety kinds of animals and insects, and it gives an exhibition of arts and crafts, namely all kinds of musical instruments, metals, arms and munitions of war, buildings, clothing, food, and so on. These objects are used as metaphors or they consist in a milieu of the heroes and heroines acting on the historical stage, contributing to the literary value of the creations.

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She King has done well, as Confucius said, "to inspire, to reveal, to unite, and to admonish." Given the diversity of the poems and their literary value, She King is a very valuable document for those who wish to seek insight into Chinese civilization, "the most literary, the most artistic, the longest established civilization that exists," as John Turner (1976, p. 6) said.

The artistic impact of *She King* goes on from generation to generation. So its charm can still be felt even today; actually it has never faded. It lives on and reproduces. On the one hand, the pattern of four-character or tetrasyllabic verse has been used until today; on the other, it has evolved into many subgenres: pentasyllabic verse, hexasyllabic verse, septasyllabic verse, and other types of songs. The images and ideas represented in these poems are still fresh, as fresh as rosebuds, and many lines have become proverbs like "Of your hands I take hold/I'll stay with you till old," "One day I don't see him/Is like three years I'm sick," "The reeds sway, green and green/The white dew becomes frost." Ask anyone if s/he knows "Of your hands I take hold," and s/he will reply with the second line "I'll stay with you till old."

She King has been a supermeme in Chinese literature and is not confined to China. As such it is a gift to the world. It is influential indeed, as well as an inalienable part of world literature, even though its translations are far from ideal. For a better understanding of the Chinese art, we need to scrutinize these translations to expose their inadequacies, and find a better approach to its expression in English and/or other languages.

II. An Imperfect Translation, a Warping Mirror

She King began to influence the West in the eighteenth century when Sir William Jones (1746-1794) pioneered the translation of fragments of *She King* into English. Then came James Legge, C. F. R. Allen, and William Jennings in the next century and L. Cranmer-Byng, Helen Waddell, Louis S. Hammond, Ezra Pound and Arthur Waley in the next.

Jones' translation, although not faithful in form or content, opened a window on China and exerted considerable influence on English poets of the nineteenth century such as Byron, Shelley, and Tennyson (De Pinto, 1946). Ezra Pound was the most influential and controversial of all these trail blazers. Despite his blatant manipulation and errors, his translation is imbued with vigor, succinctness and poignancy and contributed to the Imagist Movement he launched; a fresh breath through American literature. From Jones and Pound we can see how English and American literature has been tinged with a Chinese hue.

However, this hue is not the whole thing of the Chinese art, only an imperfect reflex of the source hue, because the translations themselves are imperfect.

Some early translators such as Sir William Jones and James Legge, probably unaware of what translation is all about or for other reasons, gave two versions, free verse and rhymed verse. Irrespective of the semantic content, their free verse translations, word for word translation from the original in most cases, are not equivalent to the original in terms of genre because the songs in *She King* are metrical, regular in meter and rhyme. Their rhymed verse translations are better, if not closer, in form but the meaning is, more often than not, distorted or lost. In translating poems, it is almost impossible to keep both form and meaning without

sacrificing the integral beauty. Poetry is what is lost in translation, Robert Frost jeered.

In the following, we shall analyze Jones' free verse and rhymed verse translations and examine others' in the next section as supporting evidences for the necessity of a holistic approach to translation. Now let us look at Jones' "A Chinese Ode" translated in 1799:

Behold yon reach of the River KI;
Its green reeds, how luxuriant, how luxuriant!
Thus is our Prince adorned with virtues;
As a carver, as a filer, of ivory,
As a cutter, as a polisher, of gems.
O how elate, how sagacious! O how dauntless and composed!
How worthy of fame! How worthy of reverence!
We have a Prince adorned with virtues,
Whom to the end of time we cannot forget.

Jones' free verse version (we have found only this fragment) can be seen as a literal translation, very close to the original in diction and layout, and very poetic owing to the tonal emphasis fashioned by the reduplications or parallelisms. But it is inadequate in two aspects. In form, the original is in rhyme though irregular in rhyming scheme, and it is tetrasyllabic except the last line of each stanza, while this translation is not rhymed and is lengthy with irregular lines, varying from nine to fifteen syllables. In content, the original depicts a gentleman or lord as gallant, refined (Like ivory polished/Like precious stone finished), and cheerful, while the translation mistakes him as "our Prince" and appoints him to be a kind of smith "as a carver, as a filer, of ivory/As a cutter, as a polisher, of gems". "Prince" and "carver" etc. are incongruous or grotesque, if not totally impossible. So, we can see Jones' free verse translation is unfaithful either in form or content due to his misinterpretation of the semantic content of the original, and most probably, inadequate understanding of translation. Now, let us look at his rhymed version:

Behold, where yon blue riv'let glides Along the laughing dale; Light reeds bedeck its verdant sides, And frolic in the gale.

So shines our Prince! In bright array The Virtues around him wait; And sweetly smil'd th' auspicious day, That rais'd Him o'er our State.

As pliant hands in shapes refin'd Rich iv'ry carve and smoothe, His laws thus mold each ductile mind, And every passion soothe.

As gems are taught by patient art In sparkling ranks to beam, With manners thus he forms the heart, And spreads a gen'ral gleam. What soft, yet aweful, dignity! What meek, yet manly grace! What sweetness dances in his eye, And blossoms in his face!

So shines our Prince! A sky-born crowd Of Virtues around him blaze: Ne'er shall Oblivision's murky cloud Obscure his deathless praise.

Jones' rhymed version is audacious, so audacious as has betrayed the original almost throughout. It can be seen as a *belle infidèle* termed by Gilles Ménage. The original consists of three stanzas, nine lines each, and four characters or syllables each line while the translation is composed of six stanzas, four lines each, and eight syllables (tetrameter) and six syllables (trimeter) in alternate lines, so it is a great deviance in layout from the original. In addition, the original is rhymed but irregular in rhyming scheme while the original is in elegant alternate rhyme, i.e. aabb. What about the content? It is a far cry from the original. Take the first stanza for example. One cannot find in the original any clue to the information expressed in the last three lines. If the first line of the first stanza alludes to the original, then the following five stanzas have almost nothing to do with it, not correspondent either in thematic structure or semantic content.

If this translation is a dazzling beauty, it is not the beauty portrayed by the author. It is a rewriting, a raping and rapturing rewriting, fitting in with the Horace Model. Jones was just paraphrasing or imitating the original in John Dryden's terms (Fan, 1981); this translation is not analogous to the original either in form or content, either.

From the above analysis, we can see Jones fell short of his effort to represent the original in either free verse or rhymed verse translation. An imperfect translation is a warping mirror of the original. So it is not ill-grounded to assert that Chinese literature has been warpingly mirrored to the west. Isn't it necessary to see what the original is like? Self-evident. But other translators were hardly better. The inadequacies of some other translators will be analysed in the next section while we discuss the holistic approach to translation.

III. Towards a Holistic Approach

III.1 The necessity of Proper Form and Proper Content

Rendering *Poems* into rhyme with regular meter while keeping the content is a great challenge to translators. Arthur Waley gave it up, as he said "if one uses rhyme, it is impossible to sacrifice sense to sound" (Waley, 1941, p. 1). He makes sense if we consider Jones' translation. Out of this understanding and probably due to the complexity of factors involved, Waley neglected the essential formal features and tried to keep the semantic content. However, what makes a poem a poem is not semantic content, or not semantic content alone.

Form and content, or sound and sense in Waley's terms, make an inseparable dyad, and the form itself is a sign, signifying the entity of poetry. So what is neglected by Waley should not be neglected at all. According to Aristotle, form is active while stuff, i.e. content, is passive, and in the eyes of Russian formalists,

form is content, and this form is even more important than the semantic content of a text because form is what makes something art to begin with, so in order to understand a work of art as a work of art (rather than as an ornamented communicative act) one must focus on its form (Shklovsky, 1990). It is true if we consider the nature of a sign, a disembodied being. Form, be it of Eidos, of logic, of language, or of poetry, is one with different realizations or reincarnations. Anyhow, the beauty of form is a salient feature of poetry or it is what poetry relies on. Of course, form without content is unimaginable. A good poem satisfies both form and content, and more specifically, it is in the tension between form and content, namely the mutual haulage between form and content. Therefore, a translator's disregard of poetic form can be regarded as a misunderstanding of verse translation, a fundamental mistake. In short, translating a poem into meaning without its poetic form is inadequate, if not meaningless.

It is easy to understand that translation of poems is not a matter of "language into language" but a matter of "poesie into poesie". Probably, James Legge realized the importance of meter and rhyme, so like Jones he gave a second version after publishing his first draft of free verse. But can he stand Robert Frost's satire and Arthur Waley's assertion? Or is he faithful at all? Let us see his two versions of the first stanza of the first poem in *Poems*:

Kwan-kwan go the ospreys, On the islet in the river. The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady: --For our prince a good mate she.

The original text follows this schema: four four-character or tetrasyllabic lines each stanza with the rhyming scheme of aaba. Legge's first version does not represent or represent its poetic form. So we can conclude that it is not faithful in form. However meaningful the content is, the whole translation is inadequate, because it is not what the original is. Poetry is what it is, in contrast with prose. Legge's version is nothing but prose in poetic lines.

Now we may focus on its content irrespective of the form. Is it faithful in semantic content? What does "Kwan-kwan" mean? What part of speech is it? Few readers know or can infer from the context that it is a transliteration of the Chinese onomatopoeic word "guanguan", the wooing sound produced by grebes or crown grebes, to be specific. So it cannot be a successful translation. And accordingly, "ospreys" should be another mistranslation. The osprey (Pandion haliaetus), sometimes known as the sea hawk, fish eagle, river hawk or fish hawk, is a diurnal, fish eating bird of prey, a large raptor. This contrasts sharply with the loving bird called crown grebe, which is analogous to a wooing young man or young woman. What about "our prince"? Does the original say it is "our prince"? The original says "junzi". It is a polysemous word, which means 1) lord, 2) gentleman, and 3) mate or husband. The original poem is a love song, of a girl being pursued by someone, so the best interpretation of this someone should be a pursuer, accordingly "junzi" here is the closest in meaning to the third one, namely mate. Every prince can be a mate, but not every mate can be a prince. In short, for the optimum function or potential of the text, the third acceptance is the best choice, which can be interpreted as "young man", "boy", "lad" and so on. What about the style? The original is terse, with four characters or syllables each

line. But the translation is verbose, twice as long as the original while irregular, varying from line to line. The wordiest of the wordy is Legge's translation of "yaotiao" into "modest, retiring, virtuous, young", but it misses the mark. The words put together do not make an equivalent to the original "yaotiao". In conclusion, considering the content and style, Legge's free verse version should not be judged as an ideal translation.

Legge's second version, namely the rhymed verse translation came in 1876:

Hark! From the Islet in the stream the voice Of the fish hawks that o'er their nest rejoice! From them our thoughts to that young lady go, Modest and virtuous, loath herself to show. Where could be found, to share our prince's state So fair, so virtuous, and so fit a mate?

Like Jones' translation we have analyzed, it is a rewriting, or an imitation in John Dryden's terms! You might say it is his own versification based on the hints or clues from the original. First, let us compare it with the original in terms of form. The original is a four line stanza with the rhyming scheme of aaba while the translation is a six line stanza of three couplets, aabbccdd; the original is tetrasyllabic while the translation is iambic pentameter, that is to say, the original is composed of 16 syllables while the translation is of 60 syllables, a vast difference. If form is necessary to a poem, this translation has a different form from the original. As Shakespeare said, brevity is beauty. If the original is a slim girl, the translation is a humpty-dumpty. Because it is a humpty-dumpty, you can easily see its proud flesh: "that o'er their nest rejoice", "From them our thoughts to that young lady go", "loath herself to show" and "to share our prince's state" are additions, redundant indeed, not to mention the misinterpretations like "osprey". It is not only redundant but also vulgar, because the worldliness of "to share our prince's state" detracts from the purity of love. Besides, the textuality is different because the author, unlike that of the original, comes onto the stage, exclaiming "Hark!" and showing his presence by saying "our thoughts" and "our prince's sate", thus adulterating the original. In short, although the poetic form is represented in a way, the content and style deviate from the original.

Based on the above analysis, we can understand Frost's irony and Waley's assertion are not without reason. Arthur Waley's version came out in 1937:

"Fair, fair," cry the ospreys On the island in the river. Lovely is this noble lady, Fit bride for our lord.

Really, it is fresh. The meaning is well conveyed although "osprey", "noble lady", "fit bride" and "lord" are not good candidates, if not wrong interpretations. Judging from the text and context, there should be no "noble lady" or "our lord" or "fit bride". It is a folk song limning the pursuit of, or yearning for, a girl by a young man. Fresh as it is, it is not equivalent to the original. On the one hand, the lines are irregular, varying from five to eight syllables; on the other, there is no rhyme or rhyming scheme, hence a loss of musical effect. Judging by Ezra Pound's criteria of Logopeia (beauty of meaning), Phanopeia (beauty of form)

and Melopeia (beauty of sound), Waley's version satisfies only one, i.e. Logopeia, though still discounted. Again, it is a far cry from the original. In this case, sense is not sacrificed to sound, but it is still sacrificed. So form should not be seen as a necessary detraction of sense.

Then comes Ezra Pound, one of the greatest figures in the history of translation from Chinese into English. Ironically, Ezra Pound knew very little Chinese. He did not translate from the original but from Ernest Francisco Fenollosa's notes, namely word to word explanations of the original verse, perhaps with reference to James Legge's translation. Let us look at the stanza he translated in 1954:

"Hid! Hid!" the fish-hawk saith by isle in Ho the fish-hawk saith: "Dark and clear, Dark and clear, So shall be the prince's fere."

It is dressed in poetic form though the lines are irregular, not analogous to the original, which is four characters a line, no more, no less. What about the semantic content? One can hardly find any similar sense between his version and the previous ones except for the last line and the word fish-hawk. What does this version convey? It's really hard to understand. Why does the fish hawk say "Hid"? How is it related to other lines or the context? Why does it say "Dark and clear, Dark and clear, So shall be the prince's fere"? This translation is not a coherent piece; few, if any, can figure out a possible logical relation. Actually, the original does not convey such information. If we try to find the cause for his absurdity, we may infer from his translation that Pound strung the words together from Fenollosa's notes or his English explanation of individual words or characters (equivalent roughly to morphemes). Of course, he strung them artistically, making the piece a rhyme. The onomatopoeic word "guan" in the first line refers to the wooing sound produced by the mating birds called crown grebes, but Pound misunderstood it as "to close", which may have something to do with "to hide"-- an effect of closing can be seen as something being hid. Accordingly, Pound used the inflected word form "hid". And because "guanguan" is a reduplication of the sound "guan", Pound, out of his misunderstanding, repeated the word "hid". Similarly, the word "yaotiao", which is formed with two characters or morphemes, means "gentle" or "quiet"; when "yao" and "tiao" are separated from each other, the former may mean "dark" or "dim" and the latter may mean "fair" or "clear", hence Pound's diction: "Dark and clear, Dark and clear". Now let us look at the word "Ho" in the second line. It is a transcription from the Chinese word pronounced "he", i.e. the "Ho" in the translation, which means "river" or "the Yellow River". But very few western readers can associate it with the common noun "river" or the proper noun "the Yellow River". Pound may have copied Fenollosa's notes without understanding what the words really mean in the original text. In addition, he changed the texture or layout of the original. The first two lines in the original make a metaphor, in which the cooing of the grebes is compared to the wooing of the hero and heroine in the next two lines. However, he made the protagonists invisible. As a matter of fact, starting with a metaphor whereby to usher in protagonists is the schema of *Poems*. So, although Pound's translation is in poetic form, it is not faithful to the original in

either form or content. If it can be judged as a poem or even a good poem, it has little or even nothing to do with *Poems*.

Now we have fully realized the implication of Sir John Denham's dictum: "Not Language into Language but Poesie into Poesie" (Bassnett, 1980). However, the analysis of Legge's and Pound's rhymed versions shows that the only requirement of "poesie into poesie" is not enough. A translation should be faithful in style as well, so "style into style" is another criterion. Still, we have to consider the real value of a classic. A classic can stand the test of Old Time. It refuses to be adapted or rewritten, for example, "grebe", a loving bird in the Chinese setting of flora and fauna, should always be "grebe"; never should it be "osprey", nor should "prince" or "lord" come to stage if they have no part to play in the original. So the ultimate criterion comes: not only style into style but also classic into classic.

Of course, "classic into classic" is a dream, but it is a dream worth pursuing. If interlingual communication, as described by I. A. Richards (1953) is "very probably the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos" (p. 250), then translation, especially verse translation, is many times as complex as normal interlingual communication because the interfaces between form and meaning, including subinterfaces between semantics and pragmatics, between content and style and so on should be properly addressed. In the process of translation, one is always at risk, prone to fall flat, as Sheng Rui (c. 371-c. 438), a Buddhist translator and critic, said, "Just like having broken through the passes, one finds a great abyss; if no *deus ex machina* comes to help, he will fall." (cited in Chen Fukang, 2000, P. 21) In this pursuit, if a translator is born with a deep insight and equipped with proper expertise, he may succeed, enjoying the kick.

III.2 How to be Holistic?

What are the principles to follow in verse translation? There are no fixed principles but a very flexible maxim, that is, rendering the original as it is into a foreign language text as close as is possible to the original. This method can be summarized in Peter Newmark's terms, namely, as literal as is possible, as free as is necessary (Newmark, 1988). To be literal is a guarantee for faithfulness: literal in terms of words and their compositions, therefore it includes form, meter and rhyme in most cases; to be free is an attempt to break the bonds of language to approximate the original from a roundabout way. Literal or free, it is for the holistic effect of the translation. The act or process of translating can be revealed as a system of checks and balances, in which anything can be vetoed according to the right weight of the elements involved. In the following, we shall see how the tretrasyllabic or four character scheme of the original is vetoed.

It is not difficult to understand that the meter or rhyme of a translation is only an analogy to that of the original because pronunciation and intonation are specific to a language and are dependent on it. For example, in English "thyme" and "prime" are in rhyme, but [taim] and [praim] are inherent to the words respectively, in other words, they have no counterparts in the original. Nor does meter have a counterpart in the original because stress or intonation is specific to a language. If a translator has no sense of adaptation, he may fall as well. Arthur Cooper (1971), trying to re-present the four-character meter of the original, translated the first stanza of the poem in question into tetrasyllabic lines, a brave act.

Waterbirds on River islands! Shy the nymph our Shepard's chosen.

However, it fails to keep the charm of the original as result of being stuck to the tetrasyllabic. A Chinese tetrasyllabic line is not an English tetrasyllabic line because Chinese is different from English. As a matter of fact, in Chinese we do not count syllables but characters, or in other words, a Chinese word is not analyzed into syllables, so the so-called tetrasyllabic is only an analogy. Of course, Cooper can translate that way, and it is recommendable if the meaning or form is not sacrificed. But, obviously, Cooper's version is not in rhyme, and the semantic content is inadequate, having lost the wooing sound and courtship as is conveyed by the original, and it is unclear who is shy; it seems to be "our Shepard". Besides, who is our Shepard? So Cooper's version, though analogous to the original in meter, is not ideal as a whole. A translation should be holistic, as close to the original as is possible, though dialectically.

It dawns on us that it is improper to translate the tetrasyllabic lines of the original into tetrasyllabic lines in English due to the different parameterizations of Chinese and English. Chinese is hypotactic, with few cohesive devices like prepositions, conjunctions and articles while English is paratactic, rich with such devices. So it is reasonable to adopt the hexasyllabic pattern, as has been tried and carried out all throughout by the author. As for rhyming scheme, aaba, abab or aabb is advisable because rhyme is to be used by analogy. Based on the above analyses and reflections, I attempt to give my hexasyllabic version, an iambic trimeter, tailored with the golden mean, as is shown below:

Do-do, the grebes do coo At shoal amid the stream; The lad is keen to woo The lass, a virtuous dream.

It is not necessary for one to comment on his own work because it is here for you to see, to hear, and to feel, and of course, to criticize. *She King* or *Poems* (Zhao Yanchun, forthcoming) as a whole falls in with this pattern, that is, iambic trimeter with its translator attempting to render the classic into a classic. Of course, a translator, bewitched with the wonder of translation, always expects later translations to do better, coming up with something incorporating both proper form and proper content.

All the same, this translation can be seen as a sample fulfilled with the proposed holistic approach. During the process of translation, the tetrasyllabic of the original is vetoed to accommodate the hexasyllabic or iambic trimeter of the translation, and the rhyming scheme aaba of the original is represented with abab in the translation. In short, the form is realized by analogy. In respect of content, the metaphor is kept intact, in which the configuration of grebes cooing is used as the vehicle and the wooing of the lass by the lad is the tenor, on the other hand, the protagonists are vividly sketched, who are playing against the background where grebes coo at shoal amid the stream. In a word, the content is not sacrificed

to the form; as a whole, the translation is approximate to the original, a dialectic fact.

IV. Conclusion

She King as part of world literature is known to westerners through translations. However, very few of its translations up to now are faithful either in form or content. Therefore, it is necessary to scrutinize the previous translations to see how the beauty of *She King* is lost or distorted in the process of translation.

We have analyzed the influential translations of *She King* to show that they failed to represent the original as it is or closely as it is, hence a warped reflection of the Chinese art. And based on the analysis, we have realized that a successful translation is dependent on a correct understanding of what translation is and an appropriate method to represent the original to the largest extent so as to keep its artistic value. Accordingly, we have provided a set of step-by step criteria for classic verse translation, i.e., poesie into poesie, style into style, and classic into classic, and thereby attempt to put forward a holistic approach to translation of classics or translation in general.

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