ANALYSIS OF DIFFICULTY IN TRANSLATION OF REGIONAL CLASSICAL CHINESE POETRY (A CASE STUDY ON CHONGQING'S OVERSEAS TRANSMISSION)

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ABSTRACT：*With the deepening of the cultural exchange in the world, the unified orientation of Chinese literature is struggling in the cross-cultural communication, however, Chinese regional traditional culture has yet attracted more and more attention in foreign academic circles. As one of the local historical and cultural communication media, the translation of regional ancient Chinese poetry has become an urgent problem to be solved, which has a great significance in increasing the influence of classical Chinese literature in global contexts, making new breakthroughs in regional research and promoting differentiation of academic studies on overseas dissemination of Chinese literary heritage. Taking Chongqing classical poetry as a case, this paper focused on the using of noun, the organizing of meaning and the expressing of allusions to interpret some difficulties in the English translation of regional ancient Chinese poems, so that provides references and lessons for the overseas communication in global contexts of regional classical Chinese literature.*

KEYWORDS：Classical Chinese Poetry; Regional Culture; Chinese-English Translation; Global Context; Chongqing

INTRODUCTION

Background

Great difficulty has always been found in the translation of ancient Chinese poetry into foreign languages. Although the core reason can be summarized as the great differences in history and culture between China and western countries, it can be seen in the translation practice that the manifestation of this difficulty is multi-level, which covers almost all aspects, such as vocabulary, sentence patterns and thought-expressing. In order to convey the original charm of classical Chinese poems, as well as make the reader understand theire potential meaning, a clear understanding of the primary difficulties in translating ancient Chinese poems is required, so that we can undertake relevant research and improvement.

Due to the effect of geography, history, customs and other factors, a variety of poems that have typical local characteristics, which had a strong vitality, were derived from classical Chinese poetry. Study of regional classical verse ought to be made on the basis of this kind of

difference, and seek for historic differentiated academic directions. At the end of the 20th century, represented by Professor Yan Jiayan in Peking University, a group of scholars began a full-scale study of local culture. Mr. Yan put forward a new point of view, "Regional influence on literature is a comprehensive one, which is closely connected with humanity factors in this region, and influences and restricts the literature through the middle part between regional cultures." In the 21st century that followed, Research for Chinese regional literature came active, during which the majority of provinces and cities have brought out historical literary works which reflects local literary achievements, and presented new problems and ideas in the study of regional literature. Nowadays, research on regional literature is booming, consequently, diversified Chinese culture is gradually walking towards the world under this situation. Not only does it begin to occupy an increasingly important position in the field of theoretical research on world literatures, but also it promotes the communication of regional literature in the world further more.

As a city with the most typical regional culture characteristics, Chongqing has a massive Ba culture1 complex. Mountain Culture, Dock Culture, and Three Gorges Culture, etc. occupy an important position in the art of Chinese regional poetry, hence became the cultural Mecca of poets who created and chanted poems here. So, it is of typical significance to take Chongqing as an example in studying the global communication of regional classical Chinese poetry as well as its strategy and meaning of overseas dissemination.

Difficulty on Translation

However, in the process of regional ancient Chinese poetry's global contexts, although numerous, the quality of these poems is uneven. Exploring the reasons, we can find that the most prominent problems are the irregular phenomena in the English translation. Such irregularities can be generally analyzed from "Using of noun", "Organizing of connotation", and "Expressing of allusion", namely, analysis of three difficult aspects in the Chinese-English translation of ancient Chinese poems.

Difficulty on Using of Nouns

Chinese character is based on table-shaped objective entity, and is compatible with empirical sound, meaning, and form of the logogram, but the total system remains ideographic characters. Therefore, literary thinking of Chinese has always been inextricably connected with specific images of the nature，such as the literary expression of "Represent an object with another one"以物表物, single form of proper nouns, complex patterns of proper nouns formed on the basis, and so on. While English belongs to the Indo-European language family, it is based on the different combination of the Latin alphabet to convey meaning. To a certain extent, this language plus its culture differs greatly from Chinese characters.

As for the translation of cultural image in classical poetry, the greatest difficulty lies in the integration of "form" and "meaning", which determines that literal and free translations are

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[1] Ba is a the feudal state which mostly distributed centered on Chongqing and Eastern Sichuan in Spring Autumn and Warring States Periods (770B.C.-221B.C.).

complementary to each other in the process of translation. Literal translation is mainly used to solve the problem of the "form" in the translation of nouns. Its methods can be roughly summed up as "pinyin" and "words", which require not so much technique of a translator. Free translation is used to solve the problem of "meaning". But the solution of how to accurately express the poet's original meaning in the translation requires a higher literary accomplishment and a strong ideation. This kind of personalized way of translation is the main causes of non-standard uses of the nouns in the process of translation of ancient Chinese poetry. Moreover, because of China's regional complexity, it is more difficult to balance "literal translation" or "free translation" to "qualitative" from a variety of regional translation of noun. This leads to the ineffective expression of "regional Chinese culture" in the context of English in the translation of classical Chinese poems. For example, the word "巴山"(Ba mountains) in Chongqing, had been used by a number of poets in ancient China so as to express their melancholy or nostalgia. Li Shangyin's Send To North In A Rainy Night (夜雨寄北) is most famous:

> 君问归期未有期，巴山夜雨涨秋池。
>
> 何当共剪西窗烛，却话巴山夜雨时。

This poem uses night rain of Ba Mountains where might be in Chongqing to express the poet's deep melancholy. Through "Night Rain of Ba Mountains", "Candle at Western Window" and so on, the poet used the scene to make readers blend in with them, as if the scene become live. In the four sentences of the poetry, "Ba Mountains" was used twice, which might refer to Mt. Jinyun in northern Chongqing nowadays. But in the process of translation, there are different forms of translation, which bring about different reading experience. For example, British Sinologist Herbert A. Giles translated it as:

> You ask when I'm coming: alas, not just yet.
>
> How the rain filed the pools on that night when we met!
>
> Ah, when shall we ever snuff candles again?
>
> And recall the glad hours of that evening of rain?

With reference to the translation, we can see that Giles didn't accurately express the original images. In the second sentence, Giles didn't literally translate "Ba Mountains", but used "When We Met", this conception of time instead, leaving the original meaning in the clouds and fogs with his subjective. Similarly, in the translation of the third sentence, the word "Candle at Western Window " was simply translated into "Candles", with "the west window" two characters vanished. That's not accurate enough in terms of literal translation, and it was far from the emotional tone of the original text. What's more, in the original poem, "Autumn" and "Rain" are two nouns, which saturated with images of a kind of desolation. In the process of translation, however, Giles just translated the word "Autumn Pool" into a "Pool", which made the translation only retained the "Rain" image, but leave out the image of "Autumn", thus greatly weakened Li Shangyin's expressing of loneliness in his poem.

These images were not the poet's impromptu, but a result of being moved by the rainy and sentimental Ba Mountains. However, the mutual infected melancholy emotions between the poet and Ba Mountains around Chongqing were nothing left in Giles' version, while the special cultural atmosphere based on the specific geographical environment of Chongqing was thin and weak. In this regard, Chinese scholar Xu Yuanchong translated it as follows:

> You ask me when I can return, but I don't know;
>
> It rains in western hills and autumn pool overflow.
>
> When can we trim by windowside the candlelight?
>
> And talk about the western hills in rainy night?

Through the analysis of this version, we can find that "Ba Mountains" was translated into "Western Hills 西山" by Prof. Xu. This kind of alienate handling expressed the intention of the original poem and it was understandable as well. Meanwhile, "Western Hills" is also used in the last sentence. Maintained the original implicit style, it lost the poet's clever attentiveness to personate the Ba Mountains where were far away from his home. Similarly, in the translation of "Candle at Western Window", Xu's translation "By Windowside the Candlelight " was only slightly better than that of Giles'.

In addition, the scholar Lin Yutang translated the 2nd and 4th sentences as "The night rains on Mount Pa swell the autumn pool", "And talk to the time of the night rains on Mount Pa". In this version, " Ba Mountains" was translated into "Mount Pa" based on Wade-Giles Romanization that was the most widely used system of transcription in the English-speaking world for most of the 20th century, which became more relevant to the pronunciation of the original. But the difference in geography and history also make English readers feel more difficult in understanding.

By comparing the above three versions, we know that although they are all close in the expression of vocabulary to the original poem, the implications that conveyed are totally different. This leads to the phenomenon that Li Shangyin's poem conveys different emotions in different translations, making the English reader unable to accurately understand the VIVID effect created by the original poet through "refined word".

Difficulty on Organizing of Connotation

Prof. Xu Yuanchong once mentioned the standard of "Three Beauties" in poetry translation in his monograph, The Art of the Translation, and he pointed out that:

Among the "Three Beauties", beauty of meaning or connotation 意美 is the first priority, and beauty of sound 音美 takes the second place, while the last one is the beauty of form 形美. That is to say, translation is the creation of beauty, in which process spirit weighs more than shape, and the beauty of meaning that poems convey is where their essence lies.

The connotation of classicial Chinese poetry is a unity of the subjective and objective, a blend

of emotion and scenery, a poet's sublimation of art when he was under the specific historical and cultural background, and an aesthetic creation by concise language and actual virtual transform techniques.

Therefore, in the process of English translation of classical Chinese poems, how to convey the abstract meanings with a particular cultural connotation becomes the most important and most difficult aspect for translators to grasp. For example, the Three Gorges of Yangtze River in Chongqing, which has been chanted by generations of poets, has become China's important historical and cultural symbols and represents the hardships and dangers and majestic momentum. This cultural imagery is caused by the cultural reflection of Chongqing's unique geographical factors on human production and lives. It is also a kind of regional culture formed by long-term history accumulation. This can be seen in Li Bai's poem, The Early Sailing From White Emperor Town《早发白帝城》:

> 朝辞白帝彩云间，千里江陵一日还。
>
> 两岸猿声啼不住，轻舟已过万重山。

In the first part of this poem，"Return in One Day" is exaggerated in space and time, which shows Li Bai's romantic characteristic extremely. "White Emperor Town" and "Jiangling" are located respectively in nowaday Fengjie County of Chongqing and Jingzhou City in Hubei. The Three Gorges Yangtze River are between the two places, along which the road is extremely complex, which can be known from another poem of Li Bai's Difficult Roads of Shu《蜀道难》. So, Li Bai used the exaggerated expressing "Return in One Day" between the two well-known locations so as to express his majestic heroism, which was the unique connotation construction way used in ancient Chinese poetry. But in the process of translation, translators are unable to explain the historical origins of Chongqing's strong local characteristics clearly to make readers realize the inner emotional connection. This brings difficulty for translation of classical Chinese poems to convey their connotations.

Let's take a look at two translated versions on the first couplet of this poem:

Leaving at dawn the White Emperor crowned with cloud,

I've sailed a thousand li through canyons in a day.　　　　　　——by Xu Yuanchong

In the morning I leave Po Ti perched in the clouds,

The thousand li to Chiang-ling are compressed to a day.　　　　——by Liu Shishun

Comparing the above two translation versions, we can easily find different translators emphasized different aspects when they were translating. Among them, Prof. Xu agreed with Dr. Liu in the form of translation in general; but the translations of "白帝城" and "江陵" were different. Dr. Liu focused on pronunciation and transliterated them as "Po Ti" and "Chiang-ling" respectively based on Wade-Giles Romanization we mentioned before, while Prof. Xu translated as "White Emperor Crowned" and the "Canyons". Between them, "Chiang-ling" and the "Canyons" are two totally different ways of translation. Although

"Chiang-ling" sounds familiar to Chinese, it is not the same for English readers. Prof. Xu translated as "Canyons" instead of "Three Gorges", the noun that people all around the world rather than Chinese know universally. Compared with the original text, it showed the long distance between Baidi Town and Jiangling indirectly, and conveyed a great momentum as well.

From the foregoing discussion, we find that different translations of different translators show different understandings of the original poems, and emotions that the translations convey to the readers also vary. Between the original classical Chinese poem and its translation, there is a relationship of "original to translation" and " translation to original", while the former is the most important foundation of these two kinds of relations. On the one hand, various tests indicate that the fitness between the translated work and the original is in the "translation to original" relationship, while the standard is the original work. On the other hand, because of the difference in language structure and cultural concepts of English and Chinese, English readers' understanding of the original ancient Chinese poems is also in the process of "translation to original", which put them in a passive position in accepting and understanding. In these two aspects, the basic requirement of handling the relationship of "translation to original" is using Chinese original as a benchmark, which requires the translators to make every efforts to go up closer to the true meaning of the poem.

Difficulty on Expressing of Allusion

In some way, an allusion is a "high enrichment" of some typical historic events in China for thousands of years, which is a symbolic representation of concepts and generally can be divided into two forms: historical and literary allusion. Historical allusion 事典 refers to borrowing ancient myths, legends, tales, fables and so son to tell what the poet wants to express in real situation, while literary allusion 语典 refers to quoting poetry, prose, lyrics, etc. to borrow someone else's words to express one's own feelings. Allusions were used mostly in order to suggest the poet's implied meaning beyond the poem and "vivify" the expression of the spiritual purpose of the entire poem.

At present, even the domestic academic circle often cannot give a completely accurate explanation on the use of allusion in Chinese poetry, let alone the ordinary people who either need to have accumulated certain historical knowledge or have to refer to some reference books on allusions to understand the usage roughly during reading a poem. As for translating allusions in classical Chinese poems into English, it needs us stride across the gap of multiple culture and history, instead of translating by explaining the nouns literally.

For example, The Diagram of Eight Formations 八阵图, a famous Chinese historical allusion used in The Romance of the Three Kingdoms 三国演义, located in Fengjie County, Chongqing, is used as a symbol of a high degree of intelligence and strategy, because it embodied the thoughts of traditional Chinese Legalism2 and The Book of Changes. Apparent

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[2] Legalism 法家 refers to a current of reforms and writings that came to emphasize rule by law in early Chinese Philosophy.

from what is discussed for Chinese, but the allusion is quite difficult to translate it into foreign language. Du Fu has a quatrain named The Diagram of Eight Formations:

功盖三分国，名成八阵图。

江流石不转，遗恨失吞吴。

The first couplet in Du's poem was translated as:

His deeds overshadowed a land split in three,

His fame was achieved in these Eight Formations.

The translator is an eminent scholar in Chinese poetic studies, Prof. Stephen Owen. The allusion "The Diagram of Eight Formations" needs no further explanation but just to leave alone as it was which will not hinder Chinese readers from understanding what Du Fu wanted to presented here: it was his high praise for Zhuge Liang's3 achievements. However, after comparing various translative methods, it can be found out that the extensibility of translation on this line is limited—it is hard to avoid literal translation. Prof. Owen translated as "Eight Formations" in the context of English, although it was the most reasonable way of translation, it was difficult for English readers to understand the profound purpose of writing of the poet as a result of quite few accumulations of Chinese history.

CONCLUSION

Facing the three difficulties in the translation of classical Chinese poems into English, we must clearly realize that it is an inevitable problem needs to be taken seriously. It relates to the correct expressions of the contents of traditional Chinese culture. Furthermore, it has something to do with the correct direction and methodology of traditional Chinese culture in global contexts. Chongqing is a city with local and diverse culture such as its various geographical landscapes, historical figures, historical events, etc. have been chanted by poets from generation to generation, and underestimated in the history of classical Chinese literature. Doing a good job in the translation of ancient Chinese poems involving some local historical elements of Chongqing into English can solve practical problems in consideration of nouns, connotations and allusions in the process of translating the Western China's regional poems might set an effective example of translating of regional poems and expand the overseas influence of classical Chinese culture. In face of the increasing prosperity of intercultural communication in China, we ought to carry forward traditional Chinese literary heritage vigorously and standardize the translations of classical Chinese poetry into English at the same time so as to ensure that the traditional culture of China will not fall into distortion and scatteration in the process of its communication in global contexts.

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[3] Zhuge Liang (181–234) was a chancellor of the state of Shu Han during the Three Kingdoms period. He is recognised as the greatest and most accomplished strategist of his era.

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