

Translation of Chinese Classical Poetry in the Perspective of Intertextuality

Yonghua Hu*

School of Foreign Languages, East China Jiaotong University, Nanchang 330013, China
**Corresponding author e-mail: Hu_yonghua@126.com*

Abstract: *Based on intertextuality theory which emphasizes the interdependence and influence of texts on each other. According to the theory founder Kristeva, each text is a mosaic of quotations, and each text is the absorption and transformation of other texts. This paper discusses the translation of Chinese classical poetry and argues that poetry translation is characterized by a great deal of intertextuality in terms of text, imagery and allusions, and that translators should both fully recognize the intertextuality in Chinese classical poetry and adopt appropriate strategies to convey the intertextual connotation.*

Keywords: *Intertextuality, Chinese Classical Poetry, Translation*

1. Introduction

T.S. Eliot, a modern English poet and literary critic, once said : "Little poets borrow, big poets steal." This statement actually implies the germ of post-structuralist intertextuality theory. The concept of intertextuality was introduced in 1969 by the French post-structuralist critic Julia Kristeva in her book *Semiotics*, which refers to the transformation of one or more sign systems within one or more sign systems. Inspired by Bakhtin's theory of dialogue and polyphony, she developed her own theory that each text constructs itself as a mosaic of references, as an absorption and transformation of another text. No text can exist in isolation from other texts, and all texts are in a relationship of interdependence. This intertextuality makes the understanding of various texts depend on this interrelationship. The meaning of texts in different time and space intersects with each other, forming a huge hypertext. But intertextuality must not be understood as a process of excerpting, cutting and pasting, or imitating, but rather as the extraction of semantic components from the web of texts that always point beyond this text to other pre-texts that situate the present discourse within the larger socio-historical text with which they are inextricably linked. In the 1960s and 1970s, structuralism and post-structuralism led to the rapid development of intertextuality theory. Following Kristeva, a number of literary scholars have elaborated the concept of intertextuality. Derrida's theory of intertextuality holds that every text, every discourse, is an "interweave" or "textile" of referents, and that the referents of these referents are determined by their discourse from the perspective of intertextuality. In this way, each kind of appreciation or critical interpretation is only a tentative and partial "addition" to a text, since the various referents of a text contain only the "marks" of their multiple references. It can be said that any text is produced on the basis of the remains or memories of its predecessors, or is formed by the absorption and transformation of other texts. According to Barth, any text is an intertext, and "other texts in varying degrees of more or less recognizable form-the textual form of the culture that preceded and surrounded (the text)-are present in this In other words, within a text, other texts exist in varying degrees and in various more or less recognizable forms, and any text is a new weave of past citations. Fowler once vividly revealed the meaning of intertextuality: "Intertextuality is like a parchment that has been scraped from the original text and then reused, and in the lines of the new ink marks there are still glimpses of the unclean traces of the previous text." The theory of intertextuality focuses not only on the interaction and influence of textual forms, but also on the formation process of textual content, on the "untraceable codes", and on the influence of the omnipresent cultural traditions. Any textual work always exists in a cultural system composed of the literature, history, geography, customs and traditions, religion, politics and warfare of the nation or the country or the region, and at the same time has inextricable ties with other cultures in other countries or regions of the world, absorbing, borrowing, influencing and spreading their own cultures, and always having various kinds of direct or indirect ties with the thoughts or words of predecessors or contemporaries. The direct or indirect connection with the ideas or discourses of the predecessors or contemporaries.

2. Intertextuality and Translation

The relevance of intertextuality theory to translation is obvious, because translation itself is a kind of intertextual activity. The intercultural nature of translation makes "dialogue and communication among authors, translators and readers across time and space, forming an interactive process of selection and absorption, creation and variation", and the "translator", as the subject of this activity, on the one hand, is suffering from the difficulties brought by the plurality of meanings of the original text, and on the other hand, is performing acts of imitation, association or allusion to other texts or other translators. This multiplicity of imagenary activities interacts with each other in a vast network, and translation is accomplished through the interreference of many texts. The introduction of the theory of intertextuality has broadened the horizon of translation studies. When two different languages and cultures are involved, this intertextual connection is often not known to people in the other cultural system because of the different cultural circles they belong to, and it becomes a barrier to understanding and communication in interlingual transfer. The language of poetry has been refined over the centuries, with refined language, strict rhyme, and clever counterpoint. Each poetic text is composed of different systems (phonetics, diction, imagery, metre, and diction) that intersect, clash, and break down to form a multiplicity of intertextual meanings, and so on and so forth. The intertextual reference is like the director of the actor who manipulates the linguistic symbols on stage, hidden behind the curtain of culture. If we only see the "actor" and ignore the "director" behind the curtain, it will lead to mistranslation, and even if we can barely translate it, it will be confusing. Therefore, intertextuality in translation is inevitable. This paper will analyze the significance of intertextuality theory in the translation of classical Chinese poetry from three important components of poetry, namely, words or phrases, imagery and allusions.

3. Intertextuality and Poetry Translation

3.1 Intertextual Characteristic of Chinese Classical Poetry

Encompassing a number of forms of expression that intersect and depend on each other in literary works, "Intertextuality" gives citation, allusion, reference, pastich, parody, plagiarism, and various forms of parroting in literary writing an essential and unifying character. Reference, pastich, parody, plagiarism, and various forms of copying have a theoretical perspective that summarizes their essence and unity. According to the French scholar Tiffina Samovayo's book *Studies in Intertextuality*, which compares the origin, doctrine and critical practice of intertextuality theory, Philippe Sollers' definition most succinctly illustrates the meaning of intertextuality: "Each text is linked to several texts, and plays the role of re-reading, emphasizing, condensing, shifting and deepening these texts. The definition of intertextuality is most succinct; " The author of *Studies in Intertextuality* attribute intertextuality to literary memory, which is carried by the text, the author and the reader respectively, and forms transformations and connections in literary writing. This is certainly insightful. Memory is one of the basic abilities of culture to accumulate and derive itself, but in the case of literature, memory cannot fully explain the subjective initiative of creation, and only by adding imitation can the mechanism of intertextuality be fully demonstrated.

All human activity begins with imitation, and literary creation is no exception. "The borrowing of an existing text may be accidental or tacit, from a vague memory, an expression of homage, or a submission to a model, overturning a classic or being willingly inspired by it." In China, where antiquity was the order of the society, imitation was a common trend and a fashion in the poetry world from the Wei and Jin Dynasties to the Northern and Southern Dynasties, and it was a feature that could not be ignored in the works of poets such as Lu Ji, Xie Lingyun, and Jiang Yan. Until the Tang Dynasty, the great poet Li Bai's compositions still clearly left traces of archaism. As a result, the intertextual relationship of classical poetry is common and permeates all levels of the poetic text. It can even be said that intertextuality is the most prominent textual feature of Chinese classical poetry and the most common phenomenon in classical poetic works.

3.2 Chinese Characters and Intertextuality

The focus on intertextual phenomena at the micro level of the word sign is one of the features of deconstructionist intertextual theory. For deconstructionism, such intertextual reading at the level of words often enables one to escape from the conceptualization of specific words, to discover cultural connotations that have been forgotten in the process of word change, and to open up a broader space of

thought. Western languages are phonetically based, and semantic intertextuality between words is mainly presented through phonetic similarities, especially through the connection between specific phoneme combinations and corresponding letter combinations with Greek and Latin roots. Chinese characters are based on ideograms, and although they do not lack phonological intertext, it is mainly through the morphological structure of the characters that intertext is produced. In the seal script, both the upper and lower parts of the character "Mo" are grass, and the sun sets in the grass, so it means "twilight". The intertext of sun and grass creates a vivid picture, so that we can still vaguely experience the feeling of the ancestors when they faced the sunset. The predominance of morphemes in Chinese characters is also a masterpiece of intertextual thinking. Characters of the same form not only form intertext with that form, but also with each other, so that they evoke not only the corresponding concepts, but also rich visual images and associations. For example, in the poem "I used to be, and the willow was still there, but now I am thinking of the rain and snow falling", "rain", "snow", "fall", "snow", "fall" and "water" remind people of rain and water. The words "rain", "snow" and "fay" remind people of the changes of rain and water vapor, almost like a living weather scene, and the traces of "rain" are always present in these words; while "yi yi" contains a strong human feeling. The "human feeling" here is mainly caused by the superimposed character "yi yi", which is reminiscent of "the feeling of reluctance to leave". The intertextuality of these characters adds a lot of complexity to the verses. Since the intertext of Western characters and the intertext of Chinese characters present different faces, the intertextual symbols contained in Chinese characters are mainly expressed in terms of sound and rhythm in the English translation of Chinese poems. For example, in Liu Zongyuan's "River Snow", the image of a lonely fisherman is vividly expressed by the Chinese characters "lonely", "Demoiselle" and "Hat", while "Cold", "river" and "snow" are all cold water uniting to show a snowy scene in the river country. Even without exploring the meaning of the verses, the intertextuality of these Chinese characters add a lot of complexity to the verses. Xu Yuanchong's translation is as follows:

From hill to hill no bird in flight;
From path to path no man in sight.
A lonely fisherman afloat;
Is fishing snow in a lonely boat.

The reader does not need to deliberately recite this translation in a calm, soft tone, a beautiful scene of birds flying out of sight, people disappearing, the long distance scenery is pale, and the lonely scene is cold. The consonants l, f, and t, which are heavily used in the translation, sound very quiet and distant; the labial and alveolar sounds th, which are not easily pronounced, and the relatively dull m sound set off a deep and somewhat depressing and desolate feeling. Although the morphological intertext of the Chinese characters cannot be expressed in the translation, the translator compensates for it by expressing a contextual effect similar to that of the original.

3.3 Allusion and Intertextuality

The use of allusion is a common expression technique in classical poetry, as explained by Liu Xie in his work *Wen xin Diao Long*, which means "to use allusions to the past to justify the present. The use of allusion is one of the common techniques to resort to intertextuality. For example, when we mention the Lugou Bridge, we either think of the War of Resistance against Japan or the Lugou Xiaoyue; when we mention the high mountain and flowing water, we think of Boya and the qin. The same is true in foreign countries, mentioning Pearl Harbor or Bin Laden, one will associate them with related things, which saves a lot of explanation and contains a lot of information which is actually a kind of information compression. However, Chinese classical poetry seems to pay more attention to the use of allusions. The purpose of using allusions is to compare the past with the present, to prove the present with the past, and to express one's feelings through the past. The so-called allusions refer to "examples and facts", specifically, myths and legends, historical stories, folklore, fables and fables, as well as ancient books and lines that have been handed down. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of allusions in classical poetry, i.e., positive allusions and counter-allusions.

3.3.1 Proper use of allusions in poetry

The proper use of allusion is to use historical facts and allusions in poetry as a positive metaphorical support to express the author's thoughts and feelings. The use of such expressions not only refines the language of the poem, but also increases the richness of the content, vividness and ambiguity of the expressions, which can receive the effect of simplicity and richness of meaning and intriguing.

However, this kind of intertextual connection is often unknown to people in another culture, and if translated rigidly, it is easy to cause misunderstanding. For example, the first line of Du Mu's poem *A Farewell to the Heart* recalls the life in Yangzhou which "depend on others for a living". In the second line, he talks about his debauchery and indulgence in wine and sex. The two allusions, "The King of Chu has a flavor for a fine waist" and "Zhao Feiyan has a light body and can dance on the palm", describe the beauty of Yangzhou and the indulgence of the author. Those who are not familiar with Chinese culture may not know who the "King of Chu" and "Zhao Feiyan" are, and therefore they have no idea of the cultural connotation behind them. If the translation is translated as "the king of Chu" or "beauty Zhao", the ideas that the author really wants to express will be lost, and the readers will not be able to appreciate the deeper meaning. In such a case, the domestication can often bridge the cultural gap better. Mr. Xu Yuanchong's translation is as follows:

With my wine- bottle, watching by river and lake
 For a lady so tiny as to dance on my palm,
 I awake, after dreaming ten years in Yangzhou,
 Known as fickle, even in the Street of Blue Houses.

Xu's translation adopts the technique of domestication, which directly expresses the imagery that the author wants to express, although it loses the ambiguity of the original poem, but the domesticated translation helps English readers who are not familiar with this Chinese history to deeply understand the text and deepen their understanding of Chinese traditional culture.

3.3.2 Counter-allusion in poetry

A counter-allusion is an expression of a thought, feeling, or opinion that is the opposite of the original allusion, when quoted in a positive way but used in a negative way. Reverse allusion expresses rich content in condensed words - the original meaning of the allusion in the work and the new meaning expressed through the original meaning of the allusion, which can save many words by using one allusion. This expression enhances the meaning of the work, but also has some influence on the reading and translation. For readers who have little knowledge of Chinese history, folklore and legends, it will cause difficulties in appreciation. If the translation is rigid or hard, it will not only ruin the "linguistic feast" carefully prepared by the poet, but also fail to let people in another cultural system appreciate the connotation and charm of Chinese poetry. For example, Wang Wei's poem *Autumn Night in the Mountains* is an allusion to the opposite use of the phrase "The fragrance of spring rests at will, and the king's grandchildren can stay". Another poem *Recruiting Hermits in Chu* uses the lines "Wang Sun wanders and does not return, the spring grass grows and luxuriates" and "In the mountains, one cannot stay long" to invite Wang Sun to leave the mountains and join the government. Wang Wei, on the other hand, uses the phrase "Wang Sun" to describe himself, and uses it in the opposite way: the spring grass decays as it wishes, the autumn colors here are really interesting, and "I" would like to stay in the mountains. This is how the book *Three Hundred Tang Poems in English Translation* translates this line:

And what does it matter that spring time has gone,
 While you are here, O Prince of Friends?

The translator did not understand the meaning of "Wang Sun" in the poem, thinking that this "Wang Sun" is the same as the other "Wang Sun", and did not taste the author's comparison with "Wang Sun". The author did not understand the meaning of "king's grandson" in the poem, and did not appreciate the author's use of "king's grandson" to compare himself to "prince", resulting in the mistranslation of "king's grandson" as "prince", which conveyed the wrong message to the readers. Another version is relatively well handled:

Let spring's fragrance vanish, as it will;
 May the wanderer tarry, as they please me.

In this translation version, the translator deeply understands the connotation of the allusion in the poem, and understands the poet's self-reference to "Wang Sun" as a way to escape from his sullen mood. Although the translation of "Wang Sun" as "me" cannot compare with the beauty of the original poem's subtlety of using allusions, it at least correctly conveys the original meaning of the poem. Cervantes once said that translation is like the back of a carpet: the outline is there, but the pattern is blurred, neither smooth nor colorful. The translator believes that the power of translation lies in making

the back of the carpet smooth and colorful, even if it is not comparable to the original, the word "similar" should be sought.

4. Conclusion

Intertextuality is an inspiration for translation, mainly in the understanding and expression of the source poems. By translating poetry in the context of intertextuality and understanding the intertextual signs contained in poetry, translators can more effectively solve the cultural problems encountered in poetry translation and break down the cultural barriers in the translating process.

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