

## On the Gain and Loss of Emotions in Pound's Translation of *Cathay*

WANG Feng, LAN Qi\*

School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, China

### Original Research Article

\*Corresponding author  
LAN Qi

#### Article History

Received: 02.10.2018

Accepted: 09.10.2018

Published: 30.11.2018



**Abstract:** The essence of poetry lies in its expression of emotions, as is the case with poetry translation, which aims not only to express the meaning, but more importantly, to convey the emotions in the original poem. The study of Pound's *Cathay* explores into the gains and losses in his translation of emotions from his idea of "Energy in Language" as well as his creative translation. The translation practice in *Cathay* shows that his two strategies of image juxtaposition and absolute rhythm have greatly enhanced the emotional effect in poetry translation. However, what cannot be neglected is that due to the distinct cultural background, there have been misreading about the poetry images and misunderstanding of the form of Chinese poetry, which inevitably lead to loss of emotional effect in poetry translation. It is hoped that this study can enlighten poetry translators and arouse their attention to the translation of emotions in poetry to gradually improve the translation quality of classical Chinese poetry.

**Keywords:** *Cathay*; Emotion; poetry translation.

### INTRODUCTION

In the history of Chinese and foreign poetry translation, emotions, the soul of poems, are inextricably linked with poetry. British poet William Wordsworth once stated in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." The essence of poetry is the expression of emotions, and without emotions, poetry cannot be called poetry [1].

That's to say, poetry translation is essentially a kind of emotional interpretation, which is the key to successful poetry translation. Ezra Pound brought Chinese poetry to the West through *Cathay* and his creative absorption of classical Chinese poetry set off a "Chinese craze" in the 20th century. T. S. Eliot predicted that three hundred years later, *Cathay* would undoubtedly be a prominent masterpiece of poetry in the twentieth century.

Pound abandoned traditional translation methods, adopted creative translation methods including image juxtaposition to innovate the English translation of poetry. Besides, he strongly opposed the traditional Victorian poetry, and adopted absolute emotions and absolute rhythm to innovate the form and content of American poetry. This is closely related to the core of his translation theory, "Energy in Language". Then, here is the question worthy of our attention: in Pound's translation practice, had he grasped the original emotions in poems to achieve the maximum value of language energy? In this article, *Cathay* will be taken as a typical case to explore the emotional gains and losses in Pound's translation of poetry through descriptive research methods and comparative analysis.

### POUND'S "ENERGY IN LANGUAGE"

Throughout the translation history between Chinese and Western countries, it is commonly assumed that the translator should convert the meaning, information or intention of the original language into another language, and this conversion is based on the presupposition of the existence of meaning. Nonetheless, in Pound's translation theory, meaning has been inexorably abandoned. He does not attach great importance to the meaning of the text. He doesn't think that the meaning of a word is static, but it is always in motion. This point of view is in line with the opinion in linguistics that words are arbitrary.

What Pound focuses on is the energy in language, which is the core of his translation theory and his poetry. In *Construction and Reflection*, Zhu Chaowei demonstrated this concept of language energy [2]. In Pound's view, words are like nodes, and as long as they are properly placed, they can produce the most energy, which can be obtained only by emotions. The acquisition of emotions needs to be obtained from the thing itself. Only in this way can the poem have the beauty of poetry, and beauty is the strong emotions in the original text. Translating poetry is to seek the equation of human emotions and to reproduce the

beauty of emotions in the original poem. Pound attaches great importance to the remolding of beauty of poetry. He believes that the beauty of poetry lies in the expression of emotions. From this point of view, to bring the emotional experience of the original poem to readers is Pound's ceaseless pursuit in translating poetry.

## IMAGE JUXTAPOSITION AND DETAIL RENDITION

### The gain of image juxtaposition

As mentioned above, Pound attaches importance to language energy in translation, so words, as the core of language energy, should take the responsibility. Pound advocates the theory of translation of details, insisting on the accurate representation of details, words, fragments and the description of images. Of Pound's imagism, image is the complex of instant sense and sensibility. In terms of language, he opposes the use of abstract and complex words, advocating the use of clear and concise language in order to present specific images. Pound classified poetry into three categories: melopoeia, phanopoeia and logopoeia. To Pound, melopoeia is untranslatable, nor is logopoeia; only phanopoeia emphasizing the images of poetry can be translated accurately, and so long as the translators do not neglect the convention of translation, good phanopoeia is unlikely to be destroyed [3]. Chinese poems are typical of phanopoeia, in which there are a lot of images. The successful translation of *Cathay* is the best case in point. "The apparition of these faces in the crowd; petals on a wet, black bough..." Pound wrote in his earliest image poem "In a Station of the Metro" [4]. In this poem, only such images as "crowd", "face", "looming", "wet", "swarthy", "branches" and "petals" are used to show what he saw as he stepped out of the carriage from Paris metro station. Such a succession of images are a clear reproduction of the scene, helping the poet to get rid of the emotional confusion on that subway. It is through the capture of the details and the presentation of specific images that enables the poem to have obtained the maximum energy of language, thus sublimating the poet's strong emotions.

Different from the bold and direct western poetry, Chinese poetry is usually implicit in meaning [5]. Chinese poets are more likely to create an artistic conception through several images for readers to touch the poets' feelings, hoping to evoke their emotional resonance. These images are displayed through a number of words, and the more important is that they carry a kind of emotional characteristics or the extended meaning associated with them. Yuan Xingpei, a Chinese scholar, called it "emotional texture," that is "the words, in addition to their original meaning, are linked with kinds of emotions and poetic texture, and this emotional texture is gained for the frequent use of these words. Anyone familiar with classic Chinese

poetry will think of a series of poetic lines the time he sees these words in turn" [6]. Ma Zhiyuan wrote in his popular poem 《天净沙·秋思》“枯藤老树昏鸦，小桥流水人家，古道西风瘦马，夕阳西下，断肠人在天涯。”(Over old trees wreathed with rotten vines fly evening crows; Under a small bridge near a cottage a stream flows; On ancient road in the west wind a lean horse goes; Westward declines the sun; Far, far from home is the heartbroken one. "Sunny Sand Autumn Thoughts", translated by Xu Yuanchong [7]. This poem does not contain a word of autumn thought; however, the author by virtue of multiple images uses "withered rattan", "old trees", "crows", "bridges", "ancient roads" to depict a picture of homesick traveler wandering in autumn, implicitly revealing to the readers the pain of homesickness. It is precisely this kind of implicature that leaves a deeper and lasting impression on readers. Influenced by these characteristics of Chinese poetry, Pound inherited and carried forward this tradition when translating Chinese poetry into English. The method of image juxtaposition is frequently applied in *Cathay*. For example, in "Lament of the Frontier Guard", “木落秋草黄” is translated into "Tree fall, the grass goes yellow with autumn," “荒城空大漠” into "Desolate castle, the sky, the wide desert," and “白骨横千霜” into "Bones white with a thousand frosts". All the translations reflect the desolate scene of frontier fortress by means of image juxtaposition, thus expressing the poet's concern for frontier guards and his earnest hope for the peaceful reunification of the motherland. It is because Pound grasped the characteristics of Chinese hieroglyphics and performed the function of Chinese hieroglyphics in poetry that makes *Cathay* unique among many translated poetry works.

### The loss of image juxtaposition

Pound's approach has greatly influenced the development of American imagist poetry. This kind of emotional expression through presenting images and reproducing scenes has also been appreciated by many American poets, and the success of *Cathay* has further triggered the Chinese style in new poetry movements. After that, many famous poetry translators as well as their representative works are deeply influenced by Pound, such as Arthur Waley and his *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (1918), Amy Lowell and Florence Ayscough and their co-translated work *Fir-Flower Tablets* (1921), Gary Snyder and his *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (1965). In addition to the influence on translators, *Cathay* also has an obvious bearing on the poetry creation of Pound's contemporary and later poets, the most celebrated of whom is William Carlos Williams, an intimate friend of Pound, who often discusses poetry with Pound and thinks highly of Pound's image juxtaposition approach with which he completed his well-known work "The Red Wheelbarrow". Similar to Pound's "In a Station of the

Metro”, this poem is also a series of images without any direct emotional catharsis. It’s dedicated to the imagination of readers to feel the inner emotions.

Poetry translation is largely related to the author's interpretation of the original text. Before this interpretation, it is necessary for the translator to have a comprehensive understanding of the source text. Unfortunately, due to the great cultural differences between China and the West, his limited foreign language competence, and the limitations of Fenellosa’s manuscripts, Pound's understanding of Chinese poetry has been distorted, leading to his misreading. It is commonly found in *Cathay*, for instance, that he translated “西辞” of “故人西辞黄鹤楼” into “go west”. Besides, he preferred to omit history allusions, for example, “抱柱信” and “望夫台” in “常存抱柱信, 岂上望夫台” from Li Bai’s poem *Changgan Xing* 长干行. It is uncertain whether this is because of his “intentional sacrifice”, but it is certain that such “sacrifice” is so costly that has destroyed the cultural meaning of the original poem, thus leaving the emotional connotation expressed in the translation only at a superficial level, and making it hard for readers to have a deep impression on this poem.

## ABSOLUTE RHYTHM

### Advantage of absolute rhythm

Victorian lyricism prevailed among American poetry in the 20th century, which was greatly favored in the history of English literature and influenced a large number of outstanding poets such as Tennyson and Browning. However, this lyrical style pays too much attention to the expression of the poet's subjective emotions with lengthy lines, rather than the description of objective facts. On the contrary, the short but profound nature of Chinese poetry is greatly admired by Pound. For him and his followers, if 12 lines don't make clear what they want to say, they prefer not to say it [8]. Giles once commented on Chinese poetry: “The most difficult poem should be a four-line verse, which China calls a quatrain, short but full of meaning” [9]. What Pound advocates is the absolute rhythm, which makes the rhythm of poetry coincide with the subtle change of emotions and the poet’s own emotion, which is one of the reasons why he sided with writing free verse. Taking “The Beautiful Toilet” in *Cathay* as an example, we analyze the connotation of Pound's absolute rhythm.

#### The Beautiful Toilet

Blue, blue is /the grass /about the river  
And the willows /have overfilled /the close garden.  
And within,/ the mistress,/ in the midmost of her youth,  
White, white of face, /hesitates,/ passing the door.  
Slender, /she puts forward forth /a slender hand [10].

Observing the whole poem, “Qing Qing” 青青 is a level tone while “Yu Yu” 郁郁 is an oblique tone; “Ying Ying” 盈盈 is a level tone, while “Jiao Jiao” 皎皎 is also an oblique tone. Though “E E” 娥娥 and “Xian Xian” 纤纤 are both level tones, a little different from the former tones, which forms a changing beauty of music. In the English version, it is possible that the translator has grasped this feature of Chinese poems. First of all, in the original poem, the first two lines describe the scene in which this couple are separated from each other. The heroine expected to meet her husband, so the emotional tone was relatively relaxed and smooth. After that, it began to describe the wife’s manner and action, and her expectation of her husband’s returning home. The emotional tone began to become depressed when the heroine’s yearning gradually deepened. Second, the rhythm in the English version is realized by the alternating use of two or three phrases, most of which are composed of two or three words, forming at least one spondee and one iambic in each line. The monosyllabic words “Blue” at the beginning of the first line and “White” at the fourth line are used twice respectively, corresponding to “Qingqing” and “Jiaojiao” in the original text, which constitute a harmonious musical beauty. On the contrary, there is a marked change in the hymns of the second and fourth lines. That is what Pound refers to as a “rough or irregular line,” which aims to let the reader notice a sudden change of mood, especially the word “hesitates” in the fourth line, an added word, is put here to present the finishing touching effect. “Hesitates” is a multi-syllable word, which slows down the rhythm of the whole poem and ends up with a long sound. It is easy for readers to construct a scene that the heroine sighs deeply, looking outside the window. The word “within” in the third line and “willow” in the second line form an alliteration, which is also an embodiment of the beauty of music. The last line is also made up of two spondee, representing the rhythm by repeating the word “slender”. In addition, the word “forth” lengthens the lines, and gives a detailed portrayal of the woman's beauty as if she were slowly extending her fingers forward. Even so, losing her precious youth in endless waiting, this beautiful woman still suffered neglect and abandonment. Her fate revealed the tragedy of women in the late Han Dynasty and aroused people’s sympathy for women. Such short fine-line free verse, combining the poet’s emotions with the rhythm of ups and downs, avoided monotonousness. This is what the unique absolute rhythm makes in translation.

### Loss of absolute rhythm

Compared with rhymed poetry, Pound has a special preference for free verse. Pound argued that “One discards rhyme, not because one is incapable of rhyming neat, fleet, sweet, meet, treat, eat, feet but because there are certain emotions or energies which are nor represented by the over-familiar devices or

patterns" [4]. That's to say, for him it is not worth the gain when translators consciously adds the content that the original text does not have or sacrifices part of the original text in order to satisfy the rhyme. Another factor is that a vast majority of translated version of Chinese poetry at that time were not rhymed. There is almost no rhyme in Fenollosa's manuscripts. In addition, Pound himself never learned Chinese before he began to translate *Cathay*, which also influenced his choice of free verse to a certain extent.

Chinese poetry pays long attention to the beauty of music. Lin Jizhong pointed out that the poet's emotional ups and downs are synchronized with the rhythm of the poem, thus forming the strength; and the rhythm of regulated poems are often embodied in the regular change of tones [11]. The first love poem of the *Book of Songs*, the earliest collection of Chinese poems, is Guan Ju, which depicts a gentleman's pursuit of an elegant damsel by singing. There are lots of household poems that all can be performed in the form of singing such as "Ballad of the Mulberry Road", and "Yumeiren". Thus, it can be seen that the rhyme in poetry has the function of conveying emotions. Poetry is often presented in the form of "song", which lies in the fact that its emotions can be expressed in virtue of music. Most classical Chinese poems are regulated. In "Taking Leave of a Friend", another poem translated in *Cathay*, the original four Chinese characters, "Cheng" 城 and "Zheng" 征, "Qing" 情 and "Ming" 鸣 rhymed in the form of aabb, with the long ending rhymes of "eng" and "ing". Compared with the shorter syllables "Guo", "Bie", "Yi" and "Qu" at the end of odd lines, they slowed down the rhythm of the whole poem, leaving readers enough time to develop their own imagination. That is the charm of the rhythm of Chinese poetry. Pound translated "huishou" 挥手 into "bowing over their clasped hands", meaning to cross his hands and then bow, which is known in Chinese etiquette as "fist and palm salute", a common way of saying goodbye to a male friend in ancient China. It can be said that Pound's handling of this detail was perfect. However, Pound did it at the sacrifice of the form. It can be said that Pound's free verse does not perfectly represent the rhythmic beauty of the original poem. Chinese translator and professor Liu Junping translated the last two lines into "Waving our hand, hereafter we have to leave, / Even the horses we ride are neighing well-nigh with grief" [12]. Not only is it poetically faithful to the original text, but the words "leave" and "grief" at the end naturally enabled people to associate departure with pain, deepening the feeling of unwillingness to part from each other. "If two words can both convey the beauty in sense, one of which can also convey the beauty in sound of the original text, then naturally, selecting the word with beauty both in sense and sound would be the best choice," stated Xu Yuanhong [7]. In other words, the form and content of

translated poetry can be gradually improved to perfection. Pound's free verse translation helps the content of his translation go closer to the original, while to some extent, it gives up the formal beauty in his translation, which is an important part of emotion.

## CONCLUSION

Pound's strategies of image juxtaposition and detailed rendition have well reproduced the emotions of poetry in content, and his absolute rhythm and the free verse approach are also efficient in expressing the emotions of the original poems. In Pound's translation theories, emotions is the only key to the maximum language energy, and he did succeed in finding it. The success of *Cathay* is a good case, which to a large extent, has maximized the language energy, giving full display of the intense emotions in the original poems. Despite some misreadings about poetry images and misunderstanding of the form of Chinese poems, Pound's contribution brought by his creative translation methods to the English translation of classical Chinese poetry can never be underestimated. From a historical point of view, Pound is undoubtedly a great translator. His translating method enables the American poets and translators to get rid of the traditional lyrical way, and brings them the new Chinese lyrical style, which fosters the development of language and form in American poetry, and makes the imagist poetry the mainstream in the world poetry for a long time. At the same time, it attracts more and more overseas translators' attention to the translation of classical Chinese poetry. Nowadays, there are more and more opportunities for people in the world to cooperate with each other in the translation of classical Chinese poetry. Standing on the shoulders of giants, people can concert their efforts to achieve the unity of content and form, maximize the language energy of poetry, and translate the emotions in the original poems into the target reader's heart.

## REFERENCES

1. Li, Z. (2008). On the Definition of Poetry: Nature, Functions and Features. *Foreign Language and Their Teaching*, (8).
2. Zhu, C. (2005). *Construction and Reflection: A Study of Pound's Translation Theory*. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House.
3. Pound, E. (1968). How to Read, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*. edited by T.S. Eliot, New Directions Publishing Corporation.
4. Pound, E. (1973). *Selected Prose: 1909-1965*. edited by W. Cookson, London: Faber and Faber.
5. Zhang, W. (2010). On Pound's Gains and Losses in the English Translation of Li Bai's Poems. *Journal of Tibet Nationalities Institute (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* (4).
6. Yuan, X. (2009). *A Study on the Art of Chinese Poetry*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
7. Xu, Y. (2006). *The Art of Translation*. Beijing:

- China Intercontinental Press.
8. Xie, M. (1999). *Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of the Chinese Poems*. London and New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
  9. Giles, H. A. (1901). *A History of Chinese Literature*. London: W. Heinemann.
  10. Pound, E. (1915). *Cathay*. London: Elkin Mathews.
  11. Wang, F. (2015). *A Comprehensive Study on the English Translation of Classical Tang Poetry*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press.
  12. Wang, F., & Ma, Y. (2011). *A Critical Anthology of Tang Poems and their English Translations*. Xi'an: Shaanxi People's Publishing Press.