A Study on the Translation of Mao Zedong's Poetic Dynamic Images from the Perspective of Image Schema Theory

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Abstract

Mao Zedong's poetry is highly valued for its literary and ideological significance, as it is rich in allusions and image that reflect his patriotism and philosophical thinking. Additionally, his poems have also been translated by renowned translators such as Xu Yuanzhong. To better translate Mao Zedong's poetry, this paper focuses on the analysis of the dynamic images with movement connotations in his poetry, and makes use of the image schema theory of cognitive linguistics to compare and analyze the images and corresponding translations of relevant verses, in order to explore the gains and losses of different translations and summarize translation methods for Chinese classical poetry, thus helping Chinese culture to go global.
Keywords: poetry translation; image schema theory; Mao Zedong's poetry; dynamic images

1. Introduction

Mao Zedong is a politician, and an outstanding poet in China. His poetry, on the one hand, is characterized by patriotism, philosophical thinking, and rich allusions. On the other hand, like Chinese classical poetry, it is rich in image and achieves the effect of "poetry in painting, painting in poetry". With rich image, it expresses specific meanings and special emotions. Among many images, there is one of type that can be called dynamic image, for lack of a better term, and are often seen in his poems. For example, in "Nian Nu Jiao: Kunlun", there is the image of "Your three million white jade dragons in flight/ Freeze the sky with piercing cold", which actually compares the ice and snow on Kunlun Mountain to millions of jade-like flying dragons. At the same time, the word "flying" in the sentence highlights the dynamic aspect, depicting the dangerous and steep natural environment of the Mountain shrouded in snow. Another example is in "Qing Ping Yue - Jiang Gui War", where the phrase " Over River Ting our red flags leap; To Longyan and Shanghang we sweep" vividly describes the rapid advance and the fearlessness of the Red Army. Because English is a static language, the presentation of dynamic images in poetry become a challenge in language translation. If Mao Zedong's poetic image (especially dynamic image and chains of such images) cannot be well understood, readers of other linguacultural groups will not be able to understand Mao Zedong's poetry. Therefore, it is necessary to borrow the image schema theory from cognitive linguistics to decipher the image code in poetry and better translate Mao Zedong's poetry into English culture.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cognitive Linguistics Approaches to Chinese Poetry Translation

Currently, research on the translation of Chinese classical poetry from the perspective of cognitive linguistics mainly includes: 1) studying the translation of cultural elements in Chinese classical poetry by combining cognitive linguistics (Liu, 2014; Zhang & Jiang, 2019). Among them, Li (2014:128-130) and Zhang & Jiang (2019:29-32) believe that translators should fully understand the cultural backgrounds of the original author, the translator, and the target readers in order to translate the relevant images. 2) Analyzing the translation of image schema and metaphors in Chinese classical poetry from the perspective of cognitive linguistics (Chi, 2011; Deng & Zhong, 2012; Huang, 2019). Among them, Chi (2011:75-77) summarizes three situations that translators and target language readers face when understanding symbolic words: firstly, the image schema of the source language and the target language are consistent; secondly, the image schema of the source language and the target language are different; thirdly, the image schema of the source language is missing in the target language. Corresponding translation methods are summarized for each situation. Deng & Zhong (2012:77-82) point out that the image in Chinese classical poetry usually exists in specific scene descriptions or spatial relationships, which are closely related to image schema theory, and can be used to guide the translation of classical poetry. Huang (2019:105-112), combining the perspective of cognitive metaphor theory, summarizes six types of metaphors in Su Shi's works, and points out that translators should flexibly use both alienation and domestication strategies based on the objective experience of the text and the subjective cognition of the translator when translating. Overall, current research with the cognitive linguistics approaches does not subdivide the image schema in classical poetry, and research on dynamic image schema is scarce.

2.2 Research on the Translation of Mao Zedong's Poetry

Research on the translation and dissemination of Mao Zedong's poetry falls into the following two aspects: the study of specific language phenomena, and the analysis of the translation and dissemination of Mao Zedong's poetry from a cross-cultural perspective. Specific language phenomena can be further subdivided into words and sentences (Long, Liu & Liu, 2013; Wang, 2007; Yu, 2016). Long. , et al. (2013) uses the blended space theory framework to study the translation of cultural images in Mao Zedong's poetry, proposing methods such as literal translation, free translation, free translation with annotations, and image replacement to convey cultural images. Wang (2007) analyzes the translation of several lines of Mao Zedong's poetry containing the word "fly" by exploring the deep meaning in the original poem and combining different interpretations by other famous scholars. He compared multiple translations by foreign publishers and Xu Yuanchong, and ultimately pointed out that when translating poetry, translators must first consider the logical relationship implied in the original sentence, followed by the language structure of the original poem as the second dimension to be considered.

Besides, both the logical relationship and the language structure in the original text should serve the overall meaning structure. Many scholars have a review and analysis of the translation and dissemination of Mao Zedong's poetry from the cross-cultural perspective (e.g., Li, Li & Li, 2008; Yu, 2016; Qi, 2020; Li et al., 2008) classify the rich allusions in Mao Zedong's poetry into three categories: legendary fables and stories, characters, and sourced words and phrases. After comparing eight translations by famous scholars, they summarized the translation methods for different categories. Yu (2016) analyzes and studied the translation of five culture-loaded words in Mao Zedong's poetry by Xu Yuanchong and Barnstone respectively, based on the classification of culture-loaded words by the translation master Nida and the purpose theory of the German functionalist school. Qi (2020) systematically investigates and studied the cross-cultural dissemination of Mao Zedong's poetry since the founding of New China based on the principles of cross-cultural communication, and sorted through relevant historical materials. It is clear that current research on the translation of Mao Zedong's poetry mainly focuses on traditional translation studies and the paradigm of cross-cultural communication. Although some studies have noticed the rich image and lines containing dynamic processes in Mao Zedong's poetry, researchers have not combined other theoretical paradigms (such as cognitive linguistics) for research. Therefore, it is promising to use the paradigm of cognitive linguistics to analyze the dynamic image in Mao Zedong's poetry.

2.3 Overview of Image Schema Theory

The Image Schema Theory of cognitive linguistics is related to the image found in literary works. By analyzing the image schema in classical poetry, we can understand the poet's perspective on issues and grasp the metaphorical expressions and the poet's thoughts and emotions in Tang poetry (Deng & Zhong, 2012:77). Below, we will briefly review the development of Image Schema Theory.

The concept of image schema originated from Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The term "image" is often used in psychology as a mental representation, referring to the visual image of an object formed through imagination. German philosopher Kant believed that schema is a bridge between perception and concept, a means of establishing connections between concepts and objects, and a necessary process for creating image and meaning (Wang, 2006:172). Image schema has different definitions: 1) It is a dynamic structure that is constantly reproduced in perceptual interaction and sensory-motor activity, which provides coherence and structure to our experience (Johnson, 1987:xiv); 2) It can generally be defined as dynamic simulations of spatial relations and spatial motion (Gibbs & Colston, 1995:349). Li (2007) points out that there are many different expressions of the definition of image schema, but they are the same in essence. Firstly, as humans, we have our own bodies (or, cognitive embodiment), and we are always engaged in various activities: our bodies are always in contact and interaction with the external objective world. In these seemingly unrelated activities, image schema arises and makes these seemingly unrelated activities coherent, giving abstract activities a concrete structure, and laying the foundation for the further formation of "categories" and "concepts" in cognition. Therefore, we can use image schema to understand these activities, and connect seemingly unrelated activities.

2.4 Image Schema Theory and Poetry Translation

Generally, two different language cultures often have different interpretations of the same image. This is also a common problem in poetry translation. Specifically, when readers of the target language try to understand the symbolic words and images in Chinese poetry, they often face three situations: first, the image schema of the source language and the target language coincide; second, the image schema of the source language and the target language differ; third, the image schema of the source language and the target language are missing (Deng & Zhong, 2012: 78). However, Chen (2010: 25-28) points out that "when the image schema is clearly shared, the grammatical structures of the two languages can be connected to each other in a shared conceptual system, and image transformation can proceed smoothly. When the image schema is not clearly shared, the grammatical structures of the two languages cannot find a shared image schema concept system, and then interpretive translation comes into play to make up for it." Therefore, the image schema theory can not only be used to guide poetry interpretation, but also to guide poetry translation, helping translators solve the difficulties of image schema translation.

This study aims to apply the image schema theory of cognitive linguistics to study the gains and losses of the English translation of Mao Zedong's poetry, and this can help translators explore translation strategies and methods for translating Mao Zedong's poetry and other classical Chinese poetry.

3. Analyzing Translations of Dynamic Images in Mao Zedong's Poetry

There are different classification methods for image schema, but their core is based on human bodily experience. The basic image schema mainly includes: space, container, path, force, whole-part, center-periphery, etc. These classifications can also be combined to form more complex schema. In the following, we will focus on analyzing several cases of Mao Zedong's poetry that contain dynamic image schema, and study their corresponding translations. Starting from the theory of image schema, we will explore the gains and losses of these translations.

Translation Example 1.

Source Text:

红旗跃过汀江，

直下龙岩上杭。

收拾金瓯一片，

分田分地真忙。 （《清平乐·蒋桂战争》）

Source text Romanized:

Hóng qí yuè guò tīng jiāng ,
Zhí xià lóng yán shàng háng .
Shōu shí jīn ōu yī piàn ,
Fēn tián fēn dì zhēn máng . (*Qīng Píng Yuè·Jiǎng Guì Zhàn Zhēng*)

This poem describes the war between reactionary warlords, which brings endless suffering to the people. The energy of the people's revolution is thus released, and the Red Army raises its banner and enters the Longyan-Shanghang area of Fujian Province to carry out land reform. The first line of this sentence uses the word "leap" to describe the movement of the red flag across the Ting River. On the surface, it describes the red flag, but in fact, it uses the red flag as a metonymy for the person holding the red flag, that is, the Red Army. The word "leap" originally means jumping, and with this word, it vividly depicts the fast marching speed of the Red Army, as if jumping, vividly reproducing the heroic fighting spirit of the Red Army soldiers leaping and charging into battle. Here are two versions of translation.

Target Text 1:

Red banners *leap over* the Ting River

Straight to Longyan and Shanghang.

We have reclaimed part of the golden bowl,

And land is being shared out with a will. (*Poems and Verses of Mao Zedong*, p.11)

Target Text 2:

***Over* River Ting our red flags *leap*;**

To Longyan and Shanghang we sweep.

A part of golden globe in hand,

 We're busy sharing out the land. (*English Translation of Mao Zedong's Poems and Verses by Xu Yuanchong*, p.16)

This line describes a Red Army soldier holding a red flag and marching vigorously on a forced march, swiftly crossing the Ting River to establish a revolutionary base. Due to the rapid march, crossing the Ting River was like leaping over it. Wang (2006:182) points out that the English preposition "over" has four image schema, one of which expresses a trajector passing a landmark to reach its destination. This is exactly the image schema that the poem wants to convey: the trajector (in this case, the red flag) passes the landmark (the Ting River) and reaches its destination (Longyan and Shanghang on the other side of the river). Therefore, the preposition "over" combined with "leap" can vividly reproduce the dynamic image of

"leaping" in the original text. However, from the perspective of whether the dynamic image schema chain is complete in the translation, Version 2 is slightly better than Version 1 for the following reasons.

In the first half of the poem, there is a line "Sowing on earth but grief and pain", which concretizes the abstract concept of "resentment" into a tangible thing that can be scattered and descend. In other words, there is a schematic framework that governs the entire poem: "the warlord melee leads to widespread resentment", including the related dynamic image of "scattering". This image is linked to other images of the same type in the poem, forming a chain of dynamic images. In the second half of the poem, after the Red Army captured Longyan and Shanghang, they eliminated feudal rule, liberated the people, and redistributed land, bringing about a new atmosphere. Therefore, there is another line " A part of golden globe in hand ", which appears to be related to the previous "scattering" image. Therefore, " To Longyan and Shanghang we sweep " is not just a description of arriving at the destination, but also carries the meaning of liberating a place, eliminating the pain and resentment brought about by reactionary rule. Hence, the well-chosen verb "sweep" in Version 2 corresponds well with the image of "scattering". In the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (6th edition), "sweep" means "to remove something from a surface using a brush, your hand, etc." (p.1786), which coincides with the meaning of "cleaning up" in the original text. Therefore, Version 2 can better reproduce the chain of dynamic images in the original text.

Translation Example 2.

Source Text:

山舞银蛇，原驰蜡象。（《清平乐·蒋桂战争》）

Source text Romanized:

Shān wǔ yín shé , Yuán chí là xiàng . (*Qīng Píng Yuè · Jiǎng Guì Zhàn Zhēng*)

This couplet describes the scenery Mao Zedong saw after a snowfall while marching on the Qin-Jin plateau. The poet climbed to a high point and looked into the distance. As his gaze moved, the snow-covered mountains appeared to be dancing and charging like silver snakes and wax-colored elephants on the northern plains. Normally, the continuous hills and towering mountains are motionless, but with the movement of the poet's vision, they gain a sense of movement. Therefore, the verbs "dance" and "charge" are used in the poem to highlight the imagined movement. In other words, this couplet has a dynamic image schema in both lines.

Target Text 1:

The mountains dance like *silver snakes*,

And the highlands charge like *wax-hued elephants*. (*Poems and Verses of Mao Zedong*, p.45)

Target Text 2:

Mountains like *silver serpents* dancing,

Highlands like *waxy elephants* advancing. (*English Translation of Mao Zedong's Poems and Verses by Xu Yuanchong*, p.59)

The first half of this couplet describes this scene: the winding mountain ranges and the snow-covered mountains appear to be like a silver snake dancing on the ground. It reproduces the scenery that the poet saw in the distance and his rich imagination, which conforms to the dynamic image schema of the Source-Path-Destination. To produce a good translation, the translator should try to reproduce this dynamic image schema as much as possible in the translation. Both versions use the verb "dance" to reproduce the image of "mountains dancing like snakes", but whether the following adverb should be "like silver snakes" or "like silver serpents" is worth considering. On the one hand, although the word "serpent" in English refers to a "large snake," according to the *New Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary* (2nd edition), it also has several other meanings, such as "a biblical name for Satan" (p.2006) and "(figurative) a sly or treacherous person, especially one who exploits a position of trust in order to betray it" (p.2006). These cultural connotations may easily lead readers to unnecessary negative interpretations. Furthermore, the original phrase "silver snakes" mainly expresses the image of the mountains dancing like snakes, rather than referring to a specific type of snake. At the same time, according to the *Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary* (2nd edition) and *New Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary* (2nd edition), there is the phrase "snake dance" in English, which refers to a serpentine procession or dance performed to celebrate a victory or welcome alumni in Western schools. Therefore, Version 1 is better.

The second half of this couplet describes the scene after the snowfall: the peaks of the mountains on the Qin-Jin Plateau, like white elephants, charge and advance across the land. Similar to the first half, it gives a sense of movement to still objects. Therefore, in the translation, the verbs (or verb participle forms) "charge" and "advance" are used respectively.

However, the word "charge" in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (6th edition) is explained as "to rush forward and attack somebody or something" (p.266), which may be associated with violent connotations in cultural implications, leading English readers to have negative associations. Therefore, although both translations can reproduce the metaphor of movement in the original text, "advance" is more appropriate in cultural implications.

Although the original text uses the term "wax elephants", it is appropriate to translate it as "glittering elephants" or "shining elephants" in order to activate the image of "mountains like wax-hued elephants advancing" in the reader's mind. The poet's "wax elephants" describe the mountains after a heavy snowfall, shining brightly under the sun - these mountains, like elephants coated in wax, reflect the sunshine and sparkle. Therefore, the translator should emphasize the meaning of "like wax-coated elephants shining in the sun" in the original text, rather than translating the original text in a word-for-word way. At the same time, according to the *New Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary* (2nd edition), the word "wax" has other meanings, such as "a fit of anger" (p.2466), and the derived word "waxy" has meanings such as "angry, bad-tempered" (p.2466), so the word-for-word translation of the original term as "wax-hued elephants" or "waxy elephants" would not only be awkward but also could lead to misinterpretation by readers. Therefore, we can translate the couplet into "Mountains like silver snakes dancing, Highlands like glittering elephants advancing" based on the above analysis.

4. Conclusion

As can be seen from the above analysis of translations, there is not just one way to translate the dynamic image in Mao Zedong's poetry and other Chinese literary works. To successfully translate the image in poetry and literature, it is essential to have an understanding of the shared image schema between the source and target languages. Translators can make use of the theory of image schema in cognitive linguistics and fully consider the allusions and cultural connotations behind the image in the original text during the translation process. Only by using these methods can Mao Zedong's poetry be translated effectively into the target language. As Mao Zedong's poetry is full of images, it is suggested that it be analyzed based on specific types and available translations. This study makes an attempt in this direction, and hope this can open up avenues for future studies.

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