

Hydronyms in *The Song of Igor's Campaign* and the Chinese Translations

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Abstract—This article analyzes the artistic and semantic functions of hydronyms in *The Song of Igor's Campaign*. The motive complex of the water element in the text consists of two artistic images: the rivers and the sea. These images are investigated based on the original text and its Chinese translations. The results reveal that almost all the hydronyms act as symbols and metaphors of the Russian land, the Polovcian steppe, and the border between them. Some discrepancies were found in the translations and commentaries of Chinese literary scholars who are investigated in this work.

Keywords—*The Song of Igor's Campaign, hydronym, Dnieper, Don, Kayala, the blue sea, Chinese translations*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Song of Igor's Campaign (hereafter “The Song”) is one of the most outstanding works in Russian literature and entered world history as a unique monument of Old Russia. Since its publication in 1800, the poem has been attracting many researchers from all over the world. In literary works the main attention was paid to the problem of authorship of the masterpiece, the ideological and political orientation, the themes, its composition and artistic features. Studying the symbolic meanings of water elements in the original text of “The Song” and their interpretation in its Chinese translations is an unprecedented innovation in studies of this monument.

This poem has been translated hundreds of times, not only into modern Russian but also Chinese. So far, there have officially been two translations of the old Russian monument into Chinese. Wei Huangnu, the illustrious Chinese literary translator, made the first translation which was published in 1957. The second translation was given to the world in 2003 by the famous lexicographer and linguist Li Xiyin.

One of the primary analytical methods in the interpretation of “The Song” is the semiotic method used by Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman and Boris Mikhailovich Gasparov. The creators of this theory reject the direct

interdependence between objects of reality and artistic symbols, believing that in the artistic space, local characteristics of geographical realities are not always identical to a particular toponym and are not always reduced to its simple reproduction. “The space in the text,” according to Yuri Lotman, “is a modeling language with which any meanings can be expressed, as long as they have the character of structural relations” [1]. The method of the Tartu scientist justifies the possibility of interpreting geographic objects in the abstract from their specific real localization. Following the idea of Yuri Lotman, Boris Gasparov supported the thesis of the universal semantization of space by considering geographical points and boundaries, distances and directions as “signs expressing certain mythological values” [2].

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II. THE RIVERS IN “THE SONG” AND THE CHINESE TRANSLATIONS

Among the geographic loci in “The Song” hydronyms are given symbolic meanings. If cities, with the exception of perhaps only of Kiev, appear as real toponymic objects, the rivers are embodied in symbolic and metaphorical images. The river in the geographic space of “The Song” is, semantically, a multi-valued hydronym. As already noticed Dmitry Sergeevich Likhachev, “all countries are defined in The Song not by principalities, but by rivers.” [3]

Russian land is the Dnieper. The hydronym is mentioned in Yaroslavna's lament in her spell-conversion: “О, Днѣпръ Словутицю! Ты пробилъ еси каменныя горы сквозѣ землю Половецкую...” [4] (O! Thou hast pierced the stone mountains to flow across the Polovcian land.) For the second time, the Dnieper is named in an episode narrating the death of Prince Rostislav, when “затвори Днѣпръ темнѣ березѣ” [4].

The Dnieper is represented in “The Song” which is not as vividly as the rivers of the Polovcian territory and borderlands. Dnepr is presented in “Word” not so catchy, as the rivers of the Polovtsian territory and borderland. Wei Huangnu, the famous Chinese philologist and translator of The Song, literally conveyed the semantics of Yaroslavna's

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address to the river as “Dnieper Slovtich”. In his translation, the Dniepr is personified because the heroine respectfully addresses him by name and patronymic. In the second full translation into Chinese, made by Li Xiyin, the appeal sounds like “Oh, the illustrious Dnieper!” The translator views the Dnieper as a real hydronym, one of the most important and famous rivers of the Russian land.

In the first episode, the river as an image-hydronym combines real-geographical and conditionally-symbolic connotations: Yaroslavna calls out with a prayer to her native river, but appeals from Putivl: “Ярославна рано плачеть Путивлю городу на заборолѣ” [4] (Yaroslavna weeps at morn at Putivl on the city wall). At the same time, in the monologue of Yaroslavna, the hydronym does not refer to the Russian land at all - the Danube: “На Дунаи Ярославнынъ гласъ слышитъ” [4] (on the Danube Yaroslavna’s voice is heard).

The second mention of the river is “затворил Днепра темные берега” [4] (At its dark banks as the Dnieper it closed over...) is a clear paraphrase, echoing the “затворить ворота на Русскую землю” (shutter the gate on the Russian land), which confirms the symbolic status of hydronym. Wei Huangnu translated this sentence, combining it with the following: “‘the Stugna River’ locked the young Prince Rostislav into its powerful stream. Rostislav’s mother is crying for the youth of Prince Rostislav on the dark bank of the Dnieper.” [5] The interpretation of the episode does not quite reflect the Old Russian text, as well as in the translation version of Li Xiyin: “The Stugna River swallowed the young Prince Rostislav in the depths of a dark rock, forcing his mother to cry about the young prince.” [6] It should be recognized that this episode is very complicated even for Russian translators from the Old Russian language, and thus far it has been included in the register of “dark places”.

The symbol of the Polovcian land is the river Don. Functionally, the Volga is equal to the Don: the localization of these rivers is correlated with the “land of the unknown”, that is, the Polovcian steppe. If the Volga is mentioned in the text of *The Song* only in two episodes, then Don is in fourteen. Thus, among all the numerous hydronyms, the Don is dominant. Unlike other rivers that perform uniquely prepared functions in “*The Song*”, Don is symbolically ambiguous. At least five semantic variants of the artistic interpretation of this hydronym can be identified:

1. Don as a real river, where the main battle events take place: “Игорь къ Дону вои ведеть” (Igor’ leads his warriors toward the Don); “половци неготовами дорогами побѣгоша къ Дону Великому” (the Polovcians fled to the Great Don by untrodden roads); “Кончак ему слѣдь править къ Дону Великому” (Konchak lays out a track for him to the Great Don.); “саблямъ потручяти о шеломы половецкыя...у Дону Великаго” [4] (sabers shall blunt against Kumars helmets...by the Great Don).

The nominal value of hydronym in all the quoted fragments Wei Huangnu and Li Xiyin had translated, retained

he vocabulary and semantics of the Old Russian text. Only with this unanimity, Wei Huangnu allowed himself originally to comment on the phrase “половци неготовами дорогами побѣгоша къ Дону Великому”: “In the XI and XII centuries, before the army left, it was usually necessary to build roads and bridges in the swamps. Here, the Kumars were obvius in a hurry to meet with Igor’s army.” [5].

2. Don as a geographical area - “by the Don”, which means the territory in which the Russian princes are fighting with the Kumars: “Спала князю умъ похоти... искусити Дону Великаго” [4] (A longing consumed the prince’s mind...by the urge of taste of the Great Don). Wei Huangnu understood this phrase as follows: “The prince’s mind gave way to try the water of the Great Don - this melancholy overshadowed him a bad omen.” [5] In Li Xiyin’s translation the episode is recreated according to the famous story about Igor’s campaign from the *Ipatiev Chronicle*, where horse fatigue was the decisive reason to stay overnight in the steppe: “Glory and lust for profit overshadowed the prince’s mind, and the desire to water the horses drowned out the revelation of God.” [6]

3. Don as a symbolically generic name of the Polovcian land: “Итти дождю стрѣлами с Дону Великаго” (A rain of arrows shall fall from the Great Don); “Половци идуть: отъ Дону и отъ моря” (The Polovcians come from the Don and from the sea); “Игорь мыслию поля мѣритъ отъ Великаго Дону” [4] (Igor’ measures in thought the steppe from the Great Don to the Little Donee). This function of the Don River was indicated by K.V. Kudryashov in his work on the Polovcian steppe, “the expression ‘Don’, ‘from the Don’ is sometimes used as a general geographical designation ... for the whole great Polovcian field” [7].

Chinese translators reproduced the image almost in accordance with its original interpretation. For Wei Huangnu, the phrase sounds like “the rain came with arrows from the other side of the Don”. Commenting on the episode, Wei Huangnu noted that, according to “*The Song*”, a “black cloud”—Polovcian army attacked Igor’s retinue, surrounded him so tightly that it was not possible to leave [5].

4. Don as a metaphorical or hyperbolic formula-cliché symbolizing victory, greatness, glory: “А любо испити шеломомъ Дону” [4] (or else to drink with their helmets from the Don) (the phrase is found in the text twice: in the speech-address of Igor to the squad at the beginning of the campaign and in the interpretation of the dream of Svyatoslav); “Ты (Всеволод) бо можеши Вѣлгу веслы раскропити, а Донъ шеломы выльяти” (You pour out the Don with your helmet) [4]. In both Chinese translations, these sentences semantically correspond to the interpretation in the original: “... draw water from the Don” [5], “You can spill the Volga with oars and scoop the Don with helmets” [6].

5. Don is generally a synonym for any river. The dictionary-reference book of “*The Song of Igor’s Campaign*” states: “There are many Dons and Danubes in

folk songs; at one time, in all likelihood, it was not a proper name, but a common noun, meaning generally a river.” [8]

The river in “The Song” is also included in the motive complex of the border between Old Rus and the Polovcian steppe. The rivers that serve as frontiers are the Volga, Sula, Ros, Kayala. The border between the Russian and Polovcian lands is indicated by symbolic hydronyms in the episode of the beginning of the campaign: “...збися Дивъ, велить послушати земли незнаемъ, Вльзъ, и Поморию, и Посулию, и Сурожу, и Корсуню...” [4] (Div is aroused, he shrieks a command to the unknown land, to the Volga, Pomorie, Posulie, Surozh and Korsun), among which are the Volga and Sula rivers, and also hypothetically - Surozh.

A special place among the frontier rivers is Kayala. In the discussion about this famous hydronym, thanks to “The Song”, two opinions were defined: or Kayala is a real (and still existing) river, but having some other names; or Kayala - a myth, image-symbol. In our opinion, the arguments in favor of the mythologized poetic image sung in the ancient monument of the river seem more convincing.

Kayala is first mentioned in the episode: “Ту ся копиемъ приламати, ту ся саблямъ потручяти о шеломы половецкыя, на рѣцѣ на Каялѣ, у Дону Великаго” [4] (Here shall the lances be broken; here shall the sabre be dulled on Polovtsian helmets; on the River Kaiala, near the Great Don). Specific indication - on the Kayala River - indicates the possibility of the existence of a real hydronym with the same or similar name. Similarly, the phrase “ту ся брата разлучиста на брезѣ быстрой Каялы” can be taken as a message about the place of Igor's capture. However, against the background of the constant use of symbolic semantics in “The Song” in interpreting the image of the border, this episode can be interpreted as conditionally allegorical: defeated princes had to be prisoners. On the other side of the river, suffer from shame in Polovcian imprisonment and repent.

Symbolically, Kayala is also present in Yaroslavna's lament: “Полечю, рече, – зегзицею по Дунаеви, омочю бобръня рукавъ въ Каялѣ рѣцѣ...” [4] (“I will fly,” quoth she, “like a cuckoo down the Don. I will dip my sleeve of beaver-fur in the Kayala river.”), and in the story about the burial of the father of Svyatopolk - Prince Izyaslav, where the mention of Kayala is definitely allegorical, since the events took place in a completely different place, and in The Song, they are related to the same Kayala.

In the full translation of this poem into Chinese by Wei Huangnu, the Kayala River is annotated in the following way: “Kayala is a tributary of the Don, the real name is Kalmius, belongs to the Sea of Azov. It symbolizes sadness and tears.” In our opinion, here the translator is very categorical in his statement. It is necessary to pay attention to the opinion of some other scientists that Kayala is a symbolic river that does not exist in real life. These variations in translations should be taken into account in order to prevent limiting the perception of the image-hydronym by Chinese researchers and readers.

III. THE SEA IN “THE SONG” AND THE CHINESE TRANSLATIONS

The sea in “The Song” is an image-hydronym no less colorful than rivers. D.S. Likhachev designated it as “an allegory of disastrous obscurity” [3]. The sea element symbolizes the image of the Polovcian steppe, which indicates the extraordinary creative insight of the author. The real sea is a huge, boundless water element. These attributes of the sea are not only visible, but also perceptible, therefore they were naturally captured by the author's artistic intuition and embodied in hydronym as a symbol of unlimited hostile space.

The lexeme “sea” is found in “The Song” in 12 episodes. Perhaps, it is difficult to agree with commentators who claim that the “blue sea” is the geographical name of the Black or Azov seas., V.N. Toporov in his article “On the poetic complex of the sea and its psychophysiological bases” wrote about the symbolism of the “sea” in works of art as a “deep metaphor”: “It is not the sea itself that is described, but something connected with it as a visible core,... ‘sea’ is a kind of element and even, more precisely, the principle of this element.” [9] It is precisely using the principle of “sea elements”, and the author of “The Song” described the Polovcian steppe through the imagery of the sea.

The semantic meaning of the sea as a symbol of a foreign land and the associations of “disastrous uncertainty” are reflected in “The Song” in almost all the episodes where this hydronym is used. The description of the Polovcian invasion is embodied in the symbolism of the “sea”: “Чръныя тучя съ моря идуть” (black clouds come from the sea), “Се вѣтри, Стрибожи внуци, вѣють съ моря стрѣлами на храбрѣя плѣкы Игоревы” (These winds, the grandsons of Stribog, blow as arrows, from the sea onto the brave warriors of Igor), “...половци идуть отъ Дона и отъ моря, и отъ всѣхъ странъ русьскыя плѣкы оступишя” [4] (Polovtsians come from the Don, from the sea).

The symbol of the “sea” as a hostile territory also hints at a distance from the native land: “О, далече заиде соколь, птицъ бѣя, къ морю” [4] (Too far has the falcon flown, striking birds toward the sea). Chinese translators astutely noted the symbolism in this episode. Wei Huangnu clearly states that “black clouds” symbolize enemies, “from the sea” means from the south, where the Polovcian army came [5].

A description of the capture of Russian princes is associated with immersion in the sea: “Два сълнца ... въ море погрузиста” [4] (two suns...sank into the sea). The escape of Igor from captivity confirms the symbolic status of this hydronym: “Прысну море полунощи... Игореву князю богъ путь кажетъ” [4] (The sea fell to splashing at midnight...God shows Prince Igor' the way...) from the Polovcian land of to the Russian.

Finally, in the episode about Igor's return from captivity,

the girlish voices “взвываются... через море” [4] (soar across the sea), express infinite joy, and here the “sea” still refers to the distant Polovcian land. In the Chinese translation of Wei Huangnu, this fragment is commented as follows: “Residents who welcome the return of expeditions always go out to sing. The lower part of the Danube River is the site of the population of the Old Russians. The author here emphasizes that even in the remotest corner of Russia, people show great joy at the return of Igor.” [5] Li Xiyin complemented Wei Huangnu’s comment: “In the 12th century, the Old Russians had a population on the Danube and remained until the 16th century. This phrase means that the vast land is full of joy.” [6] In both comments, it is essential that Chinese researchers perceive the “sea” as a metaphor of unlimited hostile space. But these comments require more clarifications. In our opinion, Li Xiyin presented a more accurate interpretation of the symbolic context. The Danube in this and other episodes cannot be uniquely perceived only as a real river. Above, we have already paid attention to the artistic function of this hydronym: often the Danube was called simply a river, that is, a proper name could be transformed into a common noun. Therefore, it is more likely to assume that the Danube, along with the Dnieper, symbolizes the native land, and the “song” by Russian girlish voices comes not so from the “remote corner” of the Danube estuary, as Wei Huangnu believed, but, as noted Li Xiyin, from the whole Russian land.

From the four episodes the “sea” can be interpreted ambivalently as a real image and its symbolic correlation: when the wind cherishes “корабли на синѣ морѣ” (ships on the blue sea) in Yaroslavna's lamentation, offense “въсплескала лебедиными крылы на синемѣ морѣ у Дону” (had made splash swan-wings in the blue sea by the Don), “Бусови врани ... несошяся къ синему морю” (Gray crows rushed to the blue sea), “готьская красныя дѣвы въспѣша на брежѣ синему морю” (Fair Gothic maidens have sung out on the bank of the deep blue sea) [4]. In these episodes, the stable phrase “blue sea” is applied, which is traditional in characterizing the real hydronym of folklore works. However, the general background of the artistic interpretation of the image still allows us to give the conclusion that the sea in “The Song” is an “allegory of disastrous uncertainty”, that is to say, a symbol of the Polovcian land. As a confirmation of this conclusion, we can refer to the arguments of researchers of color terms in the old Russian language, N.B. Bakhilin, V.V. Kolesova and A.M. Panchenko, who convincingly proved that the blue color (in “The Song”—the sea, the Don, lightning, wine,

mist) denoted blackness, darkness, in other words, symbolized a hostile world [10]. Wei Huangnu drew attention to this functional feature of the epithet “blue” and in the commentary on the translation explained that the “blue sea” was the place of imprisonment of Prince Igor.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the analysis, it was found that hydronyms in *The Song of Igor's Campaign* constitute an integral motive complex of the “water elements”, which includes numerous rivers and the sea. The Don river can be interpreted as a real river, a geographical area, a symbolically generic name of the Polovcian land, a metaphorical or hyperbolic formula-cliché and as a synonym for any river. Whereas the Dnieper, the frontier river—Kayala, and the blue sea perform primarily symbolic functions. Our analysis of the comments on the Chinese translations shows that Wei Huangnu and Li Xiyin carefully preserved the main semantics of hydronyms. The discrepancies between the original and translated piece discovered here would allow for improvements for a better understanding and further study of this ancient masterpiece both in Russia and China.

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