

# **Sublimation Theoretic Approach to Xu Yuanchong's Translation of Images in Li Bai's Lyric Poetry**

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**Abstract.** This paper aims to study Xu Yuanchong's translation of the imagery in Li Bai's lyric poetry in light of Qian Zhongshu's Sublimation Theory. It is found out through this research that the basic ideas of Qian's Sublimation Theory, namely, "enticement", "avoidance of errors/misinterpretation" and "pursuit of sublimity" have been perfectly embodied in Xu Yuanchong's translation of the imagery in Li Bai's lyric poetry. With his translation, Xu Yuanchong successfully conveys the artistic beauty of Li Bai's poetry to the readers and attains the goal of "enticement" by skillfully reproducing the beauties of sound, sense and form of the imagery in the original poetry. Xu's translation successfully avoids errors/misinterpretations in comprehending the rhetoric and emotions of the original poetry and conveying the word meaning and cultural background information. Xu Yuanchong's image translation realizes the object of "sublimation" by reproducing the semantic and stylistic effects of the images in Li Bai's lyric poetry as perfectly as possible.

## **Introduction**

Tang poetry is the peak of ancient poetry achievement and the most splendid cultural heritage. As a result, translation research of Tang poetry plays a pivotal role on the spread of Chinese culture. Li Bai possessed a lofty position in Tang poetic history. The most salient feature of his poetry is the use of various natural and social images. With richness in types and deepness in meaning, these splendid and elegant images are closely connected with his different subjective feelings.

As Qian Zhongshu's Translation Theory of "Sublimation" was put forward since the 1960s, it has been a hot topic in the field of translation. In addition, Professor Xu Yuanchong's Tang poetry translation has high research value. The purpose of this research is to make connection between the two and study the relationship between them. This paper provides readers with a complete introduction to the ideas of Qian's translation theory and concrete analysis of Xu's image translation of Tang poetry to let the readers know more about extensiveness and profoundness of Xu Yuanchong's poetry translation.

## **Qian Zhongshu's "Sublimation" Theory**

To understand the deep connotation of "Sublimation" theory, it is necessary to illustrate it comprehensively. The most important thing is to know what "诱", "讹" and "化" are. Based on the understanding, it turns out that the ultimate purpose of "Sublimation" theory is to realize the highest realm "化" through introduction of "诱" and avoidance of "讹".

Nature and Function of Translation(引"诱"): Qian Zhongshu (1997) has pointed out in his work that "诱" is related to the function of translation in cultural communication[1]. As a connector and medium, it offers a chance for people to be familiar and fall in love with foreign works. Therefore, excellent translation can arouse readers' curiosity and motivate readers to analyze the original text. "诱" is the original and internal motivation that makes it possible to form ties between different

cultures.

Problem of Avoidance in Translation(避“讹”): “讹”refers to the mistakes that occur due to various kinds of reasons in the process of translation. From Qian Zhongshu’s point of view, it is divided into several types 1. the mistake caused by the translator’s random deletion because he fails to solve the problem and chooses to ignore it; 2.the mistake caused by the translator’s wild speculation and guess because he can’t understand the original text but he makes a far-fetched explanation(1997:287)[2]. On account of different times, customs, history, culture and personal opinions, translator misunderstand the author’s intention of the original text.

Highest Ideal of Translation(求“化”): Qian Zhongshu (1985) has said, “The highest measure of literary translation is transmigration. A piece of writing transformed from one language to another without showing strain inflicted by differences in language customs while perfectly preserving the original style/favor can be said to be a transmigration”[3]. As we can analyze from the above explanations, “化” has three layers of meaning including conversion (转化), adaptation (归化), and transmigration(化境). “化” is like Fu Lei’s Spirit “A likeness” and Zhu Shenghao’s “Keep the romantic charm of the original text”.

### Introduction of Artistic Beauties of Tang Poetry’s Images to English Readers (引“诱”)

**Beauty in Sound.** Richness in regular rhymes is obviously seen in ancient Chinese poems. In virtue of similarities and differences of Chinese and English pronunciation, the translation of images in Chinese poetry is bound to contain beauty in rhyme. In consequence, the aim of the introduction of artistic beauties can be achieved with the image reproduction of beauty in sound.

The most salient feature of classical Chinese poetry is rhyming. So for the sake of making the readers aware of the melody of traditional Chinese poems, Xu Yuanchong pays great attention to the musical effect of rhymes in the process of image translation.

[4] 九江秀色可揽结，吾将此地巢云松。

(李白《望庐山五老峰》)

*If I could drink in beauty of the Rivers Nine,*

*Here I would make my nest amid the cloud and pine.*

(Li Bai, *The Five Greybeard-Like Peaks of Mount Lu Viewed from Afar*. Xu (trans.), 2007:16)

River Nine, cloud and pine are all images that show the beautiful scenery of the Five Greybeard-like Peaks. Li Bai appreciates the splendid and precipitous landscape from the top of the mountain. His thought of renouncing the world can be seen through the image description of “Rivers Nine”, “cloud” and “pine”. And judging from the pronunciation, the words “Nine” and “pine” have the same diphthong “ai”. So The last two lines of this poem rhyme with each other at the end of the lines.

**Beauty in Sense.** Meaning takes the most important part in poems. And images are the good meaning carriers that can represent a vivid picture to the readers. So the translators always convey the imagery meaning of the original text to reproduce the beautiful scenery or deep emotions. It can be proved from figures of speech.

Li Bai uses various figures of speech freely in his poems to make poetic images vivid. As a result, translation of his poetry should keep his original style by using similes, personifications, and exaggerations and so on. And Xu has a perfect command of rhetoric equivalence to retain the charm of Li Bai’s images.

[5] 山花如绣颊，江火似流萤。 (李白《夜下征虏亭》)

*The flowers blow like cheeks that glow,*

*And lanterns beam as fireflies gleam.*

(Li Bai, *Passing by the Triumphal Tower at Night*. Xu (trans.), 2007:30)

The main images in this poem are flowers and lanterns. And Li Bai takes the moon as their background. The author compares flowers to the young girls’ cheeks and lanterns to fireflies. Therefore, the application of similes are found in the last two lines, reflecting Li Bai’s good mood

and appreciation of landscape. Xu's translation of images with rhetorical devices keeps the original meaning and beauty in Li Bai's poetry.

**Beauty in Form.** In terms of the reproduction of beauty in form, it usually refers to the body of the poem rather than the title. Because images belong to the body part, their translation forms are concerned with the beauty of the whole poem. And translation of parallelism is one of typical examples that reproduces harmonious and neat beauty of image translation in Li Bai's lyric poetry.

Form is another indispensable aspect in the translation of images in Li Bai's lyric poems. Chinese poems attach great importance to parallel structures because it arouses reader's interest and is pleasant to the eyes. In parallel structures, it is necessary to balance word with word (noun for noun, verb for verb, ect.), phrase with phrase, clause with clause. Hence, in the translation of images in Li Bai's lyric poems, parallel structures are also widely used.

[6] 青山横北郭, 白水绕东城。 (李白《送友人》)

*Green mountains bar the northern sky,*

*White water girds the eastern town.*

(Li Bai, *Farewell to a friend*. Xu (trans.), 2007:182)

The images in this poem are "green mountains", "white water", "northern sky" and "eastern town". "Green", "white" and "northern", "eastern" are adjectives of color and orientation respectively, while "mountains", "water" and "sky", "town" are nouns. "Green" is paralleled to "White", "northern" to "eastern", "mountains" to "water" and "sky" to "town". The translator has succeeded in retaining the original beauty of the poem by using similar well-balanced structure.

### Avoidance of Errors/Misinterpretations (避“讹”)

**Avoidance of Comprehension Errors.** Comprehension errors mean the errors made in the process of receiving information, usually while listening or reading. When we read literary works, poems for instance, if our understanding is deviated from the meaning the poets convey, then comprehension errors occur. In image translation in Li Bai's lyric poetry, Xu correctly understand meanings or emotions that images bear.

Li Bai is inclined to use a lot of parts of speech to describe images in his lyric poems. So meanings of some imagery expressions in Li Bai's poetry are not their literary meanings. The translators should correctly understand the function of these parts of speech and then change and use another way to explain the meanings.

[7] 白发三千丈, 缘愁似个长。 (李白《秋浦歌》)

*Long, long is my whitening hair,*

*Long, Long it is laden with care.*

(Li Bai, *Song of Autumn Pool*. Xu (trans.), 2007:184)

Images in this poem are "白发" and "愁". In Chinese, "愁" and "长" can both be a verb or adjective. But in this poem, if we analyze carefully, we will find they are served as adjectives here, which reveals the poet's frustration about the politic corruption. Based on the comprehension of the images, Xu doesn't translate "似个长" as "grow" or other things, but uses "long, long" instead. The whitening hair symbolizes his worries and depression on his unrecognized talents.

**Avoidance of Expressive Errors.** Influenced by the native language, some translators can't use the proper expression in perfect accordance with the standard of the second language. That is why some expression errors occur in the process of translation. So as an outstanding and experienced translator, Xu makes great effort to avoid such expression errors. And when translating the images in Li Bai's poetry, he sometimes gets rid of the original structure of the poems by using English thought.

Cultural images frequently appear in Li Bai's Poetry. Though images in Chinese and English may refer to the same thing, actually seen from the cultural perspective, they are totally different. Besides, some Chinese cultural images have no equivalent in English culture. So errors seem to appear due to different cultural background information. Avoidance of this kind of errors is necessary in image translation.

- [8] 精卫费木石，鼇鼇无所凭。  
君不见，骊山茂陵尽灰灭，  
牧羊之子来攀登。（李白《登高丘而望远海》）

*Mounting the Height and Viewing the Sea*

*The sea couldn't be filled with stones.*

*Nor could the gap by Turtle's bones.*

*Have we not seen imperial tombs in ruins lie,*

*Which shepherds set on fire?*

(Li Bai, *Mounting the Height and Viewing the Sea*. Xu (trans.), 2007:164)

The image “精卫” is a kind of bird originated from a fairy tale in Shanhai Jing. It is a story about a drowned girl who becomes a bird after her death. Then it persistently carries branches and stones with its beak to fill the East Sea. Xu explains “精卫” based on his knowledge of Chinese culture and translates it into “The sea couldn't be filled with stones”. Another cultural image example in this poem is “牧羊之子”. It is a story from History of Han Dynasty. A sheep enters into a mountain cave and a boy shepherd looks for it with a fire torch, which accidentally burns the coffin of the first emperor of Qin. So Xu uses “shepherds set on fire” to substitute “牧羊之子” in English. These two examples prove that Xu's ability to avoid expression errors according to the cultural background information.

### Pursuit of “Sublimity” (求“化”)

**Transmigration in Meaning.** In literature translation, translators always think from the readers' perspective. During the process of image translation, if they translate images directly, the reader's may be confused without the understanding of Chinese culture. Therefore, the translators tend to translate some cultural images into something whose meanings are easy to understand.

- [9] 君歌杨叛儿，妾劝新丰酒。（李白《杨叛儿》）

*You sing a lover's lore;*

*I urge you to drink more.*

(Li Bai, *A Love Song*. Xu (trans.), 2007:20)

As we all know, 《杨叛儿》 is an ancient Yuefu song originated from a love story between an emperor's mother and a witch's son in ancient times. Xu Yuanhong translates the image in it into “a love song” and “a lover's lore”. It accurately conveys the meaning of the original image so that readers can absolutely comprehend the poem.

**Transmigration in Style.** Different styles appear in different historic periods. So different poets or authors have different writing styles connected with the poets' subjective thoughts, types of literature, artistic manners, regional conditions and so on. As a consequence, the reproduction of poetry style in poetry translation is not easy. Li Bai is famous for his romantic writing feature. With rich imagination and lively language, his lyric poetry is natural, elegant and unrestrained. Xu's image translation of Li Bai's poetry accurately reproduces Li Bai's writing style. The transmigration in style is totally realized in his poetry translation.

- [10] 对酒不觉暝，落花盈我衣。  
醉起步溪月，鸟还人亦稀。（李白《自遣》）

*I'm drunk with wine*

*And with moonshine,*

*With flowers fallen o'er ground*

*And o'er me the blue-gowned.*

*Sobered, I stroll along the stream*

*Whose ripples gleam,*

*I see no bird*

*And hear no word.*

(Li Bai, *Solitude*. Xu (trans.), 2007:174)

As we can see, in the Chinese version, every line in this poem has only five characters. This poem is very short and concise but meaningful. Through “酒”, “落花”, “溪”, “月” and “鸟”, it reveals the poet’s enjoyment and pleasure in the tranquility of being alone. In the translation of these images, Xu also uses short phrases or sentences as a line to reproduce the free and easy feeling in Li Bai’s poetry, which makes the contribution of the transmigration of the style.

**Transmigration in Effect.** Images are closely associated with artistic conception. The poets leave readers a space for imagination to reproduce the images created by them. And, images with Li Bai’s emotions present to the readers a vivid and splendid picture in his poetry. Xu’s translation of images has the same effect as Li Bai’s lyric poetry.

[11] 金窗夹绣户，珠箔悬琼钩。（李白《登锦城散花楼》）

*By golden windows and embroidered doors,*

*The pearl curtains hang on silver hooks.*

(Li Bai, *On the Flowery Tower in the Town of Silk*. Xu (trans.), 2007:4)

As we can be seen from the example above, instead of describing the Tower’s architectural scale or location layout, the author uses images including the windows, doors, curtains and hooks that shine under the sun to show the elegance and uniqueness. And in Xu’s translation, he manages to describe the details of the Flowery City and show the beauty to readers. Because “embroidered doors” and “silver hooks” has the same effect as “绣户” “琼钩” The transmigration of the effect is realized and it expresses Li Bai’s pleasure to be on the Flowery Tower.

## Summary

As we can see from the above analysis, Qian Zhongshu’s Sublimation theory provides a new perspective for the research of Xu Yuanchong’s image translation in Li Bai’s lyric poetry. It is a new way to correctly understand the charm of images in the translation of Li Bai’s poetry. It is found that Xu Yuanchong’s abstractness of Sublimation Theory can be interpreted concretely. The image translation can be comprehended from three aspects including introduction of artistic beauties of Tang poetry’s images to English readers, avoidance of errors, and pursuit of “Sublimity”. Due to the essential role of images in Li Bai’s lyric poetry, it is necessary to understand the rich cultural connotations in the images before the translation. Translators should have a full picture of the cultural background and poets’ life experience as well. And Qian Zhongshu’s Sublimation theory is connected with aesthetic theory and philosophical theory. So for purpose of realizing Qian’s Sublimation theory, it is necessary to avoid some translation errors or misinterpretations based on the comprehensive understanding of his translation theory.

## References

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