

# Appreciation of the Translation of Tang Poems and Song Poems Under Xu Yuanchong's Theory of Three Beauties

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## ABSTRACT

Classical Chinese poetry, like a long cultural river, brings together the artistic essence and emotional heritage of the Chinese nation for thousands of years, and has become a cultural treasure passed down from generation to generation. The fundamental reason why these poems have been able to transcend time and space and spread through the ages lies in the profound connotations they contain. They not only entrust the spiritual pursuit and ideal ambition of countless literati and artists, but also carry the unique poetry and poetic heart of the Chinese nation, and have become an important symbol of our national cohesion and centripetal force. "We live in an international environment that requires fruitful communication, and Professor Xu Yuanchong has always been committed to building bridges between people who speak Chinese, English and French", said by The International Federation of Translators and Interpreters in his award speech. Mr. Xu also said that transforming the beauty created by a country into the beauty of the world is the pleasure of the world, and it is also his original intention of translating poetry. Today, there are many new explorations on the inheritance path of classical poetry, so the cross-cultural dissemination of poetry is of great significance. Starting from the Theory of Three Beauties, this article will analyze how Xu Yuanchong applied this theory when he translated Tang poems and Song poems. When discussing the important guiding significance of the Theory of Three Beauties to the practice of poetry translation, students should have the ability to think independently and critically, so as to better complete the task of poetry translation.

**Keywords:** *Xu Yuanchong, Theory of Three Beauties, Tang poems and Song poems.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION: THE FORMATION, DEVELOPMENT AND INFLUENCE OF TANG AND SONG POETRY

As the pinnacle of classical Chinese poetry, Tang poetry's brilliant achievements are indeed closely related to the prosperity of Tang society, the openness of culture and the innovation of literature. The Tang Dynasty was an era of political stability and economic prosperity, which provided a good soil for the flourishing and development of culture. Coupled with the importance and promotion of culture by the rulers of the Tang Dynasty, poetry creation became a part of the social fashion at that time. The Song Dynasty was an era of change, with profound changes taking place in various fields

such as politics, economy, and culture. These changes provided an important social background for the rise of Song poetry.

Tang poetry has gone through four stages of development: the early Tang Dynasty, the prosperous Tang Dynasty, the Middle Tang Dynasty and the late Tang Dynasty. In the early Tang Dynasty, five-character and seven-character rhythmic poems basically completed their stereotype; In the Tang Dynasty, the five-character and seven-character rhythm poems and quatrains were complete in form, and the masterpieces were like clouds, with a wide range of themes; The Middle Tang Dynasty was the heyday of Tang poetry, with many poets and rich works; Although the poetry of the late Tang Dynasty is not as good as that of the Tang Dynasty and the Middle Tang

Dynasty, there are also famous artists such as Du Mu and Li Shangyin. Song poetry was developed on the basis of the literature of the previous dynasty, but reached new heights in the Song Dynasty. Song poetry was originally mainly popular among the people, and was later introduced into the literary world by literati. In the Song Dynasty, with the improvement of the imperial examination system and the development of education, the number of intellectuals increased greatly, which provided sufficient talent guarantee for the prosperity of literary creation.

Tang poetry has a variety of styles, including realism and romanticism. The works of realist poets such as Du Fu and Bai Juyi focus on social reality and reflect the suffering of people's livelihood; The works of Romantic poets such as Li Bai and Wang Changling are full of imagination and passion, expressing personal ambitions and experiences. At the same time, Song Ci has both the bold and graceful schools. The works of bold lyricists such as Su Shi and Xin Qiji are magnificent and have a broad artistic conception; The works of graceful lyricists such as Liu Yong and Li Qingzhao are emotionally nuanced and picturesque.

Tang and Song poems are not only an indispensable pillar in the history of Chinese literature, but also a brilliant treasure in the treasure house of literature. With their unique artistic charm and cultural connotation, they have provided rich materials and inspiration for later literary creations, such as poetry, prose, novels and other literary forms, and have had a profound impact. They carry the cultural traditions and values of the society at that time, express emotions in delicate language, and depict the details of life, so that people can get spiritual sustenance and emotional catharsis from them. By studying and appreciating Tang and Song poems, we can better understand people's attitudes and emotional experiences towards life, as well as traditional Chinese culture and national spirit. At the same time, Tang and Song poems have also become an important expression tool in interpersonal communication and social activities, which has had a positive impact on people's spiritual world and added interest and cultural atmosphere to communication.

## **2. THE FORMATION PROCESS OF XU YUANCHONG'S THEORY OF THREE BEAUTIES**

Xu Yuanchong, born on April 18, 1921, is a famous Chinese translator. Mr. Xu has a long

reputation for his dedication to the field of literary translation, and is fluent in Chinese, English and French. He is a unique translator of classical Chinese poetry in English and French rhyme, and his translation results are fruitful. Mr. Xu has translated many masterpieces such as "The Book of Songs", "Chu Ci", "Selected Poems of Li Bai", "The Legend of the West Chamber" and many other masterpieces, among which "Chu Ci" is known as "a peak in the field of British and American literature", and "The Legend of the West Chamber" has been praised by the British publishing industry as "comparable to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet". In addition, his translation of "Songs of the Immortals" was also selected by Penguin Publishing, a well-known British publishing company, and was included in the "Penguin Books" series. Mr. Xu Yuanchong's life has been dedicated to the cause of literary translation and education, and his translation works and theories have had a profound impact on the literary translation community in China and even the world.

Xu Yuanchong mentioned in "Literature and Translation" that he applied Lu Xun's "Three Beauties Theory" to translation, thus forming the Theory of Three Beauties of translated poetry. Mr. Lu mentioned in the article "From Words to Articles": "The beauty of meaning appeals to the heart, which is the first aspect; the beauty of sound appeals to the ear, marking the second aspect; and the beauty of form appeals to the eye, representing the third aspect." Prior to this, although Lu Xun's "Three Beauties Theory" talked about writing articles and did not explicitly mention the relationship with translation, Xu Yuanchong drew inspiration from it, reasonably applied the Three Beauties Theory to translation, especially poetry translation, and then combined it with his own translation practice to put forward the Theory of Three Beauties.

Xu Yuanchong's Theory of Three Beauties, namely the beauty of meaning, the beauty of sound, and the beauty of form, is a unique translation theory formed by him in his long-term translation practice. Aesthetic is the beauty of thoughts, emotions and artistic conceptions expressed in poetry. In Xu Yuanchong's translation, he pays attention to accurately conveying the artistic conception and emotion of the original poem to the reader through precise word choice and sentence structure. For example, when translating Li Bai's "Thoughts on a Tranquil Night", he successfully conveyed the poet's deep longing for his hometown,

and readers could feel the loneliness and nostalgia in the poet's heart more deeply. Phonology refers to the beauty of the rhyme of a poem, including rhyme, flatness, rhythm, etc. When translating Tang and Song poems, Xu Yuanchong paid attention to maintaining the phonological characteristics of the original poems, and made the translated text fit the original poems in terms of phonology through ingenious rhyme selection and sentence arrangement. For example, when translating Wang Zhihuan's "Climbing the Stork's Tower", he used appropriate rhyme and sentence structure to maintain a high degree of consistency between the translation and the original poem in terms of phonology, and enhanced the artistic appeal of the translation. Form beauty refers to the beauty of the form of poetry, including the arrangement of poems, antiphons, long and short sentences, etc. When translating Tang and Song poems, Xu Yuanchong paid attention to maintaining the formal characteristics of the original poems, and made the translated texts close to the original poems in form through reasonable sentence arrangement and paragraph division. For example, when translating Du Fu's Spring View, he maintained a high degree of consistency between the form of the translation and the original poem by maintaining the antiphon and sentence structure of the original poem, showing the beauty of the original poem's form.

When Xu Yuanchong first proposed the Theory of Three Beauties, he mainly emphasized that product design should have a balance between aesthetics and function. He believes that product design should not only pursue aesthetics, but also meet the needs of use function, and the two should complement each other to achieve a balance. With the deepening of practice, Xu Yuanchong found that in addition to aesthetic and functional requirements, product design also needs to consider economic issues. Therefore, he added economic requirements to the Theory of Three Beauties, that is, product design should be based on aesthetics and function, and strive to reduce costs, improve production efficiency, and achieve the optimal balance between economic benefits and costs. In the field of translation, Xu Yuanchong's Theory of Three Beauties emphasizes that translators strive to convey sound and form beauty on the basis of faithfully conveying the beauty of meaning. He insisted that the translated poems have the same rhythm as the original poems, showing the beauty of classical Chinese poetry in terms of context and rhyme.

Xu Yuanchong's Theory of Three Beauties has attracted widespread attention in the field of translation. Some scholars hold the view that his translation concept deviates from the traditional translation principle of "seeking truth from the text", and at the same time elevates the status of sound and beauty to an unprecedented height. At the same time, he attached great importance to the re-creation of translations, and was also criticized for not being faithful to the original text. Xu Yuanchong's Theory of Three Beauties is the result of his continuous exploration and innovation in translation practice, which has unique aesthetic value and practical significance. Although this theory has sparked controversy in the translation community, it is undeniable that it has made an important contribution to the development of China's translation industry.

### **3. THE APPLICATION OF XU YUANCHONG'S THEORY OF THREE BEAUTIES IN THE TRANSLATION OF TANG AND SONG POEMS**

#### **3.1 *Beauty in Sense***

"Thoughts on a Tranquil Night" was written by the famous poet Li Bai of the Tang Dynasty, and was created around the 15th day of the ninth lunar month in 726 AD (the 14th year of the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty). At that time, Li Bai, who was only 26 years old, was adrift in a foreign land. On a starry night, the poet looked up at the bright moon in the sky, and couldn't help but evoke nostalgia for his hometown. The poem depicts the author's nostalgia for his hometown in the quiet night. The first two lines capture the illusion of the protagonist in the special environment of a foreign land, while the last two sentences further deepen the poet's longing for his hometown through the portrayal of his actions and demeanor. The language of the poem is fresh and simple, rich in meaning, and evocative, and has been widely praised since ancient times. With its unique artistic charm and deep emotional connotation, this poem is known as one of the treasures of Chinese culture.

《静夜思》

李白

"Thoughts on a Tranquil Night"

Li Bai

床前明月光，疑是地上霜。

Before my bed a pool of light--

O can it be frost on the ground?

举头望明月，低头思故乡。

Looking up, I find the moon bright;

Bowing, in homesickness I'm drowned.

First of all, Mr. Xu translated the “静” of Jingye as tranquil, which means calm and peaceful and without noise, violence, worry, etc. Secondly, Mr. Xu translates the abstract concept of “明月光” as a pool of light, which makes the moonlight concrete, and this point also echoes the translation of “思故乡” in the last sentence, drown in homesickness, both translations contain the image of water. In this process, Mr. Xu also attaches great importance to the choice of words, because the meaning and beauty are to accurately convey the emotions and artistic conception of the original text to the reader, so the accurate vocabulary can also bring the reader into the artistic conception that the poem wants to express, so that the reader is more immersive.

### 3.2 Beauty in Sound

“On the Stork Tower” is one of the six quatrains created by the Tang Dynasty poet Wang Zhihuan, Wang Zhihuan is known for his concise and bright poetic style, and his works are filled with fresh and natural atmosphere, singing and harmonizing with Gao Shi and Wang Changling, and is known for being good at describing the scenery of the border stopper. It is speculated that “Climbing the Stork Tower” may have been composed when Wang Zhihuan abandoned his official position and returned to his hometown, and the creation date was about 15 years (727) to 29 years (741). The stork tower is located in Yongji City, Shanxi Province, China, adjacent to the Yellow River in the southwest of the ancient Puzhou City, and is named after the stork magpie that often inhabits it. When the Tang Dynasty poet Wang Zhihuan climbed the Stork Tower, he was impressed by the magnificent scenery in front of him and created this masterpiece that has been praised through the ages. “On the Stork Tower” depicts what the poet saw and felt in ascending to the heights and looking into the distance with concise and bright language, subtle and far-reaching artistic conception and thinking about the philosophy of life, and expressed the attitude of active exploration and infinite progress in life. With its unique artistic charm and profound philosophy of life, this poem has become an

important work of Tang Dynasty literature and one of Wang Zhihuan's representative works. After thousands of years, this poem has always inspired the Chinese nation to move forward bravely, and it is still widely circulated and highly praised. Qing Dynasty poetry critics praised this poem: “The meaning of the first ten characters is clear, and the following ten characters have the potential to expand endlessly.”

《登鹤雀楼》

王之涣

“On the Stork Tower”

Wang Zhihuan

白日依山尽，

The sun along the mountain bows;

黄河入海流。

The Yellow River seawards flows.

欲穷千里日，

You will enjoy a grander sight

更上一层楼。

By climbing to a greater height.

Mr. Xu's translation of this poem is very short and concise, but it clearly uses the sound beauty of the Theory of Three Beauties. In the process of translation, the translation requires that the translated text convey the rhythm, rhyme, and flatness of the original poem as much as possible. Mr. Xu pays attention to rhyme, and tries to make the translation consistent with the original text in rhyme as much as possible, so as to convey the musicality of the original poem. Compare the bows and flows, a grander sight and a greater height in this poem, and the two lines translate into two sets of rhymes. Xu Yuanhong also pays attention to the rhythm of the translation when reading aloud, by arranging the length of sentences and pauses reasonably, such as controlling each sentence to five to six characters, which also makes the translation visually and audibly close to the original poem. This theory has been widely applied and embodied in his translation practice. Another example is what Li Qingzhao, a lyricist of the Song Dynasty, wrote:

《声声慢》(节选)

“Slow, Slow Tune”

寻寻觅觅，

I look for what I miss,

冷冷清清，  
I know not what it is:  
凄凄惨惨戚戚。  
I feel so sad, so drear,  
So lonely, without cheer.

The two sets of rhymes in this poem, Miss and Is, Drear and Cheer, are the presentation of the beauty of the sound in the Theory of Three Beauties.

### 3.3 *Beauty in Form*

“Spring View” is a poem by the famous poet Du Fu of the Tang Dynasty, written in March of the second year of the reign of Emperor Suzong of the Tang Dynasty (757). At this time, some time had passed since the Anshi Rebellion, but the economic and political influence of the country was still continuing, the people’s lives were withering, and the social order was slowly restored. During his years in Chang’an, Du Fu witnessed the eternity of mountains and rivers and the shattering of the country, the contrast between the vitality of spring and the barrenness of the city. He was in a predicament, missing his distant hometown, and couldn’t help but feel emotional. He couldn’t suppress the grief in his heart, and the deep sorrow and emotion gushed out like a spring, turning into his words, telling the desolation and helplessness of the country’s ruin and family’s ruin. By depicting the scene of spring, the poem shows the author’s feelings of dissatisfaction with the current situation and his expectations for the future of the country. The poem expresses the desolation of the country’s land and cities, the pain and helplessness of political corruption and social injustice, as well as the worry about the rise and fall of the country and the prayer for the future of the country.

《春望》

杜甫

Spring View

Du Fu

国破山河在，

On war-torn land stream flow and  
mountains stand;

城春草木深。

In towns unquiet grass and weeds run riot.

感时花溅泪，

Grieved over the years, flowers are moved  
to tears;

恨别鸟惊心。

Seeing us apart, birds cry with broken heart.

烽火连三月，

The beacon fire has gone higher and higher,  
家书抵万金。

Words from household are worth their  
weight in gold.

白头搔更短，

I cannot bear to scratch my grizzled hair;

浑欲不胜簪。

It grows too thin to hold a light hair pin.

Form and beauty mean that the translated poem should be as consistent as possible with the original poem in form, including the neatness of the verses, the confrontation, and the overall coordination. The beauty of form is first reflected in the faithful conveyance of the original verse form of the translated poem. In the process of translation, Xu Yuanchong strives to maintain the structural characteristics of the original poem, such as the length of the poem, so as to reflect the neatness of the sentence structure of the original poem. In addition, Mr. Xu will also pay attention to the correspondence and echo of the words in the translated poems, try to maintain the relationship between the battles in the original poems, and strive to reproduce the beauty of the original poems in the translated poems by carefully selecting the translated words, so as to enhance the artistic effect of the translated poems. In addition to the neatness of the poems and the neatness of the battles, Xu Yuanchong also considers the harmony and unity of the translated poems in terms of overall structure, rhythm and style. In the first two sentences, the prepositions in and on are formed in advance, and the third and fourth sentences use the form of non-predicate clauses plus a simple sentence. In addition, the position and order of the substantive words in the translated text follow the format of the original text. And on the whole, the length of each translated sentence is basically the same, which also shows Mr. Xu’s pursuit of neat verses. Because the format requirements of Tang and Song poems are very strict, in the title, number of lines, rhyme, rhythm and other aspects are exquisite, if these aspects are too casual, it is inevitable to lose their artistic characteristics, then in order to better translate the poems, it is necessary to use the beauty

of form reasonably, otherwise if the translation does not comply with the characteristics of the poems, such as like other genres, it is inevitably too strict, which may lead to the final display of the translation is also unsatisfactory.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In the above-mentioned translation appreciation of each poem, the author only chooses one of the perspectives of the Theory of Three Beauties to focus on the analysis, but in fact, the translation of each poem skillfully uses the meaning and beauty, sound beauty and form beauty of the Theory of Three Beauties. For example, looking up and bowing in “Thoughts on a Tranquil Night” form a neat battle, and here it is the use of physical beauty; In the last “Spring View”, Mr. Xu’s careful selection of words is countless, such as the “in” in which the country breaks through mountains and rivers, Mr. Xu uses stand, this verb reflects the turmoil of the country at that time from the side, and also reveals the poet’s determination that the country can restore its health. And the translation of “鳥惊心” here is bird cry with broken heart, because the verb to describe the sound of birds in Chinese is bird cry, so the cry here is very vivid and concrete to reflect this concept, and here is also very lamented by the exquisite words used by Mr. Xu. This consideration of vocabulary is actually the meaning and beauty in the Theory of Three Beauties.

And the three aspects of the Theory of Three Beauties are also in clear order. First of all, the most important of the Theory of Three Beauties must be the United States. Xu Yuanchong believes that the first thing to do in translating poetry is to take “beauty” as the starting point, and the primary task of translating poetry is to convey the artistic conception, emotion and artistic conception of the original poem as much as possible, and it is also the basis for realizing the beauty of sound and form. Although the presentation of sound beauty is secondary, it is also indispensable. Phonological beauty, that is, the aural beauty of a poem, such as rhythm, flatness and rhyme, plays an important role in enhancing the artistic appeal and attractiveness of poetry. On the premise of conveying the artistic conception of the original poem, the translator should maintain the rhyme and beauty of the original poem as much as possible, so that readers can feel the rhythm and rhythm similar to the original text when reading the translated text. Finally, physical beauty is often seen as the least

important component. The beauty of form mainly focuses on the visual beauty of the poem, such as neatness, confrontation and coordination. After conveying the artistic conception and phonological beauty of the original poem, the translator should try to maintain the formal beauty of the original poem, but this is not a hard and fast rule, because the formal beauty can be compromised to a certain extent for the sake of aesthetic and phonological beauty.

Xu Yuanchong’s Theory of Three Beauties has been fully embodied in the translation of Tang and Song poems. Through precise word selection, clever phonological arrangement, and reasonable formal processing, he successfully conveyed the artistic conception, emotion, and formal beauty of the original poem to the reader. This concept of translation not only enriches the theoretical system of poetry translation, but also provides valuable experience and enlightenment for later poetry translation.

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