

Transknowtology and Historical-Orientation: A Study on Burton Watson's Translations of Lu You's Poetry

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Abstract—Burton Watson's translation of Lu You's poetry and literature, notably "The Old Man Who Does as He Pleases", symbolizes a critical turning point in the global dissemination of Lu You's creative output, liberating the translation of his masterworks from the constraints of academic research. This paper scrutinizes Burton Watson's translation of Lu You's poems through the perspective of selection, translational strategies, para-text, and reception, while also considering the backdrop of nativism during the counter-culture movement. The study finds that Watson's translation maintains the characteristics of Transknowtology and historical orientation. The Chinese and Western differences in the translation of Lu You's poems continue to fade in the collision of Chinese and Western cultures and the compromise between the two languages, which expands the scope of the study of Lu You's poem translations in the United States and deepens its analysis. Examining Watson's translation of Lu You's poems encourages readers to consider English translation techniques from a variety of angles, expands their understanding of the interplay between language, culture, and knowledge, and supports the comprehensive translation of Chinese writings into other languages in the modern era. Additionally, it advances the conversion of Chinese traditional culture from local to global knowledge.

Keywords—Burton Watson, transknowtology, Lu You's poetry, poetry translation, historical orientation

I. INTRODUCTION

The translation of Song Dynasty poems has been on the periphery of the whole history of Chinese poetry English translation, and is less able to receive the attention of translators. Compared with the English translation of Tang poetry, the dissemination and popularity of the English translation of Song poetry is dwarfed. Even compared to the "vocal" of the same period, it is less mentioned. Lu You, as a representative poet of Song poetry, is regarded as one of the greatest poets of the Song Dynasty in Chinese literary history, but the dissemination of his works overseas is relatively marginal compared to that of Tang poets such as Li Bai and Du Fu, or contemporaries of the Song Dynasty such as Su Shi. In comprehensive overseas translations, Arthur Waley's *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (1918) included only four Lu You's poems; in the following half-century, Kenneth Rexroth increased this number to eleven in his *One Hundred Chinese Poems* (1971). Overseas translations focusing on Lu You's personal poetry, on the other hand, only four were published in the fifty years between the mid-twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, and some of these translations are full of flaws.

Currently, there are fewer domestic studies on Watson's translation of Lu You's poems, and the latitude of the study is relatively homogeneous, which "mainly focuses on analyzing his translation style and strategic choices" [1]. Against this

background, this study aims to deepen the understanding of knowledge translation in the English translation process of Lu You's poetry in Watson's translation works. Moreover, the new concept of (transknowtology) is introduced in order to explore translation not only as a conversion of language, but also as a process of transmitting and recreating cross-cultural knowledge.

Through this theoretical perspective, this study aims to reveal how Watson transformed Lu You's poetry from a local knowledge to a global knowledge through his work. Through in-depth analysis of Watson's selection of materials, translations, and para-texts of Lu You's poems in order to understand his translation strategy and the way he reconstructed the knowledge content of the poems, this study examines the reception of Watson's translations as well as the effect of the translations and how these works to examine the reception of Watson's translations and the significance of these works in the context of the "Counter-culture Movement". This study aims to fill the gap in the research on Watson's translations of Lu You's poems, and also attempts to provide new theoretical perspectives and practical guidance for the English translation of Chinese poems through the application of the science of knowledge translation. At the same time, it is hoped to explore how the work of translation can promote the international dissemination of China's outstanding traditional culture in the context of globalization. Especially how to transform local knowledge into global knowledge, so as to enhance readers' understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture and literature.

II. TRANSKNOWLETOLOGY

A. Transknowtology with Language, Culture and Knowledge

The concept of transknowtology was first mentioned in the Declaration on Knowledge Translation, which argues that "translation is a cultural behavior and social practice of cross-language knowledge processing, reconstruction, and re-transmission" [2], translation is a practice about the interplay of language, culture, and knowledge. The three interact with each other, constrain each other, and intertwine with each other's practice. "Knowledge itself is material and spiritual culture, and culture belongs to knowledge in essence because of its accumulation and purpose." [3] Although the three act in different links, focus on different directions, and produce different causes of the three, they are essentially the same kind of existence. Therefore, in the practice of translation, it is the language itself that is transformed, and neither the knowledge implied behind it nor the culture carried by the language is changed.

B. Watson's Translation of Lu Poetry under the Perspective of Transknowletology

Knowledge-based translation is a distinctive feature of Watson's practice of translating Chinese poems into English. Watson's English translation of Lu You's poems is not only a linguistic conversion of the text, but also a deep-seated cultural and knowledge translation activity. He's works show how he transforms poems deeply rooted in the soil of traditional Chinese culture into literary works that can be accepted and appreciated by Western readers through scientific translation strategies and methods. This process involves an in-depth understanding of the intellectual content of the original text, an extensive study of the cultural background, and an accurate capture and reproduction of the poetic mood, reflecting the importance of cross-cultural knowledge conversion and re-creation emphasized in the Transknowletology.

Watson's translation practice of Lu You's poetry not only focuses on the poetic text, but also deeply excavates and presents the cultural and historical veins behind it, providing readers with the necessary interpretive framework and background knowledge through deep translation strategies supplemented by the form of para-texts, and effectively transforming Lu You's poems from a kind of knowledge with strong local colors into a global cultural product that global readers can also understand and appreciate.

1) Watson's selection strategy enhances the intellectual content of the translation

Watson's strategy of selecting materials, mainly idyllic poems, enhances the intellectual content of the translation. When translating Lu You's poems, Watson chose the *jiannanshigao* as the original translation, which was compiled by Lu Ziyu, Lu You's eldest son. As "One of the most prolific, leaving behind a collection of close to ten thousand poems, as well as miscellaneous prose writings" [4], Lu You left behind more than nine thousand poems in his lifetime, of which patriotic poems accounted for the vast majority and in Watson's translation, a total of 63 poems were translated, of which 51 were idyllic poems and only 12 were patriotic poems. One of the reasons for Watson's "reverse" selection strategy, favoring the translation of Lu You's idyllic poems over his more widely known patriotic poems, is that Watson believed that he had "probably done less than justice to this aspect (the patriotic works of Lu You) of his work." As a translator, his personal preferences influenced his choice of translations of Lu You's poems; at the same time, Watson has also clarified that "I find Lu Yu's constant calls to battle, no matter how sincere in conviction and noble in a final objective, rather difficult to sympathize with, though I have made a conscious effort to overcome my prejudices in this respect." Due to his disapproval of this idea of "call to battle", Watson chose to translate fewer poems with patriotic themes, which to a certain extent circumvents the influence of his subjective behavior on the translation and maintains the objectivity of it.

Unlike patriotic poetry, which focuses on the expression of the author's inner ambitions, idyllic poetry depicts the life of the ancient Chinese people in a more detailed and all-encompassing way. It is undoubtedly a good choice for overseas readers to understand Chinese culture and enhance their knowledge of traditional Chinese culture.

a) Multi-dimensional display of cultural and historical knowledge

Idyllic poetry not only reflects the poet's intuitive feelings about natural beauty, but also contains rich cultural and historical knowledge, such as descriptions of farming culture, delicate capturing of seasonal changes, and deep emotions with the land. These elements demonstrate the poet's deep connection with nature and society, and provide readers with a window into a deeper understanding of ancient Chinese social life and cultural traditions. In contrast, patriotic poetry, while profoundly expressing the poet's political stance and national emotions, may be relatively homogeneous in terms of type and level of knowledge.

b) Integration of humanistic emotions and philosophical reflections

Idyllic poetry is rich in the fusion of humanistic emotions and philosophical reflections, such as reflections on life, old age, friendship, and loneliness, as well as the realization of the laws of nature and the philosophy of life. These themes reflect the poet's in-depth exploration of the meaning of life and his understanding of the philosophy of nature, making the idyllic poems uniquely valuable in terms of both emotional depth and breadth of thought. This fusion of emotion and philosophy provides readers with an important perspective for understanding the thought and emotional world of ancient Chinese literati.

c) Embodiment of language art and aesthetic value

Idyllic poetry shows great aesthetic value in the use of language and artistic expression, such as the delicate depiction of scenery, skillful expression of emotion, and innovative use of imagery. These artistic techniques not only enhance the aesthetic effect of the poems, but also reflect the poet's profound control of language and creativity. Through appreciating idyllic poetry, readers can feel the unique aesthetic charm and artistic achievement of ancient Chinese poetry, and further understand the aesthetic tradition and values of Chinese culture.

Therefore, compared with patriotic poems, field and garden poems contain richer and more multidimensional knowledge. They not only reflect profound cultural and historical knowledge, but also integrate humanistic emotions, philosophical reflections, linguistic art, and aesthetic values, as well as a deep understanding of ecology and the environment. This diversity and depth of knowledge makes field poetry an important carrier of cross-cultural knowledge transfer and acceptance, providing readers from different cultural backgrounds with a window to fully understand traditional Chinese culture, aesthetic concepts, and environmental awareness.

2) Para-Texts and in-depth translation strategies are conducive to increasing the knowledge concentration of translation

The para-text added by Watson in the translation and his in-depth translation strategy for Lu You's poems increase the knowledge concentration of the translation in terms of breadth and depth.

In the cross-cultural communication of literature, in order to effectively avoid literary misinterpretation, reduce textual distortion, and at the same time increase the space for interpretation to fill the gap of cultural knowledge, "subtexts,

which are flexible, marginal, and interpretative, play the role of increasing the cultural tension and informational elasticity of the translated text" [5]. In other words, the subtext can effectively increase the concentration of knowledge in the translation, provide supplementary interpretation in addition to the original text in order to increase the concentration of knowledge while improving the flexibility of information. This deep translation strategy "places the translated text in a rich cultural and linguistic environment" [6], successfully realizes the intermingling of language, culture, and knowledge, and "is a powerful means of compensatory translation, enabling the translator to comfortably convey various cultural information and background information" [5].

In Introduction, Watson introduces Lu You's life, from his family background to his life trajectory, from his personal ambitions to his writing style, from his career as an official to the collection of his best works, explains the historical environment of the Song dynasty, the dynasty in which he lived, popularizes the knowledge of Chinese culture for the readers, shaping an exhaustive image of Lu You.

Before the main text, Watson also posts a picture called "Places important in The Life of Lu Yu", which is a typical application of the deep translation strategy, in which the translator enhances the knowledge concentration of the translated text in a concrete and intuitive way. The inclusion of this para-text provides readers with an intuitive geographic knowledge framework to better understand the specific geographic context of Lu You's life and creations, reflecting the importance of different places in his life and works. To a great extent, it deepens readers' understanding of the cultural and historical background behind Lu You's poetry. At the same time, the inclusion of maps adds a spatial dimension to the translation, enabling readers to relate the literary works to specific geographical locations when reading the book, which further enhances the intellectual concentration of the translation and the richness of the reading experience. In addition, as an information carrier and a visual tool, the map helps to break down cultural and linguistic barriers and promotes readers' understanding of and interest in Chinese history and culture.

C. Transknowletology in Practice: Watson's Translation of *The Merchant's Joy*

Take the poem *The Merchant's Joy* as an example.

Chinese version:

估客乐

长江浩浩蛟龙渊，浪花正白蹴半天。
轳峨大艚望如豆，骇视未定已至前。
帆席云垂大堤外，缆索雷响高城边。
牛车辘辘载宝货，磊落照市人争传。
倡楼呼卢掷百万，旗亭买酒价十千。
公卿姓氏不曾问，安知孰秉中书权。
儒生辛苦望一饱，赳赳光范祈哀怜；
齿摇发脱竟莫顾，诗书满腹身萧然。
自看赋命如纸薄，始知估客人间乐。

English translation:

The Merchant's Joy

The wide wide Yangtze, dragons in deep pools; Wave blossoms, purest white, leap to the sky.

The great ship, tall-towered, far off no bigger than a bean; My wondering eyes have not come to rest when it's here before me.

Matted sails: Clouds that hang beyond the embankment;
Lines and hawsers: their thunder echoes from high town walls.

Rumble rumble of oxcarts to haul the priceless cargo; Heaps, hordes to dazzle the market—Men race with the news.

In singing-girl towers to play at dice, a million on one throw;
By flag-flown pavilions calling for wine, ten thousand a cask.
The Mayor? The Governor? We don't even know their names;

What's it to us who wields power in the palace?

Confucian scholar, hard up, dreaming of one square meal; A limp, a stumble, prayers for pity at His Excellency's gate.

Teeth rot, hair falls out—No one looks your way; Belly crammed with classical texts, body lean with care.

See what Heaven gives me—Luck thin as paper! Now I know that merchants are the happiest of men.

Transknowletology's guiding principles are embodied in Watson's translation of Lu You's *The Merchant's Joy* (估客乐), which offers a useful illustration of how local Chinese knowledge is translated into global knowledge. This poem captures the social and economic dynamics of the Song Dynasty, especially the conflict between intellectuals and merchants, and is full of subtle cultural and historical details. Watson's translation demonstrates how translation serves as both linguistic and cultural transmission by preserving the integrity of these cultural dynamics while also making them understandable to a global audience.

The original poem combines vivid natural imagery to illustrate the force of the Yangtze River, as shown in the line "长江浩浩蛟龙渊" ("The wide wide Yangtze, dragons in deep pools"). The Yangtze River is a powerful and expansive symbol in Chinese culture, which is where this metaphor has its roots. Watson's translation, "The wide wide Yangtze, dragons in deep pools," effectively conveys this metaphor while ensuring that a broad readership may grasp it. The Yangtze's power and mystery are made clear to the reader, even if they are not familiar with Chinese mythology or geography by the preservation of the image of "dragons in deep pools".

One of the most significant aspects of *The Merchant's Joy* is its commentary on the disparity between the scholar class and merchants in Chinese society. The original line "自看赋命如纸薄，始知估客人间乐" expresses a bitter realization from the scholar's perspective that their fate is as fragile as paper, while merchants seem to enjoy the best of life. Translation by Watson: "Look what Heaven gives me, luck as thin as paper! Now I know that merchants are the happiest of men," effectively communicates this idea and helps a global audience understand the socioeconomic disparity.

By translating "赋命如纸薄" as "luck thin as paper", Watson transforms the original Chinese concept of fate into a universally relatable idea of fragility and unpredictability. His choice of words highlights the delicate balance of life, a concept that resonates with readers beyond the confines of Chinese culture. At the same time, the translation "merchants are the happiest of men" captures the economic disparity conveyed in the original, presenting a theme that holds relevance in both Eastern and Western societies.

III. HISTORICAL-ORIENTATION

A. *Origins: The Exoteric Orientation of the American "Counter-Culture Movement"*

The "Counter-Culture Movement" of the 1960s and 1970s profoundly influenced the reception of Eastern philosophy and literature, particularly Chinese poetry. Disillusioned with Western materialism and modernity, many young Americans sought alternative spiritual and philosophical values in Eastern traditions. This shift was not mere curiosity; it reflected a deeper quest for meaning, especially in philosophies like Taoism and Buddhism. Chinese classical poetry became a key medium through which these seekers explored Eastern wisdom. As one scholar notes, they "began to walk out of the center of Western civilization and turned to Eastern civilization, which was in a marginal cultural position, to seek spiritual support." [5]

Watson's translations, emerging during this cultural shift, resonated with this new generation eager for philosophical insights. His work provided not just literary value, but access to the deep philosophical and historical contexts embedded in Chinese poetry. The popularity of Chinese classical texts during this period opened new avenues for their translation, and Watson's efforts aligned perfectly with the counter-culture's embrace of Eastern thought. "In search of a breakthrough, the new generation of poets not only looked for remedies from their own traditions but also turned their attention to the great Chinese traditional culture." [7]

B. *Results: Preparing for Future Historical Research*

Watson's translations of Lu You's poetry, along with his earlier work on Hanshan and Su Dongpo, marked a significant moment in the global dissemination of Chinese literature. His focus on preserving both the poetic and historical integrity of the works is evident. "His translations take into account the poetic nature of translated poetry as translated literature and its documentary function as literary historical material." [8]

Watson aimed for accessibility, ensuring that Chinese poetry reached a broader audience. His "reader-centered" concept of translating poems and the purpose of translating" [9] lowered barriers to understanding, expanding the impact of these works. His detailed introductions and annotations also highlighted the historical significance of each poem, making his translations valuable both as literary and historical documents. This approach laid the groundwork for his later historical publications and demonstrated the continuity of his scholarly interests.

IV. THE ENRICHMENT OF RESEARCH LATITUDE

A. *Marginalization of Song Poetry*

In the field of research and translation of classical Chinese poetry, Song poetry has long been in a more marginalized position compared to Tang poetry. Scholars have traditionally tended to regard the Tang Dynasty (618–907) as the golden age of Chinese poetry, a notion that has deeply influenced the direction of Western research and acceptance of Chinese literature. "Scholars have historically viewed the Tang Dynasty (618–907) as the great age of Chinese poetry." [10] This tendency has resulted in the poetry of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) being largely ignored, despite the fact that Tang poetry has received increasing attention for its

richness of subject matter and aesthetic value. This meant that Chinese poetry tended to focus on a small number of poets, especially those of the Tang dynasty (618–907). An unintended consequence of this situation is that Song dynasty poetry has been largely ignored.

B. *The "Foreignization" Image of Lu You in Watson's Writing*

In China, Lu You is usually regarded as a patriotic poet, and his poems mainly show his "determination to fight against the Jin Dynasty and serve the country, his indignation to crusade against the traitors and sycophants, the generosity of his passion to serve the country, and the sadness of his unfulfilled ambitions" [9], so it can be said that Lu You is a patriotic poet undoubtedly. Of the 63 poems in Watson's translation of Lu You's poems, only 12 are patriotic poems, and the remaining 51 are idyllic poems, even though Watson's preface in *The Old Man Who Does as He Pleases* has already stated in advance: "In the former type of poetry, in the former type of poetry, in which Lu Yu appears as an ardent the great Tang poet Tu Fu (712–70), those works he admires intensely. The other Lu Yu, the contented, philosophical farmer, derives eventually from another great poet of the Past, Tao Yuan-ming or Tao Chi'en, who was likewise one of Lu Yu's literary idols." [4] He continued to favor idyllic poetry in his choice of texts, and consciously or unconsciously portrayed Lu You as a "Tao Yuanming"-style poet, which led to the foreignization of Lu You's image abroad, and seemed to be quite different from the patriotic poet in the traditional Chinese perception. On second thought, there is even an image of Zhuge Liang, who was "in the fields but concerned about his country".

V. CONCLUSION

To summarize, Watson's translation of Lu You's poems has an obvious knowledge-orient translation and historical-orientation. The strategy of selecting materials mainly from idyllic poems enhances the intellectual nature of the translations, and at the same time, the annotated subtexts and the deep translation strategy of Lu You's poems increase the intellectual concentration of the translations in terms of both breadth and depth, and the counter-culture movement and his personal academic career contribute to the historical orientation in his study of Lu You's poems.

Watson's translations have not only contributed to the expansion of the dimensions of translation studies of Lu You's poetry in the United States and globally, but have also enhanced the depth and breadth of the studies. This in-depth excavation and precise communication of Lu You's poetry in terms of content, form, and cultural context provides Western readers with a window into the society and culture of Song dynasty China. Through the study of Watson's translation, we are able to deepen the diversified thinking on the English translation strategies of Chinese poetry, explore how to realize its effective communication in different languages and cultural contexts while preserving the cultural essence of the original text, contribute to the promotion of the international dissemination of classical Chinese literary works, and also provide valuable experiences and strategies for the promotion of the global dissemination and recognition of the excellent traditional Chinese culture.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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