

A Comparative Study of Chinese Translations of Keats's *To Autumn* Under "Three Beauties Theory"

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Abstract

Xu Yuanhong, a Chinese professional translator, firstly proposes "Three Beauties Theory" in poetry translation. After a lot of practical application, the theory mainly focusing on the beauty in sense, beauty in sound and beauty in form has become a guide for poetry translation. As one of John Keats's most classic poems, *To Autumn* is full of beauties in sense, sound and form. It has many translations of this poem in China, among which Mu Dan's and Tu An's translations selected in this paper are widely adopted in China. This paper explores three beauties of poetry translation through a comparative study of the merits and inadequacies of the two translations in reproducing three beauties of the original in hope of helping readers better appreciate the artist appeal of *To Autumn* and promoting cultural exchange between China and the West.

Key words: *To Autumn*; "Three Beauties Theory"; Translation of Mu Dan; Translation of Tu An; Chinese translation of English poetry

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 John Keats and *To Autumn*

1.1.1 Brief Introduction of John Keats and *To Autumn*

John Keats is an outstanding Romantic poet in the UK in the 19th century. Although died at an early age, he composes a large number of famous poems. As one of the classic poems of Keats, *To Autumn* is different from his previous works filled with gorgeous words and mythological imagination, for it depicts autumn scenes realistically with plain language and sincere feelings, epitomizing the aesthetic value of odes of Keats.

1.1.2 Appreciation of *To Autumn*

To Autumn was inspired by the warmth of the reaped wheat fields at dusk as Keats wandered through the countryside back then, depicting three separate yet integrated idyllic scenes in autumn respectively in its three stanzas. The first stanza unfolds a fruitful autumn morning with bent apple trees, plump hazelnut, bulging gourds, blooming flowers and busy bees. The second stanza describes busy harvest in the afternoon such as wheat reaping and juice pressing, in which the wheat fields dyed with sunset glow is highlighted, revealing a warm picture with bright but not dazzling hues. In the third stanza, a symphony of nature is playing with gnats' choir, sheep bleating, hedge-crickets singing, then whistle of red-breast brings it to a climax and swallows' twittering terminates the whole song and concludes the poem as well.

To Autumn is brimmed with harvest in terms of fruits, grains and livestock, and for Keats, his spring sowing in poetry composition also bears fruits at that time. The poem expresses Keats's affection for nature through a vivid description of fascinating scenery, vibrant harvest and enchanting sounds in autumn.

1.2 Two Authors: Mu Dan and Tu An

Mu Dan (1918-1977) whose original name is Zha Liangzheng, is a famous poet and translator in China.

He composes many poems in the first half of his life and later devotes himself to translating classic foreign poems, including those of Pushkin, Shelley, Byron and Keats. Tu An (1923-2017) whose original name Jiang Bihou, is also a renowned poet, translator and a successful publisher. He translates many English poems written by British and American writers, such as Whitman, Shakespeare, Stevenson as well as Keats. His published translation works including Whitman's collection of poems *Drum*, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, *Selected English Poems with Chinese Translation* and *A Child's Garden of Verses*. Being excellent poets and translators, both of them translate Keats's poems systematically, and Tu An's translation of *Selected Keats' Poems* won the second National Excellent Literary Translation Rainbow Award in 2001.

1.3 Xu Yuanchong and His "Three Beauties Theory"

Xu Yuanchong is a prominent figure in literary translation. He publishes 60 translated works in Chinese, English and French at home and abroad during his over 60 years' translating career, including *The Book of Songs*, *Selected Poems of Li Bai*, *The Red and The Black*, *Madame Bovary* and *In Search of Lost Time*. He won the "Lifetime Achievement Award in Translation" in 2010 and became the first Asian winner for "Aurora Borealis" Outstanding Literary Translation Award by International Federation of Translators in 2014. He proposes "Three Beauties Theory" based on his translation practices of translating Chinese classical poems into foreign languages. "Three Beauties" refer to beauty in sense, beauty in sound and beauty in form. Beauty in sense means artistic appeal of poems' contents and emotions, thus "the translated poem should be as touching as the original poem" (Xu; 85). Beauty in sound lies in "cadence and rhyme which make it catchy and pleasant to the ear" (Xu; 55) and so should the translation. Beauty in form rests with length and symmetry (Xu; 58), which can be achieved by "keeping the original form as much as possible" (Xu; 85) in the translation. Among the three beauties, beauty in sense is the most important, followed by the sound and then the form. The theory mainly serves as a guidance for translating Chinese poems into other languages, and the author believes that it is also of great guiding significance to translate English poems into Chinese, which is especially suited for Keats's poems in that they are as rich as Chinese classical poems in the above-mentioned three beauties.

At present, relevant researches on *To Autumn* are made from the perspective of literature and most of them are based on the translations of Mu Dan and Tu An, while studies on the two translations are relatively few. The paper aims to compare and analyze two translations of *To Autumn* by Mu Dan and Tu An in reproducing the poem's three beauties under Xu's translation theory, so that readers can better appreciate its artistic appeal and to explore the art of poetry translation.

2. A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE TWO TRANSLATIONS UNDER XU YUANCHONG'S "THREE BEAUTIES THEORY"

2.1 Beauty in Sense

An important reason for the artistic beauty of *To Autumn* lies in its vivid detailed description. Those dense decorative details not only strengthen the expressiveness of the poem, making readers feel as if they were personally on the scene, but also contain Keats's delicate emotions. As Zhao Bo (2016; 18) points out that most of the nouns in Keats's *To Autumn* are compounds modified by various attributive, gerund and past participle, which helps him to portray beautiful things of autumn more accurately with deeper emotions." Some lifelike details omitted in Mu's translation are reproduced in Tu's translation, which will be shown in the following example (L stands for Line).

Example 1:

- L1 Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness¹,
- L2 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun,
- L3 Conspiring with him how to load and bless
- L4 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;

Mu's Translation:

- L1 雾气洋溢、果实圆熟的秋,
- L2 你和成熟的太阳成为友伴;
- L3 你们密谋用累累的珠球
- L4 缀满茅檐下的葡萄藤蔓;

Tu's Translation:

- L1 雾霭的季节, 果实圆熟的时令,
- L2 你跟催熟万类的太阳是密友;
- L3 同他合谋着怎样使藤蔓有幸
- L4 挂住累累果实绕茅檐攀走;

In L1, "mellow" is translated into "圆熟" in both of the translations, which not only vividly presents the loveliness of ripe fruits, but also indicates that life has reached the fullest state in autumn. In L2, "密友" better presents the close relationship between autumn and the sun than "友伴", and "催熟万类" shows the vitality of the dynamic process of maturing embodied in the present participle more accurately compared with "成熟" in Tu's translation. In L3, Tu translates "bless" into "使……有幸", thus a generosity of autumn stands vividly on the paper.

¹ The source text of *Tu Autumn* comes from John Barnard. The Complete Poems of John Keats. Penguin Classics. 2nd Ed edition (27 Jan. 1977) and Mu Dan's translation comes from *Selected Poems of Keats*, China Astronautic Publishing House, 2019 and Tu An's translation comes from *Selected Poems of Keats*, North Literature and Art Press, 2019.

Example 2:

L5 To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,
L6 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
L7 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
L8 With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
L9 And still more, later flowers for the bees,
L10 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
L11 With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
L12 And still more, later flowers for the bees,
L13 Until they think warm days will never cease,
L14 For Summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells.

Mu's Translation:

L5 使屋前的老树背负着苹果，
L6 让熟味透进果实的心中，
L7 使葫芦胀大，鼓起了榛子壳²，
L8 好塞进甜核；又为了蜜蜂
L9 一次又一次开放过迟的花朵，
L10 使它们以为日子将永远暖和，
L11 因为夏季早填满它们黏巢。

Tu's Translation:

L5 让苹果压弯农家苍绿的果树，
L6 教每只水果都打心里熟透；
L7 教葫芦变大；榛子的外壳胀鼓鼓
L8 包着甜果仁；使迟到的花儿这时候
L9 开放，不断地开放，把蜜蜂牵住，
L10 让蜜蜂以为暖和的光景要长驻；
L11 看夏季已从粘稠的蜂巢里溢出。

In L5, the detail “mossed” is translated into “苍绿”， which reinforces the color expressiveness of the scene, reveals Keats's meticulous observation and echos the above “mists”, for mists suggest moisture, a precondition for moss to grow. In L6, Tu's translating the detail “all” into “每只” is conducive to amplify the joy of harvest. Unfortunately, such expressive details are not reflected in Mu's translation.

Example 3:

L16 Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,
L17 Drowsed with the fume of poppies while thy hook
L18 Spares the next swath and all its twinèd flowers;

Mu's Translation:

L16 有时候，为罌粟花香所沉迷，
L17 你倒卧在收割一半的田垄，
L18 让镰刀歇在下一畦的花旁；

Tu's Translation:

L16 或者在收割了一半的犁沟里酣睡，
L17 被罌粟的浓香所熏醉，你的镰刀
L18 放过了下一垄庄稼和交缠的野花；

In L18, the exertion of personification makes the scene even more dynamic, such as “歇” in Mu's

translation and “放过” in Tu's translation. “放过” is ingeniously translated here, making the hook more intelligent. In dealing with the detail of “twinèd flowers”, Tu translates it into “交缠的野花” rather than “花” as Mu does, through which the artistic effect is further enriched.

Example 4:

L19 And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
L20 Steady thy laden head across a brook;
L21 Or by a cider-press, with patient look,
L22 Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Mu's Translation:

L19 或者，像拾穗人越过小溪，
L20 你昂首背着谷袋，投下倒影，
L21 或者就在榨果架下坐几点钟，
L22 你耐心地瞧着徐徐滴下的酒浆。

Tu's Translation:

L19 有时像拾了麦穗，你跨过溪水，
L20 背负着穗囊，抬起头颅不晃摇；
L21 或者在榨汁机旁边，长时间仔细瞧，
L22 对滴到最后的果浆耐心地观察。

Mu translates “hours by hours” in L22 into “坐几点钟”， which actually creates a sense of leisure, while “长时间” translated by Tu emphasizes the long lasting time. Besides, “果浆” is a better grasp of the original than “酒浆”， for cider is an alcoholic beverage made after the fermentation of pure apple juice. Moreover, “滴到最后的果浆” reproduces “the last oozings” and demonstrates farmers' patience and “观察” can better indicate farmers' meticulous work in Tu's translation.

Example 5:

L23 Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
L24 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too –
L25 While barrèd clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
L26 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue:

Mu's Translation:

L23 呵，春日的歌哪里去了？但不要
L24 想这些吧，你也有你的音乐——
L25 当波状的云把将逝的一天映照，
L26 以胭红抹上残梗散碎的田野，

Tu's Translation:

L23 春歌在哪里？哎，春歌在何方？
L24 别想念春歌——你有自己的音乐，
L25 当层层云霞把渐暗的天空照亮，
L26 给大片留茬地抹上玫瑰的色泽，

In L23, Tu presents the second question omitted by Mu, and there is also minor change in its expression, which better reflects the repetition in sound. “别想念春歌” is more idiomatic Chinese than “但不要想这些吧”。 “Blossom” in L25 is especially animated, giving a sense of dynamic picture in which sunset clouds make

² “壳” here is pronounced as qiào in Chinese.

the sky gorgeous. In L25, Tu's translation "层层云霞把渐暗的天空照亮" shows the change of time when the sky is getting darker, while Mu's translation "波状的云把将逝的一天映照" is less expressive. Nevertheless, compared with "玫瑰的色泽", "胭红" in Mu's translation is more poetic that allows Chinese readers to have more empathy with the beautiful color of the sky in L26, and "touch" is translated into "抹" in both translations, thus a charming sunset view is rendered vividly.

2.2 Beauty in Sound

English and Chinese poems have their own means to convey the beauty in sound. English poems tend to use cadence and rhythm, while Chinese poems employ rhyme and level and oblique tones. *To Autumn* adopts iambic pentameter and rhetorical devices such as parallelism and repetition to enhance its musical beauty. The two translators successfully reproduce the sound effect of the original through corresponding methods.

2.2.1 Rhyme and Alliteration

As a metrical poem, *To Autumn* is unique for its 11 lines in each stanza in comparison to 10 lines in his previous works. Every 11 lines can be divided into the first 4 lines and the last 7 lines in terms of rhyme. Taking the first stanza as an example, rhymes such as "秋" "伴" "球" "蔓" and "令" "友" "幸" "走" are used respectively by Mu and Tu to reproduce the rhyme of the first four lines, as shown in Example 1. Accordingly, "果" "中" "壳" "蜂" "朵" "和" "巢" and "树" "透" "鼓" "后" "住" "驻" "出" are used for reflecting the rhyme scheme ABABCDEDCCE, as shown in Example 2. The rhyme scheme of the last 7 lines is changed into CDECDDE in the second and third stanza, which is also well-reproduced in the two translations. Expectations are met overall in both translations to show the beautiful rhyme of *To Autumn* to the greatest extent, despite some inconsequential failure in strictly following the original rhyme.

As for alliterations in *To Autumn* such as "mists and mellow", "the fill all fruit", "songs of Spring" "winnowing wind" and assonance like "swell/shells", Chinese words such as "洋溢" "密谋" "拾穗" "酒浆" "散碎" "群起" sharing the same initial consonant and reduplicated words like "累累" "一次一次" "徐徐" "忽而忽而" used by Mu along with "季节" "葫芦" "色泽" "红胸" "呢喃" and "胀鼓鼓" "层层" "小小" correspondingly used by Tu, greatly enhance the translations' beauty in sound, coupled with unique Chinese tone.

2.2.2 Cadence and Onomatopoeia and Parallelism

Tu replaces iambic pentameter with "five pauses", that is to use natural pauses in Chinese to reproduce English pentameter to intensify the cadence of translation. The accurate use of onomatopoeic words will greatly

enhance the expressiveness of sound, which is a common technique both in English and Chinese. What's more, quite a few parallel structures in *To Autumn* that strengthen the tension of language and enrich emotions of the poem are also reflected in the two translations.

Example 6:

L27 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
L28 Among the river shallows, borne aloft
L29 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
L30 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
L31 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
L32 The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
L33 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

Mu's Translation:

L27 这时呵/, 河柳下的/一群/小飞虫
L28 就/同奏/哀音, 它们/忽而/飞高,
L29 忽而/下落, 随着/微风的/起天;
L30 篱下的/蟋蟀/在歌唱;/ 在园中
L31 红胸的/知更鸟/就/群起/呼哨;
L32 而/群羊/在山圈里/高声/咩叫³;
L33 丛飞的/燕子/在天空/呢喃/不歇。

Tu's Translation:

L27 这时/小小的/蚊蚋/悲哀地/合唱
L28 在/河边/柳树丛中, 随着/微风
L29 来/而又去, 蚊蚋/升起/又沉落;
L30 长大的/羔羊/在山边/鸣叫得/响亮;
L31 篱边的/蟋蟀/在歌唱; 红胸的/知更
L32 从/菜园/发出/百啭千鸣的/高声,
L33 群飞的/燕子/在空中/呢喃/话多。

Basically, both translators use natural pauses in Chinese to reproduce the cadence embedded in English poems in the above example, and Tu follows the "five pauses" strategy relatively more strictly. Parallel structures that display the symphony of autumn are reflected in these two as well.

As for onomatopoeic words, "咩叫" in L30 more vividly simulates the sound of sheep in Mu's translation, and "whistle" in L32 is translated respectively into "呼哨" and "百啭千鸣的高声" in the two translations. "Twitter" in L33 is translated into a very poetic Chinese word "呢喃" in both translations. However, "话多" makes a sense of abruptness for Chinese readers given such a harmonious musical performance and its special location, "不歇" instead is more appropriate here.

2.3 Beauty in Form

Peter Newmark (1998, p.765) argues that in most examples of poetry translation, the translator first decides to choose a TL poetic form (viz, sonnet, ballad, quatrain,

³ The translation of Mu Dan is in different order from the original.

blank verse etc.) as closely as possible to that of the SL. In this case, the two translators choose to translate *To Autumn* into modern metrical poems rather than Chinese classical poems whose lines have the same number of words. There are two benefits by doing so. First, it can give full play to their common identity as poets in modern China. Secondly, modern metrical poems with relatively more formal flexibility can enable the translation to reproduce the form of *To Autumn* as closely as possible, released from the strict formal limits of classical ones.

Lines of *To Autumn* Ode is orderly arranged in the shape of a serrulation with regular length, so are the two translations. The number of words in Mu's lines ranges from 10 to 13, while that of Tu ranges from 11 to 14. Both are equally neat in terms of formal beauty. It is worth noting that Mu's translation is more concise as a whole, and in other words, it is terser in expression and smoother in language flow compared with Tu's translation.

Example 7:

L12 Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
L13 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
L14 Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
L15 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
L16 Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,
L17 Drowsed with the fume of poppies while thy hook
L18 Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers;

Mu's Translation:

L12 谁不经常看见你伴着谷仓？
L13 在田野里也可以把你找到，
L14 你有时随意坐在打麦场上，
L15 让发丝随着簸谷的风轻飘；
L16 有时候，为罌粟花香所沉迷，
L17 你倒卧在收割一半的田垄，
L18 让镰刀歇在下一畦的花旁。

Tu's Translation:

L12 谁不曾遇见你经常在仓廩的中央？
L13 谁要是出外去寻找就会见到
L14 你漫不经心地坐在粮仓的地板上，
L15 让你的头发在扬谷的风中轻飘；
L16 或者在收割了一半的犁沟里酣睡，
L17 被罌粟的浓香所熏醉，你的镰刀
L18 放过了下一垄庄稼和交缠的野花。

In this example, there are eleven words in each line of Mu's translation, which adds up to 77 words, and Tu's translation amounts to 95 words ranging from 12 to 14 words each line. There are possibly two reasons for such a difference. On the one hand, Mu focuses on the concision of language. He puts forward that poetry is originally composed of few words and rich meanings, so wordiness should be avoided. I think twelve or thirteen words per line can express any thought. If the lines are too long, division of lines will make no sense" (Jian, p.61).

On the other hand, Tu gives more emphasis on faithfully reproducing the original including details, which will almost inevitably lead to more words. He mentions in an interview that he always implements the principles of "faithfulness", "expressiveness" and "elegance" proposed by Yan Fu. "Faithfulness" is the root, while "expressiveness" and "elegance" are two aspects (Ding, pp.56-57). At the same time, it also relates to his fondness of Keats's poems, for they share values and even the same experience of suffering from lung disease at the age of 22. Tu regards Keats as his bosom friend and he manages to survive by reading his poems in the time of difficulty. Therefore, he digs deeper into spirits of Keats's poems and pays more attention to show its original charm. However, just as what Susan Bassnett (2014, p.111) remarks that the success of failure of these attempts must be left to the discretion of the reader, but the variations in method do serve to emphasize the point that there is no single right way of translating a poem just as there is no single right way of writing one either."

CONCLUSION

Due to the great differences between English and Chinese, it is difficult to achieve the three beauties. In spite of some little deficiencies, the two translations, on the whole, succeed in reproducing beauty in sense of *To Autumn* and they are rich in rhythm and regular in the length of the lines and stanzas, displaying beauties in sound and form. In comparison, Mu's translation enjoys more concision, while Tu's translation contains more lifelike details, enabling it to reproduce the subtleties in a more preferable way.

It can be seen from the translation of *To Autumn* that translators with different translation advocacies and experiences may have different translations. However, no matter what strategies and methods are adopted in translation, they should serve to reproduce the three beauties of the original. "Three Beauties Theory" is also proven to be helpful for poetry translation from the perspective of sense, sound and form. The analysis of Keats's poetry could make poetry lovers appreciate it better, and promote the exchange of Chinese and Western culture. Moreover, the reason why Tu An is awarded with the prize for his translation of *Selected Poems of Keats* is also closely related to his meticulous and tireless writing and translating practices, which inspires all translators to strive for perfection.

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