

Zen Springs from a Peaceful Heart— On the Conveyance of Zen in the English Versions of *Deepak Village* by Wang Wei

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Abstract—Based on four English versions of *Deepak Village* by Wangwei, in the context of Zen ideas, this paper attempts to evaluate the effects of Zen conveyance in these versions and analyze the causes, especially from the following three views: tranquility, subject-object relationship, void.

Index Term—Zen, tranquility, subject-object relationship, void

In Zen poems, emotions, scenery, principles and specific incidents mingle as water and milk do, the flavor, delight, principle, and content of Zen seem to be there but hard to grasp, one can taste them in his mind but difficult to find the clear evidences or traces of them, limited words are barely enough to clarify the endless Zen meanings. In order to render their integral style as properly and precisely as possible, how should the translators do to overcome the obstacles in cultures and languages? What qualities should they possess? During that process what problems will arise? This thesis attempts to analyze the problems in four English Versions of the poem *Luzai* by Wangwei from the angle of conveying Zen meanings, but it will not make a judgment whether they are good or not. (鹿柴 空山不见人,但闻人语响。返景入深林,复照青苔上。王维)

I. AN ANALYSIS OF THIS POEM'S ZEN MEANINGS

Combined with a description of pastoral landscape, the poem has a very brief, serene, smooth, and natural style, just like a well- organized exquisite painting. Its Zen meanings are mainly shown in the following aspects: (1) tranquility. Zen pursuers treasure tranquility, in which they can obtain Buddhist awakening. If they can be tranquil in heart, then they can achieve understanding of Buddhist principles, by and by they will become Buddha. Only in everlasting tranquility can they clear up all worries, desires, limitations, inequalities so as to achieve “the great void”, then to reach a complete awakening and transcendence, to be identical with Buddha. Where to find this perfect tranquility? Many poets turn to Nature, which they incline to choose as a carrier and foundation, the mystical immortal nominee “tranquility” tends to appear in Nature. In Wangwei’s poems there is extreme tranquility and peace, yet which is not dead stillness but full of vitality, such as a ray of sunshine in *Luzai*, the bird chirping in *Niaomingjian*. Tranquility is interspersed with motion and enlivened by motion; eventually motion is reduced to tranquility. That is so-called peaceful, free and natural realm. Therefore tranquility is the soul of Zen; it sometimes even displays a kind of vague and vast mysticism. (2) With the dispelling of opposition between subject and object, there is a total tacit agreement between subject and object in the poem. Subject and object become a wholly one, intangibly integrated. The quiet outside objects and the serene environment project onto subjective minds, from which arises thought, minds mingle with objects, and again project onto outside objects. All demarcations, limits, bounds between subject and object disappear, the only thing one turns to is instinct and sudden awakening. In this poem, one hears someone talking but cannot see who is speaking, which exactly exhibits the traits of Zen state of being in the secular world at the same time without in it. The greatest mystery lies in the sunshine’s coming, going and then back, lies in people’s voice being heard yet the speaker not being seen. (3) Void. The poem presents a state of leisure and void. Buddhists maintain that the substance of all things in the world is void, that is, they are illusory, and all phenomena are just the embody of Buddhist principles. Zen holds that the root of everything is void and advocates an empty heart holding nothing. Buddha arises in the heart, it comes and goes with karma. Wangwei maintains that there is no difference between presence and void, and takes delights in tranquility, not seduced by sensual pleasures. Promotion or demotion never leaves a trace in his heart, flavor or insult never disturbs him, and nothing can taint or tether him, so he can attain absolute freedom in which his pure nature can present itself. Therefore the images in this poem is not totally objective, they are scenes created by the poet’s heart, yet the sound, light in it are just temporarily illusions of the subject’s heart, and only serve as a foil for the tranquil and free natural landscape. Only in void can all creations appear clear and elegant, and restore its true nature. All in all, this poem reveals an elegant Zen state: closeness to nature, void, and integration between object and subject, transcendence above mortal world.

II. THE PROBLEMS AND RESULTS IN THE CONVEYANCE OF ZEN IN FOUR ENGLISH VERSION OF LUZAI

A. Translation by Ye Weilian

Deer Enclosure
 Empty Mountain: no man is seen
 But voices of men are heard
 Sun's reflection reaches into the woods
 And shines upon the green moss

Void: In Wangwei's poems, there are many Chinese synonyms of void, *Kong*(空), such as “空山新雨后”, “夜静春山空”; Yet *kong* here does not mean the same as empty, the latter means being bare or having nothing. From the context of this poem, the hills are not really bare ones having nothing, at least there should be deep and luxuriant plants, and moss, and anything else normal hills or woods have, such as grass, flowers, insects, and other little creatures. There is an evident cold and serene tone in this poem, yet not to the extent of being bare or dead.

Firstly, *Kong* here means that there are almost no people's traces; Secondly it means being serene, peaceful, cheerless; Thirdly it means that in the poet's mind it is just like a place of remote antiquity, vast and void. It is the void in Philosophy and Zen, the opposite of *Se*(色), that is, phenomenon. Just like any other creations in the world, the substance of the mountain is void, and illusory. But void in Zen is not being dead or lonely, it is lively and natural, well-provided with all creations. In Mr. Ye's translation, voices of men seem too literal and noisy. From the whole mood of the poem, there should not be too many people in the hills, not to say the continuous clamor of human beings. In the poem, voices are heard, yet the focus is not on whether there exist people or not, the poet just uses partial, fleeting and occasional voices to set off the long-lasting void and tranquility of the whole mountain, to reflect the deepness of mountains and woods. The voices break the tranquility but make the mountains more peaceful.

The personification used in “reaches into” seems somewhat strange from the conveyance of Zen meanings. Zen admires nature and tends to describe the true features of things. The light of setting sun is a natural phenomenon, if it is personified, then the real nature is not reflected in an objective way. And the word “woods” only renders partial meaning of 深林, “深” is not translated, but this word emphasizes the exuberance, darkness, serenity of the hills, and lack of sunshine all the years around, which foreshadows the moss at the end of the poem. As to the poem's visual effect, the most of the picture uses cold color, then polished by a beam of warm color--- a ray of the declining sun, faint and fleeting, yet it makes the whole painting even colder. “Shines” in Ye's translation seems too brilliant to reflect the complicated charm analyzed above.

B. Liu Ruoyu's Translation

Deer Enclosure
 On the empty mountains no one can be seen,
 But human voices are heard to resound.
 The reflected sunlight pierces the deep forest,
 And falls upon the mossy ground

“To” in the second line of this translation uses future tense, which is somewhat contrary to the objective narration mood of the whole poem. Buddhists hold that the universe is void but well-provided with all creations. In time, it has no beginning or end; in space, it has no bound or limit. The difference in time is just subjective forms. Buddhists maintain that there is transcendence of time and space. The past can accommodate the present and the future, and the present also can accommodate the past and the future, an instant can accommodate eternity. So the translator had better use the present tense to describe time here. In order to use rhyme in this translation, Ye translates “响” as “resound”, which means “fill a place with sound, produce echoes, spread far and wide”, no matter from the tenseness and spreading range of the sound, “resound” is much stronger than the sound presented in the Chinese version. Furthermore, “pierces”, so sharp, so strong, just like a pointed sword, destroys all the serenity and void in this Zen poem. The tenseness is too strong to describe the faint shine of the setting sun. The last line of this translation makes one feel that something falls on the ground just like a heavy stone, so it is unsuitable to describe a ray of faint shine of the setting sun, “照” is rendered as “落”.

C. W. Robinson's Translation

Deer Park
 Hills empty, no one to be seen
 We hear only voices echoed——
 With light coming back into the deep wood
 The top of the green moss is lit again

This translation almost renders this poem as a family outing. Firstly, “park” in the title means a noisy place with crowded people coming and going, plus “deer” makes one suspect whether it is a zoo; Secondly, plural “we” “voices” make the scene bustling with noise. If used in a quiet context, “echo” will be a wonderful word, but here it seems that the tourists are shouting and responding to each other. So here the tranquility in the original poem is ruined totally.

As to “we” in this translation, I have two points to point out: Firstly, on what basis does the translator add people to the objective natural scenery? Secondly even if the scenery needs to be observed, then on what basis does the translator

judge that there is more than one observer? Why should be “we”, not “I”? In Zen, a scene without “me” is highly esteemed, so poets tend to disappear in Zen poems, they just silently present what should be presented, never explicitly expound the subtle connotation of the poem, which is only up to the readers’ slow tasting. *Luzai* presents an eternal, ontological, invariable state without action and desire, which are the internal rhythm of all creations in universe and the profoundest secret of nature. This poems aims at the eternal ontology, of course, it is also a state of mentality and awakening. Zen esteems instinctive intellect, which tends to signify something else between the lines and has transcendence. Words are just symbols for impressing thoughts and emotions, the highest level of Zen meditation is saying by without saying, that is, what counts is not the poem’s superficial meaning, what counts is the metaphysical ontology between the lines. The readers tend to transcend the static objects and those sensual phenomena so that they will meditate the abstruse principle of the universe and obtain relaxed, free, natural pleasure from Zen. From the angle of conveying Zen meanings, the author proposes that any observer should not be present in the translation, to say nothing of the presence of more than one participants, it is best if the observer can disappear as completely as possible.

D. *The Translation of Chang Yin-nan and Lewis Walmsley*

Through the deep wood, the slanting sunlight
Casts motley patterns on the jade-green mosses.
No glimpse of man in this lonely mountain,
Yet faint voices drift on the air.

The above translation’s disadvantage is that it is too plain and too overdose, “motley”, “faint”, “glimpse”, “drift”, all these seems too literary and refined, just like a beauty with too much unnecessary make-up, the Zen state presented by pure and clear words disappear, the translation becomes a over-adorned prose. The brevity and naturalness in the original makes the poem more implicative, light-colored.

III. CONCLUSION

The above analysis at least can make the readers notice two cliches: firstly, translation study is not just based on linguistic level, such as measuring the equivalence between the original and the translation by comparing their words, expressions, paragraphs or the whole text. It should also be based on the cultural level. Translators should grasp the original from a broader scope, and researchers should find out whether the translation is loyal to the original in content and style. Secondly, the hardness of translating poems is beyond imagination. Poems’ life lies in its various interpretations. Therefore, this thesis just attempts to analyze the English version from a single angle, never meaning putting another pair of handcuffs to poetry translation which is already in chains. Due to the narrowness of research angle, inevitably there will a lot of errors in this thesis, so here the author begs the forgiveness and correction of experts and readers.

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