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Translation Theories and the Strategy of Interpretation in the Chinese Translation of José Martí's *Ismaelillo*

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Abstract

The present study investigates the translation theories employed in the process of translating José Martí's *Ismaelillo* into Chinese as 《我兒，以實瑪利》 (Soang, 2020). The translation theories investigated in this study include the strategies of poetry translation developed by André Lefevere and the theories of Charles Sanders Peirce, Ferdinand de Saussure, Jacques Derrida, and Roland Barthes. Further, it is important to examine the differences between the source language and the target language in relation to cultural issues. Lastly, some practical suggestions for the future study of poetry translation are discussed.

Keywords

Poetry Translation, Translation Theory, Cuban Poetry, Modernism, José Martí

1. Introduction

The translator is, metaphorically speaking, a solitary navigator who travels through infinite oceans. Discussing the translator's identity, Zaixi Tan (2012) used images of social persons to describe what a translator is or should be like. Tan provided a list of "categories" of metaphors depicting the translator's identity: painter, actor, musician, mediator, bridge-builder, matchmaker, photographer, competitor, transformer, traitor, slave, traveler, merchant, reporter, pass keeper, and a morning star (Tan, 2012: p. 19). Based on my experience of translation, I am particularly interested in the metaphor of the translator as a "traveler" since there are many unknown things waiting to be discovered in the journey of words. Charles Batteux also viewed the translator as a "traveler": "He

will act only like a traveler, who, for his convenience, exchanges sometimes one piece of gold for several of silver, sometimes several pieces of silver for one gold" (Batteux, 1747-1748: p. 198). Similarly, Johann Gottfried von Herder suggested that "[w]e will gladly make this journey with the translator, if only he would take us with him to Greece and show us the treasures he has found … he must be our tour guide, point things out to us… as pilgrims seeking the great state secrets of Greek literature" (Herder, 1766-1767: p. 208).

Translation is never an easy task. In Taiwan, most research on translation has focused on comparative studies of the texts of novels translated from English to Chinese. Little is known about the methodological problems encountered in poetry translation, especially in the works of translation between Spanish and Chinese. Three works of translation of Spanish contemporary poetry that have received the most attention by Chinese readers are Juan Ramón Jiménez's *Platero y yo* (1914, 1917), Pablo Neruda's *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (1924), and Octavio Paz's *Piedra de Sol* (1957). These poets shared the same honor of being a Nobel Prize winner in World Literature. Their poetic works have been translated either directly from Spanish to Chinese or indirectly from English to Chinese.

Another significant Spanish-language poet was José Martí, who wrote *Ismaelillo* (1882), considered the first work of modernism in Latin American Literature. Martí was not only a great man in Latin American history but also an advocate for children's education. In my attentive study of *Ismaelillo*, which consists of fifteen poems focusing on a father-son relationship, I was amazed by the powerful images and innovative language used by the poet. Although the poetic style is not complicated, the number of aphorisms used and the length of complex sentences make the reading difficult. Martí references historical figures and events and makes constant allusions to literature, current affairs, and cultural matters to illustrate and render convincing his ideas and "advanced" notions. For this reason, Héctor Hernández Pardo suggested that Martí may be difficult to read and translate (Hernández Pardo, 2000: p. 146). Translations of Martí's work that can be found in World Literature have indeed been scarce.

My present research is an investigation of the theoretical works on poetry translation applied to the translation of Martí's *Ismaelillo*. First, I will examine André Lefevere's seven strategies of poetry translation; the strategy of interpretation will be included in my discussion. Further, I will examine the theories of semiology created by Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Roland Barthes and develop a model of translation to explain more clearly the processes of translating *Ismaelillo* into Chinese. Finally, I will discuss some practical matters, such as problems in the process of translation.

2. Translation Theories

Susan Bassnett (2002: p. 84) suggested an analysis of poetry translation should include an investigation of Lefevere's seven strategies of poetry translation (1975), which were based on his study of the English translation of Catullus' six-

ty-fourth poem.[1] Lefevere considered the form, content, and aesthetic merits to be valuable elements within a unified content when translating poetry. A summary of these seven strategies of poetry translation is as follows: 1) **Phonemic Translation** reproduces the source language (SL) sound in the target language (TL); 2) **Literal Translation** is similar to word-for-word translation; 3) **Metrical Translation** reproduces the SL meter; 4) **Poetry into Prose** distorts the sense, communicative values, and syntax of the SL text; 5) **Rhymed Translation** attempts to transfer the rhyme of the SL poem into the poem in the TL; 6) **Blank Verse Translation** ensures that the equivalents in the TL have meanings close to those of the original poem; 7) **Interpretation** deals with versions, which occur when the substance of the SL text is retained but the form is changed, and imitations, which take place when the translator reproduces a poem of their own.

Sen and Shaole (2010) confirmed these translation strategies to be comprehensive, well defined, and useful for translations when English is either the SL or the TL. Given these strategies are meant to be used mainly by English translators, it is not an easy task to apply them to poetry translation from Spanish to Chinese. The first strategy, phonemic translation, can only occur in rare occasions. Among the seven strategies, literal translation is highly recommended because of its principle of fidelity. It has proven to be the most applicable strategy for poetry translation from Persian to English (Kolahi & Emamian, 2012: pp. 462-463). However, the disadvantage of this strategy is that it can distort the sense and the syntax of the original poem. To avoid distortion, I propose the use of the last strategy named by Lefevere, that is, interpretation, for poetry translation from Spanish to Chinese. From my experience of translating Martí's *Ismaelillo*, I found the strategy of interpretation to be helpful for the deconstruction and reconstruction of the poems in Chinese.

2.1. Interpretation

The strategy of interpretation is divided into two subcategories, i.e., versions and imitations. Bassnett explained that "Lefevere discussed what he calls *versions* where the substance of the SL text is retained but the form is changed, and *imitations* where the translator produces a poem of his own which has 'only title and point of departure, if those, in common with the source text'" (Bassnett, 2002: p. 84). "Versions" represent an SL—oriented approach, whereas "imitations" represent a TL—oriented approach. Based on Lefevere's strategy of interpretation, a basic model of poetry translation processing (PTP) was developed as illustrated in Figure 1.

In the process of deconstruction, several situations, such as rhyming problems and semantic issues, need special attention. When the translator attempts to recompose a poem, he/she has to tackle the problem of selecting the proper vocabulary by employing the addition, deletion, and recreation of words, i.e., a

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[1]Catullus' sixty-fourth poem, written in Latin, is four hundred and eight lines long. According to Lefevere, the poem tells the love story of the marriage of Peleus and Thetis. See his *Translating Poetry: Seven Strategies and a Blueprint*. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975, p. 9.
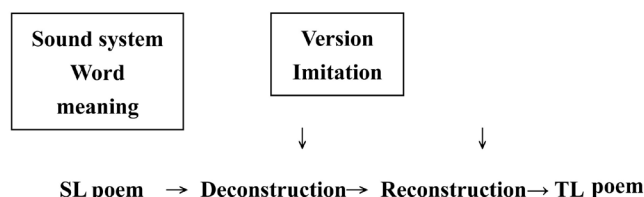
Figure 1. Poetry translation processing.

"meaningful unit", in the context of the TL.

Examining the relationship between text and meaning, Walter Benjamin[2] and Derrida[3] implemented deconstruction as a critical approach to the process of translation. In his article, "The Task of the Translator" (Die Aufgabe des Uber-setzers, first published in 1923), Benjamin regarded the work of translation as an "afterlife" of the original: "For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life" (Benjamin, 2005: p. 254). When facing a new environment, the TL text is reborn and should thus be considered an independent work from the SL text.

Derrida interpreted or *translated* in his own language the myth of the "tower of Babel"[4] in his article, "Des Tours de Babel" (1985), arguing that the SL text is not original; instead, it is the elaboration of an idea from *another* foreign language. Therefore, the assumption of viewing the TL text as a product inferior to the SL text should be abandoned. According to Derrida, a translation contract is a "marriage contract in the form of a seminar": "Benjamin says as much, in the translation the original becomes larger; it grows rather than reproduces it-self—and I will add: like a child, its own, no doubt, but with the power to speak on its own which makes of a child something other than a product subjected to the law of reproduction. This promise signals a kingdom which is at once 'promised and forbidden where the languages will be reconciled and fulfilled'" (Derrida, 1985: p. 191).

2.2. Semiology

Signs exist everywhere in our daily life. We communicate with each other either verbally or non-verbally by sending as well as receiving messages. In the world of literature, it is the obligation of the reader/-translator to interpret the SL message by employing multidisciplinary methods with the purpose of "decoding" the signs of the original text and then "encoding" the language into the TL text, ac-

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[2]Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) was a German Jewish philosopher, literary and social critic, essayist, and translator. Two other essays of his are of great importance as well: "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Preproduction" (1936) and "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940).
[3]Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) developed most of his ideas about deconstruction in his work, *Ot Grammatology*, first published in 1967 (Derrida, 1997).
[4]"The 'tower of Babel' does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompletion, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system and architectonics" (Jacques Derrida, 1985: p. 165).

cording to Nida's (1964) translation theroy[5]. A translator's role thus becomes increasingly difficult in the current era of globalization, where a translator must tackle challenging situations involving problems of "equivalence", untranslatability, and many other cultural and ideological issues.

In the PTP model proposed by L.-L. Soang, something essential is missing in the process of translation between the deconstruction and reconstruction of the poetry (SL poem → Deconstruction → ? → Reconstruction → TL poem). It is necessary to search for a more detailed description of the missing link in this process of poetry translation. I propose the use of the system of signs to add to the model to produce PTP-I (Figure 2).

Before we advance the development of PTP-I into PTP-II, let us examine carefully some of the most important theories of semiology, which I believe would contribute positively to the analysis of my translation of Martí's poetry.

1) Sign and Language

According to Saussure (1916), language is a system of signs, and words only carry meaning because of the contrast between these signs. Saussure explained the relationship between sign and language in the following:

> [W]hen we consider the/sign in its totality, we have something that is positive in its own class. A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with a series of differences of ideas; but the pairing of a certain number of acoustical signs with as many cuts made from the mass of thought engenders a system of values; and this system serves as the effective link between the phonic and psychological elements within each sign. Although both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact; the parallelism between the two classes of differences is the distinctive function of the linguistic institution. (Saussure, 2003: p. 33)

Saussure provided a clear idea of how signs could be distinguished from one another and theorized that each sign carries a signified (符旨, lo designante) and a signifier (符徵, designante): "The entire mechanism of language... is based on oppositions of this kind and on the phonic and conceptual differences that they imply" (2003: p. 33). For instance, the father-son relationship may have different meanings between Latin culture and Chinese traditional society. In ancient China, the family system had a hierarchical order that was deeply rooted in Chinese daily life. According to Confucius (551-479 B.C.), an influential Chinese teacher and philosopher, the importance of social roles and identity should be emphasized in the governmental system. One should be faithful to his duty and shall not overstep his authority. Confucius once said to Duke Ching of Ch'î, who

SL poem → Deconstruction → Sign → Reconstruction → TL poem

Figure 2. Poetry translation processing-I.

[5]The terms "decoding" and "encoding" derive from Nida's (1964) translation theory.

consulted him about his ideas of government,—"There is government when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son" (君君，臣臣，父父，子子，*Confucian Analects*, Book XII: Chapter 11).[6] The following is the passage from which this quote derives:

Good government is achieved only when all of the relative duties are maintained.

a) Duke Ching of Ch'î asked Confucius about government.

b) Confucius replied, "There is government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son."

c) "Good!" said the duke, "if, indeed, the prince be not prince, the [minister] not minister, the father not father, and the son not son, although I have my revenue, can I enjoy it?"

齊景公問政於孔子。

孔子對曰：「君君，臣臣，父父，子子」。

公曰：「善哉! 信如君不君，臣不臣，父不父，子不子，雖有粟，吾得而食諸?」。

As the "son" image is associated with obedience and filial duty in Chinese traditional thought, Martí's use of the "son" image requires a further explanation for Chinese readers. In *Ismaelillo*, as a symbol of power, bravery, love, and justice in the context of war and revolution, the "son" is a source of inspiration for the poet as well as the representation of idealization.

In *Ismaelillo*, the poet names the son after the biblical figure of Ishmael, the first son of Abraham (亞伯拉罕), who was born from Abraham and Sarah's (撒拉) handmaiden, Hagar (夏甲). Ishmael's name literally means "God has hearkened" (神聽見).[7] He was promised to be a brave fighter who would beget numerous descendants who would become so strong that they would establish a large nation in the future. Ishmael is also believed to be the ancestor of Arabs today. The following passages from the Bible describe Ishmael:

The angel of the Lord also said to her:

"You are now with child

and you will have a son.

You shall name him Ishmael,

For the Lord has heard of your misery. (Genesis XVI: 11)

[耶和華的使者]並說：你如今懷孕要生一個兒子，可以給他起名叫以實瑪利，因為耶和華聽見了你的苦情。(創世紀 16 章 11 節)

He will be a wild donkey of a man;

his hand will be against everyone

and everyone's hand against him,

and he will live in hostility

toward all his brothers.". (Genesis XVI: 12)

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[6]See *Confucian Analects* (*Lun Yu*), Translation by James Legge, 1893, Book XII: Yen Yûan, Chapter 11. www.cnculture.net/ebook.

[7]Genesis, XVI: 11. See Chinese-English Bible. Union-New International Version, 1990.

他為人必像野驢。他的手要攻打人，人的手也要攻打他，他必住在眾弟兄的東邊。(創世紀 16 章 12 節)

And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. (Genesis XVII: 20)

至於以實瑪利，我也應允你：我必賜福給他，使他昌盛極其繁多，他必生十二個族長，我也要使他成為大國。(創世紀 17 章 20 節)

According to Jorge Camacho (2006), Martí (1999) employed oracular discourse to reveal the poet's search for a union with the universe through the son's realization of the ascending journey: "El motive de la ascension del poeta al cielo-naturaleza no se reduce a la relación que establece el hablante con el universe, sino que se proyecta en las acciones del hijo y en las escalas ascensionales del poemario" (Camacho, 2006: p. 9).

While the image of the "son" is associated with obedience and filial duty in Chinese traditional thought, the son in *Ismaelillo* is gifted with the spiritual strength and transcendental ideals to fight against the unjust world. In "Musa traviesa" (Martí, 1999: p. 71), the poet says, "Al viajero del cielo/¿Qué el mundo frágil?/Pues ¿no saben los hombres/Qué encargo traen?" (What is the fragile world to one/Who travels in the heavens?/Do men not know/The task they bear?, "Mischievous Muse", trans. by T. Fisher, 2007: p. 15).

來自天國行者
世界何等脆弱？
人們並不了解
何等重責大任？　(Trans. by L.-L. Soang, 2020: pp. 15-16)[8]

2) *Representamen*, Object, and Ground

As a philosopher and the founder of American semiotics, Peirce (1839-1914) proposed "a complex classification of signs precisely in terms of the different relationship each manifested between *signans* and *signatum*, or signifier and signified" (Terence Hawkes, 2003: p. 103). Hawkes's (1977) clear analysis of Peirce's semiotic ideas is as follows:

A sign or *representamen* is "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect of capacity" (*ibid.*, Vol. 2, Para. 228): it is "anything which determines something else (its *interpretant*) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its *object*)" (*ibid.*, Vol. 2, Para. 303). A sign thus *stands for* something (its *object*); it stands for something to somebody (its *interpretant*); and finally it stands for something to somebody *in some respect* (this respect is called *its ground*). These terms, *representamen*, *object*, *interpretant* and *ground* can thus be seen to refer to the means by which the sign signifies; the relationship between them determines the precise nature of the process of *semiosis*. (Hawkes, 2003: p. 103)
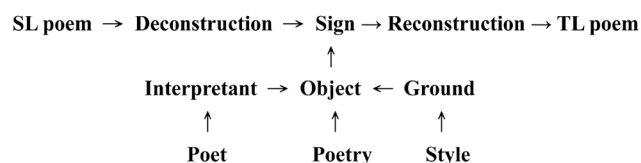
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[8]Chinese translation by L.-L. Soang. 馬帝，《我兒，以實瑪利!》，宋麗玲譯著，2020.

This relationship between "*representamen*" (sign), "*object*", and "*ground*" is critical to the explanation of the sign system in my PTP-II model. I shall employ these semiotic ideas to formulate and elaborate my process of translating Martí's poetry more specifically. We will take a closer look at the incorporation of the "sign" system from the PTP-I model into the PTP-II model:
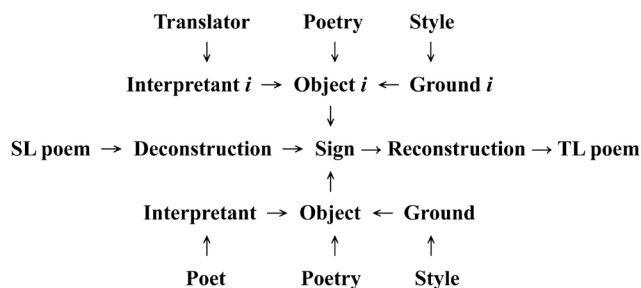
As shown in Figure 3, the poet plays the role of the interpretant of his poetry based on the language style that he uses. The translator focuses on the sign system to interpret the text. Alternatively, he/she might need to rewrite the poem in the TL. In other words, the translator could be observed as "another" poet or a "half poet" who plays the role of the interpretant, i.e., interpretant *i* in PTP-III in Figure 4, as well. However, the translator is required to exert significant effort in the connection by decoding and encoding the message of the text during the process of translation. Comparatively speaking, the translator has more responsibilities than the original poet because the translator needs to address every detail in the application of this PTP system. This model of the process of translating poetry is expected to be applicable to not only Martí's poetry and other poetry translated from Spanish to Chinese but also all poetry. A complete procedure of poetry translation using the sign system is illustrated in Figure 4.

Before discussing PTP-III in detail, let us examine again how Peirce defined his idea of "an equivalent sign" created by the *interpretant* of the first sign. On the topic of the "Division of Signs," Peirce explained his ideas as follows:

> A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person **an equivalent sign**, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representamen. (Peirce, 2003: p. 106)

SL poem → Deconstruction → Sign → Reconstruction → TL poem
↑
Interpretant → Object ← Ground
↑ ↑ ↑
Poet Poetry Style

Figure 3. Poetry translation processing-II.

Translator Poetry Style
↓ ↓ ↓
Interpretant *i* → Object *i* ← Ground *i*
↓
SL poem → Deconstruction → Sign → Reconstruction → TL poem
↑
Interpretant → Object ← Ground
↑ ↑ ↑
Poet Poetry Style

Figure 4. Poetry translation processing-III.

In my PTP-III model, instead of "a sort of idea", I used a more concrete word, "style". In other words, the poet creates the sign for his poetry, its object, and the meaning represented by the sign generates "an equivalent sign" for the designated person depending on the background that the person possesses or the style that he seeks to adopt. I will use Martí's poem to exemplify the use of the sign system in a cross-cultural situation.

In "Príncipe enano", the first poem of *Ismaelillo*, Martí uses the word "príncipe" to address his dear son. The image of the son is represented by a "prince", which is socially recognized as a noble and powerful individual. The Spanish word "príncipe" is literally translated into English as "prince". However, "príncipe" can be translated into several equivalent signs in Chinese that generate nuanced meanings:

a) 皇太子 (Huáng tàizǐ): "Son of the Royal Magnanimous" is the only heir to the crown of the kingdom in ancient China.

b) 皇子 (Huángzǐ): This term is literally translated as "son of royalty". It is a formal title referring to the son of a king in ancient China. In the Qing Dynasty, "阿哥" (Ā gē) was an informal title for the son of royalty and could be used orally.

c) 王子 (Wángzǐ): This term refers to the son of a king and is used mostly in European countries. However, in this iteration, a prince is not necessarily the heir to the crown. "Prince" can also be a title of nobility like knighthood. In Spain, the term "infante" is used instead of "príncipe" to address the son of a king.

As the first and second terms, 皇太子 (Huáng tàizǐ) and 皇子 (Huángzǐ), are no longer popular in the usage of modern Chinese language, 王子 (Wángzǐ) is the appropriate term that is widely used. When translating, the translator would select 王子 (Wángzǐ) to translate "príncipe" in the poem, "Príncipe enano" (小王子).

3) Signifier and the Signified

According to Roland Barthes, the signifier and the signified belong to systems of signs that have their own complexity. It is thus necessary to analyze and subsequently develop a system of classification by collecting data and conducting the work involved in interpretation. Above all, one should pay attention to the problem of "readership": *Who is reading the message*? When a message is sent to someone, each message receiver (the reader) may have his/her own interpretation that is different from that of the other. The differences may derive from the reader's education, cultural background, and national identity. Barthes indicated,

> Finally... we may consider that to each system of signifiers (lexicons) there corresponds, on the plane of the signifieds, a corpus of practices and techniques; these collections of signifieds imply on the part of system consumers (of "readers", that is to say), different degrees of knowledge (according to differences in their "culture"), which explains how the same "lexie" (or

large unit of reading) can be deciphered differently according to the individuals concerned, without ceasing to belong to a given "language". Several lexicons-and consequently several bodies of signifieds—can coexist within the same individual, determining in each one more or less "deep" readings. (Barthes, 2003: p. 206)

To take this into account, we need to examine not only the language itself but also the cultural and historical elements of a text and its readership.

For instance, in *Ismaelillo*, the frequently recurring images of the father and the son may evoke contradictory interpretations in Chinese readers who believe in Confucianism. In the poetry, the image of the son, Ismaelillo, represents "courage" and "glory"; the son is expected to become a knight, warrior, or even king through his future combats that belong to the world of the spiritual, secular as well as literary imagination. By contrast, in Confucian philosophy, the son's duty includes "filial piety" (孝道): he should always obey and serve his parents and all other senior members of the family. The year of publication of Martí's *Ismaelillo* was 1882, which was Emperor Guangxu's[9] eighth year of power during the Ching Dynasty (清朝光緒八年). The wish for one's son to be the king of the world would have been considered an act of betrayal to the country in the time of the Ching Dynasty. The following clarifies the difference in the signified of the "son" signifier in 1882 between Cuban literature and Chinese society:

The "son" in Cuban literature in 1882:

Signifier	*The Signified*
Son	Courage, glorified king

The "son" in Chinese society in 1882:

Signifier	*The Signified*
Son	Filial piety, a family model

Nowadays, the idea of filial piety is still the gold standard of ethical thinking in modern Chinese society. Therefore, it is necessary to explain the cultural and historical background of Cuba for Chinese readers when translating *Ismaelillo* into Chinese. In other words, the translator must explain how Martí's poetic son carries a double meaning that refers to not only the son of the father but also the "new blood" (nueva sangre) of his generation who will rule the world with freedom, dignity, and glory.

3. Conclusion

José Martí's work of modernist poetry, *Ismaelillo*, is characterized by the usage of hyperbaton, aphorism, long sentences, and biblical allegory, which makes its translation a difficult task. The translator would require a high level of reading comprehension and would encounter constant decision-making challenges concerning translation strategies. Literal translation is suggested as a possible strategy for the process of translation; however, if the use of this strategy results in translations that are awkward or absurd to Chinese readers, it would be neces-

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[9]Emperor Guangxu (1875-1908) was the eleventh Emperor of the Ching Dynasty.

sary to adopt the strategy of interpretation. Through interpretation, despite changes to the form, the substance of the SL text is retained. The strategy of interpretation has been applied in numerous examples of translations. Further investigations into these examples will provide insight into such issues as the problem of translating the style of the poet and the utilization of symbol and color in translation, which will be the focus of my future research.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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