Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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The Primary Research of the Poem of ‘What Plant is not Faded?’

Translation of Text

First, let's look at the meaning of this poem. I refer to the translation of James Legge and Arthur Welley. At present, I think Arthur Welley's translation of many sentences is closer to my understanding of this poem than Legge's translation. Next, I will explain why I think so. At the same time, some sentences will be interpreted according to the meaning explained by Pei Puxian and Mr. Qu Wanli.

This song is divided into four paragraphs. Let's look at the first paragraph.

何草不黃，何日不行。

何人不將，經營四方。[1]

The translation of James Legge is

Every plant is yellow;

Every day we march.

Every man is moving about,

Doing service in some quarter of the kingdom.[2]

The translation of Arthur Waley is,

What plant is not faded?

What day do we not march?

What man is not taken

To defend the four bounds?[3]

The words at the beginning of the first three sentences of this paragraph are translated respectively ‘every’ and ‘what’. Because these sentence are question sentences, I personally prefer to choose Arthur Waley's translation——‘what’. Of course,every plait,every day also reflects the feeling of helplessness, which means that there is not a day when people are not on the march.

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[1] Quanwanli 屈萬里, *Shijing Quanshi*《詩經詮釋》 (Taibei: Lianjing publish Shiye Co.LTD, 2018), p.448.

[2] Trans. by James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* Vol.I V(Taibei: Nan Tian Book Co.LTD, 2015), p.424.

[3] Trans. By Arthui Waley, *The Book of Songs*(New York:Grove press,1996), p.221.

Secondly, James Legge's translation for 經營四方 is 'doing service' and Arthur Waley's translation is 'to defend'. When reading this poem, we will feel the helplessness of being forced to become a soldier and to fight. Therefore, I think maybe 'to defend' is more appropriate here than 'doing service'.

何草不玄，何人不矜。

哀我征夫，獨為匪民。[4]

The translation of James Legge is，

Every plant is purple;

Every man is torn from his wife.

Alas for us employed on these expeditions!

How are we alone dealt with as if we were not men?[5]

The translation of Arthur Waley is,

What plat is not wilting?

What man is not taken from his wife?

Alas for us soldiers,

Treated as though we were not fellow-men![6]

First of all, James translated the character of 玄 into purple, but actually 玄 means red and black. There is still a big difference between red, black and purple. Red and black also means that the grass withers in winter, so wilting is more appropriate.

According to *HanDian*, the character of 匪 have the meaning of 'it not'. So I think this sentence of 獨為匪民 means that 'am I the only one who is not your people.'

匪兕匪虎，率彼曠野。

哀我征夫，朝夕不暇。[7]

The translation of James Legge is，

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[4] Quanwanli 屈萬里, *Shijing Quanshi*《詩經詮釋》, p.448.
[5] Trans. by James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* Vol.I V, p.424.
[6] Trans. By Arthui Waley, *The Book of Songs*, p.221.
[7] Quanwanli 屈萬里, *Shijing Quanshi*《詩經詮釋》, p.448.

We are not rhinoceroses, we are not tigers,

To be kept in these desolate wilds.

Alas for us employed on these expeditions!

Morning and night we have no leisure.[8]

The translation of Arthur Waley is,

Are we buffaloes, are we tigers

That our home should be these desolate wilds?

Alas for us soldiers,

Neither by day nor night can we rest![9]

The book of Shijing Pingzhu Duben compiled by Pei Puxian said that there are two explanations for this paragraph. First, those buffaloes and wild tigers can walk freely in the wilderness, while people keep on working without freedom and can not rest. This is a lament that people are not as good as beasts. Second, lament that people are not bison and tigers, but have to run around in the wilderness. I think these two explanations will be more in line with the meaning of the above and below, and I prefer that the former bison and wild tiger can walk freely in the wilderness, while people only keep on working for battles.

有芃者狐，率彼幽草。

有棧之車，行彼周道。[10]

The translation of James Legge is，

The long-tailed foxes,

May keep among the dark grass.

And our box-carts,

Keep moving along the great roads.[11]

The translation of Arthur Waley is,

The fox bumps and drags

Through the tall, thick grass.

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[8] Trans. by James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* Vol.I V, p.424.

[9] Trans. By Arthui Waley, *The Book of Songs*, p.222.

[10] Quanwanli 屈萬里, *Shijing Quanshi*《詩經詮釋》, p.448.

[11] Trans. by James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* Vol.I V, p.424.

Inch by inch move our barrows

As we push them along the track.[12]

I prefer to use James Legge's translation in the last paragraph, because I think this paragraph means that the fox with long tail can hide in the grass unhurriedly, while many people can only run on the road of the Zhou Dynasty. James Legge's translation is more inclined to this meaning.

So at present, according to my understanding for the song, I will combine the translation of James Legge and Arthur Waley, as well as some changes I have made on the basis of their translation.

The Background of the Poem

The preface to the poem records that this poem satirizes the king you of Zhou — Gongsheng Ji. When he presided over the regime, foreigner invaded the surrounding areas. His countrymen betrayed themselves. He fought constantly and regarded the people as animals. The gentleman was worried about this situation, so he wrote this poem.

Zhuzhuang said that The Western Zhou Dynasty was about to perish, and the people perform military service ceaselessly. The people were very painful, so they made this poem.

Whether this poem satirizes king you of Zhou or not, it obviously describes the vision of troubled times in late West Zhou dynasty. At the end of the Western Zhou Dynasty, Gongsheng Ji, king you of Zhou was the emperor at that time. He loved and spoiled the beauty Baosi very much. After Baosi gave birth to a son. The king abolished the empress Shen and the crown prince at that time, and established the son given birth by Baosi as the crown prince. Baosi didn't like to laugh. In order to make Baosi happy, the king tried many methods, but failed. Finally, he teased the Dukes with Beacon. He raised the beacon fire to attract the princes' army, (In ancient times, if the enemy came to attack, the emperor would ask people to raise beacon fire, which told the princes to ask them to rescue) but there was no enemy. He watched with Baosi that thees princes were fooled. Baosi finally laughed which made the king happy. After that, he raised the beacon fire many times, but he lost the trust of the princes, so they ignored him. In addition, the king appointed Guo Shifu, a flattering

[12] Trans. By Arthui Waley, *The Book of Songs*, p.221.

venality of secular people, as his minister. The people complained. Because the king did a lot of bad things, empress Shen's father was very angry so that he united foreigner assaulted the King of Zhou. Because before, the King of Zhou lit the beacon without the enemy's attack, this time someone really attacked, and the princes who saw the beacon did not come to rescue. Hence, the king you died and the Western Zhou Dynasty perished. The above is the historical background of this poem.

Self-reflection

From the stories about king you of Zhou recorded in *the historical records*, maybe we don't seem to think it have anything to do with the poem, but in fact, these behaviors of king you of Zhou trigger people's pain directly. First of all, from the content recorded in the historical records, king you of Zhou had no sense of being responsible for the people as an emperor. His eyes only had his own desires, which were just satisfied by Baosi and Guo Shifu, so he loved Baosi and listened to them. However, Baosi and Guo Shifu only had their own joys, sorrows and desires. As long as they were happy and benefited, they never cared whether the people were doing well. And their desires are not beneficial to people.For example, if King You of Zhou thought about the feelings of princes and soldiers, he would not light a beacon fire when there is no enemy. This is not what the emperor should do. This behavior made him lose his faith in the world, and for the troops of these princes who came to rescue, they had to spend not only time, energy, but also financial and material resources. The loss must be great, but king you of Zhou didn't think about it at all. All these absurd behaviors will accumulate people's resentment, so the Queen's father attacked king you of Zhou later. The world is in chaos, and it is the people who suffer. It can be imagined that at that time, the war was incessant, and the old, weak, sick and disabled fled everywhere because of the war. Young men with physical strength were selected to serve as soldiers, and they ran around all year round, so they couldn't rest, and they couldn't take care of their families. In addition, although the poem does not mention how many people died in the war, we can also imagine the scene of corpses everywhere according to such a scene. Therefore, in this background, there naturally appears this kind of poetry full of resentment,helplessness and sadness.

There are many such sad and desperate poems in the book of songs, especially compared with

the poems praised by the people in the prosperous period. For example, the scene of people taking the initiative to build a Lingtai for King Wen of Zhou in the poem of Lingtai can be said to be happy.

The people of King wen of Zhou sang:

When he planned the commencement of the marvellous tower,

He planned it, and defined it;

And the people in crowds undertook the work,

And in no time completed it……

In what unison sounded the drums and bells!

What joy was there in the hall with its circlet of water!

The lizard-skin drums rolled harmonious,

As the blind musicians performed their parts.[13]

Whereas the people of King you of Zhou sang:

Bison and wild tiger can walk freely in the wilderness, while people only keep on working for battles.

In a word, this poem tells us the importance of being close to moral people and having a sense of responsibility. If you don't have a sense of responsibility, don't know think for the people, and don't get close to moral people, you will have a bad ending like king you of Zhou, and you will always be regarded as a negative example by people. Just like in the Book of Songs alone, there are 20 poems satirizing King You of Zhou.

[13] Trans. by James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* Vol.I V, p.456.

Bibliography

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