
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

English Translation of Chinese Poetry *Shijing* from the Perspective of Transcreation

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| ABSTRACT

As a cornerstone of ancient Chinese literature, *Shijing* exemplifies the rich linguistic features of Classical Chinese and reflects profound cultural traditions, which pose considerable challenges for cross-cultural translation. This study adopts the theoretical framework of transcreation and conducts a comparative analysis of English translations of selected *Shijing* poems by two representative translators: Xu Yuanchong and James Legge. Focusing on four key dimensions of meaning, sound, syntax, and rhetoric, the study explores the concrete application of transcreation strategies. The findings reveal that transcreation not only preserves the poetic essence of the original, but also enhances target readers' receptivity, thereby facilitating the global dissemination of Chinese culture. This research offers methodological insights into the translation of classical texts and highlights the significant role of transcreation in intercultural dialogue.

| KEYWORDS

Shijing translation; transcreation; poetry translation; cultural globalization

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1. Introduction

As a cornerstone of ancient Chinese literature, *Shijing* not only showcases the linguistic beauty of early Chinese poetry but also vividly portrays the social customs and emotional expressions of the Western Zhou to the Spring and Autumn periods (circa 11th–5th centuries BCE). Its contents span a wide range of themes, from ceremonial hymns to political satire, from romantic sentiments to pastoral scenes. As the wellspring of Chinese literary tradition, *Shijing* also serves as a vital repository of traditional morality and philosophical thought. However, due to the complexity of Classical Chinese syntax and the rich cultural connotations embedded within the text, English translations of *Shijing* have long faced significant challenges. Conventional translation strategies, whether literal or liberal, often prove inadequate in conveying the aesthetic depth and cultural resonance of the original.

Against this backdrop, transcreation has emerged as a promising alternative. As a translation strategy that foregrounds the creative agency of the translator, transcreation provides a more flexible and culturally sensitive approach to rendering classical poetry. Transcreation is defined as a process that combines linguistic transfer, cultural adaptation, and creative reconstruction (Díaz-Millón & Olvera-Lobo, 2023). As Jackson (2010) notes, rather than “formative moments” of national literary history, Haroldo de Campos sees the main process at work as transformative, not a closed entity but as “difference, as overtness, a dialogic moment of difference against the background of the universal.” Originally applied in advertising and postcolonial texts, this concept stresses that translators must surpass a simple transfer of informational content, striving instead to recreate the emotional resonance, rhetorical style, and cultural vitality of the source text in the target language. Compared to the traditional paradigm of “equivalence and fidelity,” transcreation places greater emphasis on the reception and aesthetic impact of the target audience.

While transcreation has already demonstrated its effectiveness and expressive power in the fields of advertising, localization, and modern poetry, its application in classical poetry translation, particularly in *Shijing*, remains insufficiently explored. A comprehensive, multi-dimensional analysis of how transcreation functions at the levels of meaning, sound, syntax, and rhetoric is still lacking, as is a comparative study of different English renditions. This study aims to fill that gap by offering a systematic exploration of the transcreative path in the English translation of *Shijing*. It also hopes to extend the scope of transcreation as a literary translation methodology, especially in rendering texts as semantically profound and linguistically concise as *Shijing*.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, the English translation of *Shijing* has witnessed substantial progress both in China and abroad. Domestic research has predominantly focused on its literary value, strategies for cultural dissemination, translation techniques, and phonological features. However, interdisciplinary approaches remain relatively scarce, and the application of transcreation theory in particular has yet to be thoroughly explored. Wang Rongpei (1994) emphasized the necessity of balancing both the spirit and form of the *Shijing* in translation. Li Yiyin (1996) analyzed five different English versions of *Guanju*, stressing the importance of integrating literariness and musicality. Since 2015, corpus-based studies have become more prevalent. For instance, Cai Yonggui (2015) conducted a comparative analysis of James Legge's and Xu Yuanchong's translations, using them as a lens to investigate the broader issues surrounding the translation and global dissemination of classical Chinese texts.

Abroad, the study of *Shijing* translations has a history spanning over four centuries, evolving from early religious interpretations to literary analysis and, more recently, cultural studies. Building upon textual analysis, foreign scholars have also incorporated interpretative and aesthetic theories into their research. Notably, Zhang Shangguan (1991), in his doctoral dissertation *The Lost Horizon: A Study of English Translations of the Shijing*, submitted to the University of Texas, adopted a hermeneutic perspective—viewing translation as interpretation—and conducted a comprehensive comparison of the translations by James Legge, Arthur Waley, and Bernhard Karlgren. His work thoroughly examined the translators' divergent approaches and underlying philosophies. Despite these important contributions, dedicated studies focusing specifically on the application of transcreation theory to the English translation of *Shijing* remain limited, particularly in terms of conveying its unique linguistic style, cultural depth, and poetic expressiveness. As such, this research aims to address this gap and holds both academic significance and practical value. The concept of transcreation was first proposed by scholars from India and Brazil and is often regarded as a fusion of translation and creative writing. Indian scholar Gopinathan (2014) argues that “transcreation not only originates from India's ancient literary culture but continues to be employed by contemporary writers.” Indian poet and translator P. Lal (1964) famously described the translator's task as involving editing, adaptation, and transformation of source materials, thereby defining his own approach to translating Indian religious epics as transcreation. Since the late 20th century, transcreation theory has gradually extended its reach to fields such as advertising and video games, where the translated content must not only be accurate but also culturally engaging and contextually appropriate (Chen Lin & Cao Peihui, 2016).

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, case-based approach, aiming to elucidate the deployment of transcreation strategies in English translations of the *Shijing*. A preliminary literature review was conducted to establish a theoretical foundation, drawing from scholarship on classical Chinese poetry translation and the evolution of transcreation as a translation paradigm. Building on this groundwork, the research proposes a four-dimensional analytical framework focusing on meaning, sound, syntax, and rhetoric, which enables a systematic evaluation of how different translators engage creatively with the source text.

The sample consists of two representative English translations of *Shijing* by James Legge (1871) and Xu Yuanchong (1993). These works were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in translation philosophy and historical context. Legge represents the early missionary-linguistic tradition, emphasizing literal faithfulness and scholarly exposition. Xu, by contrast, advocates his “three beauties” principle (semantic, phonetic, and formal), prioritizing aesthetic resonance alongside fidelity. Their distinct approaches provide a solid comparative basis for assessing how transcreation unfolds in practice.

Through meticulous close reading and comparative analysis, the study investigates how each translator reinterprets poetic meaning, reconstructs phonological features, adapts syntactic structures, and employs rhetorical devices to accommodate the target language's stylistic norms and reader expectations. By foregrounding these four dimensions, the research uncovers the mechanics of creative intervention in classical poetry translation and maps their implications for the ongoing theoretical refinement of transcreation.

4. The Concrete Manifestations of Transcreation in the English Translations of *Shijing*

As the earliest anthology of Chinese poetry, *Shijing* occupies a foundational position in Chinese literary history and has long been a central focus in the study of literary translation. Over the years, numerous scholars have attempted English translations of

the *Shijing*, among which the versions by James Legge and Xu Yuanchong are regarded as the most influential. These two translators reflect distinct historical periods, cultural standpoints, and translational approaches, offering unique interpretations of the original texts. Legge's translation emphasizes classical form and literary fidelity, preserving the poetic structure and elegance of the original. Xu Yuanchong, guided by his "Three Beauties" theory, beauty in sense, sound, and form, pursues a harmonious integration of poetic meaning, musical rhythm, and visual imagery. Their translations demonstrate a variety of creative strategies in linguistic transformation, cultural transmission, and aesthetic expression, illustrating the multifaceted potential of transcreation in rendering classical Chinese poetry into English.

4.1 Transcreation at the Level of Meaning

In the process of transcreation, the translator's in-depth interpretation of the source text's meaning is not only the point of departure but also the foundation for all subsequent creative reconstruction. This understanding goes far beyond accurate lexical comprehension; it encompasses a deep engagement with the poem's cultural connotations, social context, and historical background. Only with a comprehensive command of the semantic field of the original can the translator move beyond the constraints of literal translation and reshape the poetic essence with both precision and imagination, producing a version that remains faithful to the spirit of the original while resonating within the target cultural context. Especially in the realm of classical poetry, translation is not merely a linguistic transference but a re-creation of cultural, emotional, and aesthetic imagery. In this sense, the translator's interpretive capacity plays a decisive role in shaping the artistic quality and cultural depth of the translation, serving as a crucial bridge between the spirit of the original and the vitality of the translated work.

The translator's path of understanding the original poem's meaning ultimately materializes in specific translation strategies such as lexical choices and decisions of inclusion or omission. The following case analyses will demonstrate how translators, while preserving the semantic core, employ reduction, addition, or reconfiguration to effectively re-present the original meaning in the target language. This dynamic balance between fidelity and creativity embodies a key manifestation of transcreation theory at the level of meaning.

Example 1

Original Text: 关关雎鸠，在河之洲。

Xu's translation: By riverside a pair of turtledoves are cooing. (Xu, 2021, 3)

Legge's translation: Kwan-kwan go the ospreys, on the islet in the river. (Legge, 2011, 5)

As the opening piece of the *Shijing*, *Guanju* not only sets the tone structurally, but also embodies the Confucian aesthetic ideals and values associated with moral transformation through poetry and the cultural system of rites and music. The poem presents a young man's admiration for and pursuit of an ideal partner. On the surface, it appears to depict romantic affection, yet it metaphorically conveys the image of a junzi (gentleman) seeking virtue, thereby symbolizing an emotionally restrained and morally elevated ideal.

Xu Yuanchong (2021) translates "关关" as "wooing", a rendering that, while retaining the onomatopoeic quality of the original, deliberately introduces the term "wooing," which carries strong emotional and cultural connotations in English. This act of transcreation transforms the simple image of birds calling into a tender scene suggestive of ritualized courtship, thereby vividly reconstructing the ethical-affective logic of "emotion tempered by propriety" embedded in the original. It exemplifies a typical transcreation strategy of "cultural logic transplantation," where the translator, while remaining faithful to the original meaning, replaces source expressions with emotionally and symbolically equivalent terms in the target language to achieve resonance and reinterpretation within the target culture.

Furthermore, translating "雎鸠" as "turtledoves" is a particularly nuanced choice. While not an ornithologically equivalent species, the "turtledove" in Western cultural tradition similarly symbolizes fidelity, gentleness, and love—thereby achieving a deep symbolic intertextuality with the Confucian connotations of "雎鸠." This type of symbolic equivalence proves more aligned with the contextual-semantic character of classical poetry than strict biological equivalence, and it reflects transcreation's emphasis on functional equivalence rather than formal equivalence in the dimension of meaning.

By contrast, Legge's translation (2011), while attempting to imitate the original sound through "kwan-kwan," translates "雎鸠" as "ospreys," inadvertently invoking Western cultural associations of raptors: aggression, predation, and power. This cultural misalignment strays far from the gentleness and fidelity symbolized by doves in the Chinese context. As a result, the ethical undertone of the original line is diluted, even distorted, potentially suggesting a metaphor of "hunting" or "wild instinct," thereby undermining the original's aesthetic ideal of junzi moderation and tender virtue.

Example 2

Original Text: 求之不得，寤寐思服。

Xu's translation: His yearning grows so strong, he cannot fall asleep, but tosses all night long, so deep in love, so deep! (Xu, 2021, 3)

Legge's translation: He sought her and found her not, and waking and sleeping he thought about her. (Legge, 2011, 5)

These two lines are remarkably concise, yet they carry profound emotional intensity. “求之不得” (longing yet unable to attain) consists of only four characters, but powerfully conveys a complex emotional state of intertwined longing and frustration. “寤寐思服” further illustrates the depth of this yearning by depicting a state in which, whether awake (“寤”) or asleep (“寐”), the mind remains occupied and unable to find peace.

In Xu's translation (2021), the added phrase “so deep in love, so deep!” stands as a model of meaning reconstruction in transcreation. While this phrase seems extraneous at first glance, it precisely captures the emotional essence of *Guan Ju* as a love poem. Though the original does not explicitly mention the word “love,” it constructs a strong emotional atmosphere centered on romantic longing. Xu's use of “deep in love”, a phrase rich in emotional resonance within English literary culture, transforms the Confucian ideal of restrained love into a romantic paradigm familiar and accessible to target-language readers, achieving a creative reconfiguration of cultural meaning.

Moreover, Xu does not replicate the original diction or syntax mechanically. Instead, he draws upon *Shijing's* rhetorical feature of repetition to intensify mood and emotion. By adopting the English poetic device of phrase repetition (“so deep... so deep!”), Xu creates emphatic closure that mirrors the repetitive structure of the original, allowing the depth and persistence of yearning to reverberate in the reader's heart.

In contrast, James Legge's literal translation (2011) reflects a different approach. By rendering “求” as the concrete action “sought,” the line is turned into a report of a failed search rather than an emotional condition. His use of the neutral phrase “thought about” for “思服” reads more like a casual recollection than a depiction of restless, obsessive yearning. Most crucially, Legge's version avoids defining the emotional nature of the scene. Although the original clearly portrays romantic love, the translation leaves only a record of actions. While Legge preserves the surface meaning, he neglects the poem's emotional resonance and cultural depth of the poem. Xu's supplementary phrase, in contrast, fills this void, enabling the target-language reader to truly feel the enduring emotional power of this ancient poem.

4.2 Transcreation at the Level of Sound

In poetry translation, the transcreation of sound is crucial. In order to preserve the rhythm of the original poem, the translator must reproduce the rhyme and rhythm in the translation to maintain its musical beauty. This involves the clever handling of elements such as rhyme, meter, and rhythm to ensure that the translated text produces a similar effect when read aloud, thereby enhancing the emotional impact and aesthetic quality of the poem. In this process, the translator not only needs to accurately convey the meaning of the original text but also, through the recreation of sound and rhythm, allow the reader to feel the emotions and musicality of the original poem.

Example 3

Original Text: 蒹葭苍苍，白露为霜。所谓伊人，在水一方。溯洄从之，道阻且长；溯游从之，宛在水中央。

Xu's translation: Green, green the reed, frost and dew gleam. Where's she I need? Beyond the stream. Upstream I go; The way's so long. And downstream, lo! She's thereamong. (Xu, 2021, 269)

Legge's translation: The reeds and rushes are deeply green, and the white dew is turned into hoarfrost. The man of whom I think, is somewhere about the water. I go up the stream in quest of him, but the way is difficult and long. I go down the stream in quest of him, and lo! he is right in the midst of the water. (Legge, 2011, 305)

The original poem adopts a four-character line structure with rhyme every other line, featuring compact form and symmetrical syllables that enhance its rhythm and lyrical quality. Specifically, lines 2 (“霜” / shuāng), 4 (“方” / fāng), 6 (“长” / cháng), and 8 (“央” / yāng) all belong to the same -ang rhyme group.

Xu Yuanchong (2021) skillfully reconstructs this rhythmic beauty in English through ABAB cross rhyme (e.g., reed/gleam – need/stream), preserving the fluid musicality of the original. To enhance the rhythm of the translation, Xu Yuanchong often adds interjections or pronouns, with “lo” and “alas” being his frequently used words. These not only enrich the emotional expression but also effectively engage the auditory experience of English readers. The interjection “lo” combined with the inverted verb phrase “Upstream I go” is clearly motivated by considerations of sound and rhythm, reflecting the transcreation principle of “restructuring and creativity,” which remains faithful to the original meaning while flexibly adapting to the target language. The

use of reduplication in phrase “Green, green the reed” cleverly imitates the repetitive structure of “蒹葭苍苍,” creating a cyclical rhythm that strengthens the poem’s emotional intensity and depth of imagery. Xu achieves a well-balanced interplay of sound, meaning, and sentiment, exemplifying the creative reconstruction of rhythm within the transcreation process.

By contrast, Legge’s translation (2011) abandons rhyme and relies on prose-like expression (e.g., “But the way is difficult and long”), resulting in a flattened rhythm and a diminished poetic tone. Phrases like “The man of whom I think” employ a Europeanized syntactic structure that feels cumbersome, weakening the subtlety of “所谓伊人”. In rendering the spatial imagery, although Legge attempts a gradual progression (e.g., “midst of the water,” “islet,” “island”), the repetition of similar terms feels somewhat mechanical and fails to convey the elusive, shifting presence implied by “宛在”. Overall, both the rhythm and atmosphere in his version appear less evocative.

Example 4

Original Text: 谑浪笑敖，中心是悼。

Xu’s translation: With me he seems to **flirt**; My heart feels deeply **hurt**. (Xu, 2021, 61)

Legge’s translation: With scornful words and dissolute, -the smile of pride. (Legge, 2011, 69)

“笑敖” is a classic example of a reduplicative rhyme, with both characters sharing the “ao” vowel, creating a resonant echo that heightens the line’s rhythm and makes it more idiomatic when spoken. This sound pattern produces a brisk, mocking beat that vividly portrays the man’s flippant arrogance and playful derision, while also laying the groundwork for the emotional shift in the following phrase.

Although Xu Yuanchong (2021) does not directly preserve the “ao” vowel repetition in his translation, he captures the original’s musicality and emotional contrast through the rhyme between “flirt” and “hurt”. This approach exemplifies a fundamental strategy in sound-based transcreation. Rather than rigidly matching each syllable, the translator taps into the rhyme and rhythm resources of English poetry, coordinating meter, rhyme, and emotional imagery to recreate the poem’s affective cadence across languages and ensure the translation evokes a similar mood and aesthetic in its new cultural context.

By contrast, James Legge (2011) employs a part-of-speech shift, turning the dynamic verbs “笑敖” into the static noun phrase “scornful words and dissolute.” While grammatically natural in English, this choice omits any rhyme or rhythmic echo, rendering the line flat and prosaic. As a result, it fails to convey the original’s sound-based momentum and emotional nuance, weakening its overall impact.

From the perspective of sound-focused transcreation, Xu Yuanchong’s translation demonstrates a creative strategy of reproducing the source text’s sonic effect in the target language—using rhyme and rhythm to rebuild the line’s musical beauty and emotional progression. Legge’s more literal, structure-first approach, however, does not fully leverage English poetry’s melodic potential, highlighting its limitations in translating the poem’s sonic artistry.

4.3 Transcreation at the Syntactical Level

In the process of syntactic transcreation, translators often do not rigidly adhere to the original sequence of lines, sentence structures, or the number of verses. Instead, they make flexible adjustments in accordance with the syntactic and stylistic norms of the target language. Such adjustments may involve reordering the original syntax, combining imagery across lines, adding or omitting words, or even restructuring entire sentences in order to enhance the logical coherence, fluency, and readability of the translated text.

This kind of creative syntactic reconstruction reflects the translator’s adaptive reorganization based on a deep understanding of the original text’s meaning and emotional undertones. Through syntactic transformation and reconfiguration, the translated version preserves the spiritual essence of the source text while reshaping its formal beauty within the framework of the target language. As a result, the translated poem becomes more accessible and emotionally resonant for the target audience.

Example 5

Original Text: 我心匪石，不可转也。我心匪席，不可卷也。

Xu’s translation: Have I not grown/Firm as a stone?/Am I as flat/As level mat?/My mind is strong;/I’ve done no wrong. (Xu, 2021, 51)

Legge’s translation: My mind is not a stone; — /It cannot be rolled about./My mind is not a mat; —/It cannot be rolled up. (Legge, 2011, 59)

These two lines of the poem vividly convey the core idea of inner resolve and immovability in the face of external forces through concise and forceful negative metaphors, structured in a parallel “subject + negative predicate + complement” form.

Xu Yuanchong’s translation (2021) breaks apart this straightforward structure entirely, reformulating the original statements into two rhetorical questions—“Have I not grown / Firm as a stone?” and “Am I as flat / As level mat?”—transforming the passive negations “cannot be turned” and “cannot be rolled” into active metaphors such as “Firm as a stone” and “As level mat.” He further adds the affirming line “My mind is strong: I’ve done no wrong.” to clarify the theme and intensify the emotional tone. This syntactic reconfiguration—from question to response to summary—not only disrupts the flat rhythm of the original but also enhances thematic clarity through a pointed concluding statement. It reflects how transcreation “goes beyond mere fidelity to informational content” and “recreates the source text’s emotional impact, rhetorical style, and cultural force,” as Jackson (2010) notes, and aligns with the definition that “transcreation is defined as a process that combines linguistic transfer, cultural adaptation, and creative reconstruction” (Díaz-Millón & Olvera-Lobo, 2023).

In contrast, James Legge (2011) adopts a more literal strategy, preserving the dual negation structure of “not... cannot...” and even mimicking the syntactic pauses of classical Chinese through punctuation. His rendering—“My mind is not a stone; — It cannot be rolled about. / My mind is not a mat; — It cannot be rolled up.”—displays a high level of formal fidelity to the source. However, the use of expressions like “rolled about” and “rolled up” introduces awkwardness, as such verbs are typically associated with soft, flexible objects in English, making the metaphor feel unnatural. Despite maintaining semantic correspondence, Legge’s version lacks syntactic transformation, resulting in a flat, prosaic tone that weakens the poem’s lyrical and emotive quality. This strict adherence to “form versus form” exemplifies the limitations of the traditional “equivalence and fidelity” paradigm—precisely what transcreation critiques. By failing to harness the prosodic and cultural resources of the target language, this approach falls short in recreating the expressive power of the original poem.

Xu Yuanchong’s translation restructures the original syntax, turning plain statements into rhetorical questions and a concluding affirmation. This enhances emotional depth and readability, reflecting transcreation’s emphasis on emotional, rhetorical, and cultural adaptation. In contrast, James Legge’s faithful rendering preserves the form but lacks aesthetic resonance in English. Xu’s version illustrates how syntactic transcreation moves beyond literal equivalence to creatively engage the target audience.

Example 6

Original Text : 齐侯之子，卫侯之妻，东宫之妹，邢侯之姨，谭公维私。

Xu’s translation: Her father, brothers, husband all / Are dukes or marquis of high grade. (Xu, 2021, 123)

Legge’s translation: The daughter of the marquis of Ts’e, /The wife of the marquis of Wei, /The sister of the heir-son of Ts’e, /The sister-in-law of the marquis of Hing, /The viscount of T’an also her brother-in-law. (Legge, 2011, 133)

The original text employs a five-line parallel structure, progressively listing complex kinship and marital relationships with a simple and highly repetitive grammatical form, thereby presenting a distinct rhythmic pattern of parallelism.

Xu’s translation (2021) integrates this information into “Her father, brothers, husband all / Are dukes or marquis of high grade.” He simplifies the syntax into a general reference to persons combined with social status labels, discarding redundant kinship details and thereby emphasizing the core theme of aristocratic honor at the syntactic level. This syntactic consolidation not only effectively reduces repetition and makes the translated structure more compact but also avoids the cumbersome effect caused by repeated coordinate phrases in English. Such adjustment exemplifies a typical syntactic transcreation strategy where the translator actively modifies the original word order and sentence patterns, strengthening the coherence and fluency of the information by merging semantic units. At the same time, the translation retains the essential cultural information of the original poem, that the relevant figures all belong to the aristocratic class, thus highlighting the theme of nobility through syntactic means.

In contrast, Legge’s translation (2011) adheres closely to a line-by-line correspondence, rendering each relational identity separately: “The daughter of the marquis of Ts’e, / The wife of the marquis of Wei, / The sister of the heir-son of Ts’e,” and so forth, with a series of consecutive noun phrases. Although the information is complete, such mechanical parallelism in English appears lengthy and monotonous because the repeated syntactic structures create a sluggish rhythm. This makes it difficult to convey the compactness and musicality expected in poetry. Legge does not consolidate or adjust the syntax which reflects a rigid adherence to the original syntactic form and overlooks the flexibility required by the target language’s syntactic conventions. As a result, the translation’s fluency and aesthetic effect are compromised.

Therefore, Xu's syntactic transcreation is manifested not only in the condensation of information and innovation in sentence structure but also in his deft grasp of English syntactic features, achieving a cross-linguistic re-presentation of the original poem's spirit. Conversely, Legge's rendition appears comparatively inflexible, lacking creative transformation of syntactic structures, and thus struggles to evoke the same artistic resonance in the target language.

Example 7

Original Text : 关关雎鸠，在河之洲。窈窕淑女，君子好逑。

Xu's translation: By riverside a pair of turtledoves are cooing; There is a maiden fair whom a young man is wooing. (Xu, 2021, 3)

Legge's translation: Kwan-kwan go the ospreys, on the islet in the river. The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady: —For our prince a good mate she. (Legge, 2011, 5)

In this poem, Xu (2021) demonstrates a high level of linguistic creativity through his restructuring of sentence syntax. His translation uses a four-line structure and cleverly employs an ABAB rhyme scheme (pair/cooing – fair/wooing), which closely aligns with traditional English poetry, enhancing the rhythm and melodic quality of the translation. Notably, Xu merges the lines “关关雎鸠，在河之洲” into “By riverside a pair / Of turtledoves are cooing,” achieving a cross-line division and connection of meanings. This cross-line technique not only retains the integrity of the original meaning but also presents the rhythm and imagery in fluent English, adding layers of lyrical expression.

Similarly, “窈窕淑女，君子好逑” is translated as “There is a maiden fair / Whom a young man is wooing.” In this translation, Xu Yuanhong maintains the poetic essence while restructuring the syntax. He uses the construction “There is” to introduce the sentence, smoothly transitioning into a relative clause, which is both natural and lyrical in English. This adjustment in word order not only resolves the differences between Chinese and English sentence structures but also enhances the readability and literary quality of the translation.

In contrast, James Legge's translation (2011) stays closer to the original sentence structure, with fewer syntactical adjustments. For example, he translates “关关雎鸠” as “Kwan-kwan go the ospreys”, preserving the onomatopoeic quality of the original but without rearranging the sentence structure. Although this approach preserves the cultural elements of the original, it appears somewhat clumsy in terms of rhythm and expression. Especially in translating “窈窕淑女，君子好逑” as “The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady: / For our prince a good mate she,” although the content remains faithful, the long string of adjectives and the awkward sentence-ending inversion (“a good mate she”) make the sentence feel heavy and less natural to English readers.

In summary, Xu Yuanhong's transcreation strategy in terms of syntax focuses more on uniting rhythm with expressive beauty. Through adjustments in word order and sentence reconstruction, he enhances the lyrical quality of the translation. On the other hand, James Legge's translation favors a more faithful and conservative approach, maintaining the original syntax but sometimes at the cost of flow and naturalness in English. This comparison not only reveals different approaches to syntactical transformation but also highlights the aesthetic pursuits and strategic differences inherent in the process of transcreation.

4.4 Transcreation at the Rhetorical Level

Meaning, sound, and syntax form the basic structure of poetry, but it is rhetorical strategies that truly impart emotional and cultural depth. The Book of Songs extensively employs repetition, parallelism, imagery, and metaphor to express subtle emotions and complex ethical meanings. Due to fundamental differences between Chinese and English rhetorical traditions, simply copying the original rhetorical forms often weakens the poem's impact and may cause cultural misunderstandings.

Transcreation emphasizes using the target culture as a frame of reference while remaining faithful to the core meaning of the source text. The translator flexibly edits, reorganizes, or adapts the source rhetoric through target language resources, reconstructing the rhetorical function. The focus lies on conveying function rather than formal equivalence, achieving equivalent emotions and rhythm through new rhetorical configurations. This approach realizes the expressive and purposeful nature of transcreation, allowing the poem's aesthetic and cultural intentions to be vividly recreated in the target context.

Example 7

Original Text : 夙兴夜寐，靡有朝矣。

Xu's translation: Each day I early rose, and late I sought repose. (Xu, 2021, 131)

Legge's translation: I rose early and went to sleep late, not intermitting my labours for a morning. (Legge, 2011, 141)

The original text employs a typical antithetical rhetorical structure. Antithesis is a rhetorical device that uses symmetry in word count, structure, and meaning to create parallel sentences that highlight contrast or correlation. In the poem, “夙兴” and

“夜寐”refer respectively to “rising early in the morning” and “going to bed at night,” with identical structures and complementary meanings.

Xu Yuanchong’s translation (2021) creatively recreates this rhetorical structure. Rather than sticking to a literal word-for-word equivalence, he skillfully employs rhetorical resources common in English poetry, such as rhyme (rose / repose), parallel sentence patterns (“I early rose / I sought repose”), and elevated diction (using “repose” instead of the more mundane “go to bed”), thereby functionally reconstructing the original antithetical form. This approach fully embodies the core principle of transcreation: “based on various factors of the target culture, creatively reorganizing the signification method of the source text.” Through a poetic expression that is natural and aesthetically pleasing in the target culture, the translation not only preserves and reproduces the rhetorical function and emotional intensity of the original but also aligns with the target readers’ aesthetic preferences in terms of rhythm, style, and imagery, achieving an equivalent rhetorical effect and enhancing literary appeal.

In contrast, Legge’s translation (2011) relies more on a literal strategy. Although the first line maintains a parallel structure, the second line becomes an explanatory long sentence, disrupting the rhythmic balance and rhetorical symmetry of the original antithesis. The language tends toward prose and lacks poetic quality and rhythm. While this method ensures complete semantic transmission, it fails to effectively transform the source’s aesthetic rhetorical function, showing a gap with the transcreation approach.

In summary, in the practice of rhetorical transcreation, Xu Yuanchong successfully mobilizes the rhetorical devices of English poetry to translate the implicit rhythm and emotional progression within the Chinese antithetical structure into a form consistent with the literary traditions of the target language, fully demonstrating the creativity and cultural adaptability inherent in transcreation’s rhetorical function recreation.

Example 8

Original Text :干禄百福，子孙千亿。

Xu’s translation:They are blessed, everyone, of his sons and grandsons. (Xu, 2021, 635)

Legge’s translation: (So) does he seek for the emoluments of dignity, (and obtain) all blessings,—Thousands and hundreds of thousands of descendants. (Legge, 2011, 725)

The original line features a clear use of hyperbole as a rhetorical device. Terms like “hundred blessings” and “thousand billion descendants” are not meant to convey literal quantities; rather, they use numerical exaggeration to express auspicious wishes for prosperity and abundant offspring. Such hyperbolic expressions are typical in classical Chinese benedictory poetry, where emotional intensity and symbolic magnitude are prioritized over factual precision.

In his translation, Xu Yuanchong (2021) omits the specific numerical expressions and instead conveys the blessing sentiment through the more general and emotionally resonant phrase “everyone of his sons and grandsons.” This approach exemplifies the principle of transcreation, in which the translator reshapes the rhetorical strategy of the source text in line with the stylistic and cultural norms of the target language. Rather than mechanically reproducing the original form of hyperbole, Xu chooses to preserve its communicative function, namely, the expression of heartfelt goodwill, through a more idiomatic and poetic English rendering. In doing so, he ensures the aesthetic and emotive intent of the original is maintained in a way that feels natural and expressive to an English-speaking audience.

In contrast, Legge’s translation (2011) retains the exaggerated numbers (“thousands and hundreds of thousands”), adhering more closely to a literal translation strategy. While this preserves the surface-level content, it results in a cumbersome and prosaic phrasing that lacks poetic resonance. From a transcreation perspective, this choice overlooks the stylistic constraints and rhetorical conventions of the target culture, weakening the affective impact of the blessing and diminishing its poetic appeal.

In sum, Xu Yuanchong’s translation demonstrates how transcreation enables functional adaptation: he reinterprets the source text’s hyperbolic rhetoric to suit the target language’s poetic tradition and reader expectations, thereby preserving both emotional force and rhetorical elegance.

5. Research Findings

This study demonstrates that transcreation significantly enhances the expressive power of *Shijing*’s English translations by enabling a dynamic interplay between meaning, sound, syntax and rhetoric. Through comparative analysis of multiple translated excerpts, it becomes clear that Xu Yuanchong’s translations, grounded in transcreation principles, more effectively convey the original’s romantic atmosphere, lyrical cadence, syntactic artistry, and rhetorical nuance. Xu’s versions transcend literal

equivalence by creatively employing rhyme, restructured sentence patterns, and heightened emotional expression, thereby making the poems resonate with contemporary English readers while preserving their poetic essence.

By contrast, James Legge's translations, though faithful in content, tend to adopt a rigid syntactic structure and lack the musicality and emotive richness found in the original, resulting in a more restrained and prosaic rendering. These findings highlight the value of transcreation as a poetic translation strategy, especially in dealing with classical texts like the *Shijing*, where form and feeling are deeply intertwined.

6. Conclusion

This study offers a transcreation-based comparative analysis of the English translations of the *Shijing*, but it is limited in scope to only several representative poems and two translators, which may not fully capture the diversity of translation strategies across the entire corpus. Additionally, the evaluation of transcreation remains largely qualitative, relying on textual comparison rather than empirical reader response. Future research could expand the sample size, include more translators and poetic forms, and incorporate reception studies to better assess how transcreated translations resonate with modern readers. Further application of transcreation to other classical texts, such as *Chuci* or Tang poetry, could also help refine its theoretical framework and explore its broader potential in cross-cultural literary translation.

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