

A Study on Plant Imagery in James Legge's Translation of The Book of Poetry from the Perspective of Transknowletology

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on “The Chien Chia” and “The T’ao Yao” in The Book of Poetry, this paper examines how plant imagery is represented and culturally transformed in James Legge’s English translation within the three-dimensional framework of truth, goodness, and beauty in Transknowletology. Plant imagery in The Book of Poetry not only embodies knowledge of the natural world but also carries profound cultural symbolism and aesthetic value. Its effective representation in translation is therefore crucial to cross-cultural communication. From the perspective of truth, this paper analyzes how Legge represents plant forms and states of growth at the semantic level. From the perspective of goodness, it examines whether the translation helps target-language readers understand the underlying cultural metaphors and ethical implications. From the perspective of beauty, it evaluates how effectively the translation reconstructs the poems’ linguistic rhythm, visual imagery, and aesthetic style.

1. Introduction

The Book of Poetry, the earliest anthology of poetry in China, portrays social life from the Western Zhou dynasty to the Spring and Autumn period and contains a wealth of cultural, ethical, and natural imagery. As one of the Confucian classics, it is not only of considerable value as a historical document but also embodies the fundamental forms and aesthetic paradigms of classical Chinese poetry. Imagery plays a particularly important role in the collection. Plant imagery serves both as a vehicle of poetic meaning and as a bearer of specific cultural associations, constituting an important expression of the work’s poetic beauty and cultural significance.

James Legge, a nineteenth-century British missionary, produced one of the earliest and most influential complete English translations of *The Book of Poetry* in the Western world. His translation not only introduced Western readers to ancient Chinese poetry but also reflected the

encounter and negotiation between Chinese and Western cultural ideas and aesthetic perceptions. As an early example of cross-cultural knowledge dissemination, Legge's translation was shaped by its missionary context and reflected how Chinese classics were understood and reinterpreted in the West at the time.

Existing studies of the English translations of *The Book of Poetry* have addressed such areas as paratextual analysis, Translator Behavior Criticism, textual interpretation, and terminology translation. Drawing on Gérard Genette's theory of paratexts, Teng Xiong and Wen Jun (2017) compare the paratextual differences among Legge's 1871 prose translation, his 1876 verse translation, and his 1879 partial translation. From the perspective of the sociology of translation, they further reveal how field, capital, and habitus influenced changes in the form of the paratexts. Zuo Yan (2022) offers a detailed evaluation of the philological character of Bernhard Karlgren's 1950 translation of *The Book of Poetry*, which was guided by the principle of conformity to literal meaning, and identifies both the scholarly value and limitations of its meticulous textual exegesis and fidelity-oriented approach. Based on the principle of dual approximation in semantics and form, Li Huimin (2022) investigates the consistency with which parallel terms such as *Feng*, *Ya*, and *Song* are translated, emphasizing the importance of logical consistency within a terminological system to the quality of a translation. Li Zhengshuan and Wu Chaofeng (2025) employ an integrated "text-behavior-society" framework to analyze Xu Yuanchong's translation practice, highlighting the contribution of his "Three Beauties" theory to the poetic recreation of *The Book of Poetry*. Wang Kun (2024) systematically examines Pound's use of the "ideogrammic method" in his translation, revealing the tension between poetics and Confucianism. Wang further proposes a dual interpretive approach based on "visual images" and "precise definitions," thereby offering a model for the creative transformation of Chinese classics in translation. From the perspective of Translator Behavior Criticism, Cai Hua (2024) compares the paratextual practices in Legge's and Wang Rongpei's English translations of *The Book of Poetry*. The study distinguishes their respective documentary and readability-oriented approaches within the differing tendencies toward "truth-seeking" and "utility-attaining," arguing that paratexts provide an effective means of tracing the dynamic evolution of translation and dissemination models. Using the integrated "text-behavior-society" framework, Li Zhengshuan and Tian Ya (2025) examine the distinctive ways in which Legge, Pound, and Xu Yuanchong handle titles, prosody, and imagery. They argue that the distinctive qualities of the translations arise from the translators' differing translational habitus, while reviews and prefaces at the social level reflect their differing reception. Although previous studies have produced substantial findings concerning translation strategies and the reception of different versions, relatively little attention has been paid to the reconstruction of plant imagery in Legge's English translation of *The Book of Poetry*. In particular, how such imagery conveys cultural significance and aesthetic tension while maintaining semantic fidelity remains underexplored.

Grounded in Transknowletology, this paper examines plant imagery in Legge's translation of *The Book of Poetry*, focusing on two representative poems, "The Chien Chia" and "The T'ao Yao." Drawing on the three principles of truth, goodness, and beauty, it investigates the translation in terms of semantic accuracy, cultural communication, and aesthetic expression. The paper aims to analyze how Legge constructs plant imagery in his translation and to explore the shifts that such imagery undergoes when transferred into the target-language context, thereby offering a new perspective on the study of the English translations of *The Book of Poetry*.

2. Theoretical Framework

Transknowletology proposes the three translation principles of truth, goodness, and beauty. As Yang Feng states, "'seeking knowledge through truth,' 'establishing meaning through goodness,' and 'writing with beauty' are interdependent and constitute the principles governing all translation production" (Yang Feng, 2021: 2). Compared with the traditional criteria of "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance," the three-dimensional framework of truth, goodness, and beauty in Transknowletology inherits the concern for linguistic fidelity and fluency while further broadening the scope of translation criticism.

"Truth" emphasizes the accurate representation of the knowledge contained in the source text. Although it shares certain concerns with the traditional requirement of "faithfulness," it is not equivalent to literal correspondence; rather, it focuses on whether the translator has accurately understood and reliably represented the knowledge conveyed by the source text. "Goodness" concerns not only the fluency of the translation but also the translator's awareness of target readers. It requires translation choices to be adjusted to their habits of understanding so as to facilitate the effective transmission of knowledge. "Beauty" is no longer confined to stylistic elegance but seeks expressive appeal and effective reception in accordance with contemporary aesthetic preferences in the target culture.

Overall, "truth" concerns the accurate understanding and expression of the knowledge contained in the source text, requiring it to be conveyed clearly and precisely in the target language without misunderstanding, omission, or distortion. "Goodness" emphasizes the translator's ethical awareness and capacity for cultural reconstruction, allowing appropriate adjustments to be made in accordance with the target readers' ability to understand and receive the source-text content. "Beauty" stresses the aesthetic effects of language and concerns the aesthetic recreation of language, imagery, and form in translation.

The three-dimensional framework of truth, goodness, and beauty provides a systematic approach to translation evaluation and is particularly applicable to classical literary texts characterized by a high density of knowledge, rich cultural significance, and distinctive linguistic forms. In such

texts, translation involves not merely linguistic substitution but also the integrated representation of knowledge, culture, and aesthetics. Compared with traditional translation criteria centered on linguistic equivalence, the principles of truth, goodness, and beauty approach translation from the three dimensions of content, value, and form, thereby responding more fully to the complexity of classical texts. Plant imagery in *The Book of Poetry* not only conveys knowledge of natural objects but also performs specific ethical, symbolic, and aesthetic functions, making it one of the collection's most expressive cultural elements. In translating such imagery, the translator must accurately represent the plants themselves and their semantic features, appropriately convey their underlying cultural connotations and symbolic meanings, and preserve the rhythm and imagistic beauty of the poetic language. The three principles therefore provide an appropriate framework for evaluating the translation of plant imagery in *The Book of Poetry*.

3. Detailed Analysis

The following discussion analyzes the translation of specific plant images in "The Chien Chia" and "The T'ao Yao" from the perspectives of truth, goodness, and beauty.

3.1 Analysis of Plant Imagery Translation under the Principle of Truth

"Seeking knowledge through truth' is a requirement for a scientific approach to translation practice and theory" (Yang Feng & Li Siyi, 2024: 12); that is, translation should "convey the true meaning of knowledge itself and emphasize its original semantic content" (Yue Feng & Chen Zeyu, 2022: 67). In other words, from the perspective of Transknowletology, translators should conscientiously pursue the true meaning of the source text and convey its knowledge to readers completely and accurately, thereby avoiding deviation and distortion in the transmission of knowledge.

Reed and rush are dark and green;

As hoar-frost the white dew is seen.

Him, the man I have in mind,

By this water I should find.

Searching, up the stream I haste,

On a long and toilsome quest.

Downwards then I turn, and see !

In the mid-stream standeth he.
He is there but far removed;
Vain has all my searching proved.

Reed and rush luxuriant rise;
Still undried the white dew lies.
Him, the man I have in mind,
On the stream's edge I should find.
Upwards first my course I keep,
Though the way is rough and steep.
Downwards then, and what to see?
In the mid-stream standeth he,
On the islet, far removed;-
Vain has all my searching proved.

Reed and rush grow thick and tall ;
Ceases not the dew to fall.
Him, the man I have in mind,
On the stream's bank I should find.
Upwards first I go along,
But the hard path leads me wrong.
Downwards then my steps I turn,
And in mid-stream him discern,

On the island, far removed ;-

Vain has all my searching proved.

(Legge,1876,p.160)

The most prominent image in “The Chien Chia” is the repeatedly occurring *jianjia*, which refers to reeds growing by the water. Each of the poem’s three stanzas begins with *jianjia*, whose different conditions are respectively described by *cangcang*, *qiqi*, and *caicai*. These descriptions create spatial depth and constitute a key element in the construction of the poem’s artistic conception.

Legge’s translation of *jianjia* as “reed and rush” is semantically appropriate. *Jianjia* is commonly understood simply as “reeds,” but strictly speaking, *jian* and *jia* are two different plants. Although closely related, they are not identical. By using “reed” and “rush” to refer to the two plants, Legge preserves the source text’s description of their ecological characteristics and avoids obscuring the distinction between the species. Placing the two terms side by side also more effectively recreates the sense of reeds growing densely along the water’s edge. This plain treatment accurately conveys the relevant botanical knowledge and is therefore reasonable from the perspective of truth.

In “The Chien Chia,” *jianjia* is not merely the name of a plant but also a visual image carefully constructed by the original poet. Changes in its appearance are conveyed primarily through different modifiers. The terms *cangcang*, *qiqi*, and *caicai* respectively describe three different growing conditions of the reeds: *cangcang* refers to their dark colour and misty grey-green appearance; *qiqi* suggests luxuriance, abundance, and vitality; and *caicai* depicts them as growing densely and within reach. Although all three are descriptive terms, they play a crucial role in constructing the plant imagery. Legge renders them respectively as “dark and green,” “luxuriant rise,” and “thick and tall.” These expressions correspond to the colour, form, and density of the reeds in the source text and preserve its knowledge-based description of their growing conditions.

Graceful and young the peach tree stands ;

How rich its flowers, all gleaming bright !

This bride to her new home repairs ;

Chamber and house she'll order right.

Graceful and young the peach tree stands;
Large crops of fruit it soon will show.
This bride to her new home repairs ;
Chamber and house her sway shall know.

Graceful and young the peach tree stands,
Its foliage clustering green and full.
This bride to her new home repairs;
Her household will attest her rule.

(Legge,1876,p.62)

“The T‘ao Yao” centers throughout on the peach tree, successively depicting its blossoms in full bloom, abundant fruit, and luxuriant foliage. These three conditions present a temporal sequence consistent with the natural growth of the plant. From the perspective of truth, the translator needs to represent the plant accurately at each stage, enabling readers to perceive the growth of the peach tree from flowering to abundant fruit and then to luxuriant foliage.

Legge consistently translates *tao zhi yaoyao* at the beginning of all three stanzas as “Graceful and young the peach tree stands.” The term *yaoyao* describes vigorous plant growth and flourishing beauty, emphasizing the vitality of the peach tree. “Graceful and young” broadly conveys this vigorous state and is therefore relatively close to the original meaning. As in “The Chien Chia,” the image of the peach tree in “The T‘ao Yao” is not sustained by the name of the plant alone but is gradually developed through descriptions of its flowers, fruit, and leaves. Since these descriptions are conveyed primarily through modifiers, an assessment of whether the translation accurately represents the plant imagery must also consider how these modifiers are rendered.

The phrase *zhuozhuo qi hua* describes the vivid colour and dazzling brightness of the peach blossoms. Legge renders it as “How rich its flowers, all gleaming bright,” effectively recreating

the full and brilliant appearance of the flowers. In *you fen qi shi*, *fen* refers to abundant fruit with full seeds. Legge translates it as “Large crops of fruit it soon will show,” accurately conveying the abundant fruit borne by the peach tree. In *qi ye zhenzhen*, *zhen* describes dense and overlapping foliage. Legge renders the phrase as “Its foliage clustering green and full,” in which “clustering,” “green,” and “full” respectively correspond to the density, verdancy, and fullness of the leaves, thus conveying the semantic content in full.

Overall, Legge’s treatment of the peach tree’s flowers, fruit, and leaves is semantically appropriate. It enables target-language readers to perceive the changes in the tree’s different growing conditions while preserving the botanical knowledge embodied in the source poem.

3.2 Analysis of Plant Imagery Translation under the Principle of Goodness

“Establishing meaning through goodness” means that translators should remain faithful to the purpose of translation and select translation methods that facilitate communication and the transmission of knowledge (Yue Feng & Chen Zeyu, 2022: 70). At a deeper level, goodness means facilitating communication (Yue Feng & Chen Zeyu, 2022: 69). From the perspective of goodness, a translation should not only be accurate and fluent but, more importantly, help target readers understand the cultural connotations underlying the source text. Translators need to consider target readers’ habits of understanding and receptive capacities and adjust their expressions accordingly, so that knowledge remains clear and comprehensible in the process of translation.

Plant imagery in *The Book of Poetry* is not merely a depiction of natural scenery but also a bearer of emotional and ethical meanings. In “The Chien Chia,” the waterside landscape is constructed through the interplay of near and distant views and developed layer by layer, exemplifying the fusion of scenery and emotion commonly found in classical Chinese poetry. By combining natural conditions with emotional pursuit, the poet suggests the apparent proximity yet ultimate inaccessibility of the ideal being pursued. This combination of botanical description, emotional projection, and metaphor for human aspiration is crucial to understanding the central meaning of the poem. According to the principle of goodness in Transknowletology, translation should not only present the surface information of a text but also help target-language readers understand its implicit cultural meanings and emotional core. In other words, translation should not stop at the transmission of surface information. It should also enable target-language readers to enter the cultural logic of the source poem and understand the symbolic meanings and emotional structure underlying its imagery.

The *jianjia* grows beside the water and is flexible and light. It appears repeatedly in the poem in changing forms, continually concealing the sought-after figure. It refers not only to a natural

plant but also to the psychological distance and practical obstacles encountered in the process of pursuit. This transformation of natural scenery into an expression of inner experience constitutes the poem's central symbolic structure. Legge renders the three descriptions of the *jianjia* as "dark and green," "luxuriant rise," and "thick and tall." "Dark and green" preserves the reeds' visual features, "luxuriant rise" conveys their manner of growth, and "thick and tall" strengthens their concealing effect. Although these renderings preserve the visual and formal characteristics of the reeds described in the source poem, they weaken the connection between symbolism and emotion. In Legge's translation, the reeds remain objectively existing plants, while the sought-after person remains merely the object of pursuit, with little connection established between them. Although "dark and green" is accurate, it functions primarily as a static description, while "thick and tall" emphasizes the density and height of the plants without conveying their symbolic function as a psychological barrier. In the source poem, however, the sought-after figure remains inaccessible precisely because the reeds and water form multiple barriers. This arrangement, in which the figure appears close at hand but remains beyond reach, constitutes one of the central poetic meanings of the poem. The translation, however, offers only simplified visual descriptions and fails to represent the complex symbolic relationship among the reeds, the sought-after figure, and the water. For target-language readers, the reeds remain scenery, the figure remains the object of pursuit, and the water remains an obstacle, but the three do not form an interconnected symbolic structure. Consequently, the translation does not fully activate the cultural symbolism underlying the imagery, making it difficult for target-language readers to enter the symbolic context of the source poem.

"The T'ao Yao," in turn, uses the three growing conditions of the peach tree—its flowers, fruit, and leaves—to develop a layered metaphor for the bride's life course, from youthful beauty through childbearing after marriage to the management of a household. *Zhuozhuo qi hua* signifies the bride's youth and beauty; *you fen qi shi* suggests flourishing offspring; and *qi ye zhenzhen* symbolizes domestic harmony and marital stability. Through the natural rhythm of plant growth, the source poem metaphorically expresses social expectations regarding a woman's development and conveys the ethical and cultural norms according to which a woman should possess beauty and virtue, fertility, and the ability to manage a household.

The principle of goodness in Transknowletology emphasizes that the evaluation of a translation should not be limited to linguistic accuracy and fluency. More importantly, it should consider whether the translator helps target-language readers understand the cultural knowledge and symbolic system of the source text. In "The T'ao Yao," the peach tree is not only a natural plant but also constitutes a progressive metaphor for the course of human life. Whether the translator successfully conveys this logic directly affects whether target-language readers can enter the cultural context underlying the poem. Some of Legge's lexical choices possess symbolic

implications. For example, “fruit” may lead target-language readers to associate the image with fertility and harvest, while “rule” suggests the woman’s responsibility for managing the household. Although these expressions do not directly reveal the cultural connotations, they provide readers who possess relevant cultural knowledge with possibilities for association and interpretation.

From the perspective of goodness, however, the translation still has limitations. The beauty, fertility, and household management symbolized respectively by *zhuozhuo qi hua*, *you fen qi shi*, and *qi ye zhenzhen* are clearly meaningful in the source poem, but these meanings are not effectively explained in the translation. The metaphorical relationship between the conditions of the plant and the woman’s roles is not clearly presented. Consequently, the transfer of the cultural context relies largely on readers’ subjective associations. Although Legge achieves a degree of formal equivalence, he does not establish an equivalent relationship at the level of cultural meaning. Target-language readers are therefore more likely to understand the translation merely as an objective description of the peach tree’s natural conditions and may find it difficult to grasp the ethical ideas concerning marriage customs implicit in the source poem. The symbolic meanings consequently become vague or may even be overlooked in translation. Readers unfamiliar with classical Chinese culture may struggle to infer from the botanical descriptions that the growth of the peach tree represents the woman’s changing cultural role from becoming a bride to managing a household, or that it symbolizes the ethical expectation that a woman should possess beauty, bear offspring, and demonstrate competence in household management. These symbolic meanings occupy an important place in the source poem, but they remain merely implicit rather than being clearly communicated in the translation. This evidently falls short of the requirements of goodness.

Overall, Legge provides a certain degree of cultural guidance from the perspective of goodness. His selection of words with symbolic implications gives target-language readers opportunities to form associations and understand the source poem. Nevertheless, because the translation does not explicitly indicate the symbolic relationships among the plants, women, marriage, and ethics, too much of the burden of interpretation is transferred to readers. They must rely on their own cultural knowledge or subjective associations to fill the gaps. As a result, the symbolic meanings conveyed by the translation remain relatively fragmented, making those of the source poem difficult to comprehend fully.

3.3 Analysis of Plant Imagery Translation under the Principle of Beauty

“Writing with beauty” enables the truth of knowledge to enter the target-language culture in an aesthetically appealing form through translation (Yang Feng, 2024: 12). From the perspective of Transknowletology, the recognition of beauty depends on the contemporary aesthetic standards

of the target language, as such standards are dynamic (Yue Feng & Chen Zeyu, 2022: 70). Beauty is no longer evaluated primarily according to whether the language of the source text is elegant; instead, it emphasizes the aesthetic compatibility of the translation with the target-language culture. Under the principle of beauty, the translator's primary task is to adjust linguistic style and modes of expression so that the translation appeals to target-language readers.

Under the principle of beauty in Transknowletology, poetic quality and rhythm are important criteria for evaluating the aesthetic value of a translation. Legge demonstrates a clear poetic pursuit in his translation of "The Chien Chia."

In terms of linguistic style, "dark and green" and "thick and tall," which Legge uses to describe the *jianjia*, naturally correspond in syllabic length and final sounds. Although they do not form strict rhymes, they create a degree of resonance and rhythm, producing a measured cadence when read aloud. Legge also employs numerous parallel structures, such as "Reed and rush are dark and green," which has a distinct rhythm and is easy to recite. This concise and symmetrical structure echoes the four-character lines of *The Book of Poetry* and is well suited to oral recitation. At the same time, Legge does not deliberately imitate the sentence patterns of classical Chinese. Instead, he adopts expressions natural to English poetry, preserving a sense of rhythm while achieving a smooth transition between linguistic forms. This structure not only formally echoes the rhythmic arrangement of the four-character lines in *The Book of Poetry* but also enables readers to perceive the original poem's cadence and emotional flow when reading it aloud. From the perspective of beauty in Transknowletology, this treatment preserves the rhythm and phonological beauty of the source poem. More importantly, it offers target-language readers a familiar, natural, and accessible aesthetic experience, effectively transferring poetic rhythm and beauty across languages.

Moreover, the central image of the poem is the *jianjia*. The source poem depicts dense reeds growing beside the water and surrounded by mist, creating a hazy and inaccessible atmosphere. Legge uses "Reed and rush are dark and green," "Reed and rush luxuriant rise," and "Reed and rush grow thick and tall" to correspond respectively to *cangcang*, *qiqi*, and *caicai*. These renderings not only reproduce the visual and spatial variations of the reeds but also retain the source poem's atmosphere of apparent proximity and ultimate inaccessibility. As a result, the plant imagery in the translation preserves the aesthetic tension created by this sense of haziness.

From the perspective of beauty in Transknowletology, Legge accomplishes more than linguistic transfer. Through his treatment of form, rhythm, and imagery, he also effectively transfers the aesthetic experience of the source poem. By employing modes of expression familiar to the target-language culture, he naturally conveys to target-language readers the visual, rhythmic, and emotional beauty embodied in the *jianjia*. Readers are therefore able not only to understand the

poetic meaning but also to experience the Eastern aesthetic tension contained within it. This recreation of poetic quality goes beyond linguistic communication and constitutes a cross-cultural reconstruction of aesthetic experience.

“The T’ao Yao,” in turn, takes the peach tree as its central image and portrays a gentle and harmonious ideal of marriage through the progressive descriptions in its three stanzas. Rather than stating this ideal directly, the source poem implicitly expresses its anticipation and praise of an ideal marriage through the rhythm and imagery of plant growth. Legge’s English translation delicately recreates this plant imagery and demonstrates aesthetic awareness in its rhythm, visual representation, and style.

In terms of rhythm, the source text of “The T’ao Yao” is highly regular in form. All three stanzas begin with *tao zhi yaoyao*. Its orderly four-character lines, strong rhythmic quality, and flowing cadence make it particularly suitable for recitation. This repetition establishes the rhythmic foundation of the poem and creates a sense of fluidity when it is read aloud. Legge begins each stanza with the same line, “Graceful and young the peach tree stands.” This consistent opening not only preserves the repetition of the source text but also effectively recreates its rhythm. The line itself has a natural syllabic pattern, measured cadence, and harmonious rhythm, allowing target-language readers to experience a gentle beat similar to that conveyed by *tao zhi yaoyao*. In the target-language context, the line is faithful not only to the content of the source poem but also to its rhythm, creating a similar poetic atmosphere and thereby preserving and recreating its linguistic beauty.

In terms of visual beauty, Legge makes full use of visually descriptive vocabulary to recreate the peach tree’s formal characteristics at different stages of growth. In *zhuozhuo qi hua*, *zhuozhuo* describes the splendour of the peach blossoms in full bloom. Legge renders it as “all gleaming bright.” The word “gleaming” conveys a sense of light and evokes an image of blossoms shining in the sunlight, while “bright” intensifies the saturation of their colour. The entire line consequently conveys vivid beauty, vitality, and radiance. In *you fen qi shi*, the culturally distinctive term *fen* is not translated literally. Instead, Legge writes, “Large crops of fruit it soon will show.” “Large crops” depicts the visual abundance and fullness of the fruit, while “soon will show” creates a sense of temporal extension and tension. This treatment not only recreates the abundance of the peach tree’s fruit but also conveys the hazy beauty of fruit that is approaching maturity but has not yet fully appeared, corresponding to the implicit aesthetic quality of the source poem. In addition, Legge translates *qi ye zhenzhen* as “Its foliage clustering green and full.” The word “clustering” conveys both movement and density, capturing the layered and interwoven quality of the foliage, while “green and full” concisely reinforces the colour of the peach tree. These seemingly simple yet highly visual descriptions keep the peach tree’s visual imagery clear, vivid, and distinct in the English translation rather than allowing it to become dry

or abstract.

In terms of linguistic style, the source poem is simple and natural in expression and calm in tone, displaying the implicit and restrained beauty characteristic of classical Chinese poetry. Legge maintains this aesthetic style in his English translation. His language is generally gentle and understated, avoiding exaggerated vocabulary and complex sentence structures. Instead, he employs concise expressions with clear meanings, allowing the poem to retain a consistently restrained tone.

Overall, from the perspective of beauty, Legge achieves a high degree of coordination among rhythm, visual representation, and style in his translation of "The T'ao Yao." Through the recreation of rhythm, the layering of imagery, and the consistency of linguistic style, the translation achieves aesthetic harmony with the source poem.

4. Conclusion

Plant imagery in *The Book of Poetry* not only depicts natural scenery but also performs profound cultural and symbolic functions. In classical Chinese poetry, such imagery often conveys ethical meanings and emotional content that extend beyond its literal significance. Accurately communicating these connotations in translation is an important issue that must be addressed in cross-cultural contexts. Focusing on "The Chien Chia" and "The T'ao Yao," this paper has conducted a close analysis of Legge's translation from the three perspectives of semantic accuracy, cultural communication, and aesthetic recreation within the three-dimensional framework of truth, goodness, and beauty in Transknowletology. In doing so, it seeks to offer a new perspective on the translation and transformation of plant imagery in *The Book of Poetry*.

Overall, at the level of truth, Legge achieves semantic accuracy and recreates the natural conditions of the plant imagery, making the botanical knowledge conveyed through these images accessible in translation. The principle of goodness requires translators to activate the culturally embedded cognitive structures of the source text within the target-language context. Legge's translation, however, provides relatively insufficient guidance in this respect, resulting in a fragmented presentation of the symbolic meanings of the plant imagery. Although the translation is fluent and poetic, it weakens the transmission of cultural connotations and leaves room for improvement in conveying the deeper cultural significance and traditional values underlying the plant imagery. At the level of beauty, Legge effectively constructs the poems' rhythmic effects through the linguistic resources and syntactic structures of the target language, achieving a degree of aesthetic harmony between the source poems and their translations.

This study inevitably has certain limitations. First, its selection of texts is limited to "The Chien Chia" and "The T'ao Yao" and therefore cannot fully demonstrate the complexity and diversity

of plant imagery in *The Book of Poetry*. Second, because of the author's limited academic experience, some aspects of the analysis may lack sufficient depth, adopt a relatively narrow perspective, or contain individual judgements that require further reconsideration. These issues need to be explored and examined more thoroughly in future research.

Under the guidance of the three-dimensional framework of truth, goodness, and beauty in Transknowletology, the translation of plant imagery involves more than the accurate transfer of linguistic information. It also requires an in-depth understanding and reconstruction of the cultural context carried by the source text, while undertaking the task of recreating the source work's aesthetic experience in the target language. This process requires translators not only to remain faithful to the knowledge conveyed by the plants themselves but also to attend to the communication of their cultural connotations and symbolic meanings, enabling target-language readers to understand the cultural logic underlying them. Through appropriate linguistic styles, rhythmic arrangements, and constructions of imagery, translators must also ensure that their translations possess corresponding aesthetic appeal. Truth, goodness, and beauty are interconnected and inseparable dimensions that together constitute a systematic framework for evaluating the translation of classical poetry.

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