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On Cultural Connotations of Animal- and Plant-related Words in *Li Sao* and Translation Methods

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ABSTRACT

Chu Ci is one of the sources of Chinese literature and the treasure of human civilization. It breaks through the traditional forms of poetry and embodies the language dynamics of Chinese poetry, with a profound impact on the literary creations of later generations. With China vigorously advocating the “going out” of Chinese culture, the transmission of *Chu Ci* has received much attention. However, research on the English translation of *Chu Ci* and its foreign communication falls behind relatively. *Li Sao*, the most typical part of *Chu Ci*, has abundant cultural images that contain affluent cultural information. Cultural image is a metaphor. For people of the same cultural background, the associative meaning of cultural images is clear without much processing effort. Nevertheless, the same cultural image often has different associative meanings due to the differences in culture, geography, living customs, and other aspects of each nation. In the process of translation, the meaning of cultural image changes inevitably. Therefore, in the translation of *Li Sao*, it is particularly important to reproduce cultural images accurately. This article first introduces the English translation of *Li Sao* and the relevant study of the translators and analyzes the definition of cultural image. Then the article studies animal images and plant images in *Li Sao* and analyzes the translation strategies adopted by the four English versions of *Li Sao*. And on this basis, we have found that only by using the strategies of domestication and foreignization together can the cultural image be reproduced more accurately.

1. Introduction

Qu Yuan (屈原) was a great patriotic poet in ancient China. *Li Sao*, a typical chapter in *Chu Ci* (楚辞), has been translated into many languages since modern times. There are many animal and plant images in *Li Sao* (离骚),

which have rich cultural connotations. Many translators at home and abroad have translated *Li Sao*, using different methods to reproduce cultural images faithfully. This article takes the English translations by David Hawkes (1959/1985) ^[1,2], Xu Yuanhong (1994/2009) ^[3,4], Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (2001) ^[5], and Zhuo Zhenying

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(2006)^[6] as examples to study how to translate animal and plant images and retain their cultural information as much as possible.

Chu Ci is one of the sources of Chinese culture and a cultural treasure of the motherland. As a typical chapter of *Chu Ci*, *Li Sao* is also the earliest full-length lyric poem in ancient China. It has been more than two thousand years since the creation of *Chu Ci*, but scholars at home and abroad are still enthusiastic about the study of *Li Sao*. Nowadays, there are many research monographs and papers on *Li Sao* in China. Many translators abroad have also translated *Li Sao*, making great contributions to the spreading of *Li Sao* in Western countries. However, domestic scholars also pay attention to the problems in the translation process, such as the reproduction of cultural images. Therefore, how to accurately translate and promote *Chu Ci* to the West has become a major event in the cultural circle. At present, the state advocates the acceleration of Chinese culture going out and enhancing cultural self-confidence.

Therefore, the translation of *Chu Ci* is particularly important. The article attempts to take cultural images in *Li Sao* as the research object, trying to figure out the best translation methods for the transmission of the animal and plant images based on the analysis of the four English translations by David Hawkes (1959/1985)^[1,2], Xu Yuan-chong (1994/2009)^[3,4], Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (2001)^[5], and Zhuo Zhenying (2006)^[6]. The research questions of the article are formulated as follows:

(1) What translation methods are used to represent the animal and plant images in Xu Yuan-chong's, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang's, Zhuo Zhenying's and David Hawkes's versions of *Li Sao*?

(2) What translation methods are most effective in translating cultural images in ancient Chinese classics?

This article attempts to find out the most plausible translation approaches for representing animal and plant images in Chinese poems so as to advance the globalization of Chinese culture by the successful translation of traditional Chinese works.

We take various approaches to solve the questions with the descriptive approach as the main method. The article aims at analyzing the translation of animal and plant images in the four versions of *Li Sao* by Xu Yuan-chong, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, Zhuo Zhenying and David Hawkes. He attempts to describe and analyze the different methods the four translators have used in their versions. The major corpus for the study is based on the following translations: *The Songs of the South—An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* by David Hawkes, which is published by Penguin Books in

1985^[2]; *Elegies of the State of Chu* by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (2001)^[5]; *Poetry of the South* by Xu Yuan-chong, which is published by Hunan Publishing House in 1994^[3]; *the Verse of Chu* by Zhuo Zhenying (2006)^[6]. Meanwhile, some other versions of *Li Sao* translated by other scholars are also used when it is necessary.

The article is composed of five parts. Part One is the introduction, including the research background and significance, research questions, research methods and structure of the article. Part Two is the literature review, summarizing the previous studies on the translation of animal and plant images in *Li Sao*. In Part Three, cultural image is defined. The cultural images in *Li Sao* and their connotations are introduced at large. Part Four focuses on the reproduction of cultural images in the translations of *Li Sao* by making a comparative study of the four English versions. Part Five is the conclusion of this study, including the major findings, limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

Nowadays, the Chinese government vigorously advances Chinese culture “going out”, which requires us to translate Chinese cultural classics into works easy to read with a global perspective. Since the 19th century, many translators at home and abroad have translated some chapters of *Chu Ci*, receiving different responses. There are many cultural images in *Chu Ci*. The reproduction of cultural images has always been the keystone and difficulty in the process of translation because there are the lexical vacancies in the target language and cultural background differences. The essence of *Li Sao*, one of the representative works of *Chu Ci*, contains large amounts of cultural information. The canon is mainly featured by affluent cultural images. Many animal and plant images appear in *Li Sao*, which have strong national cultural connotations. In the following part, we will introduce and summarize the research achievements on the translation of *Chu Ci* and its cultural images, especially animal and plant images.

2.1 Previous Studies on the Translation of *Li Sao*

Chu Ci constitutes one of the sources of Chinese literature and a cultural treasure of the motherland. In the past two thousand years, it has attracted more and more scholars with its special charm. Gradually, more and more studies on *Chu Ci* were carried out. At present, there are numerous monographs and papers on the study of the canon in China. Moreover, *Chu Ci* has been studied globally, attracting the attention from a good many sinologists. In the early 19th century, *Chu Ci* began to be introduced

into Europe, and its translation began to appear in France, Germany and Britain. It is widely acknowledged that the Viennese sinologist August Pfizmaier is the first scholar who translated *Chi Ci* in the West. In other words, he renders *Li Sao* and *Jiu Ge* into German. But his translation is replete with weaknesses in reproducing cultural images. This section focuses on previous research in the major English translations of *Li Sao* by translators at home and abroad.

Previous Studies on the Translation of *Li Sao* Abroad

In 1879, British sinologist E. H. Parker translated *Li Sao*, which was published in the seventh issue of *China Review* (1879) [7]. On the basis of the fact that there is no introduction, notes, or comments in Parker’s translation, namely, *The Sadness of Separation*, David Hawkes makes comments on it as follows: “It is really more a paraphrase than a translation, and its bouncing Victorian verse could have been written by a clever schoolboy” [1].

Since then, the English translation works of *Chu Ci* continued to appear. In 1895, James Legge published “The *Li Sao* Poem and its Author” in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* [8]. In 1947, Robert Payne published *The White Pony: An Anthology of Chinese Poetry from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, including *Encountering Sorrow (Li Sao)* [9]. David Hawkes’ comments on it are as follows: “The footnotes are sometimes misleading, but the translations are fresh and readable” [1].

In 1973, David Hawkes published *Ch’u Tz’u: The Songs of the South* on the basis of *Syntactic Analysis of Chu Ci* [10] by Wang Yi [11] of the Eastern Han dynasty. Hawkes represents the essence of these images and the complex emotions they are endowed with so as to reflect the poet’s thought and state of mind [1]. Dobson (1959) [12], Shadick (1959) [13] and Whitaker (1960) [14] all praised highly this translational canon.

Previous Studies on the Translation of *Li Sao* at Home

The Chinese academic circle also began to translate

Chu Ci into English after the founding of the People’s Republic of China. The versions by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang [5], Xu Yuanchong [3,4], Sun Dayu [15], and Zhuo Zhenying [6] are widely acknowledged (see Table 1).

In 1953, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang published *Li Sao and Other Poems of Chu Yuan* [5] in the Foreign Language Press. David Hawkes’ comments on it are as follows: “It is a monument of ingenuity, but to my mind bears about as much relation to the original as a chocolate Easter egg to an omelet” [1].

In 1994, Xu Yuanchong (许渊冲) published *Elegies of the South* in the Hunan Publishing House, including a translation of *Li Sao*, namely *Sorrow after Departure*. It seems to him that, *Sorrow after Departure* [3] may be compared with Homer’s *Odyssey* composed 500 years earlier, and with Dante’s *Divine Comedy* composed 1,500 years later [3]. In the preface to this translation canon, Xu makes comments on some earlier English versions of *Chu Ci*. For example, his comments on David Hawkes’ version are as follows: “His version is perhaps more accurate than that by others, but from a microscopic point of view, it is as void of literary merit as other prosaic translations, including those of 1975 and 1984” [3].

Previous Studies on Animal and Plant Names in *Li Sao* and Their Translation

In the article “On Deformations of Plant Images in Chu Culture in the English Version of *Li Sao*”, Wu Songlin (2002) [16] finds out that an image evolves into a different image after its rendering of it. He concludes that the translation betrayal is creative via making a comparison of some plant names from *Li Sao* on the basis of the English versions of Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, Sun Dayu, and Xu Yuanchong.

In the article “On Comparative Studies of *Li Sao* from the Perspective of Intertextuality”, Zhao Honghui (2016) [17] discusses the rendering of the title and typical excerpts of *Li Sao*, pointing out that translation itself is a kind of intertextual activity. By the observation of different translations of *Li Sao*, Zhao makes a conclusion that during the

Table 1. Major English versions of *Li Sao* by domestic translators.

Year of publication	Translator(s)	Publisher	Title
1953	Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang	Foreign Language Press	<i>Li Sao and Other Poems of Chu Yuan</i>
1994	Xu Yuanchong	Hunan Publishing House	<i>Elegies of the South</i>
1996	Sun Dayu	Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press	<i>Lee Sao: Suffering Throes</i>
2006	Zhuo Zhenying	Hunan People’s Publishing House	<i>The Verse of Chu</i>

process of translation, the translator should be a reader, an interpreter, and an author, and give full play to his creativity and subjectivity so as to express the profound connotation of the original text and meanwhile make the translation understandable to target readers.

Choosing the English versions of *Chu Ci* by Xu Yuan-chong, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, and David Hawkes as research subjects, Xu Qianqian (2014)^[18] attempts to make the contrastive studies on the translation of cultural images in *Chu Ci* from the perspective of domestication and foreignization. Xu points out that domestication and foreignization should be used together to convey and recreate cultural images to the utmost degree.

In the article “On the Translation Strategies in the Rendering of Archetype Images in *Chu Ci*,” Li Honglv (2015)^[19] chooses “荃”, “芰荷”, “芙蓉”, “扶桑”, “若木”, “九天”, “灵修”, “白水”, “阆风” and “咸池” as research subjects to make a comparative study on the two English versions of *Chu Ci* by Xu Yuan-chong and Zhuo Zhenying. Li points out that Xu mainly takes the strategy of domestication and tends to use literal translation and free translation; Zhuo mainly takes the strategy of foreignization, using literal translation and transliteration.

2.2 Summary

From the studies mentioned above, we can safely say that *Li Sao*, as the most significant part of *Chu Ci*, has been a popular literature at home and abroad. The translation of *Li Sao* cannot be separated from its research. In the recent two decades, scholars have been studying it from different perspectives. These studies on the translation of *Li Sao* have yielded many achievements. However, attention should be paid to the rendering and reproduction of culture-loaded words in *Li Sao*, especially animal and plant names.

3. An Overview of Animal and Plant Images in *Li Sao*

In this part, we will introduce and analyze the definition of cultural images, and then more than 30 animal and plant images will be presented.

3.1 Definition of Cultural Images

The article pays much attention to the central concept of “image”. We can obtain clear definitions of the image from the website of *Vocabulary.com* and Urban Dictionary:

- 1) the overall outlook of a place, person, or thing.
- 2) a visual representation (of an object or scene person or abstraction) produced on a surface.

3) an iconic mental representation.

4) an optical counterpart or appearance of an object, as is produced by reflection from a mirror, refraction by a lens, or the passage of luminous rays through a small aperture and their reception on a surface.

5) the concept or idea of someone or something that is held by the public.

According to Medio-translatology^[20], cultural image is the crystal of national wisdom and cultural history, which has a strong relationship with the ancient legends and the ethnic totem in primitive society. As a kind of cultural symbol, cultural image has rich associative meanings, which makes it easy for native speakers to understand the content contained in the image. A cultural image contains a cultural symbolic meaning which constitutes a kind of cultural symbol with relatively specific cultural connotation and strong contextual compatibility. In Chinese classical poetry, image is emphasized as one of the most important elements necessary for a successful poem. It combines the external world with the internal world, evoking the most pleasant poetic atmosphere for readers. Cultural images are inevitably rooted in different cultural symbols, such as animals, plants, historical figures, mythical figures, and so on. As an important carrier of Chinese culture, the cultural image in Chinese classical poetry has its unique way of thinking and aesthetic taste. The connotation of a poem can be deepened and the associative space can be expanded by means of frequent use of cultural images.

Therefore, we can conclude that a cultural image is composed of a specific image and associative meaning. These two components are equally important and inseparable from each other. Associative meaning is the subjective part of cultural image. So associative meaning will come into people’s minds when they think about realistic and concrete images. For example, the word “bed” generally does not contain a cultural image, only bearing literally denotative meaning and referring to something “flat with four feet”. On the other hand, “plum blossom” is a kind of cultural image. Because of its literal extension, plum blossom has always been associated with elegance, strength and faithfulness.

However, due to the differences in national geography, lifestyle, customs and cultural traditions, the same cultural image often have different connotations in Chinese and English. Although the same cultural image is shared by many nations, it is endowed with a wide range of different and even contradictory meanings. Let us take “dog” as an instance. In Chinese culture, dogs are disgusting and only serve as a guard, and thus there are a large number

of derogatory dog-related idioms and expressions in Chinese, such as “狗改不了吃屎” (the leopard can’t change its spots), “狗腿子” (henchman), “狗头军师” (inept adviser), “狗窝” (dog house), “狗咬狗的社会” (a dog-eat-dog society), “累得像条狗” (a dog’s life), “狗眼看人低” (be a bloody snob) and “狗咬吕洞宾” (wrong a person of good will). Nevertheless, in Western cultures, dogs have a very high status. Westerners like dogs and treat them as their friends and even as a family member. So there are many commendatory dog-related idioms and expressions in English, such as “like a dog with two tails” (非常高兴), “teach the dog to bark” (多此一举), “a gay dog” (一个快乐的人), “a lucky dog” (幸运儿), “Every dog has his day” (凡人皆有得意之时), “be old dog at a thing” (对某事很内行), and “Love me, love my dog” (爱屋及乌).

3.2 Classification of Cultural Images in *Li Sao*

There are four kinds of cultural images in *Li Sao*, namely plants, animals, figures, and places. Due to our limited knowledge, the article mainly focuses on plant and animal images.

Plants

There are many plants in *Li Sao*. These plants represent some kinds of emotion and affection and can be classified into two categories: fragrant herbs and stinking weeds. The fragrant herbs represent the people of good character, while stinking weeds allude to the evil-hearted sycophants around the king. Both of them imply the human emotion expressed by the poet through observing their growth characteristics, forms, and functions.

There are 15 kinds of fragrant herbs and woods in *Li Sao*. Among all these plants the herbs outnumber the rest of the plants, including “江离”, “白芷”, “秋兰”, “胡绳”, “宿莽”, “蕙”, “茹”, “留夷”, “杜衡”, “菊” and “揭车”. And the woods include “薜荔”, “椒”, “桂” and “木兰” (see Table 2). The stinking weeds such as “檄”, “茅”, “蕘”, “策”, “菴”, “萧” and “艾” are always creeping plants with sharp thorns, and they are used as a metaphor for something sinister. There are three plant images relating to mythology, including “扶桑”, “若木” and “琼枝”.

Animals

Besides plant images, there are many animal images in

Table 2. Plant images and their translations.

Source text	Xu’s version	The Yangs’ version	Zhuo’s version	Hawkes’ version
江离	sweet grass	Angelic herbs	Selinea	Selinea
秋兰	orchids	orchids	Cymbidium flowers	autumn orchids
宿莽	secluded one	winter-thorn	Winter-Thorn	sedges of the islets
蕙	sweet orchids	melilotus white	Cassia	the most-prized blossoms
荃	you	The prince	The Calamus	the Fragrant One
杜衡	fragrant grass	The rumex fragrant	The Rumex fragrant	arums
胡绳	ivy	ivy	ivy	ivy
留夷	peonies	azalea bright	Azalea bright	sweet lichens
秋菊	aster	aster	Chrysanthemum	chrysanthemums
木兰	grass	magnolias	Magnolia	angelica
申椒	pepper	cassia	Sweet Grass	pepper
菌桂	cassia	pepper	Angelica	cinnamon
薜荔	/	blue wisteria	Wisteria wreaths	castor plant
菴	thorns and weeds	lentils and weeds	weed	thorns, king-grass, surly-ear
艾	foul mugwort	stinking mugwort	Stinking Mugwort	mugwort
茅	weeds	weeds	Wild-Grass	straw
萧艾	weeds and wormwood	mugworts	Moxa	Worthless mugwort
檄	it	dogwood	The Cornel	Stinking dogwood
扶桑	giant tree	the brake	Fusang	Fu-sang tree
若木	branch	a golden bough	Ruomu the Fairy Tree	Ruo tree(Jo-tree)
琼枝	jasper bough	jasper boughs	Jasper Bough	jasper branch

Li Sao, containing “骐骥”, “飞龙”, “蛟龙”, “虬龙”, “鸾皇”, “鸞鸟”, “鸱”, “鸢”, “鹑”, and so on. These animal images can strike a chord with potential readers (see Table 3). Among these animals, dragon (蛟龙) and phoenix (鸾皇) appear to be the most common animals.

Qu Yuan was exiled because he was unwilling to collaborate with evil counselors of the State of Chu. The images of grasses, flowers, birds, and beasts are not only an embodiment of political metaphor in *Li Sao* but also express his willingness to keep himself decent and loyal.

4. Animal and Plant Images in *Li Sao* and Translation

In this part, we will first discuss the most commonly used translation methods for animal and plant images in conformity with several English versions of *Li Sao*. Finally, we make a comparative analysis of translations of cultural images in *Li Sao*.

4.1 Translation Methods for Animal and Plant Images

Transliteration

As is well known, transliteration is featured by retaining the phonetic features of the source text without changing its meaning. Transliteration has been neglected for many years. Some scholars hold the opinion that it plays little role in translation and cannot be mentioned in the same breath as literal translation and free translation; others think that transliteration cannot be regarded as a translation method. However, it has been proved that transliteration is upgrading with the development of translation and has been playing an important role in translation. In some cases, transliteration may even become one of the main means of translation. *The Chinese-English Bilingual Dictionary of Modern Chinese* (2002) [21] explains

that transliteration is a method of translating words from one language into the same or similar sounds in another language. In the practice of translation, most proper nouns can be translated by taking the approach of transliteration. Examples of transliteration include “太极” (Tai Chi), “麻将” (mahjong), “中国大妈” (Chinese Dama), “苦力” (coolly), “New York” (纽约), “上海” (Shanghai), and so forth. In the four English versions of *Chu Ci*, many animal and plant images are rendered with the method of transliteration, such as 扶桑 (Fu-sang tree) and 若木 (Ruo tree).

Literal Translation

Literal translation is the reproduction of the literal meaning of the source text while maintaining the sentence structure basically. Domestically, many translators abide by the principles of “faithfulness”, “expressiveness” and “elegance” proposed by Yan Fu (1971) [22]. There is no denying that literal translation is in conformity with the principles. This method makes it easier for target language readers to comprehend the meaning the original author attempts to express. Translators often use this method when the cultural image of the original has a similar or the same association in the target language. The advantage of literal translation is that it can avoid the interference of subjective factors more effectively than free translation in absorbing new beneficial factors from the source culture and reflecting the things and emotions existing objectively in foreign countries [23]. Although this method helps to reproduce the cultural image containing the original culture, in view of subtle cultural differences, the same images with the same denotations may have different associations across cultures. This could lead to misunderstandings or misconceptions on the part of target readers. For instance, both the Yangs and Zhuo translate the image “鹑” directly into “cuckoos”. Western readers can easily comprehend it for Chinese readers and Western readers all know

Table 3. Animal images and their translations.

Source text	Xu's version	The Yangs' version	Zhuo's version	Hawkes' version
玉虬	Dragon	Jade-green dragons	Four draught dragons	jade dragons
鸞	phoenix	birds with plumage gold	Phoenix carriage	Phoenix-figured car
鸾凰	phoenixes	royal blue bird	Phoenixes	Bird of Heaven
凤鸟	Giant bird	The phoenix	Phoenixes	phoenixes
鸱	Falcon	falcon	The bird Zhen	magpie
雄鸱	Turtledove	Turtle-dove	Turtle-Dove	magpie
鹑	Autumn birds	cuckoos	cuckoos	shrike
蛟龙	Dragon	dragons	Dragons	Water-dragons
八龙	Eight-dragon-steeds	Eight horses	Eight dragon-steeds	Eight dragon steeds

that “orchids” constitute stand for a bird that tweets in late spring and whose tweets are mournful. However, “鶉鴂” in Chinese culture is a symbol of nostalgia, melancholy, and sorrowing for spring, meanwhile, it does not have that kind of association in English.

Omission

Omission as one of the translation methods is also existent in the translation of cultural images, which means that the translator completely omits the image-related cultural words in the original text in order to achieve a smooth, brief, and reasonable text without affecting the target reader’s understanding of the content^[24]. Since it omits something in the source text, the omission is used in the rendering of cultural images with caution. According to Zhang Peiji^[25], omission refers to omitting the dispensable and redundant words or words violating the language norms of the target language. Problems will arise if we do not use omission when we handle the translation of cultural images. Let us take as an example the translation of “沉鱼落雁，闭月羞花” in the *Chinese-English Dictionary*^[21]. The translation is as follows: “have features that can make the fish sink and birds alight, and looks that can outshine the moon and put the flowers to shame.” In Western culture, the image “moon” has a strong romantic color and is always associated with beauty. Furthermore, people of all ethnic groups regard flowers as a symbol of beauty. Therefore, it would not be an issue to describe the beauty with the images “花” and “月”. Nevertheless, Western readers have difficulty understanding the association of the images “鱼” and “雁” with beauty due to the lack of relevant association in Western culture. Therefore, the two images should be omitted in the translation so as to express the meaning clearly. As far as the translation of *Chu Ci* is concerned, Xu does not translate “玉” in his translation of “玉虬”; Xu, the Yangs and Zhuo omit “荃” in their renderings.

Interpretation

Some translators have used the method of interpretation in the process of translating cultural classics. For instance, Zhang Peiji (1980)^[25] calls it an “explanatory translation method” that uses explanatory additives in the target text, even though there is no such word on the surface in the original. According to Huang Zhonglian^[27], interpretation means to give a clear explanation of the original words, sentences or even articles in translation, which will facilitate the target language readers’ understanding of the

target text. Liu Miqing^[27] claims that interpretation means to explain the meaning of the source text appropriately. Interpretation, which is also called explication, is the most commonly used method for translating words when it is difficult to achieve semantic correspondence in translation between English and Chinese. Interpretation can be classified into two kinds: firstly, adding an associative qualifying determiner before a noun; secondly, explaining the original noun in other words. For example, in translating “留夷”, Zhuo and Hawkes add the post-modifier “bright” after the noun “azalea” and the pre-modifier “sweet” before the noun “lichens” respectively to produce their translations: “Azalea bright” and “sweet lichens”. In translating “鹭” and “鸾凰”, the Yangs explain them with the plain words: “birds with plumage gold” and “royal blue bird”. Interpretation is a domestication method; it makes it easier for the target readers to comprehend the nature of the original image.

Annotation

Annotation means the use of notes. It can be divided into three kinds: in-text notes, footnotes, and endnotes. According to Chen Hongwei^[28], annotation refers to providing additional background knowledge of culture by adding a note to make up for the differences between Chinese and English cultures. Translators often use annotation and other translation methods to complement each other so as to transmit the connotation and denotation of cultural images fully. In rendering *Li Sao*, annotation refers to transferring cultural images by adding some background knowledge in footnotes. For instance, when he translates “蒹” into “thorns and weeds”, Xu offers a note like this: “It refers to a common grass, describing the Chu court replete with wicked ministers.”

4.2 A Comparative Analysis of Translation Methods for Animal and Plant Images in *Li Sao*

In this section, we introduce the translation methods that are applied by the translators by virtue of descriptive analysis, with more than 30 cultural images as the object of study. The 30 cultural images in the corpus of this study include 30 plants and 10 animals which have been selected randomly.

Plant Images

Let us look at two examples related to plant images in *Li Sao*:

Example 1

兰芷变而不芳兮，荃蕙化而为茅；
何昔日之芳草兮，今直为萧艾也。(Li Sao: 309-310)

	Xu	Yang & Yang	Zhuo	Hawkes
兰芷	sweet orchids	orchids	orchid and angelica	orchid and iris
荃蕙	sweet grass	angelicas	magnolia	flag and melilotus
茅	weeds	weeds	wild-grass	straw
萧艾	weeds and wormwood	mugworts	moxa which stink	worthless mugwort

Sweet orchids have lost fragrant smell, oh!
Sweet grass turn to *weeds* stinking strong.
...Turn to *weeds and wormwood* unfair? ^[3]

Even *orchids* changed, their fragrance quickly lost,
And midst the *weeds angelicas* were tossed.
...Their hue have changed, and turned to *mugworts* grey? ^[5]

The *Orchid and Angelica* lose their perfume.
And the form of *Wild-Grass* the *Magnolia* does assume.
...To the status of such grasses as the *Moxa which stink*? ^[6]

Orchid and iris have lost all their fragrance;
Flag and melilotus have changed into *straw*.
...Now all transformed themselves into *worthless mugwort*? ^[2]

Among all the plants, fragrant plants are a common kind of plants which have medicinal value. As “兰”，“芷”，“荃”和“蕙” in example 1 are just fragrant plants, they stand for the noble personal qualities and cultured character in the poem. On the other hand, “茅”和“萧艾” as mentioned above symbolize court jesters and scumbags. This example tries to reflect that the King Huai of Chu (楚怀王) bestows his favor on his dubious sycophants, which leads to the downfall of the State of Chu. Ordinarily, we are supposed to study the botanical meaning of the images meticulously. In the meantime, we need to deliberate and comprehend cultural contextual meanings of these plant images.

“兰芷” in example 1 is translated as “sweet orchids”, “orchids”, “orchid and angelica”, and “orchid and iris” respectively. In Zhuo’s version, the referential meaning of the two images is represented by taking the literal

translation approach. Xu Yuanchong not only translates the referential meaning but also represents the features of the plant. Hawkes substitutes the image “芷” with “iris”. Iris, a tall plant with long pointed leaves and large purple, white, or yellow flowers, is a common wildflower. It is often designated as the national flower by many countries, including France.

Hawkes substitutes the image “茅” with another image “straw”. It is widely acknowledged that straw, as an agricultural by-product, is not the plant that the original image refers to. Obviously, Hawkes’ hypothesis of contextual meaning is mistaken in some sense. Both Zhuo and Hawkes resort to the interpretation approach and translate the image “艾” into “Moxa which stinks” and “Worthless mugwort”. The features of the two images are transmitted precisely by virtue of the verb “stink” and the adjective “worthless”.

Example 2

扈江离与辟芷兮，纫秋兰以为佩。(Li Sao: 53-54)
I weave *sweet grass* by riverside, oh!
Into a bet with *orchids late*. ^[3]

Angelic herbs and *sweet selineas* too,
And orchids late that by the water grew. ^[5]

I dressed in *selineas* and *shady angelica*
And twined *autumn orchids* to make a garland. ^[2]

From what has been mentioned above, we can know that the four translators all try to translate “兰” into “orchid”. “兰” is a plant that often appears in poems. We may raise the question that “兰” is a kind of plant belonging to feverwort, so its correct scientific name in English should be “thoroughwort”. However, the word “thoroughwort” is very scientific and technical, so it is also rarely used. Common people may not know this word, so it is not easy to comprehend. Moreover, it is not easy to grasp the rhythm. The word “orchid” was extensively used in ancient China. Many kinds of plants are called “orchids”. Therefore, translating “兰” into “orchid” is acceptable so as to avoid many troubles and ruin the rhythm of the original poem. “江离” is also a kind of plant and it is often translated into sweet herb. The Yangs and Hawkes translate it into “selinea”. And “辟芷” is a kind of plant which grows in quiet places. If it is translated into “fragrant angelica grown in secluded places”, the expression will be too long and will lose the original style of conciseness. Hawkes translates it into “shady angelica”, which cannot only be equivalent to “sidelines” to strike a balance, symmetry, and melody, but also shorten the sentence so as to

represent the beauty of sonority.

Animal Images

Let us look at two examples related to animal images in *Li Sao*:

Example 3

驷玉虬以桀鸞兮，溘埃风余上征。(Li Sao: 183-194)

	Xu	Yang & Yang	Zhuo	Hawkes
玉虬	dragon	jade-green dragons	four draught dragons	jade dragons
鸞	phoenix	birds with plumage gold	phoenix carriage	phoenix-figured car

Dragon and phoenix star my race, oh!
I rise on wind into the blue.^[3]

Swift jade-green dragons, birds with plumage gold,
I harnessed to the whirlwind, and behold.^[5]

Towards the sky, riding on a dust-raising gale,
My phoenix carriage and four draught dragons does sail!^[6]

I yoked a team of jade dragons to a phoenix-figured car,
And waited for the wind to come, to soar up on my journey.^[2]

In accordance with the annotated book of Wang Yi (王逸)^[11], the image “鸞” embodies a phoenix with rainbow colors, while the image “虬” embodies a young dragon without horns. On the other hand, the image “虬” is described as a young dragon having horns in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (山海经). The four scholars translate the image “玉虬” into “dragon” or “jade dragons” without any explanation.

“鸞” has another name in Chinese culture—“鸾鸟”. It symbolizes a man of lofty personality, and represents decent ministers in *Li Sao*. In Greek mythology, a phoenix constitutes a sacred long-lived bird. The bird can come back to life from ashes, symbolizing immortality. Despite the fact that the image of phoenix is endowed with a slightly different cultural connotation from that of “鸞”, they both can be linked with a mythical animal. However, the differences crops up in whether the image “鸞” refers to an animal or a carriage with animal patterns in the translations. Xu, Zhuo and Hawkes translate the image “鸞” into “phoenix”, but the Yangs take the strategy of in-

terpretation and translates “鸞” into “birds with plumage gold”. The Yangs’ translation of “鸞” can enable the target language readers to associate it with a holy bird quickly without much processing efforts.

Example 4

恐鹈鴂之先鸣兮，使夫百草为之不芳。(Li Sao: 299-300)

But autumn birds may cry in tears, oh!
And fragrant grass no longer sweet.^[3]

Spring is but brief, when cuckoos start to sing,
And flowers will fade that once did spread and spring.^[5]

Otherwise, once the cuckoos begin to chuckle,
The Fragrant Flowers will stand no chance to survive.^[6]

Beware lest the shrike sound his note before the equinox,
Causing all the flowers to lose their fine fragrance.^[2]

According to Baidu (<https://baike.baidu.com/item/鹈鴂>), “鹈鴂” refers to a bird that tweets in late spring and whose tweets are mournful. “鹈鴂”, also called “杜鹃” or “子规”, is a very common animal image in classical Chinese poetry. When Chinese people talk about “杜鹃”, they will think about spring and love or something like that. A notable fact is that its associative meaning is nearly the same in both classical Chinese poetry and Western poetry. In Chinese culture, the image “杜鹃” is usually used to demonstrate the theme of nostalgia, melancholy, and sorrowing for spring. In *Li Sao*, the image “鹈鴂” expresses the affection of sorrowing for spring. In other words, the tweeting of “鹈鴂” means that spring is transient and will pass before long. In accordance with the definition of Wikipedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuckoo>), the cuckoo is a distributed bird, and it has made a difference in human culture in the process of human history. In Greek, it is reckoned as holy because it has something to do with the goddess Hera. In India, cuckoos are sacred because it has a bearing on Kamadeva, also called Mara, who is the god of desire and longing according to Wikipedia. In Japan, the cuckoo stands for love. In Europe mythology, it is linked with spring, and with adultery, for example, in *Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

The Yangs and Zhuo take the strategy of literal translation to translate the image “鹈鴂” into “cuckoos”. Because of the similar association of “鹈鴂” in Chinese and Western culture, their translation can attain a sufficient

contextual effect without much processing effort. Shrikes are also famous as butcherbirds. They have a very special feeding habit that they thrust through the dead or wounded prey with a thorn or any available sharp pointed object to help themselves tear the flesh into small pieces. However, Hawkes substitutes the image “鸺鹠” with “shrikes” without a note. So readers have to make a great effort to comprehend the exact meaning of “鸺鹠”.

4.3 Summary

For one thing, this part makes a comparative analysis of the translation of cultural images in *Li Sao*, mainly discussing its animal and plant images. we conclude that there are five translation methods used in the four versions, namely transliteration, literal translation, annotation, omission, and interpretation.

For another, a combination of literal translation and annotation and a combination of domestication and foreignization seem to be the most effective and successful translation methods in the rendering of the cultural images in *Li Sao*. Therefore, the methods may be the perfect choice in the rendering of traditional Chinese classics full of cultural images.

5. Conclusions

With the stepping up of economic globalization, different cultures communicate with each other and spread around the globe. As China implements the “going out” strategy of Chinese culture, the rendering of classical works should be given priority. *Li Sao*, as the most important part of *Chu Ci*, has attracted much attention at home and abroad. We attempt to research translation strategies of plant and animal images in *Li Sao* by making a tentative study on the four versions of *Li Sao* by David Hawkes, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, Xu Yuanchong, and Zhuo Zhenying.

This article has studied plant and animal images in *Li Sao* and their connotations and made a comparative study on their translations. Through the observation and analysis of plant and animal images in *Li Sao*, the article has obtained the following findings.

First, the methods of domestication and foreignization are two main methods in translating the plant and animal images in *Li Sao*. Nevertheless, we cannot merely use one method when translating classical works because the two methods cannot be seen as totally different. Whatever strategy is taken, a translator should aim to express the contextual meaning to readers. Therefore, they should be applied together to complement each other so as to reproduce plant and animal images in *Li Sao* adequately.

Second, translators are supposed to have a profound comprehension of source text when translating classical works. In the meantime, translators should have a high level of proficiency in English and Chinese. In the four versions mentioned above, David Hawkes, Yang Xianyi Gladys Yang, Xu Yuanchong, and Zhuo Zhenying are all proficient in English and Chinese. Therefore, they express the cultural connotations of plant and animal images in *Li Sao* in plain English, compared to other versions of *Chu Ci*.

It should be pointed out that the article has its limitations to some extent due to our inadequate knowledge and the lack of references. Moreover, only the popular versions—the English versions by David Hawkes, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, Xu Yuanchong, and Zhuo Zhenying are studied, while the more recent English versions, such as Gopal Sukhu’s *The Songs of Chu* ^[29], have received little attention. Therefore, there is much to be desired for the further study of *Chu Ci* and its retranslation.

Author Contributions

Jiayi Liu is a graduate student of the School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, and as the first author, she finished the writing of the draft manuscript; as Liu’s supervisor, Chuanmao Tian revised and polished it in ideological content, language and style; he is a distinguished professor of translation studies at Yangtze University with a Ph.D. degree in Translation and Intercultural Studies. He is an advanced member of the Translators Association of China. His area of interest is translation theory and practice. He has published over ten articles concerning translation in major scholarly journals at home and abroad, such as *Chinese Translation Journal*, *Across Language and Cultures*, *Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice* *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, *LANS-TTS*, *Babel*, *English Today*.

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