



# On the Female Perspective Rewriting in *The Book of Jade*

Yun Zhang\*, Fufeng Yang

Foreign Languages Institute, Hunan Engineering Institute, Xiangtan 411104, Hunan, China.

**How to cite this paper:** Yun Zhang, Fufeng Yang. (2024) On the Female Perspective Rewriting in *The Book of Jade*. *Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science*, 8(10), 2437-2441.

DOI: 10.26855/jhass.2024.10.029

**Received:** September 22, 2024

**Accepted:** October 18, 2024

**Published:** November 15, 2024

\*Corresponding author: Yun Zhang, Foreign Languages Institute, Hunan Engineering Institute, Xiangtan 411104, Hunan, China.

## Abstract

Judith Gautier's *The Book of Jade* is one of the earliest French translations of ancient Chinese poems. Compared with le Marquis d'Hervey St Denys's *Poems of the Tang Dynasty* which has a smaller audience, *The Book of Jade* shocked the French literary world as soon as it was published and was soon translated into Danish, Russian, Portuguese, English, and German. Its translator, Judith Gautier, became famous overnight with this book. Since then, she has taken oriental charm as her creative characteristic and was elected as the first female academicien of the Académie Goncourt in 1910. Since its publication, *The Book of Jade* has attracted the attention of many researchers at home and abroad, and the research results are relatively rich. The main research direction is to discuss the fidelity problem of its translations from the perspective of translation practice. Most researchers think that the translation of *The Book of Jade* is not faithful to the original text and is even the author's "re-creation"; there are also some works that analyze the translation characteristics shown in its translations by means of relevant theories of deconstructionism and imagism. However, the current research has forgotten a very important characteristic of *The Book of Jade*—its preferred feminist characteristics. If analyzed from the theoretical perspective of feminism, many "unfaithful" translations in *The Book of Jade* are actually a kind of manipulation of literary text translation by translator Judith Gautier in order to "make women appear in language so that the world can see and hear women." This feminist thought runs through all aspects of *The Book of Jade*.

## Keywords

Female perspective; Judith; *The Book of Jade*

In recent years, discussions on the feminist perspective in translation theory have been increasing day by day. "Feminist theory has brought a new cultural turn to the translation field and also brought new research methods and perspectives to translation theory" (Arul, A. & Ganeshram, 2019). Different from the emphasis on fidelity in traditional translation theories, feminist translation theory pays more attention to the subjectivity of translators. Gogol's famous saying "An ideal translator should be like a piece of glass, so transparent that readers cannot feel his existence" fully reflects the positioning of translators in traditional translation theories, believing that translators should be "invisible" in works. However, feminist translation theory has always emphasized that translation is a kind of rewriting. Even if translators want to be fair and faithful to the original text, the final translation will still carry more or less their own viewpoints. They believe that "the requirement for translators to be invisible in traditional translation theories is as unreasonable and impossible to fully achieve as the 'silencing' imposed on women by patriarchal society." "Translators should not only be passive transmitters of meaning but also active creators of meaning" (Liu, F., 2006).

Judith Gautier's *The Book of the Jade* is one of the earliest French translations of ancient Chinese poems. Compared

with Deribere's *Poems of the Tang Dynasty* with a narrower audience, *The Book of the Jade* received extensive attention from the French academic community as soon as it was published and was soon translated into Danish, Russian, Portuguese, English, and German, and then spread to the whole of Europe. Its translator, Judith Gautier, became famous overnight with this book. Since then, she has taken oriental charm as her creative characteristic and was elected as the first female academician of the Académie Goncourt in 1910. Since its publication, *The Book of the Jade* has attracted the attention of many researchers at home and abroad, and the research results are relatively rich. The main research direction is to discuss the fidelity of its translations from the perspective of translation practice. Most researchers believe that *The Book of the Jade* is not faithful to the original text and is even the author's "recreation". For example, STOCES Ferdinand directly criticizes the infidelity of *The Book of the Jade* (Stoces, F., 2006); DETRIE Muriel proposes in her thesis that *The Book of the Jade* is a misreading of Chinese characters (DETRIE, M., 1989); Qian Linsen believes that *The Book of the Jade* is a creative rewriting based on the original ancient Chinese poems (Qian, L. S., 2004). There are also some works that analyze the translation characteristics shown in their translations by means of relevant theories of deconstructionism and imagism. For example, Ding Xin's master's thesis analyzes *The Book of the Jade* from the perspective of deconstructionism (Ding, X., 2015); Meng Hua starts with the theory of imagism to analyze (Meng, H., 2012). However, current research seldom focuses on another important characteristic of *The Book of the Jade*: its feminist characteristics. Based on this, the author intends to conduct a systematic analysis and research on three aspects: the feminist characteristics of the text of *The Book of the Jade*, Judith Gautier's life and work characteristics, and the fit between *The Book of the Jade* and ancient Chinese poems in terms of female characteristics.

## 1. The Female Perspective in *The Book of Jade*

### 1.1 Preferring Female Narrative Themes

Since *The Book of Jade* is a selected translation collection of ancient Chinese poetry, it shows an obvious female tendency when selecting poems, preferring more graceful boudoir lyrics. Looking at the 106 ancient Chinese poems in *The Poetry of the Tang Dynasty*, the author Judith divides them into eight themes, including 42 love poems, 21 autumn moon poems, 6 court poems, 8 war poems, 8 wine poems, and 21 friendship and travel poems. Among these themes, love and autumn moon are obvious female narrative themes, and there are 7 poems about resentful women in the court poems and war poems. In other words, the narrative themes with obvious female characteristics in *The Book of Jade* account for nearly three-quarters, which is a very high proportion (see Table 1 for details).

**Table 1. Classification of Poems with Different Themes in *The Book of Jade* (the number of resentful women poems in parentheses)**

Theme Classification	Love	Autumn	Court	War	Wine	Friendship & Travel	Total
Number of Poems	41 (3)	21 (3)	6 (4)	8 (3)	8	21	106
Poems with Female Characteristics	42	21	4	4	1		72

**Table 2. Classification of Li Bai's Poems with Different Themes in *The Book of Jade* and *The Poetry of the Tang Dynasty***

Theme Classification	Love Poems	Scenery and object-describing Poems	Homesickness Poems	Heroic Poems	Friendship Poems	Satirical Poems
<i>The Book of Jade</i>	13		2	7	1	
<i>The Poetry of the Tang Dynasty</i>	6	3	1	10	1	3

If *The Book of Jade* is compared with another ancient Chinese poetry translation of the same period—*The Poetry of the Tang Dynasty* by Marquis d'Hervey-Saint-Denys, the female characteristics of its selected poems are even more prominent. Take Li Bai's poems in the two translations as an example: *The Book of Jade*'s translation selected 18 of Li Bai's poems, and *The Poetry of the Tang Dynasty*'s translation selected 24 of Li Bai's poems. According to different emotional colors, the poems are divided into six different themes. It can be found that the love poems in Li Bai's selection of *The Book of Jade* account for nearly two-thirds, while the heroic poems only account for nearly

one-quarter. The situation in *The Poetry of the Tang Dynasty* is exactly the opposite, with love poems accounting for one-quarter and heroic poems and satirical poems accounting for nearly half (see Table 2 for details).

## 1.2 Preferring Female Narrative Perspectives

When analyzing ancient Chinese poetry, it can be found that "Chinese poems often omit the subject, allowing the poet not to let his own personality interfere with the poetic realm. The unstated subject in the poem can be easily assumed to be anyone, which makes Chinese poetry often have a non-personal universal property." In other words, the absence of a person becomes a blank in the work, waiting for the reader to experience it on their own. In contrast, European and American languages, with their strong logical grammar, often require a clear person. Therefore, when translating ancient Chinese poetry into French, the person is often added. And the poems after adding the person will inevitably form different narrative perspectives. The addition of the person in *The Book of Jade* reflects the subjectivity of Judith's female perspective. For example, in Bai Juyi's "The Song of the Rear Palace":

Original poem: Tears wet the silk handkerchief, dreams cannot be formed; late at night, the singing in the front hall can be heard. The beauty has not yet aged, but the favor has been cut off first; leaning against the incense burner, sitting until dawn.

In the original poem, there is no clear subject, and the identity of the narrator is unknown. It can be understood as an external focusing perspective for objective description; it can also be a first-person internal focusing perspective. However, Judith's translation uses a first-person internal focusing narrative perspective throughout. The narrator attaches directly to the protagonist and describes the scene through her own actions, perceptions, and mental activities. "Its immediacy and experience intensify the subjective lyrical effect." "During the reading process, it shortens the distance between the character and the reader, giving the reader a sense of intimacy." In *The Book of Jade*, for many resentful women poems and love poems with an absent subject and a female protagonist, Judith uses an internal focusing method to directly express female emotions. For example, Li Bai's "Crying of the Crows at Night", Du Fu's "The Beautiful Lady", Wang Changling's "The Boudoir Resentment", Qian Qi's "Imitating the Ancient Autumn Night Long" (partial translation), etc. all use this method.

In contrast, other French translators, for such resentful women poems, mostly prefer to use a third-person omniscient perspective for narration. For example, Marquis d'Hervey-Saint-Denys, who was contemporaneous with Judith, translated "Imitating the Ancient Autumn Night Long", and Xu Yuanchong translated Wang Changling's "The Boudoir Resentment" using a third-person omniscient perspective for narration. It can be seen that, compared with other translators, Judith is more inclined to use a female perspective for narration.

## 1.3 Compensation

One of the commonly used translation strategies by feminist translators is the so-called "compensation". The main purpose of compensation means is to obtain female discourse power through the "manipulation" of the text by the "other", and imprint the text with feminist colors (Wei, Q. Q., 2024). Zhu's translations of poems mainly use the compensation strategy to weaken the thought of women's "three obediences and four virtues" in traditional Chinese culture or highlight the image and role of women in poems. For example, "A Virtuous Wife's Lament" by Zhang Ji:

Original poem: You know I have a husband, yet you give me a pair of bright pearls. Touched by your lingering affection, I tie them to my red silk robe. My family's high tower rises next to the garden. My beloved holds a halberd in the Mingguang Palace. Knowing your intentions are as bright as the sun and moon, I vow to live and die with my husband. Returning your pearls with tears in my eyes, why didn't we meet before I was married?

JUDITH's translation is as follows: You sent me two bright pearls as a gift. Although I turned my head away, it was hard to hide the touch in my heart. / I immediately hung them on my robe. Against the red silk, they shone with a rosy glow. / How wonderful it would be if we met when I was still unmarried! However, I must leave you because I am already a married woman. / The two teardrops trembling on the edge of my eyelashes are the pearls I return to you.

The poem portrays the image of a virtuous wife who is loyal to her husband and refuses the pursuit of an amorous man. Originally, this poem by Zhang Ji uses an object to express his aspiration. It is used to express his political determination to be loyal to the imperial court and not be wooed by feudal towns. However, Judith's translation does not fully translate the original work. The fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth lines are all omitted and not translated. What Judith wants to express is the sorrow and reluctance of a young wife who is emotionally moved by marriage but has no choice. Obviously, the omitted lines are contradictory to the theme and emotion she wants to express, so she omits

them and does not translate them. In addition, in the original work, it is the two bright pearls that are returned to the gentleman, but in the translation, it becomes two teardrops. Compared with the original work, the translation obviously weakens the thought that "a woman should obey her husband after marriage." Obviously, in Judith's mind, etiquette should not restrain "love" and "freedom."

## 2. Reasons for the Female Perspective in *The Book of Jade*

### 2.1 Translator's Identity and Experience—The Translator's Active Choice

When *The Book of Jade* was published, Judith was only 22 years old. At this age, a young girl's longing and yearning for love are inevitable. Remy once commented that *The Book of Jade* is purer and sweeter than the works of Judith's father Theophile, and it is the "product of a girl's adolescent contradictions". This comment from the side confirms the girlish temperament reflected in *The Book of Jade*. In addition, Judith grew up in a wealthy environment and did not experience too many hardships before the age of 22. Therefore, she did not have a deep understanding of the reality and cruelty of society. This is why the most common themes in *The Book of Jade* are love, pastoral, and rarely involve heavy social reality problems. Taking the selection of Du Fu's poems as an example, *The Book of Jade* contains 17 of Du Fu's poems, but none of his famous "Three Farewells" and "Three Officials" that reflect social problems are included. Instead, most of them are love poems, friendship poems, and pastoral poems. It can be seen that the use of the female perspective in *The Book of Jade* is actually an expression of Judith's personal preference.

Secondly, the cultural circle in which Judith is located also has a profound impact on her creation. In the 19th century, France was a period when romanticism and aestheticism prevailed. Judith's father was Theophile, a pioneer of aestheticism. And Judith was the proudest child of Theophile. He often showed his daughter's works to his literary friends for comment. It can be said that her thoughts were deeply influenced by romanticism and aestheticism, especially her father's aesthetic view of "art for art's sake" which was well inherited by her. Some people later commented that Judith's works are full of imagination and exoticism and do not care about reality. This is in line with the claim of aestheticism that "poetry should be separated from politics and social issues and advocate ancient and exotic themes". The use of the female perspective in *The Book of Jade* helps her to stay away from political society and to exert her magnificent imagination in the small love stories of Chinese themes. The author believes that this choice of perspective has more or less the mark of Judith's ideological tendency.

### 2.2 Literary Misreading—The Translator's Passive Choice

Judith met her Chinese teacher, Ding Dunling, at the age of 18. With his help, Judith began the translation of ancient Chinese poetry and published it in the "Artist Magazine" under the pen name Judith Walter a year later. That is to say, Judith's translation of poetry and her Chinese learning were basically carried out simultaneously. It is conceivable that Judith, who had never been in contact with Chinese before, was unlikely to master Chinese proficiently in a short time. During the translation process, the lack of proficiency in the source language will inevitably lead to many misreading in the translation. Therefore, the lack of profound Chinese knowledge and insufficient understanding of Chinese culture are the reasons for the many literary misreading in Judith's translation of *The Book of Jade*. In the process of misunderstanding the original text, as a female representative of aestheticism, Judith is more inclined to use her own female perspective to understand and express the poetic meaning, thus causing the variation of the female perspective writing in *The Book of Jade*.

## 3. Conclusion

This paper, by combing through the feminist colors of *The Book of the Jade* and its translator, reproduces the feminist perspective that has been overlooked in the text. It traces the source of feminism in the translation and finds the original feminist characteristics of ancient Chinese poems, showing the interoperability and integration of the feminist perspective of *The Book of the Jade* and the feminist characteristics of ancient Chinese poems. At present, as international Sinology research ushers in another climax, the overlooked feminist perspective in *The Book of the Jade* is worthy of being mentioned and concerned. Undoubtedly, it provides a new idea for the translation of ancient Chinese poems: when translators translate ancient Chinese poems, they should first be aware of the typical characteristics of female metaphors. Secondly, they should adopt corresponding feminist translation strategies according to these characteristics, namely, female perspective, female consciousness, and feminist aesthetic psychology (Yang, X. W. &

Dai, X. H., (2024).

With the increasingly frequent exchanges between Chinese and Western cultures, and the continuous improvement of China's international status, international Sinology research is ushering in another climax. The phenomenon of "the spread of Chinese learning to the West" quietly appears on the international stage again. At this time, the translation of Chinese ancient poetry will surely set off another climax. In this context, can the overlooked female characteristics in "Jade Book" be brought up again? And how should the deep psychological structure of Chinese culture behind it be displayed to the Western world? In the process of Chinese ancient poetry being accepted in the Western world, how should we build a bridge for deep cultural and psychological exchanges? These are indeed questions worthy of further consideration.

## Funding

This work was a project supported by the Youth Scientific Research Fund of the Hunan Provincial Education Department, "Research on the Translation and Influence of Tang Poetry in France in the 19th Century from the Perspective of Socio-Translation Studies" (Grant No: 21B0673).

## References

- Arul, A. & Ganeshram. (2019). Discourse of Feministic Myth in Angela Carter's Shadow Dance. *IJELLH* 7.2, February, 372-380.
- DETRIE, M. (1989). Le Livre de Jade de Judith Gautier, Un livre pionnier. *Revue of Comparative Literature*, March, 301-324.
- Ding, X. (2015). On Judith Gautier's Creative Translation in "Le Livre de Jade" from the Perspective of Deconstructionism. Master's thesis, Ocean University of China, p. 25.
- Liu, F. (2006). Translation Fidelity and Translator Subjectivity from a Feminist Perspective. *Journal of Tianjin Foreign Studies University*, February, 39-47.
- Meng, H. (2012). The Unfaithful Beauty: A Brief Discussion on Judith Gautier's Chinese Poetry Translation. *Oriental Translator*, 4, 49-58.
- Qian, L. S. (2004). Light Comes from the East-French Writers and Chinese Culture. Ningxia: Ningxia People's Publishing House; pp. 182.
- Stoces, F. (2006). Sur les sources du Livre de Jade de Judith Gautier (1845-1917). *Revue of Comparative Literature*, March, 109.
- Wei, Q. Q. (2024). A Brief Analysis of Truncated Narration as the Core Critical Path of Ecofeminism. *Foreign Literature*, February, 43-52.
- Yang, X. W. & Dai, X. H. (2024). Research on the material body view of feminist new materialism. *Journal of Fujian Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, May, 158-168.