

Plants Have Hearts: Intersecting Biosemiotics, Translation Studies, and Chinese

Poems

Eng 409 Interdisciplinary Approach to English Study

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Abstract

Biosemiotics is the nonhuman expression via biological information changes in relation to their *umwelt*. Translation is the transferring between two codes. Since biosemiotics is about semiotics, the biological information as one sign can be translated into human signs. Chinese words exemplify such ideas through ideograms drawn from perceived biological information. When organized into poems which often include nature as scenery, biosemiotics is further highlighted on the sentence level and virtual interpretation highlighting subjectivity of nonhumans. Yet a translation inevitably is not able to preserve biosemiotics in Chinese words. Translations may foreground subjectivity of nonhuman species by retaining the meaning in the source text, as well as providing a virtual meaning where nonhumans are the subjects. This paper takes a qualitative approach through close reading of Tong poet Zhang Jiuling's poem "Thoughts II of IV", as well as analyzing the translation of the poem by Betty Tsang and an anonymous person. In this poem about orchid and cinnamon, biosemiotics is demonstrated through the formation of each word using ideograms and them organized into the same line to highlight relation with *umwelt*. The poem also emphasizes that grass and woods have heart, implying possibility for nonhuman species being subjective in meaning making. When translating the poem, the two translations in this paper succeed in preserving the

relation between plants and season through retaining the surface meaning. Tsang also

emphasize on the subjectivity of nonhumans and stating that they can “wish” when

anonymous fails to emphasize the subjectivity by placing the human as the subject.

Due to the difference between Chinese and English, both translations fail in retaining

the ideogram and foregrounding nonhuman subjectivity.

1. Introduction

Interdisciplinarity has always been a popular approach towards all areas of studies. The major reason is perhaps because knowledge is never constrained in a single way, and the world we are living in is never static. Therefore, a need to intersect 2 disciplinaries is encouraged in the scholarly world to expand and further develop each rim of knowledge. Or in the saying in Marais and Kull's essay linking biosemiotics and translation studies, interdisciplinarity "often lead[s] to the respective disciplines rethinking the conceptualization of their field of study" (2016, p.170), hence bringing unlimited potential to each discipline. Translation studies and biosemiotics are similar in a sense that both "are fields of study with no singular, unified approach" (Marais & Kull, 2016, p.170), therefore enabling possibility for intersection with endless potential. Biosemiotics in particular, contains the morpheme "semiotics" meaning signs. If it can be signs, it can be translated in a broad sense in translation, hence the interdisciplinarity. Putting the two fields of study together may inspire and discover new grounds, where "biosemiotics not only challenges the broader field of studies of TS to be grounded in a biosemiotics basis. It also challenges the conceptualisation of translation itself" (Marais & Kull, 2016, p.181).

Having named biosemiotics and translation as the grounds for intersection, this paper would analyze one of the works of Tong poet Zhang Jiuling, "Thoughts ii of

iv". A Chinese poem is chosen as a cultural text due to their frequent depiction of natural sceneries which may enable focus on the other-than-human species and an analysis on biosemiotics. The text analysis has two parts. The first part attempts to analyze how do Chinese words in the poem demonstrate biosemiotics in their origin and formation, followed by how biosemiotics is illustrated through the interpretation and the meaning in the lines of the poem. In the second part, through analyzing two versions of the interlingual translation of the poem by Betty Tsang and an anonymous person, this paper would attempt to determine whether biosemiotics mentioned in the first part is retained.

Keywords: Biosemiotics, Translation Studies, Chinese Ideogram, Chinese poems

2. Literature Review

2.1 What is biosemiotics

It shall first be noted that biosemiotics is not a particular concept itself, but a large field of study. This paper would narrow it down to the definition of Wendy Wheeler (2014), that is “joining the biological sciences (bio) and the humanities (semiotics-from *semeion*, Greek for sign)” (p.122). In a straightforward way it is the biological signs from salient observable biological features of a lifeform to the genetic formation of a being. These signs are not only the appearance of a lifeform, but also “[n]onverbal semiosis-gesture, expression, movement, sound, olfaction” (Wheeler,

2014, p.127). These are the biological information that is observed by humans as semiotics and treated as signs in the field of biosemiotics. In relation to translation, Marais and Kull (2016) consider biosemiotics as the study of “prelinguistic semiotics, i.e. the study of non-symbolic sign processes.” (Marais & Kull, 2016, p.171). Therefore, it has been clarified that nonhuman expressions are biological information that joins biology and semiotics together into biosemiotics.

On top of that, biosemiotics not only focus on the nonhuman biological information, the relation to *umwelt* shall also be highlighted. Wheeler (2014) emphasized that it is “not the genes *per se* (itself), but their interplay and interpretation in the cell that counts.” (p.122), and that interplay in the cell comes from their “creative semiotic interaction with their environments” (*ibid*). These environments are the *umwelt*, the subjective surrounding perceived by the living thing. The *umwelt* is full of environmental pressures, pressures that generate innovative readings, lead to new formulations and “activate problem-solving intelligence on the part of cells” (Wheeler, 2014, p.123) through various changes and adaptations in the cells. These changes urged by the *umwelt* is the active meaning-making displayed in the biological information. This goes subversive to the conventional idea that nonhumans such as animals and plants are passive. It is the meaning-making of nonhumans that make them intelligent and subjective in ecology

study. Examples can be zebras growing white and black stripe camouflage sharing resembling patterns to the savannas to hide from predators, or pandas developing cyanide-resistant stomachs to digest the bamboos which are high in cyanide to alleviate food supply. In another word, Biosemiotics is Darwin's evolution theory, but without stating one species turning into another species. Instead, it takes the idea of lifeform making biological changes to adapt their environment. In that case, biosemiotics itself is also interdisciplinary. Interplay can be a situation of one plus one plus one, where the "plus" as an interplay is more important than, if not as important as the "ones". In biosemiotics, it is not only the one as biological and *umwelt*, but the plus (relation) between the ones (biological information, *umwelts*) that counts.

Biosemiotics is critical to the study of humanities since it reminds us that nature and culture cannot be separated. We as humans are also part of nature. Language as our sign and expression "depend on forms of semiosis, and semiotic patterns and earthly habit formations" (Wheeler, 2014, p.128). The formation of language is linked to nature, as the "structural development in language is based on meaningful semiotic patterns and imitates homologically the (evolutionarily derived) processual and patterned becomings of organisms." (Wheeler, 2017, p.302). Ideograms such as Chinese have a high chance of taking inspirations from the observed biological information in the evolving organisms. A poem as a popular example often depicts

natural imageries and expresses feelings based on scenery. Chances are that a poem can be written in a way that nonhuman characters are active meaning-maker or meaning-carrier rather than being static in the background. Therefore, demonstrating biosemiotics in a poem through depicting biological information or establishing subjectivity of nonhumans involved. In the text analysis part, attention will be paid to whether biological information and subjectivity is presented in the poem.

2.2 The Intersection between Biosemiotics and Translation

When linking biosemiotics and translation, one shall look beyond the conventional idea of “only human signs are translatable”. Afterall, human language is our most familiar sign. Since biosemiotics treats biological information as semiotics, nonhuman expressions can be considered as translatable signs. Scholars agree that there are three levels of translation, the first level is intralingual, the second level is interlingual, and the third level is “intersemiotic translation, which is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (Marais & Kull, 2016, p.177). If one can turn a verbal sign into a nonverbal sign, there is no reason why it could not work vice versa. As long as it is a sign, it can be studied in translation studies. When scholars are debating whether nonhuman expressions can be successfully translated to human languages, there is already an existing language turning biological information into words and symbols that humans know.

Chinese could be the most appropriate demonstration of biosemiotics and translation. Chinese is a logograph, which is ideograms first originated from pictures. Unlike alphabets, logographs have radicals and strokes to form a word, and those parts of a word are images. There is a high chance that biosemiotics can be reflected in these words. In Chinese, particular radicals are plants related such as 艹 and 木 to signify plant origin or relation. These radicals are then drawn together with strokes to form a word, of which the strokes can be the biological information that humans observed. Despite some being abducted due to human lived experience, Chinese words nevertheless can be a demonstration turning one code, the biological information into another code that humans can comprehend.

2.3 Translating Ambiguity with Ecological Awareness

Chinese poems stand out perhaps because of its ambiguity, there is no absolute interpretation of a particular poem. Syntactically, unlike most English poems which follow the SVO sentence structure, Chinese poems have no certain sentence structure. Unique poems only consists of nouns such as 枯藤老樹昏鴉 小橋流水人家 are possible. Take the famous poem 靜夜思 by Li Bai, 舉頭望明月 低頭思故鄉 (raise head to watch the bright moon, lower head and think of home) consist of only verb and object, the subject of the line is missing and therefore open for interpretation. Since it is the poet who wrote the poem, a mainstream interpretation is that the human

poet is the subject to the poem. Additionally, the mentioning of a bright moon (most likely a full moon) coincide with the Chinese idea of 人月兩團圓 (the moon is round and the next of kin are gathered, “gather” in Chinese happens to be 團圓, oftentimes allocated with the roundness of the moon), with the time context collocates with festivals such as Lantern Festival and Mid-Autumn festival where family gathers, resulting with the common interpretation that the subject is human. This is the actualized meaning, the widely established meaning of the poem. Placing human as the subject is common even in poems where other-than-human species are the focus. Such interpretation is perhaps lead by the presumption that only humans are sapient, the lifeform capable of thinking and feeling, as well as to express themselves with their own language.

Yet it has been established in biosemiotics that animals and plants have their active expression too and are capable to form signs that are observed by humans. Such focus of nonhuman subjectivity is central to ecological awareness where nature is not passive but capable of its own meaning-making like humans do. To raise ecological awareness where nonhumans are the focus, the interpretation shall include subjects other than human. Therefore, when animals and plants are active in expression, those raise head to look at moon and lower head to think of home can be nonhumans instead of humans. This is the virtual meaning as opposed to the

actualized meaning, where new interpretation of human not being the subject is possible. Afterall, the meaning of “virtual” can be things that has yet not been actualized. Such virtual meaning is essential when considering interpretation and translating a poem where nonhumans are the focus.

3. Research Questions and Hypothesis

With the theoretical framework mentioned, we can now proceed with the research questions.

1. How do Chinese words and Chinese poems demonstrate the interplay between translation and biosemiotics?

2. Do English translations of the poem retain the linkage to biosemiotics?

For question 1, it is hypothesized that Chinese words demonstrate how nonhuman nonverbal expressions as biological information in relation to their *umwelt* could be translated into human signs as the intersemiotic level of translation. Chinese poems in advance further illustrate biosemiotics in terms of biological information in relation to their *umwelt* and the subjectivity of nonhuman species through meanings on a sentence level and the poem’s possible interpretations. Additionally, the focus on nonhuman species may imply an ecological awareness which recognizes the subjectivity of nonhumans in meaning-making. A null hypothesis is made when

words and sentences in a poem have no distinguishable biological information and the sentence which organizes words together fails to imply biosemiotics.

For question 2, let's first presuppose words are constructed in reference with biological information, the words organize in a sentence reflects biological information in relation to their *umwelt*, and subjectivity of nonhuman species is highlighted through various means in the poem, the focus shall be whether a Chinese to English interlingual translation of the poem should retain the biosemiotics. It would be a null hypothesis if translations fail to translate the biological information and the relation with its *umwelt*, Chinese ideograms and their connection inevitably are missing due to the difference between the two languages, and the translations may also provide only one interpretation towards the humans rather than the nonhumans central to this poem.

4. Methodology

This paper will adopt a qualitative approach through close reading of the chosen texts for analysis towards the research questions. To answer question 1, analysis takes reference with the origin of a single word with translated reference from Hui (2015) to point out the relation between Chinese words and biosemiotics. On a sentence level, this paper will attempt listing out linkage between the nonhuman and the environment, as well as interpretations of the poem which may imply biosemiotics

and the subjectivity of nonhumans. To answer question 2, this paper lists out and compares two versions of translation, and analyzes if demonstration of biosemiotics in the previous part stays intact in the translations.

5. Text Analysis

5.1 Text Selection

It shall be noted that not every poem fits the analysis for biosemiotics. The ideal poem should be focusing on the nonhuman and their *umwelt* for demonstration of biosemiotics. Therefore, Tang poet Zhang Jiuling's poem "Thoughts II of IV" is chosen. Its Chinese version and English surface meaning can be found in Appendix 1.

5.2 Biosemiotics on the Word Level and Sentence Level

Since biosemiotics is about the biological information as a nonhuman expression in relation to their *umwelt*, now considered as signs transferred into the Chinese language, focus shall be allocated to how words are formed and how they are organized in a sentence to demonstrate biosemiotics. The first two lines depict plants and season as the scenery, whereas the seventh line displays subjectivity of nonhumans.

The first line is 蘭葉春葳蕤. 蘭 is orchid and the part "蘭" signifies its sound and its sign in Chinese. Its ideogram is a wooden gate by the door which grows herb

in it, hence the wood (木) with a rectangle with two dots signifying the herb to form the stroke 束 in a door (門) and the radical 艹 to signify leaf. The word 葉 is leaf. The wood (木) at the bottom signifies the tree. The three vertical lines symbolize branches of a tree, and three points of intersection on a horizontal line symbolize the leaves, hence the part 世 in 葉 (Yuan, 2007, p.217). The ideogram 葉 hence depicts a picture of leaves on a tree. 春 means spring, the season Spring. Its original ideogram is “the Sun(日) in the middle, surrounded by plants from the North, South and East” (Yuan, 2007, p.5). The word changed but the sun (日) still retains. The word 威蕤 is unusual even in Chinese. 威 is another word 威 meaning prestige and power under the radical 艹. 蕤 is formed by three parts, 艹, 犀, and 生. 艹 again is the typical radical symbolize grasses. Interesting is 犀 and 生. 犀 means pig in Chinese, perhaps meaning fruitful, multiplying like the livestock do. 生 is a plant growing from the land, where 一 is the land, and 丿 on the side is the leaf of a plant (Yuan, 2007, p.501). Biosemiotics itself is already established here on the word level which dense leaf is the perceived biological information.

Further establishing biosemiotics is the sentence itself. The radical 艹 is frequent in this sentence in four out of five words with the latter two 威蕤 being describing the scenery. The intensive use of 艹 may imply dense leaves as the biological information that is seen by the poet. And this dense leaves is organized

together with the word 春, which brings up the scene of flourishing leaves in Spring.

Biosemiotics is the biological information in relation to their *umwelt*. Spring is a season, the season being marked as the warm and moist one after Winter, the warm environmental pressure that can be felt by the plant as their *umwelt* and urging them to grow, hence the image of intense leaves. Chances are, Spring with the Sun(日) surrounded by plants as a word is the *umwelt* Chinese word-makers recognize as having close relation with the growth of leaves, and they proceed to translate this sign into a Chinese ideogram. The poet then makes use of such biological information of dense leaves in relation to the warm spring. Therefore not only demonstrate biosemiotics on the word level, but also on the sentence level of how the poet put 蘭葉 the plant in the *umwelt* of 春 leading to the state of 蔚蕤.

The second line is 桂華秋皎潔. The ideogram 華 is just “the shape of a flower” (Yuan, 2007, p.221). 桂 as cinnamon has two parts, the radical 木 signifies that it is a plant and the stroke is 圭. According to Yuan, 圭 isn’t only the sound of the word, it is the second smallest measuring unit in China (2007, p.199) with 粟 being the smallest measuring unit. Six 粟 is one 圭. Cinnamon flowers are small as 粟 with the shape of grain. They also grow together, echoing the image of 圭 being formed by several 粟 together (Yuan 2007, p.199). 秋 is Autumn, the Chinese word now is the image of fire next to crops, but its original ideogram is fire burning under a

grasshopper. “The ancient people found that grasshoppers make sounds in Autumn, uses its image to conceptualize Autumn”, and the fire under them is the image of “after harvesting in Autumn, burn the stem of the crop to remove pests” (Yuan, 2007, p.5). 皎潔 means white and clear together. However, they don’t usually describe flowers, but instead the Moon. Ignoring the 皎潔, first three words originate from their ideograms are biological information of the plant, the flower and the season, biological information that has meaning to humans.

On a sentence level, 蘭葉春葳蕤 is much more direct, the dense leaves in Spring. Yet 桂華秋皎潔 in a sentence level might require more interpretation to highlight the biosemiotics. 桂華 is actually 桂花. Since 華 is the shape of a flower, 華 and 花 is interchangeable sounds in Chinese. If the focus on the first line is leaves and Spring, then the focus of this line is flower and Autumn. Autumn as a season is usually distinguished by its dry and cool weather. Combined with the hot and humid Summer that comes before to further enhance plant growth after Spring, and the cold Winter that comes behind which no plants have leaves and flowers, Autumn is the season in which fruits are ripe and ready for harvest. At this time the cinnamon is in full bloom and ripe just like other plants. Autumn is the umwelt leading to cinnamon flower blooming as the nonhuman expression caused by the environment. 皎潔 is used conventionally to describe the Moon (particularly full moon). The Moon has a

few full blooms in a year, yet the most significant one to Chinese humans happens to be in Autumn (Mid-Autumn festival). The white and clear Moon shares attributes with cinnamon flowers which ripe by the corresponding time. Pan (2001) recognizes that linking cinnamon with the description of the Moon means that “the white flower as white and clear as the moon which blossoms in Autumn” (Pan, 2001, p.9). It is a common habit for ancient people to “metonymize the Moon as cinnamon, calling the Moon Palace as ‘The Cinnamon Palace.’” (Pan, 2001, p.9). Laying out all the human interpretation clarifies the biosemiotics behind this line. Cinnamon flowers bloom as white and clear as the Moon in Autumn, underlining the biosemiotics of flowers are at full bloom in Autumn where the weather as *umwelt* simulates plant behaviour. Since biosemiotics involves semiotics, there are inevitable human abductions giving meanings established by humans rather than what they are biologically. Nevertheless, biosemiotics is demonstrated here. Like the first line about leaves and Spring, biosemiotics is not only demonstrated on the word level, but also on the sentence level of how the poet put 桂華 the flower in the *umwelt* of 秋 leading to the state of as 皎潔 as a Moon.

Skipping four lines describing how prosper and lively the scene is for the ones in the forest to rejoice from, the seventh line is 草木有本心. 草 as grass in the original ideogram is just ++, and the 早 is there just for clues of pronunciation (Yuan, 2007,

p.181). ⁺⁺ is specifically the very shape of a grass. 木 as wood is simply the image of a tree, with the roots and branches (Yuan, 2007, p.194). When the word 本 means “itself”, its ideogrammatic origin sticks to plants. The word 本 is highly similar to the word 木, as the ideogram of it is the ideogram of 木 with three dots signifying the roots. “In this ideogram three dots of roots are linked into a horizontal line (Yuan, 2007, p.215) to form the word. It could be the best example of natureculture where language comes from nature. 心 is “the very shape of a heart” (Yuan, 2007, p.364). When there is no relation to the *umwelt*, these four words, 草, 木, 本, 心 are all the very shape of their biological counterparts. They are the biological information as signs turned into signs intelligible to at least Chinese humans. The words themselves are the most basic and straightforward biological information.

There is no *umwelt* to establish biosemiotics, yet it highlights the subjectivity of nonhuman species. As mentioned that the Chinese word for 心 is the very shape of the heart. Ancient people believe that the heart is responsible for thinking and feeling. An emphasis on the heart entails that nonhuman species, specifically the plants which we typically consider passive and static, are able to think, feel, and most importantly, capable of meaning-making themselves. The words being the very shape of the objects they describe further reinforce the idea that nonhumans, biotics and abiotics have their own meaning making, rather than waiting for humans to give them

meaning. It is the ecological awareness that returns subjectivity back to the nonhumans. In the poem, this line is followed by 何求美人折. The two lines together can have the interpretation of “plants flourish and blossom because it is their own thoughts and willingness, not because they want the appreciation of the beauty”. The subjectivity and the possibility of active meaning-making highlights the biosemiotics and pushes the poem to its climax.

Having listed out the biosemiotics interplay with translation through turning biological information as a sign into another sign that is ideograms and Chinese, as well as establishing the implication of biosemiotics on the sentence level, these ideas shall be the focus in the translation criticism.

5.3 Translations of the Poems

There are 2 versions of translation included, one translated by Betty Tseng, and another has no specified translator. For convenience, this paper will refer to Tseng’s version as version 1, and the unnamed version as version 2. Translations are attached in Appendix 2. This part analysis will focus on whether the translations are able to retain biosemiotics in the Chinese word formation and the meaning on a sentence level.

Biosemiotics is demonstrated in the first two lines, orchid grows dense leaves in relation to the *umwelt* Spring; and the cinnamon flower blossoms in relation to the

umwelt Autumn. A translation that ensures the retention of biosemiotics shall not only preserve the relation between plants and seasons, but also the ideogram of each word.

The first two lines in both of the translations put leaves and Spring, cinnamon and Autumn together to retain the relationship. Maintaining the most surface meaning is necessary to create equivalence between source text and target text. Yet when version 1 “In spring orchid leaves flourish” still preserved the picture of intense leaves growth in the first season of the year, version 2 “Tender orchid-leaves in spring” fails to retain the image of dense leaves in Spring. The adjective “tender” means soft. It doesn’t seem to match the image of 蔓, let alone the overwhelming usage of 蔓 painting the imagery of grass in the first line. As for retaining the ideogram of the word, both versions fail. Failure is inevitable due to the difference between Chinese and English. Chinese is a logograph or ideogram, originated from pictures. These images are biological information, of which the alphabets can never manage to recreate with sequences of letters. 春 is the Sun surrounded by plants, there is no way that the imagery can be maintained with “s” “p” “r” “i” “n” “g”. 秋 is burning crops after harvest to kill the pest, there is no way that the letter sequence “a-u-t-u-m-n” can signify the meaning. Similarly, the overwhelming grass growth in 蔓 cannot simply be symbolized by a “flourish”. When the relation between nonhuman

expressions and the *umwelt* is kept in the translations, the imageries of the Chinese words cannot be retained regardless of the effort.

草木有本心 is central to the poem, as well as the ecological implication that plants have hearts for active meaning-making. The explicit expression of “plants have hearts” might sound strange to Westerns. If the concept of 心 has to be replaced with an equivalent concept, it shall be conscious, mind or sentience, or any other methods to highlight subjectivity. Version 1 refers plants as “verdure” and the word closest to heart is “natural instincts”. The plants as a subject also “wish” not to be discovered, where “wish” is an active action. Whereas in version 2, this line is combined with the previous lines and translated as “Yet why will you think that a forest-hermit, Allured by sweet winds and contented with beauty, Would no more ask to-be transplanted Than Would any other natural flower?”, allocating focus to the sentiment to the human hermit where the heart and subjectivity of plant is omitted.

Another line worth mentioning is the last line 何求美人折, where the two versions seem to intergrade it and translate it differently. In the Chinese, 何 is a usual marker of a question. Despite it is ambiguous whether 草木有本心 何求美人折 is intended to be a statement or a question, it is perhaps this question marker lead to both translators translating the last two lines as questions. In version 1, this line is translated as “Why would it wish for discovery by the refined?” where the subject “it”

refers to the verdure and plants. It also follows a similar structure of the source text and only translate the last line as a question. Version 2 on the contrary, integrated the previous few lines and the translation is “Yet why will you think that a forest-hermit, Allured by sweet winds and contented with beauty, Would no more ask to-be transplanted Than Would any other natural flower?”. The action of wishes not to be transplanted is now allocated to the hermit (presumably human) instead of the plants, placing the hermit as the subject of the question and the focus of subjectivity that comes before nonhuman species. Therefore, diminishing the heart and subjectivity of the plants and oppose the central idea of 草木有本心. An additional note is that not only structurally the line 草木有本心 becomes “Than Would any other natural flower?” where the action of being picked is missing, it only includes flowers out of all plants. This translation omitting the explicit heart all undermines the element of the “heart” in plants, where the subjectivity of the hermit comes before plants. When version 1 still recognizes the heart of plants as instincts and it is a fact that they “wish” as a demonstration of their subjectivity, version 2 foregrounds the hermit as the subject and omits the subjectivity of the plants. Comparatively, version 1 adds subjectivity to the nonhumans by placing the verdure as the subject of the question alongside the action “wish”.

5.4 Translating the Ambiguity for Ecological Awareness

Poems typically have their conventional interpretation and Tong poems are no exception. It is usual for a poem to first describe a scenery, then express the feelings of the poet overtly or implicitly. Since missing a subject in the line is common, the subjectivity oftentimes is allocated to the poet. It is common that despite the nonhuman characters are the focus, the interpretation often centers the poet and claims the poet attempts to express sentiment through the nonhuman characters present. Biosemiotics stressing on the subjectivity of nonhumans can be foregrounded through alternative interpretation where nonhumans are the center of interpretation.

The message of this poem lies on the last two lines: 草木有本心 何求美人折. A conventional interpretation is usually: Through praising the beauty of orchid and cinnamon and stating that these plants have these attributes just because this is how they naturally are, rather than to please and be picked by people who like them. With this poem the poet is expressing that his talent is naturally there, and not for the emperor of that time to use. Of which matches the background information which the poet went exiled because of his colleague. Besides, the Chinese title of the Poem 感遇 directly translated to English as feeling, and the encounter can be separated to form another words. 感 can be 感嘆, exclaimate plaint on the 遇, 際遇 experience of how one is treated. All clues seem to be pointing towards the poet using plants to imply that his talent is naturally there just like the plants. And the plants are what they

are, not for pleasing people, so is the poet. Such an interpretation hugely undermines the subjectivity of nonhumans. The alternate biosemiotics approach might be returning to the primary meaning. Plants actually have their heart and mind, capable of meaning-making. And have no need to please the humans around them. Therefore, placing the focus on what the poem itself actually mean and how subjectivity is present in plants. Yet, as seen in the previous paragraph, the translation, particular version 2, places the hermit, the human as the focus instead of the plants, further omitting the subjectivity of the plants. Whereas version 1 not only follows the structure of the Chinese poem, but also states that the plants can wish to highlight biosemiotics. Version 1 sticks to the meaning of the source text to foreground the subjectivity of nonhumans when version 2 focus on the hermit like what conventional interpretation does.

Another line that can be ambiguous is 誰知林棲者 聞風坐相悅. In the conventional interpretation, 林棲者 must be the one who exile into the nature, the hermit. He smells the wind containing the smell of the plants and feels happy. The subjectivity goes to the poet as both versions translate 林棲者 as “hermit in the wood” (version 1) and :forest-hermit”(version 2) . However, the meaning of 林棲者 is never specific, for 者 not only means human be an individual. Since 林棲者 is ambiguous and open for virtual interpretation, why can’t it be the animals living in

there, and even other plants acknowledging each other's presence? In that way the subjectivity goes to the animals and nonhumans. In the translations, there is a chance that the translator takes the human-centered approach and allocates subjectivity to humans and undermines the biosemiotics stating nonhumans are also active in meaning-making.

6. Conclusion

The interdisciplinary between biosemiotics and translation lies in the formation of Chinese words translating biological information as signs into human signs. Chinese poems organize these words into lines which often depict natural scenes and further highlights the biosemiotics between living things and their *umwelt*. A poem can also foregrounds the subjectivity of nonhuman species through its underlying meaning and the interpretation alternate from the human being subjective. It might be established here that intersemiotic translation between biological information and Chinese exemplifies the intersection between biosemiotics and translation.

Interlingual translation of Chinese poems into English shall pay attention to these biosemiotic details.

In response to question 1, the poem "Thought II of IV" not only highlights the biological information of dense leaves and blooming cinnamon flowers in their respective *umwelt* Spring and Autumn, the poem also states that plants have heart

implying nonhuman species such as plants which is usually viewed as passive is capable of meaning-making and is in fact conscious. In response to question 2, the translations can retain the relationship with nonhumans involved and their *umwelt* in both versions by keeping the surface meaning in the first two lines of the poem. Comparatively, version 1 expresses the subjectivity better as the heart of plant is retained through them being the subject and is able to “wish”. Translating the ambiguous 林棲者 as hermit still barring the translations from nonhuman-centered. Yet on the interlingual level, translations in this paper fail to retain biosemiotics and nonhuman subjectivity as the ideogram inevitably failed due to the difference between English and Chinese. We might just accidentally illustrate that the difference between Chinese and English, of which commonly paired together, is further than Chinese and nonhuman expressions.

As a closing remark, I would like to propose my own version of translation of the poem so that biosemiotics demonstrated in the source text can be preserved in the target text. When the imagery of words can never be transferred in English, one shall translate the poem according to its surface meaning. Hence maintaining the ecological awareness from 草木有本心, as well as enabling retain the ambiguous to provide chances for alternate interpretation where nonhuman characters in the poem can be the subject. The translation goes as followed:

Orchid leaves flourish densely in Spring

Cinnamon flowers blossom brightly in Autumn

Such exhibition of vitality

Portrays the season lively

Plants have hearts: Intersection between Biosemiotics, Translation Studies, and

Chinese Poem

Those who lives in the forest

Rejoice together in the wind

Grasses and woods have their innate heart

How would they desire to be picked by the beauty

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Appendix 1 Chinese version of the poem

張九齡 – 感遇 四首其二

蘭葉春葳蕤

桂華秋皎潔

欣欣此生意

自爾為佳節

誰知林棲者

聞風坐相悅

草木有本心

何求美人折

Appendix 2 English translations of the poem

Version 1. Translated by Betty Tseng

Thoughts II of IV

In spring orchid leaves flourish,

In autumn cinnamon trees blossom brightly.

Such exhibition of vitality

Portrays seasons lively.

How hermits in the woods

In these prospects take delight.

The verdure knows to natural instincts keep,

Why would it wish for discovery by the refined?

Version 2. Translated by Anonymous

Thoughts II

Tender orchid-leaves in spring

And cinnamon-blossoms bright in autumn

Are as self-contained as life is,

Which conforms them to the seasons.

Yet why will you think that a forest-hermit,
Allured by sweet winds and contented with beauty,
Would no more ask to-be transplanted
Than Would any other natural flower?