

# A Comparative Study of Two Spanish Versions of the Poem *Junzi Xielao* of *Shi Jing*

WU Qian

Autonomous University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

The purpose of this paper is to do a comparative study of two complete Spanish versions of *Shi Jing* with a detailed analysis of the poem *Junzi Xielao*. The culture and personal backgrounds of the two translators, their translation purposes and intended readers largely influenced the translating style and technique of the two versions.

*Keywords:* *Shi Jing*, Spanish translation, traditional Chinese culture, extratextual factors

## Introduction

*Shi Jing* is the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry. As one of the “Five Classics” (五经) of Confucianism, this anthology occupies a transcendental position in the Chinese civilization and has a profound impact on the development of Chinese literature. It is also commonly regarded as a treasure of the world literature. *Shi Jing* began to spread westward as early as the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century, almost all the major European languages have their translations, and even one language has several versions (Shan, 1995). These translations have opened a wide window through which the westerners could understand and appreciate Chinese culture. But Spanish-speaking readers didn’t have the opportunity to approach the complete translation of this great work in their native tongue until 1984. It was in this year that *Romancero Chino* was published by Editora Nacional in Madrid. At present, we have two complete translations into Spanish. The other one, entitled *Libro de los Cantos*, was published in 2013 by Alianza Editorial. These two versions were produced in two different ages, and the translation purposes and intended readers of them vary from each other.

As Hurtado (2013, p. 507) explained, “la traducción es un acto complejo de comunicación, ya que se realiza entre dos espacios comunicativos diferentes (el de partida y el de llegada) e intervienen muchas variables”. We totally agree with the author that translation is not a simple transfer of linguistic units between different systems of predetermined equivalences, but is an act of communication in which several factors intervene. To carry out this study we want to situate ourselves in the descriptive studies of translation. Because in the face of prescriptive rigidity, commonly expressed in terms of “literal”, “free”, “correct” or “incorrect”, the descriptive studies of translation do not pretend to say whether a translation is correct or incorrect, but to explain the linguistic and extralinguistic factors that give rise to a certain translation. In this paper we will do a comparative study taking into consideration all the extratextual factors.

---

WU Qian, Ph.D. Student, Department of Translation and Interpreting, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain; research areas/interests: translation and intercultural studies.

In the first part, we will introduce the original work *Shi Jing*. The second part is devoted to the comparative study from a macro point of view. On one hand, we will carry out a general presentation of the two Spanish translations. On the other hand, we will analyze those extratextual factors that surround the two translations. In the last part, we will study in detail the translation of *Junzi Xielao*, one of the most famous and representative poems of *Shi Jing*.

### *Shi Jing*

*Shi Jing*, translated variously as the “Book of Songs”, “Book of Odes”, or “Classic of Poetry” is the first poetic anthology of China. Almost all Chinese know it. It comprises 305 poems dating from the beginning of the Western Zhou period (1046-771 BC) to the mid-Spring and Autumn period (approx. 771-476 BC). It is generally acknowledged that the poems of *Shi Jing* were collected by dedicated governmental officers in Zhou Dynasty, then edited and composed with music and dance.

*Shi Jing* is divided into three parts. The first part, called *Guo Feng* (Airs), comprises 160 local folk songs collected in 15 different localities. It is the most valued part or essence of the anthology. Most of the poems that enjoy great prestige come from this part. These poems vividly describe the customs, marriage, rebellion of the people against oppression, the desire to achieve freedom, and other aspects of the society. It is like a window through which we can see the Chinese civilization of more than 2,500 years ago. The second part *Ya* (Court Hymns) contains *Da Ya* (Lesser Court Hymns) and *Xiao Ya* (Major Court Hymns). 105 poems are included in this part. *Ya* is said to be the classical music in the capital area of the Zhou Empire. The last part *Song* (Eulogies) consists of the songs that the emperor or governors used in events like offering sacrifices to gods or ancestors. It elaborates the achievement of the governing classes. 40 poems are included.

Confucius thought very highly of the social, political, and didactic functions of *Shi Jing*. Being one of the classic canons of Confucianism, *Shi Jing* was an essential part of the education of Chinese intellectuals for thousands of years. Even today, many moral principles present in *Shi Jing* continue to be praised by people. As for the syntax, they are mainly composed of four Chinese characters, with a clear, harmonious, simple and accessible style for the reader.

### **The Two Spanish Translations**

#### ***Romancero Chino***

The first complete Spanish version, named *Romancero Chino*, was published in 1984 by Editora Nacional.

The translator of this version, Carmelo Elorduy<sup>1</sup> (1901-1989), was born in 1901 in a northern town of Spain. When he was 19 years old, influenced by two missionaries, San Ignacio and San Francisco Javier, Elorduy collaborated in the Society of Jesus as a novitiate. His first trip to China was in 1926 and he worked at the Jesuit mission located in Wuhu City, Anhui, where he remained for several years. In 1929, he returned to Spain to finish his studies in Theology and Philosophy and was ordained a priest. In 1934, he returned to China

---

<sup>1</sup> The material about Elorduy’s livelihood mainly comes from two articles. One is “20 世紀西班牙漢學家：杜善牧 The Spanish Sinologist in the 20th Century: Carmelo Elorduy” of José Ramón Álvarez (雷孟篤) collected in 汉学研究通讯 (2008, 27 (3), pp. 30-33). The other one is “La traducción del chino al español en el siglo XX: Carmelo Elorduy”. The author of this article is the translator of the second complete Spanish version, Gabriel García-Noblejas. The article was published in *Centro Virtual Cervante* (<https://cvc.cervantes.es/obref/china/carmelo.htm>).

to promote and make known the Catholic religion to the Chinese people. In 1951, he moved to Macao and the following year to Taichung City, and it was there where he began and later developed his prolific activity, both as a teacher and as a translator. In 1959, he had to return to Spain for health reasons. While at rest he began to translate some Chinese classics. In 1962, he returned to Taiwan and devoted himself totally to the research and translation of Chinese classical works, especially in the philosophical and political field. He died in 1989 at the New Nursing of the Society of Jesus of Spain.

Thanks to the fruitful period of time that Elorduy spent in China, he became a specialist in that language. In the field of translation, Elorduy is a pioneer in the translation of Chinese classics. Many of his translations were the first to be made directly from Chinese to Spanish. As García-Noblejas says, Carmelo Elorduy deserves to be considered one of the great translators of Chinese into Spanish. Elorduy's life is from a missionary to a great sinologist.

The book *Romancero Chino* has altogether 507 pages including a prolegomena of 17 pages, the Spanish translation of all the poems and appendix.

The prolegomena is one of the most noticeable features of the book. It deals with every aspect of the anthology: its creation and compilation, its historical background, annotations by ancient Chinese scholars, and its historical value.

It is worth mentioning that in the prolegomena Elorduy used “El Tao (Logos estoico)” to transfer the concept “道” (dao). “道” is a Chinese ideological concept and refers to the primordial essence or the fundamental aspect of the universe. Stoicism is a school of Hellenistic philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium in Athens in the early 3rd century BC. By using a term typical of Greek philosophy, Elorduy's interest in comparing the Chinese ideological concept with Western philosophical thought is perceived.

For almost all the translated poems, Elorduy adds before them a brief annotation in order to present the main theme.

In the appendix, he provides a chronological table of the poems and an index of proper names with Chinese characters. These indexes are like a small dictionary, which facilitates the reading and understanding of it by the reader.

The main purpose of Elorduy would be to introduce the cultural aspects of the anthology to the Spanish community. Until the publish of this translation, only had indirect translations of English or French. Elorduy would have seen the need to make a complete and direct translation into Spanish of a work that had such significant importance for Chinese civilization. Secondly, we believe that the translation would also be aimed at spreading Chinese literature and culture to the western missionaries, in order to help them to fulfill their mission work and spread Christianity efficiently.

As to the readers of this version, they mainly include two types of recipients: those Spanish readers interested in approaching Chinese culture and civilization and those Jesuit missionaries in China.

In 1986 Elorduy received the National Translation Prize (Premio Nacional de traducción) for this translation.

### ***Libro de los Cantos***

The second translation, entitled *Libro de los Cantos*, was published in 2013 by Alianza Editorial.

The translator of this version is Jesús Gabriel García-Noblejas Sánchez-Cendal.<sup>2</sup> He graduated in Spanish philology at the University of Oviedo (1984-1989), where he later became a PhD (2002) with the thesis “La traducción de la literatura del chino al español: un relato de Gan Bao”. In 1993 he moved to China, where he stayed five years. During his stay in China, he worked as an English teacher at the Beijing Number 5 Institute and as a Spanish teacher at the Capital Normal University. Since the year 2003, he has worked as a professor of translation Chinese-Spanish at the Faculty of Translation and Interpretation at the University of Granada. In addition, since the year 2007, he is the president of the Spanish Association of Teachers for the teaching of Chinese (AEPEC). As for his works, García-Noblejas has an extensive production of Chinese culture and literature, dedicated to both translation and academic research.

The translator kindly gave us a telephone interview, from which we have been able to extract many important data. He tells us that he tried to make a different version of the first one. Because Elorduy did not seek so much to produce a literary discourse, but a discourse that was accurate in terms of knowledge. Therefore, in his translation he tried to emphasize both the traditional Chinese culture and the literary beauty. As to the readers, this translation is aimed at a Spanish-speaking audience that expects a certain literary value.

The book has 372 pages in all, divided into four parts: An index of Chronology of the dynasties, Prologue written by Luis Alberto de Cuenca, Preliminary study and Poems.

His version is highly evaluated by many literary critics, for its careful edition, for its introduction of preliminary study and also, for its simple and understandable language. As Luis Alberto de Cuenca says in the prologue, “el castellano utilizado por el traductor en sus versiones no puede ser más elegante, preciso y exquisito”.

### Comparative Study of the Poem *Junzi Xielao*

In this part we will compare in detail the two translations of the poem *Junzi Xielao* (君子偕老), one of the most famous and representative poems of *Shi Jing*.

The protagonist of this poem is Xuan Jiang (宣姜). She had an incestuous relationship with his father-in-law, Wei Xuangong (卫宣公), the governor of the State Wei (卫). The poem describes the beauty of Xuan Jiang, as well as her striking and beautiful dress. For that reason, in this poem there are many references of traditional Chinese garments.

The following are the source poem and the two translations.

(Source text):

君子偕老，副笄六珈。委委佗佗，如山如河，象服是宜。子之不淑，云如之何！  
 玼兮玼兮，其之翟也。鬢髮如雲，不屑鬢也。玉之瑱也，象之掎也，  
 揚且之皙也。胡然而天也？胡然而帝也？  
 瑳兮瑳兮，其之展也。蒙彼縹緜，是繼袿也。子之清揚，揚且之顏也。  
 展如之人兮，邦之媛也！ (Li, 2015, p. 78)

(Elorduy's translation):

Envejecer con su señor

<sup>2</sup> The biographical data of the translator come from the Web page of *Asociación de Cátedra China*.

庸国君子偕老 Chün tzu chiaï lao

*Belleza de cuerpo y fealdad de conducta de la marquesa Hsüan Chiang [131] de Wei [293], para la que construyó la nueva torre de la canción 43.*

Comprometida a envejecer con su marido.

lleva alto moño sujeto con alfileres y adornado con seis jades.

Solemne y satisfecha, avanza

cual eminente montaña, como caudaloso río.

Su indumentaria se conforma a su condición.

Siendo fea su conducta,

¿cómo se exhibe en esta forma?

Luce fulgurante su rico vestido

de figuras de faisanes bordado.

Nube de negros cabellos es su cabeza.

No necesita añadir ajenos a los suyos.

Jades son sus arracadas.

De marfil el alfiler de su moño.

Blanca su espaciosa frente.

Ya se parece al radiante cielo, ya al mismo Dios.

Blanca como el jade su rica túnica.

Sobre ella, ropón de rizado crespón.

Fina y fresca su ropa interior.

Claros y limpios sus hermosos ojos.

Alta su serena frente,

En verdad, su belleza

no tiene par en la región.

(Appendix of proper name: 131. 宣姜 Hsüan Chiang; 293. 衛 Wei) (Elorduy, 1984, pp. 83-84)

(García-Noblejas' s translation):

Con el señor hasta ser viejos

y seis joyas en el tocado

era tan grácil, tan hermosa

como los montes, como los ríos

era justo que vistiera túnica decorada

¿podría alguien decir

que no era una buena mujer?

Cómo brillaban, cómo brillaban

sus plumas de faisán

nubes parecía su negro cabello

los falsos tocados le sobraban

los pendientes eran de jade

las horquillas de marfil

la frente blanca y ancha

¿no parecía del mismo cielo?

¿no parecía una emperatriz celestial?

Cómo relucían, cómo relucían

sus ropas de ceremonia

qué ricos los tejidos y bordados

que llevaba y portaba

y qué límpida la frente

la frente qué bien formada

en verdad que la dama es  
la más hermosa del reino. (García-Noblejas, 2013, pp. 82-83)

After a general observation, we find that Elorduy's translation is like a lined prose which loyally explains the meaning of the source poem. Besides the faithful translation, Elorduy also translated the title, added an introductory note at the top of the page to explain the theme of the poem and introduced the Chinese characters of two proper names in the appendix. These reflect the purpose of this version of presenting the Chinese culture to the Spanish community. Different from the translation of Elorduy, García-Noblejas's version is close to the simple style of the original poem.

We have passed both texts to the Wordsmith tools 6.0 to obtain quantitative statistical data at the lexical level. The results are shown in the following table.

Table 1

*Lexical Level Analysis by the Wordsmith Tools*

Parameter	Elorduy's translation	García-Noblejas's translation
Token	134	118
Type	98	79
Radio type/Token	74.81	66.95
Mean word length	4.55	4.58

From Table 1 it can be found that the first translation has 134 words and the second one consists of 118 words. It indicates that, compared with García-Noblejas's translation, Elorduy's translation is much bigger in size. In other words, Elorduy uses more words to translate the same poem. The number of the type of Elorduy's translation is also higher, which indicates that his version contains more different words. We can also see that Elorduy's version has a higher type/token ratio, approximately 8% more than the second one, which means that the lexical variability in Elorduy's translation is higher than that of García-Noblejas's translation, and therefore, Elorduy's translation contains more information. The possible reason for this difference may consist in their different translation purpose: Elorduy pays more attention to the transmission of information than García-Noblejas, so he tends to translate the poem in a more explicit and voluminous way. As to the mean word length, we can see that there is no big difference between the two translations.

Then we find several points that deserve detailed analyses.

The first point is the translation of “副笄六珈” (fuji liujia). “笄” (ji) refers to a traditional hair bun that is held at the crown of the head, with the help of a hair stick. “六珈” (liujia) means “six jades”. Elorduy translates the term as “alto moño sujeto con alfileres y adornado con seis jades” (high bun tied with hair stick and decorated with six jades). Elorduy's description precisely presents the contents of the original. García-Noblejas's translation is shorter and simpler: “seis joyas en el tocado” (six jewels in the headdress). It's obvious that Elorduy's translation is more faithful to the original in meaning. But the brevity of the four-word poem is well preserved in the second translation. It is easy to explain this difference. Elorduy's purpose is to make everything in the poem clear to his readers, while García-Noblejas puts his emphasis on the original poetic value of the poems and a long description will interrupt beyond all doubt the poetic rhythm.

The second point is the translation of “翟” (di). It refers to the embroidered dress of pheasant figures. The two translations are “rico vestido de figuras de faisanes bordado” (beautiful embroidered dress of pheasant

figures) and “plumas de faisán” (pheasant feathers) respectively. Again, the first translation is closer to the meaning of the original word than the second translation.

Another detail that we want to mention is the translation of the verse “嗒兮嗒兮，其之展也” (cuoxi cuoxi, qizhi zhanye). The reduplicated word “嗒兮嗒兮” reinforces the poetic rhythm and provides the liveliness and musicality to the text. *Shi Jing* contains many reduplicated words and their frequency in the original text makes them be the characteristic feature of the anthology. Elorduy has omitted the peculiar reduplicated form: “Blanca como el jade su rica túnica” (White as the jade his rich tunic). García-Noblejas uses “cómo” (how) followed by the verb “brillar” (shine) to show exclamation, and has reduplicated the expression “Cómo brillaban, cómo brillaban” (How it shines! How it shines!), in such a way that it gives the translated text some expressive effect and musicality. In summary, the first translation is more precise and complete regarding the content; the second translation is similar to the source work in its style and sound beauty. We believe that this difference corresponds again to the different extratextual factors of the two translations.

The last word that we will analyze is “帝” (di). The term both can allude to a male god (Jade Emperor) as a goddess. However, since in the poem “帝” is used to compare the beauty of the protagonist, the most reasonable choice would be the feminine form. Elorduy has spoken of “Dios” in capital letters to make reference to the God of Christian tradition. This shows again Elorduy’s interest in comparing the Chinese ideological concept with the Western philosophical thought. The second translator has chosen the female form, which in this case would be more logical.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have presented the original anthology and we have compared the two Spanish versions from both a macro point of view and a micro point of view. The first translation has a long Prolegomena, a brief note before almost all the poems and two appendices. As we mentioned before, Elorduy’s translation is like a dictionary, which can provide a lot of information about the original anthology and the traditional Chinese culture. García-Noblejas intends to make a different version of the first one, in which he tried to emphasize both the culture and the original poetic value. His version is highly evaluated by many literary critics for many factors, especially for its simple and understandable language. After the comparison of the two translations of the poem *Junzi Xielao*, we have detected that the most notable difference is that Elorduy’s translation is more accurate with regard to the specific terms, and the García-Noblejas’s translation is closer to the original style. In our view, all the differences in translation reflect the different extratextual factors of the two versions.

## References

- Albir, A. H. (2013). *Traducción y traductología*. Cátedra.
- Álvarez, J. R. (2008). The spanish sinologist in the 20th century: Carmelo Elorduy. *Hanxue Yanjiu Tongxun*, 27(3), 30-33.
- Bassnett, S., & Lefevere, A. (1998). *Constructing cultures. Essays on literary translation*. Clevedon etc.: Multilingual Matters.
- Chen, J. S., & Gao, B. (2011). Jiyu yuliaoku de shijing lianggeyingyiben de yizhe fengge kaochao. *Journal of Tianjin Foreign Studies University*, 18, 36-41.
- Cheng, F. (1977). *Chinese poetic writing*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Elorduy, C. (Ed.). (1984). *Romancero chino*. Editora Nacional.
- García-Noblejas, G. (2013). *Libro de los cantos*. Alianza Editorial.
- Huang, J. H. (1997). Jianlun hanyu dieyinci de yingyi. *Journal of Sichuan International Studies University*, 1, 81-85.

182A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO SPANISH VERSIONS OF THE POEM *JUNZI XIELAOOF SHI JING*

- Li, S. (2015). *Shijing xuan*. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Mangiron, C. (2006). *El tractament dels referents culturals a les traduccions de la novel·la de Botxan: la interacció entre els elements textuais i extratextuais*. Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona.
- Mu, Y. F. (2012). *Shijing quanbian jianzhu dianping*. Beijing: The Chinese Overseas Publishing House.
- Nida, E. A. (2004). *Language, culture, and translating*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Nord, C. (1997). *Translating as a purposeful activity [translation theories explained]*. Manchester: St Jerome.
- Shan, Q. (1995). *Shijing de xichuan yu yingyi. Shucheng*, 2, 25.
- Toury, G. (1995). *Descriptive translation studies and beyond*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Xu, Y. C. (2015). *Book of poetry*. Dolphin Books.
- Yan, Xi. Z. (2005). *Contrastive analysis of four English translations of Shi Jing*. Zhejiang University.
- Yang, J. (2005). *Shijing dieyinci jiqi jufa gongneng yanjiu*. Ningxia University.
- Zhou, Z. F. (2005). *Shijing xuanyi*. Zhonghua Book Company.
- <http://granadaesnoticia.com/los-relatos-chuanqui-de-la-dinastia-tang-en-su-contexto-conferencia-de-gabriel-garcia-noblejas/>
- <https://www.catedrachina.com/claustro-senior>
- <https://cvc.cervantes.es/obref/china/carmelo.htm>
- <https://cvc.cervantes.es/obref/china/cancionero.htm>