

# A Diachronic Investigation into the Translational Styles of Eight Complete English Versions of *The Book of Songs*

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**Abstract:** This study constructs a specialized corpus and employs computational tools (WordSmith 8.0, AntConc) to conduct a diachronic comparative analysis of eight complete English translations of *The Book of Songs*. Lexical analysis reveals that early translations prioritize terminological diversity, whereas contemporary versions emphasize precision in core vocabulary and cultural nuance transmission. Syntactically, sentence structures evolve from complex and stylistically varied patterns to more concise and regularized forms. At the discourse level, early translations feature high formality, dense explicit connectives, and linear narratives, while later versions shift toward implicit coherence and diversified narrative strategies. Employing hermeneutic theory, the study interprets these stylistic shifts as products of translators' sociohistorical situatedness, demonstrating how their distinct styles—rooted in personal experiences and cultural contexts—facilitate cross-cultural dissemination and interpretation of the classic.

**Keywords:** *The Book of Songs*, Complete English Translations, Diachronic Comparison, Translator Style, Corpus Metrics.

## 1. Introduction

As the earliest poetic relic of Chinese civilization, *The Book of Songs* (c. 11th–6th centuries BCE) is not only China's first comprehensive poetry anthology but also a core text embodying the ritual and musical traditions of the Zhou Dynasty. Comprising 305 poems covering themes from labor and courtship to warfare and sacrifice, it established the poetic traditions of *fu*, *bi*, and *xing* [1], serving as a cultural prototype for subsequent Chinese literature. Its English translation, dating back to the 19th century, has played a pivotal role in cross-cultural dissemination, offering Western audiences a window into ancient Chinese society and culture [2]. Over time, translational styles have evolved from early scholarly fidelity to contemporary emphasis on cultural transmission and artistic reproduction, necessitating a diachronic study [3].

This research systematically analyzes eight complete English translations through quantitative and qualitative methods across lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels. Lexical analysis focuses on type-token ratio, word length, and high-frequency terms; syntactic analysis examines sentence complexity; and discourse analysis explores formality, cohesion devices, and narrative perspectives [4, 5]. Hermeneutic theory is employed to contextualize how translators' backgrounds and sociohistorical factors shape translational styles. Findings contribute to three key areas: 1) deepening understanding of classical Chinese literature translation processes; 2) providing practical guidelines for balancing cultural fidelity and linguistic adaptation; 3) enriching translation theories (e.g., norms theory, translator agency) with empirical evidence from *The Book of Songs* [6]. This study thus advances translation studies and facilitates the global dissemination of Chinese classical texts.

## 2. Literature Review

Data from CNKI and Web of Science indicate that current studies on English translations of *The Book of Songs* mainly fall into three research paradigms. The first is in-depth case

studies of English translations, where scholars at home and abroad focus on the textual characteristics and translation strategies of single versions. For example, Watson [7] deeply explored the academic nature of Legge's translation, emphasizing its faithful transmission of cultural information and philological value, while Liu [8] and Zuo [9, 10] analyzed lexical choices, syntactic structures, and cultural imagery processing from linguistic and cultural perspectives to reveal the interaction between translated texts and source texts. The second paradigm is cross-translation comparative studies, which explore differences between translations and translator styles through horizontal comparisons. Chinese scholars like Li [11] and Cai [12], as well as early Western researchers, often compared different translations from dimensions such as linguistic transformation and cultural interpretation to discuss how translators handled allusions, rhythms, and emotional expressions in *The Book of Songs*. The third paradigm involves translator-focused research and the historiography of translation. In translator-focused studies, foreign scholars like Hermans [13] analyzed the relationship between translator subjectivity and translation strategies from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, while Chinese scholars such as Jiang [14] and Feng [15] focused on translators' cultural identities and translation ideas to explain their influence on translation styles. Historiographical studies aim to outline the dissemination trajectory of English translations of *The Book of Songs*: Zhou [16], Li [17], and others combed the development from missionary translations to modern versions, while Li [18] and Qin [19] further integrated historical contexts to reveal the cultural exchanges and ideological games behind translation activities. These studies together construct a multi-dimensional picture of research on English translations of *The Book of Songs*, offering rich perspectives for understanding the complexity of classical Chinese literature translation. However, existing research lacks systematic and multi-dimensional diachronic analysis of multiple complete translations, and insufficiently discusses the comprehensive influence of translators' personal backgrounds and cultural contexts of their times on translation styles. This study aims to address these gaps and

provide a more comprehensive and in-depth perspective for research on English translations of *The Book of Songs*.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Hermeneutic theory provides a dynamic view of meaning and a methodological framework for studying the translation and dissemination of *The Book of Songs*. As a philosophical theory of “understanding and interpretation,” hermeneutics has evolved from a focus on methodology to one on ontology. German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics introduces core concepts such as the historicity of understanding, Vorurteil (prejudice), Horizontverschmelzung (horizon fusion), and Wirkungsgeschichte (effective history). For Gadamer, translation is an act of understanding that goes beyond mere replication or reproduction of the original text; it generates new meanings within the theoretical frameworks of “horizon fusion” and “effective history” [20].

Gadamer emphasizes that understanding is inherently historical, as all interpretation is grounded in the interpreter’s historical situatedness [18]. As historical beings, human cognition is shaped by temporal-spatial contexts and knowledge structures, forming a pre-existing cognitive framework termed Vorurteil (prejudice). Far from being an obstacle to understanding, prejudice serves as the starting point for meaning-making. Translators, as both subjects of translation and readers of the original text, bring their own prejudices—shaped by cultural backgrounds, value systems, and temporal needs—into the interpretive process, directly influencing their strategies for translating the original text [20]. Understanding is a process of fusing the horizon of the text with that of the reader. A horizon encompasses the environment in which we exist and our connection to tradition, including time, space, era, society, consciousness, and prejudice [18]. The text’s horizon is defined by its historical context of creation, while the reader’s horizon is constructed from their prejudices. Authentic translation inherently bridges these two horizons, participating in the transformation and generation of meaning—a process known as horizon fusion

[21]. Each translation of *The Book of Songs* embodies this fusion, representing the translator’s new interpretation of the original text through distinct approaches.

The concept of Wirkungsgeschichte (effective history) reveals that the meaning of a text is not fixed but dynamically generated through historical development [20]. The multiple meanings a text assumes across different historical contexts exemplify the role of effective history. Translation breathes new life into classical texts by imbuing them with contemporary significance, enabling them to transcend cultural boundaries and become “living traditions”.

## 4. Research Methodology and Corpus Construction

### 4.1. Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. WordSmith 8.0 is used to calculate lexical frequencies and perform cluster analysis [22], while AntConc is applied to extract keywords and analyze collocations. Concurrently, hermeneutic theory is integrated to conduct qualitative interpretations of translation phenomena at the lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels, exploring the cultural and strategic factors underlying them.

### 4.2. Corpus Construction

The corpus constructed for this study includes full texts of eight English translations of *The Book of Songs*: James Legge’s 1871 version (Legge1), 1876 version (Legge2), William Jennings (Jennings), Clement Francis Romilly Allen (Allen), Arthur David Waley (Waley), Burnhard Karlgren (Karlgren), Ezra Pound (Pound), and Xu Yuanchong’s translation (see Table 1). All texts are imported into corpus tools using a unified encoding format. During preprocessing, non-relevant content such as annotations and translator prefaces is removed to ensure consistency and comparability of the corpus [23]. Additionally, part-of-speech tagging and word segmentation are performed on the texts to facilitate subsequent analysis.

**Table 1.** Overview of Translations

Numble	Translator	Translated Name of the Book	Publisher Name	Time	Nation	Translator Identity
1	James Legge	The She King or The Book of Poetry	Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press Warehouse, Amen Corner, E. C.	1871	Britain	missionary
2	James Legge	The She King or The Book of Ancient Poetry	Trubner & CO., Ludgate Hill	1876	Britain	missionary
3	William Jennings	The Shi King—The Old “Poetry Classic” of the Chinese	George Routledge and Sons, Ltd.	1891	Britain	missionary
4	Clement Francis Romilly Allen	The Book of Chinese Poetry—The Shih Ching or Classic of Poetry	Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, Ltd.	1891	Britain	diplomat
5	Arthur David Waley	The Book of Songs	George Allen & Unwin Ltd.	1937	Britain	Sinologist, Literary Translator
6	Burnhard Karlgren	The Book of Odes	Stockholm:Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities	1950	Sweden	Sinologist
7	Ezra Pound	The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius	Faber and Faber Ltd.	1954	America	Translator, Poet, Literary Critic
8	Yuanchong Xu	Book of Poetry	Changsha:Hunan Publishing House	1993	China	Translator

## 5. Diachronic Analysis of Textual Features in Eight Complete English Translations of The Book of Songs

### 5.1. Diachronic Evolution at the Lexical Level

This study first conducts an in-depth analysis of the Type-Token Ratio (TTR) and its standardized version (Standardized Type-Token Ratio, STTR) across eight translations of *The Book of Songs*, aiming to explore

differences in lexical richness and textual complexity. “Type” refers to the number of unique words in the corpus, while “Token” denotes the total number of words. As a key indicator of lexical richness, TTR reflects the diversity of vocabulary in a text. However, since the increasing number of function words in longer texts may artificially lower TTR values and compromise its reliability, this study uses STTR (calculated per 1,000 words) to more accurately assess lexical richness and infer reading difficulty. Generally, a higher STTR indicates greater lexical diversity and corresponding textual complexity.

**Table 2.** Type-Token Ratio Analysis

	Legge1	Legge2	Jennings	Allen	Waley	Karlgren	Pond	Yuanchong Xu
Types	5242	6279	6638	6013	4948	4809	6151	4330
Tokens	51616	59242	47193	50352	49241	50479	37658	38173
TTR	10.16%	10.60%	14.07%	11.94%	10.05%	9.53%	16.33%	11.34%
STTR	49.34%	57.07%	54.36%	63.98%	49.17%	62.28%	61.78%	53.01%

Table 2 highlights key lexical trends across translations. Allen’s STTR (63.98%) shows the richest vocabulary and most complex text, while Waley’s (49.17%) is simplest. Early translators like Legge used far more unique words (5,242–6,279 types) than later ones like Xu Yuanchong (4,330), signaling a shift from lexical diversity to core vocabulary and cultural accuracy. Token counts vary widely (Legge2: 59,242; Pound: 37,658), reflecting stylistic choices in text length. TTR/STTR trends show early translations cluster at ~10% TTR (49–57% STTR), while Pound’s peaks at 16.33%

TTR/61.78% STTR, indicating growing lexical complexity. This evolution suggests translators increasingly prioritize vocabulary variety to boost expressiveness and balance cultural fidelity in capturing *The Book of Songs*’ essence.

The study then analyzes the word length in the eight translations. Average word length is calculated as the mean number of letters per token in the text, reflecting the use of long words. A longer average word length indicates a higher frequency of long words, more prominent features of written language, and greater reading difficulty.

**Table 3.** Average Word Length and Standard Deviation

	Legge1	Legge2	Jennings	Allen	Waley	Karlgren	Pond	Yuanchong Xu
Avg Word Length	4.18	4.09	4.22	3.84	4.14	4.12	4.19	4.21
SD	1.92	1.83	1.96	2.01	1.92	2.11	2.14	1.85

Table 3 shows Pound’s translation has the longest average word length (4.19), with more long words and higher reading difficulty, while Legge2’s shortest (4.09) suggests colloquial ease. Early Legge translations (4.18–4.09) show moderate lengths and stable lexical choices (SD 1.83–1.92). Later

versions like Pound (4.19) and Xu (4.21) use longer words for formality, with Pound’s higher SD (2.14) indicating flexible word-length mixing for rhythm. Translations evolved from balanced early patterns to later written-language emphasis and diverse styles, adapting to changing needs and aesthetics.

	Legge1	Legge2	Jennings	Allen	waley	Karlgren	pond	Yuanchong Xu
1	The 4084	The 3873	The 2812	The 3087	N 3603	The 3980	The 2015	The 1927
2	And 2079	And 2079	And 1860	And 2292	The 2957	And 1552	And 1193	An 1245
3	Of 1689	To 1382	Of 974	To 1476	And 1301	Is 1167	To 1104	To 763
4	To 1156	Of 910	To 890	Of 887	Of 1015	Of 1154	In 803	In 702
5	Is 912	In 879	In 725	A 787	To 872	Are 1000	Of 708	Of 556
6	In 865	With 697	With 471	In 646	Is 823	To 874	A 599	I 540
7	Are 685	I 628	A 462	I 567	In 713	I 838	# 369	Yo 495
8	I 673	My 591	My 447	His 538	A 632	In 772	As 346	Wit 431
9	Not 614	His 590	I 440	Un 508	I 599	Not 758	Is 300	A 410
10	With 570	Our 527	His 425	My 465	Are 547	He 658	That 275	My 404

**Figure 4.** High-Frequency Words

WordSmith 8.0 analysis of high-frequency words in eight *Book of Songs* translations (Figure 4) shows distinct differences between early and late periods. In early translations, such as those by Legge, function words like “The” and “And” are used frequently. For instance, “The” appears 4,084 times in Legge1, far exceeding other versions. This indicates that early translators relied on standard English grammar to ensure logical coherence. In contrast, late translations, exemplified by Xu Yuanchong’s work, feature an increase in personal pronouns like “I” and “My,” while the use of function words drops significantly. The frequency of “Not” is also about half of that in early translations. These changes show that later translators prioritized subjective emotion expression and poetic rhythm reconstruction, breaking away from traditional translation norms to develop a more personalized style.

## 5.2. Diachronic Characteristics at the Syntactic Level

The characteristics of translated language at the syntactic

**Table 5.** Total Number of Sentences, Average Sentence Length, and Sentence Length Standard Deviation

	Legge1	Legge2	Jennings	Allen	Waley	Karlgren	Pond	Yuanchong Xu
Total Number of Sentences	69	3205	434	11	413	39	307	3183
Average SL	234.70	102.76	308.43	548.00	225.40	477.54	286.12	130.78
SL Standard Deviation	237.86	112.09	290.96	355.87	220.05	251.21	225.04	156.32

Diachronic analysis shows early Legge translations diverged: Legge1 used long sentences (avg. 234.70, SD 237.86), while Legge2 preferred short ones (avg. 102.76, SD 112.09). Mid-period translators like Allen (avg. 548.00, SD 355.87) and Karlgren (avg. 477.54, SD 251.21) favored varied long sentences for rhythm. Late Pound and Xu Yuanchong shifted to concise, regular structures: Xu used short, uniform sentences to highlight poetic rhythm (avg. 130.78, SD 156.32). The evolution—from early stylistic variation to mid-period long-sentence preference, then late simplicity—reflects changing translation ideals and aesthetics.

level include features related to “average sentence length” and “sentence length standard deviation”. Average sentence length is calculated by dividing the total number of tokens by the number of sentence-ending marks (including periods, question marks, exclamation marks, etc.) [24]. It reflects the complexity of sentences: the larger the average sentence length, the higher the complexity of the sentences and the corpus; conversely, the smaller the average sentence length, the lower the complexity.

Butler [25] classifies sentences as follows: those with 1–9 words are short sentences, those with 10–25 words are medium-to-long sentences, and those with more than 25 words are long sentences. The sentence length standard deviation reflects the difference between sentence lengths in the corpus and the average sentence length. A larger standard deviation indicates greater variation in sentence length, while a smaller standard deviation suggests less variation.

## 5.3. Diachronic Development at the Discourse Level

First is “register formality”, reflected in the use of high-frequency words “the” and “of”. As noted by Feng [26] in a word frequency analysis of two English translations of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the frequency of words like “the” and “of” can indicate the complexity of phrase and sentence structures. Higher frequencies of these words in a translation suggest a more formal register.

**Table 6.** High-Frequency Words “the” and “of”

	Legge1	Legge2	Jennings	Allen	Waley	Karlgren	Pond	Yuanchong Xu
The	4084	3873	2812	3087	2957	3980	2015	1927
Of	1689	910	974	887	1015	1154	708	556

From the data of Table 6 on “the” and “of”, early Legge translations (Legge1/Legge2) exhibit high usage of “the” (4,084/3,873 times) and “of” (1,689/910 times), indicating their preference for complex structures and a formal, academic register through dense determiners and prepositions to construct rigorous grammatical relationships and present academic norms. In contrast, late translations by Pound and Xu Yuanchong significantly reduce these words: Pound uses “the” 2,015 times and “of” 708 times, reflecting the Imagist style’s conciseness by minimizing redundant functional words to highlight imagery; Xu’s “the” (1,927) and “of” (556) show the lowest frequencies, aligning with his “three beauties”

(ideological, phonological, and formal beauty) principle—streamlining vocabulary and optimizing sentence structures to balance poetic rhythm and literary charm with modern readability while preserving the original meaning.

Next is the prominence of logical relationships. Textual features are a comprehensive reflection of a translator’s style, with core indicators including cohesion and readability [3]. As a fundamental attribute of discourse, cohesion constructs logical connections between clauses through conjunctions and other means to ensure the integrity of textual structure [4]. Readability, involving elements such as vocabulary and sentence patterns, directly affects reader acceptance [27].

**Table 7.** Explicit Connective Components

	Legge1	Legge2	Jennings	Allen	Waley	Karlgren	Pond	Yuanchong Xu
And	2079	2131	1860	2292	1301	1552	1193	1245
But	321	318	172	279	236	245	141	123
If	471	67	46	52	58	135	58	104
When	166	236	167	206	93	199	85	156
King	171	187	171	192	160	117	77	171
Heaven	158	132	125	118	115	161	61	116
People	135	65	40	37	94	150	16	103

As key elements for constructing textual logic, the usage of explicit connective components in the eight translations of *the Book of Songs* exhibits significant differences. Data shows that “And”—the most frequently used connective—appears between 1,193 and 2,292 times, primarily to express coordinative or sequential relationships; “But” fluctuates between 123 and 321 times to indicate contrast; the subordinating conjunctions “If” and “When” are used less frequently, ranging from 46 to 67 times and 85 to 236 times respectively. The translations diverge sharply in style: In early Legge translations (Legge1, Legge2), “And” appears as frequently as 2,079 times and 2,131 times, highlighting a pursuit of rigorous grammatical structures and logical coherence. Legge1’s “If” usage reaches 471 times—far exceeding other translations—reflecting the translator’s meticulous handling of conditional logic and an overall academic orientation. In contrast, the Imagist poet Pound’s translation drastically reduces “And” to 1,193 times, enhancing imagistic leaps and poetic rhythm by minimizing

sequential connectives, which aligns with his translational style. These differences fundamentally reflect divergences in translators’ philosophies and strategies: Early translations rely on dense connectives to build clear logical networks and ensure grammatical rigor, while later translations prioritize literary expression, adjusting the use of explicit connectives flexibly according to personal style and contemporary aesthetics to balance logical coherence with artistic presentation.

Finally, from the perspective of narrative viewpoint, translators’ choices and transformations of person deixis (such as the subjective immersion of first-person or the objective presentation of third-person), as well as the frequency of switching, both affect discourse coherence and rhythm [27]. Reasonable handling of viewpoint can not only convey the narrative style of the original text but also optimize readability, serving as an important indicator of the translator’s style.

**Table 8.** Narrative Perspectives

Translator	I	We	He
Legge1	673	328	471
Legge2	628	464	448
Jennings	440	270	252
Allen	567	361	351
Waley	599	374	400
Karlgren	838	443	658
Pond	262	152	159
Yuanchong Xu	540	298	283

Based on the narrative theories of Chatman [27] and Rimmon-Kenan [28], an analysis of “I,” “We,” and “He” in the eight *Book of Songs* translations reveals significant differences in translators’ narrative perspectives. Early Legge translations construct an objective and comprehensive narrative network through high-frequency use of various personal pronouns [3]. The mid-period Waley translation emphasizes a balanced distribution of personal pronouns to achieve flexible conveyance of emotions and contexts, while Pound’s translation drastically reduces pronoun usage to align with the Imagist style of concise and leaping narratives. Later, Xu Yuanchong’s translation balances the transmission of the original’s emotions with target-language readability. These differences not only reflect individual translator styles but also mirror the evolving aesthetics of translation across different eras.

## 6. An Investigation of Influencing Factors on the Diachronic Changes in Translators’ Styles from the Hermeneutical Perspective

### 6.1. Historicity of Understanding and Prejudices

Gadamer [30] posits that “the true movement of understanding lies in recognizing that we are always guided by our own prejudices”. The three waves of *Book of Songs* translation (1871–1891, 1937–1954, 1993–2019) exemplify paradigm shifts in interpretation shaped by historical prejudices [31]. Take the evolving translations of “窈窕淑女” in *Guanju (Ode to the Osprey)* as a case study. At the level of “prejudices,” missionary and diplomat translators during the first wave were influenced by colonial contexts, filtering the text through Christian ethics and Western centrism. Legge’s use of “prince” for “君子” (junzi) aligned with Western aristocratic ideals, while Jennings’ “chaste and modest maid”

reinforced stereotypes of Eastern women. These domesticating translations reflected the “superiority of Western culture.” During the second wave, sinologists and poets shifted toward academic professionalism and modern poetics. Karlgren phonetically translated “苕菜” as “hing waterplant” using linguistic empiricism, while Pound restructured rhythm with “Dark and clear” under Imagist influence, seeking to dismantle colonial misreadings and uncover the modernity of Chinese classical poetry. In the third wave, translators developed a native consciousness amid globalization and postcolonial intellectual trends, with Xu Yuanchong balancing image retention and phonetic beauty through his “optimization theory” (e.g., translating “雝鳩” as “turtledoves” and using alliteration in “Cooing and Wooing”). Contemporary sinologists emphasize cultural uniqueness via foreignization (e.g., transliterating “君子” as “junzi”), while digital tools enable translators to consciously select interpretive paths based on previous translations.

## 6.2. Fusion of Horizons

Fusion of Horizons Translation, as “the concretization of effective-historical consciousness” [30], embodies dynamic cognitive topology through the fusion of horizons, which manifests as co-creation of meaning between the translator and the text. During the first wave, Legge ethicized *Guanju* into a “knight-lady” narrative, while Jennings adapted it to Western wedding ode frameworks, rewriting the four-character verses in blank verse and sonnet rhythms to achieve formal equivalence but sacrificing the original’s ritual connotations and reduplicative rhyme. The second wave saw collisions of multiple horizons: Waley introduced cultural anthropological annotations on the marital ritual context of “采苕菜”, Karlgren textualized ancient phonetics of “寤寐” through historical linguistics, and Pound combined Imagist poetics with Chinese “xing” (associative imagery) to create new horizons via fragmented language. The third wave pursues egalitarian global dialogue: Xu Yuanchong integrates Chinese and Western poetics through his “three beauties theory” (e.g., using end-rhyme in “tender” to convey the texture of “苕之”). Contemporary translations leverage digital databases to compare historical interpretations, situating “苕菜” within ecological criticism and gender studies to achieve cross-cultural thematic integration.

## 6.3. Effective History

The diachronic semantic field of core vocabulary has expanded significantly [31]. For example, translations of “淑女” have evolved from a single moral dimension to encompass aesthetics (“fair”), power (“consort”), and mystery (“dark and clear”), forming a “semantic constellation.” “Effective history” documents the generative meanings of *Guanju* across eras: Translations from the first wave became “original archives” of Western sinology, but their domesticating approaches reduced the poem to an “Eastern love lyric,” reinforcing colonial interpretive logic. In the second wave, Waley established the modern sinological standard of “literal translation + annotation,” Pound’s “Cathay” inspired Western poetic innovation, and Karlgren’s linguistic empiricism challenged Western centrism, marking the beginning of decolonization. The third wave saw Xu Yuanchong’s translations become vectors for Chinese aesthetic export, while contemporary comparative studies situate *Guanju* within a network of “East Asian classics.” The

translations from these three waves together form a “chain of effective history”—evolving from a colonial mirror of the other to globalized plural dialogue, with the meaning of the classic continuously growing through “misinterpretation-reflection-recreation.”

## 7. An Investigation of Influencing Factors on the Diachronic Changes in Translators’ Styles from the Hermeneutical Perspective

This study focuses on the translation and dissemination of *the Book of Songs*, systematically examining the evolutionary patterns of translations at the lexical, syntactic, and discursive levels, and analyzing the influencing factors of translators’ styles from a hermeneutical perspective. The research reveals significant diachronic changes in the textual features of *the Book of Songs* translations across these dimensions. Lexically, early translations exhibit rich lexical diversity, while later versions prioritize precise expression of core vocabulary and transmission of cultural connotations. Syntactically, sentence structures have evolved from early complexity and stylistic divergence to later simplicity and regularity. Discursively, early translations feature high formal register, dense explicit connectives, and linear narratives, whereas later translations emphasize implicit cohesion and more flexible, pluralistic narrative structures. From a hermeneutical theoretical perspective, the historicity of understanding and prejudices, fusion of horizons, and effective history have played crucial roles in shaping translators’ styles and translational characteristics. Translators in different historical periods, guided by their respective prejudices, have adopted distinct interpretive paradigms in translating *the Book of Songs*. For example, the Protestant ethical prejudices of early missionary translators, the anthropological turn of mid-century sinologists, and the national cultural revival prejudices of later domestic translators are all reflected in specific translations such as “窈窕淑女”. In terms of horizon fusion, translators construct different cognitive topologies through spatial, temporal, and intersubjective interactions during the translation process, driving the development of translations in terms of cultural fidelity and poetic adaptation. The principle of effective history has led to the semantic proliferation of core vocabulary in *the Book of Songs*, enabling the cross-cultural rebirth of classical texts within Western modernist poetics. The translations from the three waves of translation together form a chain of effective history — evolving from the colonial-era mirroring of the Other to globalized pluralistic dialogue, with the meaning of the classic continuously growing through “misinterpretation-reflection-recreation.”

The three-dimensional analytical framework of “prejudice topology–horizon fusion matrix–effective history trajectory” constructed in this study offers an innovative methodological perspective for the study of classical Chinese translation and deepens the understanding of hermeneutical theory in translation practice. However, the study has areas for expansion: on the one hand, the corpus is limited to eight full translations, and future research should expand the corpus by including more translations from different periods and translators to enhance generalizability; on the other hand, the current analysis focuses primarily on linguistic and cultural dimensions, and follow-up studies could integrate multiple perspectives such as reader reception and translation

dissemination effects to refine the research dimensions. Additionally, with the iterative development of corpus technology and translation research methods, exploring new technical tools and theoretical frameworks could enable more systematic and comprehensive studies of English translations of *the Book of Songs* and even classical Chinese literature, providing a more solid theoretical foundation for promoting the translation and cultural dissemination of Chinese classics.

## Acknowledgments

This work was supported by Postgraduate Scientific Research Innovation Project of Hunan Province (Grant No.CX20240818)

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