

# The Cognitive Linguistic View on the English Translations of Metaphors in “Rainy Alley”<sup>\*</sup>

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The English translation of modern and contemporary Chinese poetry can help “Chinese culture go abroad”, which has far-reaching influence on the culture communication. Therefore, the accurate understanding of the metaphors in poetry is extremely necessary. This paper takes Dai Wangshu’s poem “Rainy Alley” and its English translations as the research subjects, and explores the different understandings of metaphors in Chinese and Western cultures from the perspective of cognitive linguistic. This paper finds out that the translation of metaphors in poetry should always base on the “emotion” so as to accurately translate the poetry.

*Keywords:* cognitive linguistic, poetry translation, metaphor, Rainy Alley

Metaphor is ubiquitous and has been discussed for a long time. There’re various metaphors in the literature, especially in the poetry, which expresses people’s feelings and ambitions. Metaphor is a natural outpouring of strong emotions, so it’s no exaggeration to say that emotion is the soul of poetry. Therefore, an accurate interpretation of emotional metaphors can help people to understand and translate the poetry.

There are a few researches on the English translations of emotion metaphors in poetry both at home and abroad. Some scholars have analyzed the development of metaphor theory and the emotional metaphors in the poem “The person is thinner than a yellow flower 人比黄花瘦” (Wen, 2004). Some scholars take the poem of Wenchuan earthquake as an example and discuss the relationship between poetry and metaphor from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. They believe that the poetic thinking is a special process of conceptualization, and metaphor serves as a bridge between two cognitive domains, providing unlimited possibilities of expressing the poetic imagery and context (Shuang, 2009). However, the studies mentioned above are not related to the translation. Some scholars put forward the idea of “conveying the real emotion” in translation. Taking the classical Chinese literature as an example, they have conducted an in-depth study on the English translation of emotional discourse from the perspective of cognitive metaphor theory (Pan, 2011). Since the classical Chinese literature, especially classical poetry, has extremely rich and unique Chinese cultural connotations. The research on translation of Chinese modern and contemporary poetry is of great significance. Because they have not only inherited the long-standing and profound classical poetic tradition of

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the Chinese nation for thousands of years, but has also been influenced by Western culture to some extent, which are the complementary combinations of Chinese and Western culture.

Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the metaphor in Dai Wangshu’s poem *Rainy Alley* and its English translation from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. Taking the poet’s emotion as a clue, this paper tries to explore a translation strategy which can both convey meaning and emotion accurately.

In 1980, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson proposed the theory of conceptual metaphor in the book *Metaphors We Live by*, which considered the conceptual metaphor as a cross-domain mapping from the source domain to the destination domain, which is based on one’s cognitive experience to discover a systematic similarity. Based on the systematic similarity, people are able to understand an abstract and unfamiliar concept by transferring from the cognitive mechanisms of familiar and easy concepts. In the human cognitive mechanism, people often “find the rules from their own experience or environment”, especially when they face the abstract emotions such as joy, sadness, anger and fear. Human beings can only perform better cognitive activities by ontologizing them. For example, the mapping between emotions and body organs can result in the expression like “broken heart”. Besides, the mapping between emotion and color can also result in the expressions such as “red face” and “pale face”.

*Rainy Alley* is Dai Wangshu’s best-known poem, which was written in 1927. It combines the lyrical methods of French symbolism in the 19th century with classical Chinese imagery, using a large number of emotional metaphors to make the poem more expressive. *Rainy Alley* has some repeated lines and its rhythm is slow and melancholy. The core emotion in this poem is “sorrow”, which is reflected in the imagery of alley and lilac.

First, this paper analyzes the metaphor “alley 巷” and its English translations by Yang Xianyi and Gregory B. Lee. In the Chinese Corpus of the Chinese Linguistics Research Center of Peking University (CCL), a search with “alley 巷” as the keyword shows that among the 840 results, “alley 巷” is most frequently used with modifiers like “deep 深”, “long 长” and “black 黑”, etc. In the British National Corpus (BYU-BNC), a search with “alley” as the keyword shows that among the 598 results, “alley” is most frequently paired with “dark” and “blind”, etc. In conclusion, “alley 巷” has the following basic characteristics in both Chinese and Western cultures, namely long (deep), dark and remote. Therefore, “alley 巷” is often used as a metaphor for life. The long alley just like the long and suffering life; the dark alley reminds people of the difficult time; the remote alley suggests that it’s hard to achieve one’s ambition. In the classical Chinese poetry, the word “alley 巷” is used to convey sorrowful feelings. For example, “Farewell at the lonely alley, even the grass is withering 别巷寂寥人散后, 望残烟草低迷”; “The autumn grass grows by the shabby door. I live in this dark alley, light up a lonely lamp at the rainy night 看蓬门秋草, 年年破巷, 疏窗细雨, 夜夜孤灯”. The metaphor above is “life is like walking in the alley”.

The same metaphor is used in *Rainy Alley*. Dai Wangshu compares his life experience to walking in the deep alley, lonely, depressing and hopeless. The long and gloomy alley is endless, and the woman he meets by chance just like a dream, drifting away silently. Finally, he is the only one who wanders in this lonely alley until the end of decaying wall. The image of “alley” deeply expresses the poet’s sorrowful feelings of life and love, as if he is caught in the mire. Therefore, the most important factor in judging the quality of the translation is that whether the translations accurately convey the profound sorrow. For example:

## Example (1)

(a) 撑着油纸伞，独自/彷徨在悠长、悠长/又寂寥的雨巷。

Yang Xianyi:

Alone holding an oil-paper umbrella/ I wander along a long/ Solitary lane in the rain.

Gregory B. Lee:

Holding up an oil-paper umbrella/ I loiter aimlessly in the long, long/ and lonely rainy alley.

There're different understandings of “alley 巷” in the two translations. The word “lane” mostly refers to a country road or a driveway. It is somewhat different from the “alley 巷” in Chinese culture, which is long and has low walls on both sides. While the word “alley” means “a narrow passage or street with buildings or walls on both sides”. Therefore, the word “alley” is more consistent with the meaning of “alley 巷” in Chinese.

Besides, the word “wander 彷徨” in the poem also contains rich emotions. The poet is not only wandering in the rainy alley, but also on the road of life. In the translation, the word “wander” means “walk around in a casual way, often without intending to go in any particular direction. While the word “loiter” means “walk or move slowly and indolently, with frequent stops and pauses, spend time idly”. Although the poet is walking aimlessly in the rainy alley at this moment, this is not his spontaneous action. Instead, he is forced to do so by the cruel life, so wandering in the alley is not a pleasure for him. He has no choice but to stay in the “rainy alley”, because there are some setbacks on the way to his ideals and his pursuit of love. Therefore, the poet aims at expressing the pains of life and his wish for the ideal love, so “wander” is a more appropriate translation.

In addition to alley's basic attribute “long 长”, its non-basic attribute “silence 寂寥” is also important. First of all, in terms of the basic attribute “long 长”, the poet uses the length of alley to refer to the long journey of life, so that the sorrowful feeling will also last for a lifetime. This is a typical metaphor of expressing emotion in Chinese literature. For example, some poets use “long 长” to express his deep sorrow, such as “The life is long, and my hatred is endless 天长地久有时尽，此恨绵绵无绝期”; There are also those who use “short” to convey their thoughts, such as “Sleepless in a long pavilion, a short letter cannot convey my sadness 长亭无寐，短书难托”; Some poets even combine the “long” and “short”, such as “Feel my lovesickness, which are endless no matter they are long or short 入我相思门，知我相思苦，长相思兮长相忆，短相思兮无穷极”. As the most basic cognitive domain of human beings, the “length” and “sorrowful thoughts” are also linked together in English culture, for example:

## Example (2)

(b) 白发三千丈，缘愁似个长。（唐·李白《秋风歌·十五》）

Giles:

My whitening hair would make a long rope, Yet could not fathom all my depth of woe.

Xu Yuanchong:

My whitened hair would make a long cord, As long as I am often bored.

Both Chinese and English translators translate “长” into “long”, which shows that both Chinese and Western culture can use “long” to refer to sad emotions. It is noteworthy that Giles also uses “deep” to describe sorrow and grievance, which is similar to the usage in classical Chinese poetry. For example, “The depth of one's love is very deep 一往情深深几许”, “When the dark red mask is covered by dust, old things are not as

good as new 一尺深红胜曲尘，天生旧物不如新”。 This shows that words that express length and depth are commonly used to refer to emotions in both Chinese and Western cultures. What is more noteworthy is that the original poem also uses two consecutive “long 悠长” to emphasize this concept of length. The “long, long” in the poem gives the reader a natural concept of length in terms of word length, which adds a sense of sentiment. The metaphor used here is to map the physical “long” to the length of the “alley”, as well as the length of “life”.

Secondly, in terms of the alley’s non-basic attribute “silence 寂寥”, this paper finds that the poet is using the aural “silence” and visual “openness” to allude to “sadness”. Without sound or people, the picture is auditory and visual “empty”. Therefore, the poet is actually using “empty” as a metaphor for “sorrow”. This kind of lyrical method is often used in traditional Chinese classical poetry, such as “Hark, on the barren hill, the cuckoos to the moon cry 又闻子规啼夜月，愁空山”，“When one is gone, nothing will e’er remain; Nine Realms are still divided, oh, my sighs 死去元知万事空，但悲不见九州同”. The poet Dai Wangshu has read a lot of classical poetry and has a deep knowledge of classical literature, which is fully reflected in his poem Rainy Alley.

In addition to the metaphor “alley 巷”, this paper will analyze the metaphor of “lilac” and its English translation. If the main emotion of Rainy Alley is “sorrow”, the main environment is “alley”, then the main imagery must be “lilac”. The poet uses the metaphor of “man is a plant”, comparing the woman in the rainy alley to a lilac and giving the human being the qualities of a lilac. The “lilac” is first appeared as an aesthetic image by Du Fu “The lilacs are soft, and their branches are matted. Fine leaves with floating hairs, sparse flowers cloaked in white 丁香体柔弱，乱枝结犹垫。细叶带浮毛，疏花披素艳”. Du Fu vividly depicts the lilacs which is suitable for planting in the secluded places and keeping company with the lonely people. Li Jing’s “The bird does not transmit the letter outside the clouds, the lilac is empty of sorrow in the rain 青鸟不传云外信，丁香空结雨中愁” and Li Shangyin’s “The banana leaves cannot unlock the lilac knot, so it signs in the spring breeze 芭蕉不展丁香结，同向春风各自愁” have been popular for thousands of years. Since then, “lilac” has become a synonym for sorrow and misery and has had a profound influence on later generations. For example, “It is the festival of farewell, a thousand knots of lilacs are under the garden 偏怨别，是芳节，庭下丁香千结”，and “Everything is desolate, lilac knots are full of sadness 满眼凄凉无限事，付与丁香愁结”. The lilacs usually bloom in the late spring, so they can remind people of those sentiment. Therefore, when the poets see such beautiful but fragile lilacs, it is easy to feel emotional, so the buds of lilacs become the best interpretation of such sorrow. For example:

Example (3)

(c) 丁香一样的颜色/丁香一样的芬芳；丁香一样的忧愁

Yang Xianyi:

The color of lilacs /The fragrance of lilacs/with the worries of lilacs.

Gregory B. Lee:

A lilac-like color she has, / a lilac-like fragrance,/ a lilac-like sadness.

In the translations, both “worry” and “sadness” have the meaning of “sorrow”, but the strength and accuracy of their expressions are different. The word “worry” is mostly used to express anxiety and worry about things that have not yet happened and dilute the meaning of “hurt”. The word “sadness” is obviously not strong enough, because it is the antonym of “happiness”, which can be equivalent to “unhappiness”. While

“unhappiness” has a broader meaning and can be used in various contexts, so it’s not precise enough to convey the emotion. Therefore, it is more appropriate to use the word “melancholy”, which is commonly used in literature, meaning “an intense feeling of sadness which lasts for a long time and which strongly affects your behavior and attitudes”. Here are three reasons: First, it can express a strong sadness; Second, this sadness lasts for a long time and is difficult to dissipate; Third, this sadness is so strong that it has a great influence on poet’s behavior and attitude. Comparing these three words, “melancholy” is better in terms of strength, accuracy, and artistic effect, which can better convey the emotions. For example:

Example (4)

(d) 我希望逢着：一个丁香一样地；结着愁怨的姑娘。

Yang Xianyi:

Hoping to encounter/ A girl like a bouquet of lilacs /Gnawed by anxiety and resentment.

Gregory B. Lee:

I hope to encounter/ a lilac-like girl/nursing her resentment.

In this example, the word “knot 结” makes the reader feel the emotion of “sorrow and grievance” in a more realistic way. When we talk about “knot 结”, we will first think of the knot made by the rope and thread or the embarrassing experience of having difficult in untying the knot of clothes. In our cognitive field, “knot 结” always represents the meaning of intricacy and is not considered as an easy task to untie a knot. Here, the poet uses “the buds of lilac 丁香结” to express “the knot of sorrow” vividly, which makes people emotional when reading these lines. This usage is common in classical poetry, such as “The bird does not transmit a letter from beyond the clouds, the lilac knots are full of sorrows in the rain 青鸟不传云外信，丁香空结雨中愁” and “Ten thousand knots twist in the sorrowful intestines day and night 万结愁肠无昼夜”, etc.

The two translations both retains the emotional text of “sorrow and grievance 愁怨”, but they choose different collocations from “knot 结”. For example, Yang Xianyi translates “knot 结” into “gnaw”, which regards the feeling of sorrow and grievance as a fierce beast that bites the poet. This translation implies the intensity of sorrow and grievance, and poet’s inability to get rid of this emotion. What he can do is to sink deep into this emotion and become depressed. Gregory translates “knot 结” into “nurse”. It reflects the “sorrowful thoughts”, which is slowly brewing, fermenting and tormenting in the heart. However, both translations fail to show the complexity of “knot 结”, although both of them can convey emotion. Different process brings different psychological feelings. This paper believes that it’s more appropriate to retain the imagery of “knot 结” by using English proverbs to interpret the original poem, such as “knit her brows”, which means frowning. The changes of human organs, especially the face, can express sorrow and misery. In traditional Chinese culture, the imagery of “brow 眉” is often used to convey emotions, such as “knit one’s brows 愁眉苦脸” to express sorrow, “beam with joy 眉飞色舞” to express happiness, and “angry eyes 怒目睁眉” to express anger. In Western culture, “brows” not only mean “frown”, but also “forehead”, which is also used to express emotions. For example:

Example (5)

(e) His brows drew together in a worried frown when he heard the remark.

In conclusion, there is a great similarity between Chinese and Western cultures in the imagery of “brows” to express emotions. The reason for this is that regardless of race, region or country, human beings of the same

biological species share some common experiences in the process of perceiving things and understanding the world, which constitute the most basic cognitive domain of human beings, such as the metaphor of body organs and orientation to express emotions. In this example, compared with the other two translations, “knit her brow” is an authentic proverbial expression, so it is more in line with the language habits of Westerners. However, its degree of “sorrow” is not deep enough, which is far less than “grievance”, so it is slightly inferior to the other two translations in terms of conveying emotion. Whether the translation convey the meaning or not is an important reference in evaluating the literary translation, especially poetry translation. For example:

Example (6)

(f) 她飘过/ 像梦一般地/像梦一般地凄婉迷茫。

Yang Xianyi

Then she floats past/ Like a dream,/ Dreary and blank like a dream.

Gregory B. Lee:

She glides by / like a dream / hazy and confused like a dream.

In this example, the core word is “float飘”, which conveys the poet’s emotion. In this poem, the poet compares the woman in the rainy alley to a lilac, using the metaphor of “man is a plant”. The falling lilac in the rain just like a person whose life is wavering, misery and sorrow. With its unique movement, the metaphor of “float 飘” also resonates with people who are “drifting” in the world. The famous American novel *Gone with the Wind* can directly translated as “随风而去”. However, it is more often remembered by people as “飘”. This is because the word “float 飘” contains rich emotional elements and alludes to the characters who are drifting in the American Civil War. It’s more concise and eye-catching as the translation of the novel’s name. In ancient Chinese poetry, the word “float 飘” is also commonly used to highlight sorrowful feelings, such as “Life is rootless, drifting like the dust 人生无根蒂, 飘如陌上尘”, “The mountains and rivers are broken, the wind is fluttering, the world is floating and sinking in the rain 山河破碎风飘絮, 身世浮沉雨打萍”.

In the examples, both “glide” and “float” are used to convey emotions by constructive metaphors. The word “float” usually refers to an object in the liquid. When it refers to an object in the air, it emphasizes the slow and leisurely movement, such as “The white cloud of smoke floated away”. In terms of meaning, “float” doesn’t fit the Chinese word “float”. In terms of meaning, “float” does not quite fit the Chinese word “飘”. But if the life is metaphorically compared to the river, lake or sea, and people are compared to the objects floating on them, it is common in Chinese culture. For example, “My heart drifts with my feelings, and my career shares the hardships 心事同漂泊, 生涯共苦辛”, “I am still wandering like this, and I do not know if we will meet again 我今漂泊还如此, 江剑相逢亦未知”, etc. Besides, the word “glide” means “move along smoothly and continuously”, which mobilizes the metaphor of “man is a bird”. Many common collocations come from this metaphor, such as “go far away and fly high 远走高飞”, “fly higher 飞得更高” and “take off one’s career 事业腾飞”, etc. However, from the perspective of emotional translation, the flight of a bird is more of a spontaneous biological behavior, which does not reflect the meaning of “forced”. Therefore, it cannot convey a feeling of drifting in the world and being pushed by life, so the emotional connotation of the word “glide” does not match the original poem.

The word “waft” means “if sounds or smells waft through the air, or if something such as a light wind wafts them, they move gently through the air”. The translator mobilizes the sense of smell to bring out the

fragrance of the woman, considering her as an invisible smell that can be wafted through the air quietly. It is common in ancient Chinese poetry to express emotions through the sense of smell, for example, “fragrance 香” refers to noble qualities, such as “Fallen in mud and ground to dust, she seems no more. But her fragrance is still the same 零落成泥碾作尘，只有香如故”，and “stink 臭” to express the bad qualities, such as “The one who sells the abalone cannot smell its stink 入鲍鱼之肆，久而不闻其臭”. Besides, the word “waft” also has the meaning of “gently”, which expresses the soft and indistinct figure of the woman. Therefore, using “waft” is more suitable to the original text.

According to the analysis above, we can find that the translation of emotional metaphors is different from that of general metaphors. When dealing with general metaphors, the translator should adopt appropriate translation methods from the perspective of the readers of the translated language. When it comes to the metaphors that do not exist in the culture of the target language, translators should consider converting them into metaphorical expressions that exist in the culture of the target language, or directly translate the main meaning without using metaphors. For example:

Example (7)

(g) You are the apple of my eye.

Keep the same metaphor: 你是我眼里的苹果。

Use a metaphor that is more in line with the culture of the translated language: 你是我的心头肉。

Without metaphors: 你是我最珍贵的人。

However, the translation of emotional metaphors is different from the translation of general metaphors to a certain extent. The core of emotion metaphor is emotion, and behind emotion is culture. For the translation of general metaphors, as shown in example (g), if the translator always omits the metaphor without any consideration and only adopts the paraphrasing method, the readers in other countries will never be able to feel the classic Western expression of “the apple of my eye”, let alone to think and appreciate the deep cultural origin behind it. Therefore, translators should also think about the appropriate translation strategy of retaining exotic expressions when they are translating general metaphors, rather than just taking care of the feelings of the readers of the translated language. The translator can add notes to help the reader understand while transmitting the original culture of the source language. In this case, the general metaphor is presented in the translation by preserving the emotion, which is full of rich emotional factors, and finally “evolves” into an emotional metaphor to some extent.

For this translation strategy, some scholars put forward the concept of “conveying emotion”, believing that the translation should not only convey the meaning, but also preserve the aesthetic imagery of the original text and try to reproduce the emotion of the original text in its “original flavor”. “Conveying emotion” is defined as “in the process of English translation of traditional Chinese emotions, we must strive to translate the text faithfully and retain the cultural heritage of traditional Chinese emotions, so that the readers of the translated text can truly understand the traditional Chinese cultural thought and national spirit, which is mainly based on social and moral emotions” (Pan, 2011). This paper believes that the essence of “conveying emotion” lies in “preservation” and “fidelity”, which aims at distancing from the readers of the translated language. Zhu Guangqian once said that one of the characteristics of beautiful things is that they tend to be a little “distant”.

Things that are close and familiar to people are often ordinary, vulgar or even ugly. However, if they are placed at a certain distance and be admired with the spirit of detachment, we can see something amazing, touching and even beautiful. Therefore, the distance is conducive to the aesthetic attitudes.

On the one hand, the translation which preserves image can express the emotions attached to traditional Chinese culture in an authentic way. Although there is no such image in the cognitive domain of the target language reader, it is not difficult to understand the target language in the light of the context. Therefore, a certain distance between the target language reader and the target text is not a big deal. On the other hand, the interpretive translation makes it easy to understand and shorten the distance between the target language reader and the target text. However, its disadvantage is that cultural connotation is completely lost at the expense of emotional factors, so foreign readers will never come into contact with the unique factors of Chinese culture. If the translator chooses the interpretive translation strategy, he or she will fail to achieve the goal of “Let Chinese culture spread out”.

### Conclusion

The Chinese contemporary poetry has profound emotional connotations and unique cultural meanings, reflecting the organic combination of ancient Chinese poetic tradition and Western thought and culture. In the context of “Let Chinese culture spread out”, it is meaningful to discuss the metaphorical phenomenon and English translation strategy with emotion as the core. This paper believes that the translation of emotional metaphors in modern poetry should pay attention to the following three aspects: Firstly, we should fully understand the differences between the poetry genre and other literary works. The imagery in poetry is often fragmented and lacks of commonality, so it must be translated accurately by understanding the emotion in the poem. Secondly, we should fully understand the difference between emotional metaphors and general metaphors, and take “conveying emotion” as the main idea, trying to preserve the aesthetic imagery of the original text and reproduce the original emotion in its original flavor, rather than just translating it interpretively. Similarly, when we are translating general metaphors, we should also consider the emotional translation strategy of preserving the flavor of the source language, so that the readers of the translated language can better feel the culture of the other country. Thirdly, we should be fully aware of the ethnic and national cultural factors behind the emotional metaphors. As a translator, the only way to deal with the cultural differences in translation is to actively learn the cultural similarities and differences among countries and fill the cultural gaps.

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