

## On Image-Gestalt and Poetic Realm in Poetry Translation

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**Abstract:** Poetry is one of the greatest treasures of Chinese literature and culture. We aim to explore into the actualization of image-gestalt (referred to as image-G) in conveying the original poetic realm in poetry translation. In this article, the images-G in different poetry translations are analyzed under three circumstances: "emotions are born out of sceneries"; 2) "sceneries are influenced by emotions"; and 3) "emotions are co-existent with sceneries", so as to realize the reproduction of the Image-G in literary translation. It will bring enlightenment to researchers who study the English translation of Chinese poetry from a new perspective.

**Keywords:** Poetry; image-G actualization; poetic realm; poetry translation.

### INTRODUCTION

Basil Hatim and Ian Mason considered translation as a communicative process that took place under a certain social context, not just a simple interlingual activity [1]. Indeed translation is not only a matter of linguistic transfer, but a complicated work. In the English translation of Chinese poetry, it's more the case. We aim to study it from a new but underdeveloped perspective to help translators to realize the profound poetic realm. In this way we can provide a better guidance for the translator's choice in the process of translation, which has significant practical and theoretical values for translation studies. At the same time, it will be beneficial to the translation of Chinese classics.

### Theoretical Foundation: Image-G Actualization

The image is a common concept in Chinese and Western poetics. What is the image in poetry? It is created by imagination, not imitated but emotional, and it stimulates readers to think further [2]. In other words, images are the physical objects the writer expresses his emotions [3, 4]. On the basis of these ideas, the image in poetry is the combination of objects and emotions, scenes and feelings. Poets can use different images to express different feelings of human beings.

Before our discussion of the image-G actualization, firstly, we may need to introduce the concept, gestalt. Gestalt is a German psychological term, which means "whole". Gestalt is formed by people's cognitive activities. Scholars emphasize the integrity of experience and behavior, and the classical viewpoint is that the whole is not equal to the sum of parts [5, 6]. In other words, gestalt attaches more importance to the whole.

In the same way, the image-G also stresses the whole. The theory of image-G was put forward by Jiang Qiuxia in *Aesthetic Progression in Literary Translation: image-G Actualization*. In her opinion, image-G has the holistic perception. And there are two ways for the image-G actualization, mental

actualization and linguistic actualization [7]. The reason why we can use the theory of the image-G actualization in literary translation is that the image-G exists in all literary works including classical Chinese poetry [8]. She states that literary works include linguistic elements and aesthetic features, and the concept of image-G is the foundation of its actualization. The process of mental actualization is that the translator must perceive the original text by means of linguistic cognition and aesthetic experience, and then form a psychological image-G with the unity of emotion and pictures; in the process of linguistic actualization, the translator must reconstruct the mental images through proper vocabularies, and the reconstructing of syntax and discourse [9]. The major contents of image-G actualization are: image-G as a holistic image exists in all literary works; all of them have similar scene-frame structure; image-G actualization is through gestalt features; the translation model based on the image-G theory is: the translator understands the original texts; the construction of the gestalt image of the original; the reconstruction of the gestalt image; the output of translation—the linguistic actualization of the gestalt image; the success of image-G actualization can make the literary translation successful from the perspective of aesthetics [10].

### **Transferred Motivation: Similarities between Image-G and Poetic Realm**

Because of the similarities of image-G and poetic realm in terms of structural and aesthetic compositions, it is possible for us to analyze how to convey the original poetic realm in the process of translation from the perspective of image-G actualization. According to Jiang Qiuxia, image-G exists in all literary works, including classical Chinese poetry. The image-G actualization is through images. The image-G is a holistic conception, which is not a simple sum of individual images but a highly integrated individual image. It is a new whole in psychological experience with a new quality that comes from all components but surpasses each part, which is called gestalt quality. As well, poetic realm also has that feature: the poetic realm is based on images [11-13]. Poetic realm, rather than words, is the soul of poetry. It is also not the sum of images; instead, it is the sublimation of images. It is a holistic and organic unity, which integrates the poet's strong thoughts and emotions with objects [14]. It is generated from images but transcends images. It is a new whole, more than the sum of parts. We also call this the gestalt quality. From the above analysis, it is easy to conclude that the similarities between image-G and poetic realm in structural composition make it possible to convey the original poetic realm in the process of translation.

As for poetic realm, Wang Guowei a famous Chinese poet points out that it should be created through physical objects and emotions; if not, there is no poetic realm [4]. Other scholars also emphasize that the creation of poetic realm should blend emotions with sceneries [15, 16]. The harmonious and natural integration of those two aspects can create poetic realm [17, 18]. The above opinions show that the poetic realm formed by the combination of emotions and sceneries is an important aesthetic feature of classical Chinese poetry, and its aesthetic composition comes from the combination of emotions and sceneries.

According to Jiang Qiuxia, the image-G's aesthetic composition also involves two aspects: one is contour, the other is mood [8]. The contour refers to the atmosphere created in poetry and the mood refers to emotions or feelings contained in the atmosphere [18]. The combination of these two creates the holistic aesthetic experience, helping readers to know the poetic realm of emotions and sceneries. Thus, it is safe to make a conclusion: the contour in image-G is similar to the realm in poetic realm, and the mood in image-G is similar to the poetic feelings in poetic realm. Therefore, image-G and poetic realm have the common foundation in terms of aesthetic composition.

From the comparison, we can find that image-G and poetic realm have common features in the

aspects of structural and aesthetic compositions. In this way we can use image-G actualization to convey the poetic realm of the original texts in the process of translation.

### **Poetic Realm Creation in Different Poetry Translations**

As mentioned above, there are common features between image-G and poetic realm; thus, in the process of translation, we can use the theory of image-G actualization to convey the poetic realm of the original texts. We will analyze different poetry translations to describe how the poetic realm is realized. In order to be more detailed and concrete, we will analyze different poems under three circumstances, which are cited from Dr. Zhang Baohong's classification of poetic realms. They are 1) "emotions are born out of sceneries"; 2) "sceneries are influenced by emotions"; and 3) "emotions are co-existent with sceneries" [14].

"Sentiments are born out of sceneries" means emotions are provoked by sceneries. A cloudy weather makes people feel dreary, while a bright weather makes people feel optimistic. Different sceneries make people have different emotions. In order to create the aesthetic poetic realm, the translator should have a better understanding of the poet's emotions expressed in the original poem through image-G, and then try his best to convey the image-G and poetic realm. Only in this way can he recreate the poetic realm. Take the following poem and two of its English translations for an example.

The original in Chinese:

闺怨

闺中少妇不知愁，春日凝妆上翠楼。  
忽见陌头杨柳色，悔教夫婿觅封侯。

The first translation:

At the Wars

See the young wife whose bosom ne'er has ached with  
cruel pain!—

In gay array she mounts the tower when spring comes  
round again.

Suddenly she sees the willow-trees their newest green  
put on,

And sighs for her husband far away in search of glory  
gone.

—translated by Herbert A. Giles [19]

The second translation:

In her boudoir, the young lady, -- unacquainted with  
grief.

Spring day, -- best clothes, mounts shining tower.

Suddenly sees at the dyke's head, the changed colour of  
the willows.

Regrets she made her dear husband go to win a fief. \*

—translated by Arthur Waley [20]

\* She urged him to enlist out of vanity, hoping to become a sort of Lady of the Manor.

There are words and phrases such as “the young wife”, “spring”, “best clothes”, “tower”, “[willows] newest green put on”, and “regret”. With these words, there forms a picture: in Spring, the young wife is in best clothes and in a good mood, but suddenly she sees the newest green willow, which makes her recall the parting time, when the willow trees just grew new branches. Separated from her husband, she feels lonely, so a feeling of regret arises from the bottom of her heart for having asked his husband to leave her to pursue glory. In this poem, “willows’ newest green put on” is part of the scenery, and the feeling of “regret” is one of the major emotions. The emotion is provoked by the scenery. As for the translation, we can see that the version translated by Herbert A. Giles is better. When translating the phrase “杨柳色”, Giles translates it into “their newest green put on”, while Arthur Waley translates it into “the changed color of the willows”. The images in these two versions are almost the same, but the different translations of the scenery image create different poetic realm. As we know, “the changed color of the willows” does not suggest the willow grows new branches. Therefore, the original poetic realm is changed subtly. However, if we use “their newest green put on”, it will remind us the time when the young wife was separated from her husband, which is in accordance with the original one in that when she is looking at the newest willow branches, the loneliness and regret rise from her heart. In this way we can say the translator smoothly realized the image-G to create the poetic realm.

“Sceneries are influenced by emotions” means people project his/her subjective emotions to external objects, making the objects subjective. The objects exist for “me” and are used for “me”, and the objects are changed for “me”. The poetic realm is formed with the objects conveying the poet’s emotions. The translator should convey the poet’s emotions based on the images in the original poem. If not, the emotional depth of the original cannot be best expressed, let alone the poetic realm. Take the following poem as an example.

The original in Chinese:

送友人  
青山横北郭，白水绕东城。  
此地一为别，孤蓬万里征。  
浮云游子意，落日古人情。  
挥手自兹去，萧萧班马鸣。

The first translation :

Homage to -- A FAREWELL TO A FRIEND  
Beyond the country line is a mountain.  
And a river of water...to the East.

There at a restaurant, we’ll meet, then we’ll part;  
A loosed power-plant, tossing energy...  
As we wave our goodbyes into the skies,  
I’ll remember you...in white clouded skies;  
Think of me as the sun...sets over the seas,  
Like an old dog, I sleep ever peacefully.

-- treated by Jean E. Ward [21]

The second translation:

ADIEU

Athwart the northern gate the green hills swell,  
White water round the eastern city flows.  
When once we here have bade a long farewell,  
Your lone sail struggling up the current goes.  
Those floating clouds are like the wanderer’s heart,  
Yon sinking sun recalls departed days.  
Your hand waves us adieu; and lo! You start,  
And dismally your horse retiring neighs.

-- translated by W. J. B. Fletcher [22]

The first line has “green hills” 青山, “northern gate” 北郭, “white water” 白水, and “eastern city” 东城. These images, with the words used in the first line like “athwart/across” 横, and “round” 绕, show us a beautiful picture. The word “横” depicts the static posture of the green hills, and the word “绕” describes the dynamics of white water surrounding the eastern city. Under such a circumstance, even this line is without the word “farewell”, it is easy for us to feel the emotion of being reluctant to depart. The second line’s images include “loosed power-plant” 孤蓬, which suggests that the friend’s life will be like the power-plant floating with wind, showing the poet’s deep concern to his friends. The third line’s images are “floating clouds” 浮云, “sinking sun” 落日, containing the poet’s emotions. In the eyes of the poet, “浮云”, “落日” convey the farewell to the friend. “浮云” also shows the poet’s concern to his friend, worrying that his friend’s life will be like the wandering clouds. The “sinking sun” doesn’t want to leave the earth, as the poet doesn’t want the friend to leave, which expresses the poet’s emotion of not willing to depart. The last line’s images include “horse” 班马 with the “neigh dismally” 萧萧, which is a bleak cry, intensifying the emotions of being reluctant to part. After analyzing the whole poem’s images, it is easy to feel the stronger emotions. Therefore, the translator should convey the emotions in translation. Comparing the two versions, obviously, in the first translation, we can find that the translator translates “浮云” into “white clouded skies”, and “落日” into “the sun...sets over the seas” respectively. However, from the above analysis, the sceneries are not just external objects, which also contain the poet’s emotions. If we agree with the first translation, the poetic realm cannot be conveyed. On the contrary, the second translation better creates the poetic

realm through translating “浮云” into “floating clouds” with the phrase “like the wanderer’s heart” and “落日” into “sinking sun” with the phrase “recalls departed days” respectively. In other words, the objects also have life, conveying the farewell to his friend.

“Emotions are co-existent with sceneries” means the poet’s emotions are inseparable from the sceneries. It is different from the former two circumstances. Under such a circumstance, the translator should try to transfer the emotions together with the sceneries in the translation. In this way, we can say the poetic realm in the original is well reproduced in the translation and the poetic realm is recreated.

Below is another poem in Chinese for analysis:

玉阶怨

玉阶生白露，夜久侵罗袜。

却下水晶帘，玲珑望秋月。

The first translation:

The Jewel Stairs’ Grievance\*

The jeweled steps are already quite white with dew,

It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stocking,

And I let down the crystal curtain

And watch the moon through the clear autumn.

-- translated by Ezra Pound [23]

\*Jewel stairs, therefore a palace. Grievance, therefore there is something to complain of Gauze stockings, therefore a court lady, not a servant who complains. Clear autumn, therefore he has no excuse on account of weather. Also, she has come early, for the dew has not merely whitened the stairs, but has soaked her stocking.

The second translation:

A Sigh from a Staircase of Jade

Her jade-white staircase is cold with dew;

Her silk soles are wet, she lingered there so long ...

Behind her closed casement, why is she still waiting,

Watching through its crystal pane the glow of the autumn moon?

-- translated by Witter Bynner & Kiang Kang-hu [24]

The poem is about the maid’s grievance, and everywhere we can feel the emotion of grievance, but there is no word directly denoting “grievance” in the poem, which makes the expression highly implicit. “Dew” 白露 highlights the depth of the night, and the protagonist is still standing on the “marble steps” 玉阶. The night is very deep and the dew is getting heavy. The “gauze stocking” 罗袜 is wet and cold. But she still stands on the “marble steps”; from that, we can see her inner meditation and plaintive feelings. The phrase “gaze at the moon serene” 望秋月 shows the deepening meditation and plaintive feelings. She has been waiting for the man for a long time, but the man doesn’t come.

So, she goes back to the room in melancholy. She just puts down the “crystal screen” 水晶帘 to get rid of the melancholy. However, the infinite sadness arises from her heart spontaneously, and the only thing she can do is to watch the autumn moon to comfort herself. As we know, in China, the moon is an image showing the wanderers’ depression and missing of home. Therefore, from the above analysis, we can deeply feel the grievance in this poem. Comparing the two versions, we can find almost all of the images in the original have been reproduced in the two translations. However, we can find that in the two versions, the two translators use different phrases in translating the word “丝袜” in Chinese. In the first translation, the translator translates it into “gauze stocking”, while in the second, it becomes “silk soles”. As we know, these two noun phrases are different in meaning. According to our knowledge, we know that the “silk soles” is thinner than the “gauze stocking”, so with the cold dew at night, the “silk soles” is easier to be wet than the “gauze stocking”. In this way, it is hard for us to image that the protagonist has been waiting for her man for a long time. In this case, the grievance cannot be fully expressed. With the images we know in the original, a scenery is set out before us: the protagonist has been waiting for her sweetheart on the marble steps for so long, but she does not see her sweetheart’s arrival. When her silk soles are wet, she tries to cut down the sadness and sorrow by pulling down the curtain, but still looking at the “moon serene”, and her sorrow could not be cut off. Through the description of the poem, the “sigh” in the whole poem is obvious. The grievance delivered in the second translation is much less than that in the first translation. The most important reason is that emotions are co-existent with sceneries, which are composed of different images. When the image-G is not well translated, the emotions in the original poems cannot be fully represented in the target translation.

## CONCLUSION

The image-G and the poetic realm have common features in terms of structural and aesthetic compositions. It’s possible for us to use the concept of image-G to judge whether a translator can well recreate the poetic realm or not, which is supposed to be in accordance with the original. Because different translators have different background, education, experience and so on, it is important for them to have a better understanding of the original images before translating. Under different circumstances in which “emotions are born out of sceneries”, “sceneries are influenced by emotions”, or “emotions are co-existent with sceneries”, there should be different preferences in the translators’ realization of image-G and poetic realm. There are also other circumstances worthy of further research, in which emotions are either implicitly reflected in the sceneries or conveyed in imaginative sceneries.

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