

Intersemiotic translation of Yixiang (Image): A case study of Tang Poetry in paintings

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on intersemiotic translation of Yixiang, or image in western literary term, from poetry to painting by taking Tang Poetry in Paintings as a case to exemplify the translation strategies of Yixiang from verbal sign system to visual sign system. Furthermore, the meditative role of the visualized images in the target context will also be touched upon. A qualitative approach is applied in the study. Typical examples will be chosen for case analysis. It is found that the strategies of equivalence, focalization, integration, montage, addition, contrast and omission are employed by the painters. The effects of those visualized images varied in different cases. Overall, cooperating with the interlingual translations, visual languages such as color, shadow, body language of figures, picture structure are employed to help English readers better receive the poems.

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1. Introduction

For Chinese poetry, Yixiang (意象) is the building block. Yi means meaning out of one's inner world, and Xiang, image from the objective world, so the compound refers to image that bears meanings [1]. Successful translation of Yixiang means, to a large extent, the successful translation of a poem by delivering the author's intention [2], highlighting emotion, strengthening its power of expression, and enriching the aesthetic and pleasurable reading experience [3]. Tang Poetry in Paintings, published in 2017, is a great case of Yixiang translation, especially from verbal images to visual ones, i.e. intersemiotic translation (hereinafter IT) [4]. The poems in the book are translated both into English and paintings [5],[6],[7],[8]. From the perspective of IT, the book can be called multimodal text which is "essentially a kind of text with the combination of pictorial signs and verbal signs as the way of expression and narration. And in most cases, it is picture that plays a significant role in facilitating the text narration and interpretation [7],[9],[10]."

Under the context of modern international communication where multimodality and IT have become prevalent, the subject of IT in multimodal text has attracted academic attention and abundant insightful studies has been produced by scholars such as Daniella Aguiar [11],[12], George Damaskinidis [13], Peeter Torop [14],[15] Susan Petrilli [16],[17],[18] Boria, Carreres, Noriega-Sánchez, and Tomalin [19],[20],[21] O'Halloran, Tan, and Wignell [22][23], Pârlog [24] ect. IT was discussed in a wide range of themes and fields. Researchers such as Mubenga [25], Qian Hong and Feng Dezheng [26], Wang Hui and Li Xiaowei [27], and Loukia Kostopoulou [28] explores into IT in films or TV dramas, Susam-Saraeva [29] and Jessica Yeung [30] into music and song, Min-Hsiu Liao [31] into museum, Nodelman [32], Lathey [33], Oittinen [34]; Oittinen, Ketola, and Garavini

[35], O'Sullivan [36], Painter, Martin, and L. Unsworth [37], Xi Chen [38], and Fu Lili [39] into picturebook, and Borodo [40] into comics.

As for IT of book illustrations, few studies are found. Nilce M. Pereira [41] explores the illustrations of Charles Dickens' works and discusses the translation functions that those pictures perform. [42] analyses the translation of rhetoric figures of the illustrations in *The Art of War*. There are even fewer studies on the translation of images in book illustrations. Overall, study of the translation strategies of images is scanty and in need of academic attention.

Against this background, this study aims to explore the strategies employed in the verbal-visual translation of images of Tang Poetry and how the visualized images helps English target readers better understand the original text, in the hope of providing specific findings in the IT of images.

2. Theoretical Framework

Intersemiotic translation is first defined by Roman Jakobson in 1959 as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" [41]. Although the innovative concept then did not attract much attention, it opened a new ground where translation study and semiotics meet. Since 1980s, translation scholars started to turn to semiotics [43]. Munday encourages the exploration of multimodal features of texts [44]. Kress points out that translation studies shall be "looking at the field of meaning as a whole and see how meaning is handled modally across the range of modes in different societies" [45]. According to O'Halloran, Tan, and Wignell, intersemiotic translation forms "the basis of cultural communication" [23] in that it constructs and reconstructs knowledge and conventions with various semiotic resources. Peeter Torop puts forward, "Translation semiotics itself can be regarded as a discipline that deals with mediation processes between various sign systems, and, on the macro level, with culture as a translation mechanism." [15] Baker considers that intersemiotic translation "is a useful option if the word which lacks an equivalent in the target language refers to a physical entity which can be illustrated, particularly if there are restrictions on space and if the text has to remain short, concise, and to the point" [46]. The concept of intersemiotic translation is expanded from Jakobson's verbal-signs-to-nonverbal-signs to the translation among various sign systems.

IT Translation strategy in multimodal text became an subject of interest for many researchers. Delabastita [47] proposes that semiotic shifts across codes cover three categories, namely *Adiectio* (Addition, incorporating additional signs), *Detractio* (Omission, reducing signs deployed in the source text) and *Substitutio* (Substitution, replacing one sign with an, more or less, equivalent one from a different code). Based on Delabastita's model, Qian Hong and Feng Dezheng put forward 5 strategies: addition, omission, addition+omission, compensation (explaining the meanings verbally or compensating by image) and typographic transformation (Italicizing the font to differentiate inner monologue/written, texts in the drama from the regular spoken form in the subtitle).

Considering the diversity of the verbal-visual translations in *Poetry in Paintings*, the previous models are not sufficient to describe their complicate process. Based on preliminary categorization and careful assessment of the cases, the following intersemiotic translation strategy model is proposed.

Table 1. intersemiotic translation strategy

IT strategy	Description
Equivalence	Presenting the same image as the original text
Focalization	Focusing on one image or a group of key images
Integration	Integrating images into one scene
Montage	Piecing separate images together
Addition	Adding images that are not mentioned in the original text
Contrast	Presenting images in the way contrast to what depict in the original text (or contrast to what the readers may expect)
Omission	Omitting certain image or some images

Yixiang is highly translatable as manifested in Chinese artistic tradition of painting-poetry affinity. Paintings often inspire poems and vice versa. Ti Hua Shi(题画诗), literally a poem written about a painting, originated in the South and North Dynasties (420-589 AD) becomes a genre of poetry. In Song Dynasty, a painting created by a litterateur must be finished with a poem or poems, created specifically on the theme of the painting to express the poet's feelings or aspirations, giving ode to the Yijing (意境, an artistic realm where emotion and scene integrate) of the painting, or talk about his or her view of aesthetics, poetics or philosophy. Mo Mei (Ink Plum) of Wang Mian in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368 AD) is a classic one. The plum blossom is elegant, pure, and transcendent, reflecting the unearthly beauty. The spirit of the painter embodied in the flower is highlighted by the poetry on the left side, especially the line “不要人夸好颜色，只流清气满乾坤” (Being praised of beautiful color is not what it aims, But breathing out fresh fragrance that fills the world).



Fig. 1. Wang Mian's "Mo Mei" (Ink Plum) , The Palace Museum

On the other way round, fine poems are also the sources of inspiration for painters. Wang Wei's *My Hermitage in Southern Mountain* (终南别业) is a good example, “the third couplet of this poem has long been regarded as a fine example that is able to inspire the creation of (a) landscape painting(s).” [35] For instance, Ma Lin's “Scholar Reclining and Watching the Cloud Rising” [35] is inspired by the third couplet “行到水穷处，坐看云起时” (I'd saunter to the source of water, and sit to watch mountain clouds rising). The painting uses the image of a scholar reclining and looking at the clouds to reflect the peace and ease the poet expresses.



Fig. 2. Ma Lin's "Scholar Reclining and Watching the Cloud Rising", Cleveland Museum of Art

In summary, the convertibility between poetry and painting suggests that poetic images can go across the border of artistic media, deal with the same subject or theme, and construct the same Yijing. In a word, a painting inspired by a poem can be seen as a translation or interpretation of it, with images as the “intersemiotic coherence links” [35].

3. Method

This research is based on a multimodal translation of Tang Poetry. This part gives a description of the methods and data to be used in the study. Methodology: Qualitative research will be applied. The study will exemplify the intersemiotic translation strategies of the paintings with cases in *Tang Poetry in Paintings*. There are 108 Tang Poems in the book and 18 painters of the Shanghai School are involved. Although the database is large enough for a quantitative analysis, the painters divide their work with some of the poems translated by only one painter, so the paintings are, in essence, the collection of independent works. Different painter has his/her own style of painting. As a result,

it is unnecessary to use quantitative approach to explore the subject of the paper. This study will mainly focus on the variety of strategies this poetry collection presents and analyze them with qualitative method.

Data: *Poetry in Paintings*, jointly published by Shanghai Qinghe Culture and Communication Co., Ltd., Confucius Institute Headquarters, and China Translation & Publishing House, is a Chinese-English translation of 108 classic poems written by dozens of poets in Tang Dynasty. In the preface, its planner claims that the book aims to help the world better understand traditional Chinese culture. Illustrated with a Chinese style painting, each poem is presented bilingually. The poems are selected from *Three Hundred Tang Poems*, a household collection of Tang Poems in China. The English translations are all translated by Xu Yuanchong, a senior expert in translating Chinese poetry. The painters of the illustrations belong to the Shanghai School. They use visual Yixiang they interpret from the verbal poems to recreate the poetic scenes of the theme. Most of the paintings are traditional Chinese ink paintings with some mixed with a contemporary twist.

4. Results and Discussion

After Equivalence: If the number of Yixiang is small or/and they are known to both original and target readers, the strategy of equivalence is most likely to be applied.

In the example *On the Tower at Youzhou* below, there are only two images in the poem, one is 天地 (sky and earth) and the other is the lonely poet. Chen Zi'ang, the poet, is a scholar with great political talents and insights. Unfortunately, he is not appreciated by Empress Wu Zetian [48]. “念天地之悠悠”, when he sees the endless sky and earth he thinks of his career: no way out and no great man there to see him. He feels lost.

Although “The sky and earth forever last” in the English version can sparkle philosophical thinking about the infinite time and space of the universe, some readers may not get what it is that overwhelms the poet. The Painting deliberately blends the sky and the earth into yellowish haziness and vastness where a scholar walks alone without any visible road and people in sight. A sense of getting lost in the vast universe penetrates the whole scene which tells the reader immediately how the poet feels. With the help of the picture, the target reader's reaction gets closer to the original reader's. Using Nida's term, functional equivalence is achieved.

ST: 登幽州台歌, 陈子昂, 前不见古人, 后不见来者。念天地之悠悠, 独怆然而涕下。
TT: On the Tower at Youzhou, Chen Zi'ang, Where are the great men of the past, And where are those of future years?, The sky and earth forever last; Here and now I alone shed tears.



Fig. 3. On the Tower at Youzhou Painter : Lu Fusheng

Focalization. Focalization means that the painter focuses on the key image or a group of key images to emphasize the emotion, depict the core event or reveal the intention of the poet.

In *Seeing a North-bound Friend Off*, the poet has to stay in the south. He feels awful not being about to return home with his friend. Then in his imagination, he accompanies his friend back home. During the journey, there is a flow of images : 白发 (white hair)、青山 (green mountain)、晓月

(the morning moon)、残垒(dilapidated fortress)、繁星(stars)、故关(ancient city gate)、寒禽(birds suffering from cold)、衰草(withering weeds), all forming a sad Yijing(artistic state). The scenes come one after another, just like the technique of montage in photography. In the last couplet, the emotion of the poet drops to the lowest point, with 寒禽(birds suffering from cold) and 衰草(withering weeds) symbolizing the poet and his friend. The last two images are the most important images that highlight the key emotion “愁”(sorrow).

Due to the limitation of pictorial space, the painter concentrates on the last couplet. On the sill of a small window in the fortress wall stands a bird. Its head is down. The body language of keeping one's head down indicates low emotions, such as disappointment, sadness, sorrow, guilt, etc.. As a result, the bird and the withering weeds in the background clearly express the theme word: sorrow.

ST: 贼平后送人北归. 司空曙. 世乱同南去, 时清独北还. 他乡生白发, 旧国见青山. . 晓月过残垒, 繁星宿故关. 寒禽与衰草, 处处伴愁颜.

TT: Seeing a North-bound Friend Off. Sikong Shu. In time of war we came to southern land; Now peace restored, you return single-hand. In alien place our hair has turned white; At home again you'll see mountains upright. The moon wanes to see fortress ruined of late; The stars twinkle at ancient city gate. What would your sad face see wherever you pass But shivering birds and withering grass.

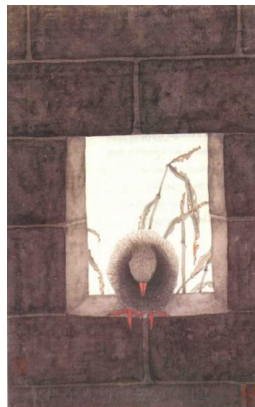


Fig. 4. Seeing a North-bound Friend Off Painter: He Xi

Integration is frequently used by the painters of *Tang Poetry in Paintings*, especially when treating landscape poetry. The independent groups of images are fused in a landscape painting of panorama. By employing the Cavalier Perspective, a typical Chinese landscape painting technique, to integrate important images, the painting shows the Yijing the poet intends to deliver and absorbs the reader into it.

The first three couplets of Du Fu's *On the Height* show five independent groups of images: the howling wind, clear sky and wailing apes; lucid water, white beach, and hovering birds; forests and falling leaves; Yangtze River and its rolling waves; the autumn and the poet on the top of a mountain alone. The magnificent view of autumn stimulates many feelings after years of wondering life with no success in politics: self-pity, anguish, nostalgia, loneliness...While in the painting, nearly all elements are fused into a panorama apart from the image of “apes wail and cry”. Taking a bird's-eye view from the height, it is easy for readers to put themselves into the poet's role and take an imaginary wonder in the picture and experience the poet's feelings.

ST : 登高. 杜甫. 风急天高猿啸哀. 渚清沙白鸟飞回。无边落木萧萧下， 不尽长江滚滚来。 万里悲秋常作客， 百年多病独登台。 艰难苦恨繁霜鬓， 潦倒新停浊酒杯。

TT : On the Height. Du Fu. The wind so swift, the sky so wide, apes wail and cry; Water so clear and beach so white, birds wheel and fly. The boundless forest sheds its leaves shower by shower; The endless river rolls its waves hour after hour. A thousand miles from home, I'm grieved

at autumn's plight; Ill now and then for years, alone I'm on this height. Living in times so hard, at frosted hair I pine; Cast down by poverty, I have to give up wine.



Fig. 5. On the Height Painter: Zhu Min

Montage. Montage originally a photographic term, refers to the technique of selecting, editing, and piecing together separate sections of film to form a continuous whole. In this context, It means the technique of producing a new composite whole from fragments of pictures. In this poetry collection, the technique is adopted by some of the painters. In the case below, three sets of scenes are packed in one painting to tell the whole story.

The first scene on the lower left shows a scholar seeing his friend off. On the bottom right, the boats are sailing. The willow trees waving in the air above the sailing boats and a town in the sunset on the top are the beautiful scenery that the poet imagines his friend will see on his way back home. Those images are his kind reminder to a failed mind that life will move on and there are many beautiful things out there. “未几拂荆扉” (you will soon get home) sounds warm to a cold heart. “孤城当落晖” (a single town looks brilliant in the sunset) presents a spectacular sight. The tone of the original poem is warm and encouraging. However, in the English translation, the two lines mentioned above are translated into “Until you reach your cottage door” and “A lonely town in setting sun”. The tone of the English translation lacks of comfort, and even sounds quite low by using the word “lonely”. The painting adds luster to the English translation in that its clear narrative structure and colorful tones better delivers the emotion and intention of the original poem.

ST: 送綦毋潜落第还乡（选段）。王维。置酒长安道，同心与我违。行当浮桂棹，未几拂荆扉。远树带行客，孤城当落晖。吾谋适不用，勿谓知音稀。

TT: Seeing Qiwu Qian Off after His Failure in Civil Service Examinations (selected Verse). Wang Wei. We drink adieu on the broad way, My bosom friend's going away. Your orchid boat will sail before, Until you reach your cottage door. Far-off trees show the roaming one, A lonely town in setting sun. Though you have not achieved your end, Do not belie your bosom friend!

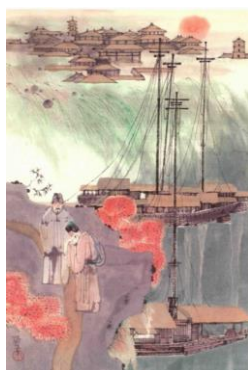


Fig. 6. Seeing Qiwu Qian Off after His Failure in Civil Service Examinations Painter: Ding Xiaofang

Addition. With addition, the painter adds some typical images relevant to the original images or the theme of the poetry. In Chinese myth, Chang'e, the moon goddess lives in the moon palace with

a rabbit, and there is an osmanthus tree on the moon. The osmanthus is also related to another myth. Legend has it that Wu Gang, the General of South Heaven Gate, falls in love with Chang'e, so he was punished to cut the osmanthus, but the tree heals itself quickly after each chop. The similarity of their fates is that they have to stay in the same way of life forever after they made mistakes, the biggest torture of all. The English translation uses the moon goddess to replace the original name “嫦娥”(Chang'e). As the target reader of this poetry collection is English readers, they may not be familiar with the image of Chang'e. It is reasonable that Xu Yuanchong uses the strategy of domestication in this case. In the picture, the painter adds the rabbit and the osmanthus to enrich the scene, which will impress the readers and help to realize the skopos of “to help the world better understand traditional Chinese culture” the collection aims at.

ST : 嫦娥. 李商隐. 云母屏风烛影深, 长河渐落晓星沉. 嫦娥应悔偷灵药, 碧海青天夜夜心。

TT : To the Moon Goddess Li Shangyin. Upon the marble screen the candlelight is winking; The Silver River slants and morning starts are sinking. You'd regret to have stolen the miraculous potion; Each night you brood over the lonely celestial ocean.



Fig. 7. To the Moon Goddess Painter: Han Shuo

Contrast. By using contrast, the painter is able to present the oppositions in the Yijing of a poem. Du Fu lived in the declining era of Tang Dynasty. The devastating An Lu Shan Rebellion nearly ruined the nation and then wars broke out among local lords in its aftermath. In Du Fu's *Spring View*, the first couplet “国破山河在, 城春草木深” shows a pair of opposition, the flourishing nature in the spring and the war-tormented nation. This contrast presents the sorrow of a patriot.

In the painting below, what the painter depicts is not a blooming spring. With yellow grass and black clouds, it looks like a desolate autumn landscape, quite opposite to the reader's expectation. The emotion thus is highlighted. The images symbolize the dark time the country is suffering, opposite to the real vitality of springtime. The black and yellow color makes the scene depressed, which expresses the grief of the poet. The contrast between what one feels inside against what the natural world is outside is well presented by the deliberately darkened images.

ST : 春望 杜甫. 国破山河在, 城春草木深. 感时花溅泪, 恨别鸟惊心. 烽火连三月, 家书抵万金. 白头搔更短, 浑欲不胜簪.

TT : Spring View Du Fu. On war-torn land streams flow and mountains stand; In vernal town grass and weeds are overgrown. Grieved over the years, flowers make us shed tears; Hating to part, hearing birds breaks our heart. The beacon fire has gone higher and higher; Words from household are worth their weight in gold. I cannot bear to scratch my grizzled hair; It grows too thin to hold a light hairpin.

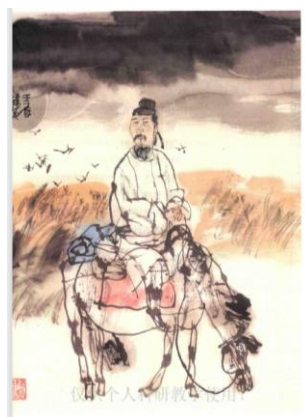


Fig. 8. Spring View Painter: Han Shuo

Omission. Due to the spatial limitation of book illustrations, not all elements of the original poems are shown in the pictures, some images have to be given up. Most of the examples in the previous sections contain the strategy of omission. For example, when the painters use the strategy of focalization, key images are emphasized by omitting less important ones.

5. Conclusion

Although the original poems are written by different poets with distinct images, styles and themes under varied contexts, the painters have developed different strategies to deal with the images that build connections between the original works, the English translations and the paintings. Every case has given the verbal text visual forms utilizing lines, colors, lights, body languages and shadows etc. As Nilce M. Pereira points out, the paintings “can be seen not as an isolated activity of crafting images for words—although pictures invariably do this—but as a process which shapes the way the literary work is received” [49]. Chinese poetry attaches great importance to the integration of images and meanings to form fine Yijing (artistic realm), so through the networks of both verbal and visual Yixiang, the readers can better appreciate the charms of the poems.

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