

# The Game of Poetic Artistry vs. Algorithmic Precision: A Comparative Study of Xu Yuanchong's English Translations of Tang Poetry and AI-Generated Translations

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**Abstract:** This study conducts a comparative analysis of the English translations of Tang poetry by translator Xu Yuanchong and an artificial intelligence (AI) system (exemplified by DeepSeek-V1), focusing on four aspects: translation strategies, cultural imagery transmission, rhythm reproduction, and aesthetic value. Additionally, it explores the potential of “human-machine collaboration” in poetry translation in the era of artificial intelligence.

**Keywords:** Tang poetry translation; Xu Yuanchong; AI translation; DeepSeekR1

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## 1. Introduction

As the pinnacle of Chinese classical literature, Tang poetry has endured for a millennium, continuing to shine with its unique artistic charm in the world literary canon. Translating Tang poetry into English is a significant challenge in the field of translation. Translators must not only convey the literal meaning of the original text but also consider cultural connotations, aesthetic appeal, and phonetic beauty. This requires translators to possess not only profound bilingual skills but also keen insight into cross-cultural communication. Mr. Xu Yuanchong’s “Three Beauties Theory” provides important theoretical guidance for the English translation of Tang poetry. He emphasizes “beauty in meaning, beauty in sound, and beauty in form,” striving to achieve cross-cultural reconstruction of poetic imagery through creative retelling. Xu Yuanchong’s translation practice highlights the unique value of humanism in literary translation. His translations not only convey the semantics of Tang poetry but also achieve a high level of artistic reproduction in terms of cultural imagery and poetic aesthetics<sup>[1]</sup>.

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence technology, AI translation has gradually become an emerging force in the field of literary translation. Represented by DeepSeek-R1, new AI translation technologies, relying on powerful big data processing capabilities and algorithm optimization, can generate high-quality translations in a short time. This paper compares Xu Yuanchong’s English translations of Tang poetry with AI translations, analyzing their similarities and differences in terms of translation strategies, cultural imagery transmission, rhythm reproduction, and aesthetic value. Furthermore, it explores the possibility of a “human-machine collaboration” model in poetry translation in the era of artificial intelligence.

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## 2. Theoretical Framework

### (1) Xu Yuanchong's "Three Beauties Theory"

Xu Yuanchong is a renowned Chinese translator and his "Three Beauties Theory" is the core of his translation theory, particularly significant in guiding poetry translation. This theory advocates pursuing beauty in meaning, sound, and form during the translation process to achieve artistic reproduction of literary works in cross-cultural contexts<sup>[1]</sup>.

"Beauty in meaning" is the core of the "Three Beauties Theory" referring to the translation conveying the emotions, imagery, and content of the original poem, rather than just the literal meaning. Xu Yuanchong believes that beauty in meaning is the soul of poetry translation. Translators need to reconstruct language to convey the imagery and emotions of the original poem to target language readers. In translating Li Bai's 静夜思, Xu Yuanchong cleverly conveys the imagery of the original poem through imagery such as "a pool of light" and "hoar-frost on the ground". "Beauty in sound" refers to the translation retaining the rhyme and rhythm of the original poem. Xu Yuanchong pays attention to rhyme and syllable coordination in his translations, making them read smoothly. In translating 静夜思, he uses an ABAB rhyme structure ("light" rhymes with "bright," and "ground" rhymes with "drowned"), enhancing the musicality of the translation. "Beauty in form" emphasizes the aesthetic form of the translation, including parallelism and neatness. Xu Yuanchong pays attention to symmetry and neatness in form, making the translation visually appealing. His translation of 静夜思 is neatly parallel, echoing the five-character quatrain form of the original poem.

Xu Yuanchong's translation practice breaks through the traditional translation theory's mechanical pursuit of "faithfulness," instead emphasizing artistic recreation in poetry translation. He believes that the essence of poetry translation is "to follow one's heart without overstepping the bounds", that is, to achieve cross-language reconstruction of cultural imagery through the translator's subjective intervention while respecting the spirit of the original poem. This creative translation not only preserves the imagery and emotions of the original poem but also enhances the artistic appeal of the translation through language optimization<sup>[1]</sup>.

### (2) AI translation

The core technology of AI translation is Neural Machine Translation (NMT), which operates based on deep learning models, achieving semantic mapping and probability generation through training on massive parallel corpora. Current mainstream AI translation platforms include Google Translate, Baidu Translate, DeepL Translate, Microsoft Translate, and Youdao Translate. These platforms rely on different algorithmic architectures and corpora, each with unique features in terms of translation quality, language coverage, and adaptability to specialized fields<sup>[2]</sup>.

Recently, the rapid rise of DeepSeekR1 has attracted widespread attention, and its excellent translation performance has made it widely used in various text translation scenarios. As a deep learning-based AI translation system, DeepSeekR1 achieves precise understanding and generation of multilingual texts through advanced algorithmic models. Its translation function has the following core advantages: (1) High-precision translation performance: DeepSeekR1 innovatively adopts the Transformer architecture and integrates a dynamic sparse attention mechanism, significantly improving the processing efficiency of multilingual translation tasks while effectively maintaining the semantic integrity and stylistic features of the original text; (2) Extensive language support: The platform breaks through the limitations of traditional Chinese-English translation, achieving seamless translation between multiple languages; (3) Professional terminology management: The system supports users uploading custom terminology databases, significantly improving the accuracy and consistency of specialized text translation by establishing domain-specific terminology standards, especially suitable for fields such as law, medicine, and technology; (4) Significant cost advantage: Compared

to traditional translation services, DeepSeekR1 provides highly competitive pricing while ensuring high-quality translation output, achieving the best balance between performance and cost<sup>[3]</sup>. When inputting the line “床前明月光” from Li Bai’s *静夜思*, DeepSeekR1 quickly translates it as “Before my bed, the moonlight gleams”. This translation mode, relying on massive corpus statistical analysis, shows significant efficiency advantages in processing everyday language texts.

### 3. A Comparative Study of Xu Yuanchong’s English Translation of Tang Poetry and AI Translation of Tang Poetry

#### (1) Transmission of cultural imagery: explicit/implicit compensation vs. implicit dissolution

In the translation process, the transmission of cultural imagery is a key issue. To effectively transmit cultural imagery, translators usually adopt two strategies: explicit compensation and implicit compensation. Explicit compensation refers to the translator directly supplementing cultural background information through clear annotations or appendices. For example, in the line “莫愁前路无知己，天下谁人不识君” (Don’t worry about the road ahead, for there’s no connoisseur on earth but loves your song), Xu Yuanchong translates “知己” as “connoisseur” and annotates that “connoisseur” (appreciator) better reflects Dong Da’s identity as a musician while conveying the deeper meaning of “知己”. Implicit compensation refers to the translator adjusting the expression of the target language, such as through addition, paraphrase, concretization, or domestication, to make the translation more understandable in the target language. For example, in the line “惆怅阶前红牡丹，晚来唯有两枝残” (I’m saddened by the courtyard peonies brilliant red, At dusk only two of them are left on their bed), Xu Yuanchong implicitly conveys the poet’s affection for the peonies through “saddened” and “brilliant red”, while preserving the imagery and phonetic beauty of the original poem. Implicit dissolution refers to the translator choosing to “dissolve” or dilute cultural imagery, implied information, or specific expressions in the source language to make the translation more consistent with the cultural habits and expressions of the target language. For example, in the line “劝君莫惜金缕衣，劝君惜取少年时” (Love not the golden dress more than the youthful golden hours), Xu Yuanchong omits the specific cultural background of “金缕衣” and implicitly dissolves the metaphor of the original poem through “Love not the golden dress more than the youthful golden hours”, conveying the theme of cherishing time. Although implicit dissolution helps improve the fluency and readability of the translation, excessive dissolution may lead to the disappearance of cultural imagery in the source language or incomplete information in the translation<sup>[4]</sup>.

Cultural imagery is one of the most challenging areas in poetry translation, often carrying the philosophical thoughts, historical background, and aesthetic tastes of a specific culture. For example, in Wang Wei’s *山居秋暝*, the line “空山新雨后，天气晚来秋” is translated by Xu Yuanchong as: After fresh rain in mountains bare, comes the autumn evening fair. Xu Yuanchong does not directly translate “空山” but implicitly conveys the of “空山” through “mountains bare” (empty mountains). This approach avoids the cultural barriers that direct translation might bring while preserving the ethereal and tranquil imagery of “空山” in the original poem. In Chinese culture, “空山” symbolizes a kind of transcendent tranquility and solitude. Xu Yuanchong cleverly conveys this imagery through the imagery of “mountains bare” and “fresh rain”, allowing Western readers to intuitively feel the atmosphere of the original poem through natural imagery. In contrast, AI translation shows obvious limitations in handling the culturally rich imagery of “空山”. For example, DeepSeekR1 translates it as: After the fresh rain in empty mountains, the weather feels like late autumn in the evening. This translation lacks the rhythmic sense of poetry and appears rather plain and straightforward. Although the semantic meaning is close to the original poem, it completely loses the cultural depth behind “空山”. Xu Yuanchong successfully achieves cross-language reconstruction of cultural connotations through implicit compensation strategies, while AI translation often leads to implicit dissolution of cultural depth due to algorithmic limitations.

## (2) Reproduction of rhythm and form: artistic reconstruction vs. technical compromise

The rhythm and form of poetry are important components of its artistic charm, but they often face significant challenges in the translation process. Li Bai's 静夜思, as a model of Chinese classical poetry, has a concise and lively five-character quatrain form and a natural and smooth rhythm, which together create a unique musical and rhythmic beauty. The original poem "床前明月光, 疑是地上霜。举头望明月, 低头思故乡" creates a serene and profound imagery through the alternation of tonal patterns and the resonance of end rhymes ("光"- "霜", "月"- "乡"). In translating 静夜思, Xu Yuanchong skillfully uses artistic reconstruction strategies to strive to reproduce the rhythmic beauty and sense of rhythm in the translation. His translation is as follows:

Before my bed a pool of light---  
Can it be hoar-frost on the ground?  
Looking up, I find the moon bright;  
Bowling, in homesickness I'm drowned.<sup>[5]</sup>

Xu Yuanchong's translation uses a rhyming form, with the first and third lines rhyming ("light" with "bright") and the second and fourth line rhyming ("ground" with "drowned"). This rhythmic arrangement preserves the musicality of the original poem, making the translation read smoothly. Additionally, he cleverly uses internal rhyme (such as "frost" with "find") to further enhance the phonetic beauty of the translation.

In contrast, AI translation often shows a tendency toward technical compromise when translating 静夜思. The translation generated by DeepSeekR1 is as follows:

Before my bed, the bright moonlight gleams,  
Seeming like frost on the ground, it streams.  
I lift my head to gaze at the moon so bright,  
Then lower it, thinking of home, in the quiet night.

Although the translation uses a rhyming form (AABB), such as "gleams" and "streams", "bright" and "night", giving the translation a sense of rhythm, the language is rather plain and somewhat stiff, lacking the beauty of poetry. The algorithmic logic of AI translation often makes it difficult to balance semantic accuracy and formal beauty, especially when dealing with the multi-syllable rhythms and complex rhythms of poetry, often resorting to a "semantic priority" strategy. This limitation essentially stems from the inherent defects of its technical architecture. Neural machine translation systems heavily rely on training with large-scale parallel corpora, but the proportion of poetry texts in these massive corpora is minimal, making it difficult for the model to fully learn the unique rhythmic patterns and aesthetic rhythms of poetry.

## (3) Generation of aesthetic value: subjective intervention vs. data-driven

Poetry translation is by no means a simple interlingual conversion but a cross-cultural aesthetic reconstruction. In this process of reconstruction, the strategies adopted by the translator and the AI are vastly divergent.

### 1) Subjective intervention: Xu Yuanchong's aesthetic reconstruction

The generation of aesthetic value in poetry translation is inseparable from the translator's subjective intervention. This intervention is not only reflected in vocabulary selection but also in the grasp of the overall imagery of the poem<sup>[6]</sup>.

In translating "人面桃花相映红," Xu Yuanchong translates it as: A pretty face outshines the flowers of peach trees. The original poem "人面桃花相映红" creates a vivid and poetic picture through the contrast between the

face and the peach blossoms. Xu Yuanchong translates “人面” as “a pretty face” and “桃花” as “flowers of peach trees”, cleverly conveying the imagery that the face is more beautiful than the peach blossoms through the word “outshines” (surpasses). This translation not only preserves the imagery of the original poem but also enhances the visual appeal through language reconstruction. In Chinese culture, peach blossoms often symbolize beauty and love. Xu Yuanchong successfully conveys this cultural imagery to English readers through “pretty face” and “flowers of peach trees”, allowing them to feel the imagery of harmony between humans and nature in the original poem.

## 2) Data-Driven: AI's standardized aesthetics

The generation of aesthetic value in AI translation is entirely dependent on data-driven logic. It generates the most probable translation by analyzing high-frequency vocabulary and common collocations in large-scale parallel corpora. In translating the word “月” in Li Bai's 静夜思, AI may choose high-frequency words such as “moon” or “moonlight” based on statistical probabilities in the corpus. This data-driven model makes AI translations semantically accurate but tends to be “standardized” in terms of artistry, appearing dull.

The limitations of AI translation in generating aesthetic value stem from its inability to understand the polysemy and cultural metaphors of poetry. In translating Li Shangyin's 锦瑟, the line “锦瑟无端五十弦” is directly translated by DeepSeekR1 as “The ornate zither, for no reason, has fifty strings”, completely losing the philosophical meaning of the original poem. In contrast, Xu Yuanchong cleverly conveys the poet's emotional tone by adding the word “sad” (“Why should the zither sad have fifty strings?”). This sensitivity to cultural context is precisely what AI translation lacks.

In Addition, the limitations of AI translation in generating aesthetic value are also reflected in its neglect of the formal beauty of poetry. In translating Du Fu's 登高, the line “无边落木萧萧下，不尽长江滚滚来” is directly translated by DeepSeekR1 as “Endless falling leaves rustle down; The boundless Yangtze River rolls on and on”. Although semantically accurate, loses the parallelism and phonetic harmony of the original poem. In contrast, Xu Yuanchong reproduces the aesthetic qualities of the original poem through rhyme (“shower/hour”) and rhythm adjustment (The boundless forest sheds its leaves shower by shower; The endless river rolls its waves hour after hour).

## 4. The Possibility of Human-Machine Collaborative Translation

Although AI has many limitations in poetry translation, its advantages in semantic decoding and efficiency cannot be ignored. In the future, how to combine the technical advantages of AI with human cultural wisdom may become an important development direction in the field of poetry translation. One possible path is to build a “AI-assisted---human-led” collaboration model: AI is responsible for initial semantic translation, while human translators perform poetic polishing. In this model, AI can undertake basic tasks such as semantic analysis, terminology matching, and sentence generation, thereby reducing the burden on human translators<sup>[7]</sup>. For example, AI can quickly generate an initial translation of “春蚕到死丝方尽，蜡炬成灰泪始干” as “The silkworm dies only when its silk is exhausted; The candle's tears dry only when it burns to ashes”. Human translators can then perform artistic processing based on this.

Additionally, AI can serve as an auxiliary tool for cultural background knowledge, providing references for human translators. For example, when translating “蓬山”, AI can provide relevant cultural annotations (such as “a mythical mountain”), helping translators better understand the cultural connotations of the original poem. This collaborative model can not only improve translation efficiency but also to some extent compensate for AI's shortcomings in cultural transmission and aesthetic reconstruction.

## 5. Conclusion

Translation is not only a conversion of language but also a dialogue of cultures and a resonance of hearts. In this cross-cultural exchange, the subjective intervention of human translators is crucial. Through the comparison of Xu Yuanchong's English translations of Tang poetry and AI translations of Tang poetry, we find that although AI has significant advantages in semantic decoding and efficiency, opening new paths for poetry translation, its tool nature makes it difficult to replace the cultural sensitivity and artistic creativity of human translators. Therefore, human-machine collaboration is expected to become the mainstream model for poetry translation in the future.

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