

Translating across Cultures: *Yi Jing* and Understanding Chinese Poetry

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Abstract: Translating across cultures stands for a complicated and demanding process. In his well-known article “Chinese Poetry and the English Reader,” David Hawkes discussed the challenges of translating classical Chinese poetry into English, but he failed to examine a most distinctive feature of Chinese poetry, *yi jing* 意境. Commonly translated as “poetic world,” *yi jing* is as much a cultural and philosophical phenomenon as a poetic argument. It is most central to Chinese poetry and the failure to make a substitute for it in English translations hinders its proper understanding by learners of other cultural backgrounds. Using concrete examples, this article examines such failure on the part of the existing English translations and makes suggestions as to its remedy. A visual approach making use of paintings is advocated as a supplementary tool in the teaching of *yi jing* in the American classrooms.

Keywords: Translation, *yi jing*, emotion and scene, painting in poetry, implicit expression, intersemiotic translation, visual approach

1. Introduction

Translation refers to “the process of making a substitute in one language for something which was at first written in another” (Hawkes, 1971, p. 94). The task, however, is much more complicated than it appears, because it involves more than a transfer of linguistic information from a source text to a target text. Language is not an independent means of human expression, but is deeply embedded in or entangled with multiple other dimensions of the signification process, many of which are not linguistic but cultural and can evade translation easily because these “paralinguistic” elements are not readily evident in the text in the first place.

This nature of human expression is particularly true with the poetic language, perhaps the most intricate form of all human expressions (Owen, 1975; Sun, 2001). In his article “Chinese Poetry and the English Reader,” David Hawkes (1975) discussed the challenges of translating classical Chinese poetry into English and proposed that the least reproducible aspect of Chinese poetry is the formal one such as the tonal pattern, meter and rhyme. Although he also included in his discussion some content-related aspects that are “refractory” in the translation process, Hawkes failed to examine a most central feature of the best Chinese poetry¹ that is perhaps the strongest defiant of the translation effort, *yi jing* 意境. Discussed by James Liu (1962) as the “world” of poetry, *yi jing* is not so much a prosodic necessity—although prosodic arrangement

¹ The primary attention of Hawkes’ study is on Tang dynasty poetry, which is also the focus of this present study.

certainly affects its genesis and depth—as an artistic exercise and creation, and is extremely difficult to be reproduced in English due to what Hawkes aptly called “the inhibiting factors beyond the translator’s control” (94).

Literally, *yi jing* can be taken to mean “the realm of meaning” (*yi*, “meaning” or “idea”; *jing*, “realm” or “sphere”). Interestingly, however, this “realm of meaning” does not reside in words but must be accessed beyond text through readers’ active imagination and artistic experience. It is intricate, ineffable and yet imbued with meanings. *Yi jing* is essential to poetry in Chinese traditions. On the one hand, it signals the level of artistic attainment of the poet, and is thus the single most important criterion against which all poetic creations are measured. On the other hand, from the reader’s perspective, *yi jing* represents the objective of reading, namely, to retrieve the meanings and nuances lying outside the ordinary reference of words while enjoying this reflective and semi-creative experience. To study Chinese poetry, therefore, constitutes the study of its *yi jing* (Lin, 1987; Huang, 1981). Most importantly, in the study of Chinese poetry at cross-cultural settings, *yi jing* has added significances because it reflects clearly and importantly Chinese world views, cognitive tendencies and attitudes toward language. For all its textual and cultural importance, *yi jing* is or should be a pivotal question to consider in the translation of Chinese poetry.

2. What is *Yi Jing*?

As a literary notion, *yi jing* refers to an ineffable and meaning-laden artistic space that the poet intently constructs through a combination of his thoughts and feelings with the objects or scene he depicts in his poem. As artistic space, *yi jing* captures a feature or effect common to all poetry because all poetry invites readers to enter its world and savor its meanings and artistic beauties. However, in Chinese poetry, *yi jing* is pursued consciously and conscientiously by both the poet and the reader as the single most important means for poetic expression and understanding. This is so because in Chinese cultural traditions the function of poetry has been viewed as one, to express human emotion or *qing* 情, and the most effectual means for such an affective purpose has been deemed to be through the depiction of scene or *jing* 景. Emotion and scene, or *qing* and *jing*, constitute two basic elements in the construction and realization of *yi jing*. All literary discussions about *yi jing* in traditional Chinese criticism revolve around the relation and interplay of these two essential elements.

2.1. *Yi Jing* as a Notion

Qing, as Cecile Chu-chin Sun defines it, “relates to the thoughts, feelings, memories, and the whole range of abstract and elusive human sentiments expressed in a poem” and *jing*, on the other hand, “refers to the physical reality in all its sounds and sights that lends a living context to feeling” (2001, pp. 61-62). Although spontaneous resonance between emotion and scene or between mind (*xin* 心) and things (*wu* 物) was realized very early in Chinese traditions² and

² In the *Book of Rites* (*Li ji* 禮記), compiled in the Western Han period, a discussion on music states: “The notes (of music) arises having been generated by the heart. The heart is stirred having been caused by things from the outside world.” 凡音之起，由人心生也。人心之動，物使之然也。

was amply discussed by the Six dynasties poets and scholars such as Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) and Liu Xie 劉勰 (465-520), the concept of *jing* 境 was first brought up in a literary context by Wang Changling 王昌齡 (689-756), a prominent poet during the golden age of the Tang dynasty which witnessed the consummation of the poetic genre in the newly established form *jin ti shi* 近 / 今體詩 (“modern-style poetry”). In his “Principles of Poetry” (“Shi Ge” 詩格), Wang Changling proposed that poetry had “three realms” (*san jing* 三境): the realm of things (*wu jing* 物境), the realm of emotion (*qing jing* 情境), and the realm of idea (*yi jing* 意境) (Wang, 2002, p. 172-173).³ Whichever form a poem may assume, Wang emphasized, there must be a harmonious interaction and cross-reference between the subjective mind (*xin*) and the objective reality (*jing*) (in his words, *chu xin yu jing, shi jing yu xin* 處心於境，視境於心). Wang Changling’s position was echoed by a great many poets and literary scholars in later times, postulated by them in various formulations: *si yu jing xie* 思與境偕 (“the harmony of thought and realm”) by Sikong Tu 司空圖 (837-908), *jing yu yi hui* 境與意會 (“the meeting of realm with idea”) by Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), and *shen yu jing he* 神與境合 (“the harmony of spirit and realm”) by Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-1590), to name just a few. This, in combination with the abundant discussions along the line of emotion and scene, *yi zhong you jing, jing zhong you yi* 意中有景，景中有意 or “there is scene in thought, thought in scene” by Jiang Kui 薑夔 (c. 1155-c. 1221), *qing zhong jing, jing zhong qing* 情中境，景中情 or “scene in emotion, emotion in scene” by Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692), etc., contributed to the establishment of the poetics of *yi jing*, which was finally synthesized and brought to a coherent disclosure by Wang Guowei 王國維 at the beginning of the twentieth century. In his “Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrics of the World*” (“*Renjian ci yigao xu*” 人間詞乙稿序), Wang Guowei grouped the three realms of poetry proposed by Wang Changling into one realm called *yi jing*, under which he divided poetry into three subcategories based on the interplay of *yi* and *jing* (“idea and realm”) or *qing* and *jing* (“emotion and scene”):

Concerning the writing of poetry, what can fully express the author’s feelings internally and touch the reader to the heart externally are none other than two things, *yi* and *jing*. The best work of poetry features the fusion of the two. Next come the ones that either excels in *yi* or in *jing* respectively. In either of these two scenarios, both *yi* and *jing* must be present; otherwise, it would fail to be called poetry. ... The two aspects of *yi* and *jing* are often intermingled with each other. The author can emphasize one more than the other, but cannot abandon one for the other. Whether a poem is considered to be of high quality all depends on whether it has *yi jing* or whether its *yi jing* is profound or otherwise. 文學之事，其內足以摠己而外足以感人者，意與境二者而已。上焉者，意與境渾，其次或以境勝，或以意勝，苟缺其一，不足以言文學。……故二者常互相錯綜，能有所偏重，而不能有所偏廢也。文學之工不工，亦視其意境之有無與其深淺而已。(Nie, 1997, p. 156)

³ It must be noted that there was a difference in the ways Wang Changling and later critics used the term *yi jing*. Wang used the term to simply refer to the type of poetry, as opposed to the two other types of poetry he identified, which focused on the expression of moral ideas.

Although, like Wang Changling, Wang Guowei also identified three types of poetry based on the relationship and interplay of emotion and scene, the one he considered the best along the line of his predecessors is where emotion and scene are completely merged, or in his words, *yi yu jing hun* 意與境渾. The word *hun* emphasizes a seamless integration, to the extent that emotion and scene cannot be separated from one another, or the reflection of scene is at the same time an expression of emotion. This total fusion of emotion and scene, or in Chinese *qing jing jiao rong* 情景交融, represents the highest artistic world or *yi jing* that a poem can exemplify.

2.2. Yi Jing in Practice

What the phrase *qing jing jiao rong* precisely means is that while writing a poem, the poet does not comment explicitly on his thought and emotion, but focuses his attention on the delineation of a natural scene in front of his (mind's) eyes that has incited or inspired his feelings. The poet, in other words, adopts an implicit or even concealed writing style referred to in Chinese as *han xu* 含蓄, describing the scene, while instilling and infusing his emotion with it. His poetic panorama is composed of carefully selected images. He arranges these images based on their physical properties as well as on their symbolic meanings so that they form a coordinated picture that conveys his feelings. Although the poet refrains from intruding himself upon the scene, the poetic world through his artful design is so colored by or steeped in his emotion that “all the language of the scene becomes the language of the emotion” (*yi qie jing yu jie qing yu* 一切景語皆情語), as Wang Guowei put it, and that it speaks of his mind in terms more vivid and powerful than a direct verbal assertion.

Take the following poem “Mooring at Night by the Maple Bridge” (“Fengqiao Ye Bo” 楓橋夜泊) by the Tang dynasty poet Zhang Ji 張繼 (715-779) as example:

月落烏啼霜滿天，	moon fall crow caw frost fill sky
江楓漁火對愁眠。	river maple fishing lamp face sadness sleep
姑蘇城外寒山寺，	Gu Su City outside Cold Mountain Temple
夜半鐘聲到客船。	night middle bell sound reach visitor boat

The moon sets, a crow caws and frost fills the sky,
 River maples, fishermen's lamps, all in sad drowsiness.
 Outside Gusu at the Cold Mountain Temple
 Tolls the midnight bell sound reaching the visitor's boat.⁴

In this poem of 28 characters, the poet creates an artistically beautiful and emotionally rich poetic world that is the reason for its longstanding popularity with the Chinese readers. It conveys the author's loneliness and homesickness as he travels away from home, and yet these

⁴ This translation by the author intends to stay close to the original syntax of the Chinese poem.

feelings are not told directly but are couched in a scene that foregrounds the poem. The scene features a dark and dreary late autumn night composed of many concrete objects from the physical environment: the moon, the crow, the frost-filled sky, maple trees, fishermen's lamps, the Cold Mountain Temple, and a traveler's boat. Each object or being performs its routine at this time of the season and the night, and yet their seemingly coordinated presence and activities transmit a strong atmosphere of desolation and solitude. Throughout the poem there is not a clear mention of the persona, very possibly the author himself, as to what he is doing and how he feels; yet, the poem reeks of overpowering sadness, augmented effectively by the forlorn cawing of the crow nearby and the austere tolling of a temple bell in the distance.

The second line contributes most effectively to this overall sad atmosphere, although it is the most problematic because of the author's implicit expression. The word *chou* 愁 is the only word in the entire poem that indicates a feeling ("distressed" or "sad"), but the way it is used in the sentence, it is unclear who is distressed or sad, the poet or the river maples and the fishermen's lamps? The grammatical fluidity of the three words *dui chou mian* further adds to the opacity of the sentence: who is facing whom as they sleep with sadness, the river maples and the fishermen's lamps, or the poet and these apparently personified objects from the physical world? Despite all these obscurities, however, the reader is nonetheless overcome by the powerful feelings invoked by the scene. The equivocal statement of the line only contributes to the strong "lingering tone" (*yun wei* 韻味) of the poem, generated as the reader goes through what he sees in his mind trying to make sense of the author's intended ambiguity. This is an example *par excellence* of the technique of fusing emotion with scene. By purposely leaving the subject of *chou* unspecified, fuzziness is incurred making it difficult to distinguish between the feelings of humans and the feelings of natural objects. The unity of emotion and scene, lying at the core of *yi jing*, achieves a harmony of the highest kind.

2.3. Characteristics of *Yi Jing*

Two things stand out, through the above brief discussion of Zhang Ji's poem, as the most striking features of the poetic world designated by *yi jing*: one is its pictorial concreteness and the other is its purposeful semantic fuzziness or ambiguity.

Concerning the pictorial concreteness of *yi jing*, the scene features iconographic details that remind one of a painting. In the Chinese critical tradition, poetry and painting are actually often discussed together, being viewed as two related arts that have shared goals, methodologies and aesthetic ideas (Qian, 1997; Zhu, 2001). *Yi jing* is perhaps the most important common element that draws the two art forms together. It was also an important notion that governed the creative process of art in traditional China (Wu, 1983; Li, 2004). The popular sayings in Chinese cultural traditions that "there is painting in poetry" (*shi zhong you hua* 詩中有畫) and "there is poetry in painting" (*hua zhong you shi* 畫中有詩) speak to the commonality of the two art forms in the minds of Chinese poets and artists. While maintaining that poetry and painting share similar artistic traits, these widely endorsed notions also spell out their different emphasis in their artistic pursuits, that is, in poetry it is visual concreteness that should be aimed at, whereas in painting it is lyrical expressiveness that should be the goal of the artist's attainment. In this way, poetic feelings and pictorial vividness complement each other and join forces in

enhancing the poetic world or *yi jing* of their respective art works. The pictorial quality of poetry, as can be seen through Zhang Ji's poem, appeals strongly to the reader through its montage concreteness and vividness. What the reader fails to see in the world of the words, he finds it in the world of the painting structured with concrete natural images. In the same way a viewer contemplates the details of a painting in front of him, the reader of the poem reflects on the imagistic representations of the poetic world, observing their implied meanings as he enacts the scene in his mind.

Yi jing also appeals to Chinese readers through its intentional semantic fuzziness or ambiguity. The technique of the fusion of emotion and scene for creating *yi jing* dictates that at the time when the poet structures the scene, he proceeds in such a way that enough "gaps" and "holes" are left in the picture so that the reader will fill them as he reads the poem and thus will reenact, re-create or, better still, co-create the poetic world that the poet has or means to put in place. Comparing Chinese poetry with Chinese painting, this implicit or evocative poetic expression resembles the technique of *liu bai* 留白 ("leaving blanks") or the interplay of void (*xu* 虛) and solid (*shi* 實) commonly employed by a Chinese painter. Both techniques use the medium, words in the former and colors in the latter, sparingly and in such a sketchy and elliptical manner so that what is present will point to what is not. To the minds of traditional Chinese poets, many of whom were also painters, suggestion works better than explanation, because working by suggestion, words will not confine thoughts but open up horizons after horizons for uninhibited reflection and emotional experience on the part of the reader. Herein lies the power of *han xu* or implicit speech style. By using minimal words and by relying on the scene to convey the emotion, the poet can bring about a poetic world that is infinite and multi-dimensional, capable of repeated readings and of generating new meanings at each such reading moment. Chinese literary criticism is replete with sayings that reflect this paradoxical idea: "Without one word, all essence is captured" (*bu zhuo yi zi, jin de feng liu* 不著一字, 盡得風流), "Implying endless meanings beyond the words" (*han bu jin zhi yi jian yu yan wai* 含不盡之意, 見於言外), "the tone beyond the sound" (*yun wai zhi zhi* 韻外之致), and "the taste beyond the flavor" (*wei wai zhi zhi* 味外之旨). Accordingly, Chinese poems considered the best are often those that are marked by an economy of words, letting the concrete details of the scene speak for themselves.

3. The Loss of *Yi Jing* in English Translations

While great poems admired for their profound *yi jing* have for centuries provided the Chinese readers with an infinite source of artistic entertainment and emotional catharsis, when translated into English, their poetic world is invariably lost. To the Chinese, the general feeling reading the poems they know in English translations is often like chewing wax, so to speak, flat and dull with little overtone or room for poetic imagination. Granted, as Owen (1975) mentioned that Chinese and English readers read poetry differently due to their different sense of beauty, English translations have in general failed to reproduce the *yi jing* of Chinese poetry, which is its life and soul and *raison d'être*. There are many factors that may account for the failure of English translations to reproduce *yi jing*—some have to do with the perceptual differences or even a total oversight of its importance on the part of many translators. One technical

explanation, however, can be found in the challenge of communicating in English the pictorial concreteness and the semantic implicitness of *yi jing*.

3.1. Analysis of Example Translations

Let us take the English translations of Zhang Ji's poem as a case in point. There are, as of now, several dozens of them, but it seems that few of these translations have succeeded in communicating or reproducing the original *yi jing* in the English texts. The following are some examples:

A Night-Mooring Near Maple Bridge

While I watch the moon go down, a crow caws through the frost;
Under the shadows of maple-trees a fisherman moves with this torch;
And I hear, from beyond Su-chou, from the temple on Cold Mountain,
Ringing for me, here in my boat, the midnight bell.

— Translated by Witter Bynner

Aside from some obvious mistakes resulting, perhaps, from the translator's lack of a full understanding of the source poem, this translation by Bynner (1929) is telling a story rather than presenting a scene without comments, which was the original intention of the poet. Despite the fact that all the individual images succeed in finding their way into the English text, the original *yi jing* is fragmented and lost due primarily to the longwinded verbosity. No longer is there a pictorial centredness that marks the original scene and serves to provoke the reader's imagination through its vivid and illuminating details. Moreover, with the prepositions and sentence connectives the narrative spells out what is originally left unspoken, effectively filling up the gaps and holes that the poet purposely created for readers' own enactment in actualizing the poem's meanings. Lastly, the focus of the poem is no longer on the scene, portrayed by the Chinese poet to embody and convey his emotion. Using the pronouns "I", "me" and "my", none of which is in the source poem, the translator repeatedly draws attention to the human, the implied author. He intrudes himself between the poem and the reader, acting as an interpreter without knowing that such "interpretative" strategy runs counter to the poem's intended implicit expression and thus totally destroys its original *yi jing*.

Night Mooring at Maple Bridge

Moon sets.
Crows caw.
Frost fills the air.
Maple trees by the river
And the lamps of fishermen
I face

In a sorrowful drowse.

From Cold Mountain Monastery,
Beyond the old city-wall,
Reaching the traveler's boat
Comes the sound
Of the midnight bell.

— Translated by Greg Whincup

This rendition by Whincup (1987) has made a significant improvement from the previous one by using fewer sentence connectives, prepositions and first-person pronouns. In general, it attempts to stay close to the original Chinese syntax as can be seen, in particular, with the way the first line is translated. However, such an attempt proves difficult, as English does not allow the juxtaposition of noun-based images without grammatical connectives that specify their relations; hence Whincup's translation of the poem's second line. Yet, this well-wrought English sentence sprawling in four lines not only diffuses the pictorial concreteness and vividness of the original line, but it also fixates the original open, fluid grammatical and semantic relations of the words by inserting the subject "I" into the sentence. This completely breaks the poet's purposeful reticence on his own emotion, and there is now only one possible reading of this originally equivocal but thought-provoking line whereas there are many with the original text. Most importantly, the fusion of emotion and scene for which this poem is widely known and which is vividly borne out by this second line, is fatally impaired. For the scene is robbed of its autonomy and loses its intended dual function to serve as a setting and to simultaneously express the author's emotion as is typical of the scenes in traditional Chinese poetry (Sun, 2001).

Mooring Near Maple Bridge at Night

The moon goes down, crows cry under a frosty sky,
Dimly lit fishing boat 'neath maples sadly lie.
Beyond the Suzhou walls the Temple of Cold Hill
Rings bells, which reach my boat, breaking the midnight still.

— Translated by Xu Yuanchong

Xu Yuanchong is a well-known scholar and translator of traditional Chinese poetry and is keenly aware of the centrality of *yi jing* to Chinese poetry in general and to this specific poem in particular. However, because of his preference for using rhyme in translation to reproduce what he called *sheng mei* 聲美 ("beauty of sound") (Xu, 2006), *yi jing* is altered or distorted if not destroyed. Hawkes (1971) pointed out that the Chinese language has few word-endings and therefore can rhyme easily without difficulty. However, the same rhyming frequency applied to English will produce "a tension which often finds relief in laughter" (p. 99). The lighthearted, playful and even comic tone generated by English rhyming is to a large extent incompatible

with the characteristically melancholy and subdued atmosphere of traditional Chinese poetry, as seen in this poem by Zhang Ji. This poem expresses *chou* or distress that the poet experiences as he travels alone away from home. Xu's rhymed translation with a singsong quality and an unintended lightheartedness fails to reproduce this basic atmosphere in the English text. Besides, for the sake of rhyme, he moves words around even more, further changing the *yi jing* and its interplay of emotion and scene. This is clearly reflected in his translation of the poem's second line. The original structure is radically altered to meet the rhyming need as well as the demand of the English grammar. "Fishermen's lamps" as a component of the scene are taken off, and the "fishing boat" is named the subject of the sentence sadly lying "under" the maple trees. While this change is creative, it is a far cry from what is conveyed by the original scene. Moreover, as with Whincup's translation, the provision of a subject in the translated sentence not only changes the intended dynamics of emotion and scene but also cancels out all other possible readings of this highly elliptical but evocative sentence.

3.2. Linguistic Reasons for the Untranslatability of *Yi Jing*

The above review of some sampling translations shows that reproducing natural images in English is not a problem; however, reproducing the poetic world or *yi jing* that these natural images help to construct represents an enormous challenge. There is a major difference between "imagery" and "poetic world," or between the often confused Chinese notions of *yi xiang* 意象 and *yi jing* 意境. Simply put, *yi xiang* refers to individual physical objects or beings that, through the poet's artistic conception, have acquired human sentiments and can be used as "objective correlatives" to denote the poet's feelings. *Yi jing*, on the other hand, refers to the entire artistic world of the poem that is created with the help of these disparate images (Chen, 1990; Chen, 1992). *Yi jing* stands for an articulation of images, because it entails how individual objects from nature are used to create a coherent and unified message, or how emotion and scene are brought to bear on each other so that much is said about the poet's feelings with the use of limited words. From the English translations of Zhang Ji's poem, there is certainly a general tendency toward verbosity, which bears little similarity to the concise and compact structure of Chinese poetry, and as a result the visual dimension of the Chinese poem suffers a serious loss of its original concreteness and luminosity. A more serious problem, however, seems to lie with the difficulty in preservation of the semantic fuzziness of *yi jing* resulting from the Chinese poet's characteristically implicit speech style.

In the preface to the new edition of his own translations of Chinese poetry, Wai-lim Yip (1990) reiterated a protest he had made earlier against what he called "a century of gross distortions of Chinese poetry" (p. xiii) by the English-speaking translators. Specifically, he objected to their misconceptions of Chinese implicit expression, or what he called "the indigenous Chinese perceptual-expressive procedures," and to their liberty in translating "shorthand into longhand, poetry into prose, adding commentary all along to aid understanding" (p. 6). Yip seems to believe that the closing-up of the aesthetic space as a result of this explanatory process is an intentional act of the translators. There is certainly a truth in this position in that some translators indeed lack a sufficient understanding of the aesthetics underlying Chinese poetry. However, the fundamental problem seems to have largely emerged from the linguistic dilemma facing

the translators as they work with the two completely non-cognate languages of Chinese and English whose “uncompromising” differences have been much discussed by scholars including Yip (1990) himself. The validity of this argument can be easily tested by the fact that Chinese native speakers, highly proficient in English, are hard put when translating *yi jing* into English, despite their extensive knowledge of Chinese aesthetics and their shared worldviews and perceptual-expressive inclinations with the poets. Wen Yiduo (2006), for example, compared the poetic world of Chinese poetry to ganoderma whose glossy beauty “would be immediately destroyed upon touching,” and Qian Zhongshu (1997) used the word *kang yi xing* 抗譯性 (“anti-translatibility”) to describe the intense difficulty of reproducing the profound artistic world of Chinese poetry into other languages.

To briefly demonstrate the inhibiting linguistic factors that prevent easy translation of *yi jing* into English, attention can be drawn to a simple fact that Chinese is by nature *paratactic*, where English is essentially *hypotactic*. What these terminologies mean is that in Chinese the formation of words and sentences is not subject to formal requirements, as English is, but to semantic factors. The connections between words, phrases and sentences are bound by semantic conditions rather than by grammatical dictates. As long as they make sense semantically, words and sentences can be created without the use of any connectives such as prepositions and conjunctions, which specify their grammatical relations. The paratactic tendency of Chinese makes the language concise and probably also imprecise, because a large amount of information is placed in context. Also because of this paratactic tendency, nouns or pronouns serving as the subject of a sentence can be omitted adding more information to the context while further reducing the language to a highly compact and pregnant form. These features are particularly evident in the poetic language. The Tang dynasty modern-style poetry in its various forms has a word limit ranging from 20 to 56 characters. Expressing a multitude ideas in such short forms and according to the demands of strict prosodic rules, the poet must be creative with language. He expresses certain ideas while leaving others unsaid or hinted at, resulting in ambiguity or a “fuzzy beauty” that is the hallmark of Chinese poetry (Tang, 1989). He also relies heavily on the presence of natural images for embodying his feelings, hence the favored technique of the fusion of emotion and scene in Chinese poetics.

In sharp contrast with the sparse syntax of classical Chinese is the “discursive” tendency of English. This is because English is essentially hypotactic and is extremely strict in terms of the presence of all linguistic components that make a sentence complete and clear. With the verb as the center, a typical English sentence spreads out sequentially in the order of the subject, the predicate and the object. Sentence connectives are a must as they indicate the grammatical relations of the words within a simple sentence and those of the sentences within a compound sentence. While semantically logical and clear, an English sentence lacks in “holes” and “gaps” which can serve as aesthetic spaces for artistic imagination and experience. Translating Chinese poems with many such gaps and holes, created due either to the nature of the language or to the poet’s aesthetic concerns, the challenge is obvious and natural. The dubious spaces must be filled and the missing links must be provided, to the detriment of *yi jing*. Take the “problematic” but highly evocative second line of Zhang Ji’s poem for example. The grammatical relations of the seven words, as discussed previously, are open and fluid, creating many different angles from which to view the scene. Yet, the fuzzy beauty of the *yi jing* generated by the multidimensional

scene is obliterated when translated into English. The subject must be determined, and so is its relation with the rest of the words in the sentence. Hence the three “logical,” precise but one-dimensional translations of Bynner, Whincup and Xu, be their native language and cultural background English or Chinese.

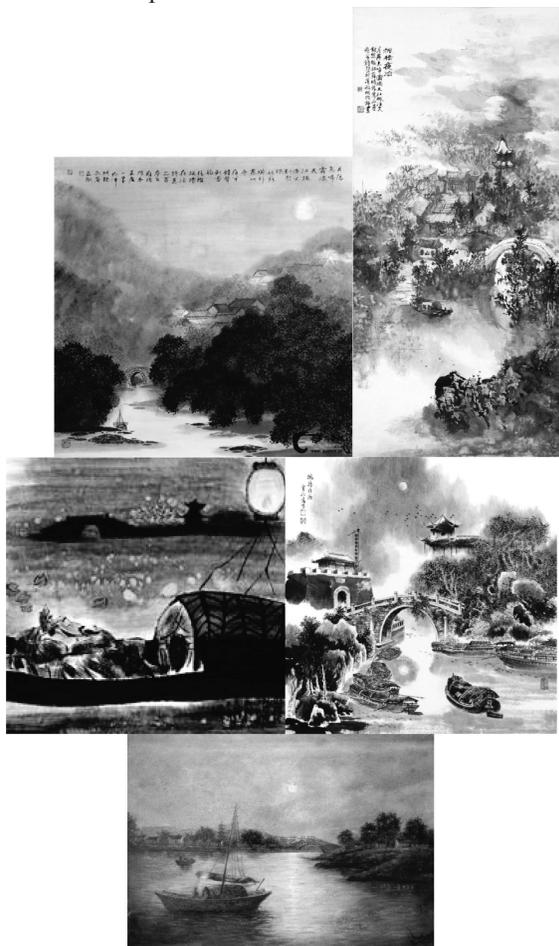
4. A Pictorial Approach to Teaching/Learning Chinese Poetry

Is *yi jing* translatable into English? Or, since *yi jing* is central to Chinese poetry, is Chinese poetry translatable into English? The latter is an issue of much debate, but participating in such debate without pondering possible resolutions is pointless because, regardless of the challenge, communication between Chinese and English or between the two cultures represented by the two languages is mandatory and will become even more so as the world further integrates. Translation of Chinese poetry is much needed because Chinese literature has increasingly become a standard subject of study in American undergraduate programs, and yet the overwhelming majority of the students do not possess sufficient linguistic skills to read the original texts. Owen (1975) rightly proposed that the study of the limits of translation can have a constructive purpose, for it will reveal the areas where improvement is possible and what measures are necessary to make such improvement (p. 83). Therefore, without joining in the debate or perhaps assuming the untranslatability of *yi jing* and for that matter Chinese poetry, this article calls for alternative ways to the teaching and learning of Chinese poetry in American classrooms. If existing English translations of Chinese poetry are not satisfactory, can these attempts be aided by other possible means? If poetry must be what gets lost in translation, as Robert Frost (1961) argued, and any attempt that relies on the medium of words is bound for failure, can we find ways to bypass the obstacles imposed by language in other media?

In his article “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” Roman Jakobson (1959) discussed the semiotics of signs and identified three possible ways of translation: intralingual translation, interlingual translation and intersemiotic translation. By “intersemiotic translation,” Jakobson means “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (p. 233). What an intersemiotic interpretation means to the translation of Chinese poetry is an interesting question and its viability is yet to be seen, but the visual art represented by paintings, pictures or digital images could be relied upon to assist the teaching of Chinese poetry to American students. The use of art in the pedagogy of Chinese poetry is highly pertinent because poetry and painting, as discussed previously, have an inherent affinity in the Chinese cultural traditions. Not only are they informed by the same artistic ideas including *yi jing*, but they also adopt similar techniques such as implicit expression in poetry and leaving blanks in painting. Tang dynasty poems that excel in *yi jing* make this pictorial approach particularly relevant. Since *yi jing* is primarily achieved through the fusion of emotion with a scene and the portrayal of a scene is at the same time an expression of the poet’s feelings, paintings could be crafted based on the scene to amplify the underlying emotional nuances. In fact, during the Tang dynasty, many Chinese literati resorted exactly to this strategy, with paintings made either by themselves or by their friends to illustrate the meanings of their poetic creations. This practice, referred to nowadays as *yi hua pei shi* 以畫配詩 (“matching a poem with a painting”), is still very much alive today in China in the teaching of classical Chinese poetry to school children. In elementary schools,

for example, it is not uncommon to see teachers assign their students to draw paintings based on the *yi jing* of the poem under study to make sure that they understand it, or to use the method as an exercise to expand students' ability of visualization for optimal perception and appreciation of the poem's artistic world. To American students who do not have sufficient cultural literacy to understand many of the cultural-specific themes, motifs and symbolisms and who have to rely on English translations which seem only to add further distance between them and the Chinese poems, visual art as a supplementary tool is especially useful.

Consider Zhang Ji's poem discussed previously again. A search on the internet yields the following and many other similar pictures:⁵



⁵ The images are retrieved April 2nd, 2014 from http://image.baidu.com/i?tn=baiduimage&ipn=r&ct=201326592&cl=2&lm=-1&st=-1&fm=result&fr=&sf=1&fmq=1396479716951_R&pv=&ic=0&nc=1&z=&se=1&showtab=0&fb=0&width=&height=&face=0&istype=2&ie=utf-8&word=%E6%9E%AB%E6%A1%A5%E5%A4%9C%E6%B3%8A

This poem is packed with images juxtaposed together to convey a vivid scene of emotionality. Except for the Cold Mountain Temple located in Suzhou, China, American students may have seen all of these natural objects or beings in one way or the other. However, different cultural background and upbringing calls up different mental images stored in memory. Set in southeast China and at a historical time when the primary means of transportation was through the boat, the images and the scene they comprise carry with them a peculiar cultural and physiological feel that may not be familiar to Western students. Also, the English translations, as required by the syntactical necessities, diffuse the picturesque concreteness of the scene, making it difficult, if not impossible, for the students to imagine and enact the visual details. Most importantly, dictated by the grammatical considerations and the translator's own reading of the poem, English translations often reduce the multiple perspectives of the scene into one perspective, causing limited or distorted conceptions of Zhang Ji's poem, as reflected in the sample translations discussed previously.

Whichever painting or combined paintings that the instructor decides to use, the visual details of the poem's scene are upfront before the students' eyes. Without any interference from the translator and free from the mediation of the English language shaped by its own distinctive way of perception, students are confronted with all the images in their pristine forms. Aided by the temporal and spatial dimensions provided by the visual art, they can clearly envision the situation in which the poet finds himself. They can even imagine themselves to be the poet and share, through empathy, his misery on such a lonely night. The poet is only half asleep perhaps because of the noises the crow and the bell make periodically, or because, more possibly, the cawing of the crow nearby and the tolling of the bell in the distance keep him painfully aware how alone and lonely he is in this world. Considering the fact that the poet was forced to travel and leave his home behind due to an unfair treatment by the court, the anguish must be too much to endure. The ambiguity surrounding the unknown subject of *chou* is no longer relevant, because sorrow permeates the entire scene and affects all the surrounding objects and beings from nature. The poet is undoubtedly sorrow-stricken, and in such a mental state inanimate beings such as trees and lamps must all take on his feelings, offering him sympathy and solace at such a sad moment.

The scene provided by the visual art brings students to a sudden realization of the poet's inner world as the opacity standing originally between them and the Chinese poem via the English translation begins to dissipate. Despite the author's own reticence about his mental state, the visual details of the picture speak volumes about how he feels. The gaps and holes of the original Chinese poem (the students are also provided with the original Chinese text accompanied by a word-for-word English translation) no longer bother them, for in what they originally felt to be dubious places caused by the poet's implicit expression, they discover a well of meanings prompted in their discovery by the visual scene of the picture and by the "point-to" function of the limited words the poet used. Throughout this visual seeing process, cross-referencing between the text and the painting, the instructor may guide the students by following a 3-step procedure: 1) envisioning the scene, 2) analyzing the images in the scene, and 3) experiencing the emotion embodied by the scene. If the first two steps stand for the means in the reading process, the last step represents the goal of the reading activity. It is true that students may not see identical things in the same painting or text, the variability hinging

on students' own background and sensibility. But likeness and preciseness is not the end result of reading Chinese poetry, as the experience of emotion is. And, as far as the appreciation of Chinese poetry is concerned, the more one feels and the richer one's emotional experience is throughout the reading process, the more fruitfully one can achieve the goal of reading. Poetry expresses emotion. The poet writes poetry to express his feelings, and the reader ponders a poem not only to understand the poet's feelings but also to find satisfaction in indulging in and letting go of his own emotion. This constitutes the nature and purpose of reading poetry in China, in both traditional and modern times.

5. Conclusion

The visual approach suggested in this article would be best used as part of a portfolio treatment of Chinese poetry. The portfolio should include the original Chinese text, a word-for-word English transcription, and 2-3 free English translations for comparison purposes. For the sake of comparison and contrast, the instructor can also include in the last category a "half" translation that approximates the Chinese poem with minimal syntax. Students can be asked to work out a full translation based on their understanding of the poem's *yi jing*. The visual component provides a supplementary tool to assist students in enacting and experiencing *yi jing*, a topic that should be included in the pedagogy of Chinese poetry but is unfortunately left out in most American classrooms for various reasons. This does not serve students well, considering the centrality of *yi jing* to Chinese poetry in its own cultural traditions. More importantly, the ultimate purpose of studying Chinese poetry and literature by American students is to understand its underlying cultural implications and perspectives. As an aesthetic concept and practice, *yi jing* is not limited to poetry, but is also central to other Chinese art forms, such as painting, music, calligraphy, dance, filmic productions and even martial arts performances. This is so because *yi jing* stands for and reflects importantly Chinese philosophical perspectives regarding worldviews, ways of knowing, and the nature of language. As Tang Yijie (1989) pointed out, the fusion of emotion and scene is predicated on a monistic view of the world, succinctly summarized in the widely known notion *tian ren he yi* 天人合一 ("the unity of heaven/nature and man"). Such a notion views humans as an integral part of the natural environment in which they live, and has forged a holistic way of thinking and knowing, characteristic of Chinese poetry, that emphasizes the integration of emotion and scene and a reflective and meditative procedure in understanding a poem's meanings. The significant position that *yi jing* occupies in Chinese literary criticism also reflects the classic Chinese attitudes towards language, that words are essentially limited, incapable of fully communicating ideas and feelings. Because words are insufficient, images and scenes are used for conveying meanings, or in the language of *Yi jing* 易經 (*The Book of Changes*), *yan bu jin yi, li xiang jin yi* 言不盡意, 立象盡意 ("Because words are not enough to fully express meanings, images are used instead"). All in all, *yi jing* provides an extremely important platform for studying Chinese philosophical perspectives as well as Chinese poetry. This utility should be fully recognized and duly employed in the teaching of Chinese poetry to Western students.

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