



An Embodied Cognitive Study of Female Character Images in Rewi Alley's Tang Poetry Translation

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Abstract: As the luster of Tang poetry reflects the depth of China's cultural heritage, its translation is instrumental in projecting the nation's cultural image onto the global stage. Rewi Alley, a figure renowned for his contributions to the Gung Ho Movement and a friend to China in the 20th century, also stood out as a distinguished poet and translator. His translations of Tang poetry are not merely linguistic transpositions but cultural conduits, carrying the rich tapestry of Chinese ethos to an international audience. This study, synthesizing insights from diverse fields such as cognitive science, translation studies, and Chinese literature, scrutinizes Alley's translation strategies of poems by great Tang Poets, including Li Bai, Du Fu and Bai Juyi. It particularly spotlights his portrayal of female characters from Tang poetry, dissecting the intricate construction of Chinese female character imagery and the embodied-cognitive processes that underscore his translations. Alley's skill is clearly demonstrated by his ability to keep the original essence of the text intact while also making the poetry engaging and meaningful to readers from Western cultures. Unveiling how Rewi Alley's translations bridge cultural divides, this analysis sheds light on the way Tang poetry's aesthetic and cultural significance is rendered accessible to a global audience. The findings underscore the translation of Tang poetry as a pivotal medium for bolstering China's cultural prestige and soft power, offering valuable implications for the fields of translation practice and cultural exchange.

Keywords: Rewi Alley; Female Character Images; Tang Poetry Translation; Embodied-Cognitive Translation Studies

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1. Introduction

The translation of classic Chinese texts serves not only as a bridge connecting Eastern and Western cultures but also as a pivotal tool in constructing and conveying the national image of China to the global audience. Despite China's rich cultural history, the international understanding of its classical literature and philosophy remains limited, underscoring the imperative role of translations in international discourse. Rewi Alley, a notable translator of Chinese poetry in the 20th century, was instrumental in fostering cross-cultural exchanges and enhancing China's image through his translations of Tang poetry. This study adopts an embodied cognitive framework that integrates cognitive studies, imagology, and translation studies to dissect Alley's translation strategies and scholarly rationale, thereby highlighting the nuanced complexities of conveying classical Chinese poetic imagery to an international readership. It seeks to offer theoretical insights and practical directives for effectively presenting Chinese culture abroad, bolstering China's cultural diplomacy, and reinforcing its voice in the global conversation. Through this lens, the study aims to explore how Alley's translations have shaped the perception of Chinese female characters and how these character images contribute to the wider understanding and appreciation of China's cultural heritage.

2. Literature Review

Tang poetry, a resplendent facet of Chinese culture, has seen its translation into other languages become a focal point of interest as the field of ancient Chinese literary studies has expanded. The allure of Tang poetry, with its deep philosophical insights and exquisite linguistic expression, has prompted scholars worldwide to delve into its complexities, making its translation a significant academic endeavor.

Jiang (2018) examines the development of English-translated Tang poetry and its propagation to the Western world. By analyzing the historical background and characteristics of the initial stage and its further development, the book traces the trend back to its roots, discusses some well-known early sinologists and their contributions, and familiarizes readers with the general course of Tang poetry's development. It is found that, from the simple imitation of poetic techniques to the acceptance and identification of key poetic concepts, the Tang poetry



translators gradually constructed a classic “Chinese style” in modern American poetry. Hence, the traditional Chinese culture represented by Tang poetry spread more widely in the English-speaking world, producing a more lasting impact on societies and cultures outside China – and demonstrating the poetry’s ability to transcend the boundaries of time, region, nationality, and culture.

Zhao & Flotow (2018) identify two kinds of translators in the history of translating classical Chinese poetry: traditional translators, and modernist translators. The former translates classical Chinese poetry by way of intellectual, directional devices. What these translators are concerned with most is the coherence of their translations. They give little attention to the ideogrammic nature of Chinese characters. The latter is highly interested in the images created by ideogrammic Chinese characters and tries to convey them in the target language. From the point of view of iconicity, modernist translators’ contribution lies in their concern with the iconic characteristics of Chinese characters. However, they did not give enough attention to syntactical iconicity and textual iconicity in classical Chinese poetry. Many factors in classical Chinese poetry are untranslatable in English. Thus, Zhao & Flotow suggest that we should go out of the limitation of language and take some time to think about the iconicity of the original.

The translation of classical Chinese poetry is not simply a transference of words from one language to another; it is an intricate process of cultural transmission and the reconstruction of imagery. This complexity is acknowledged in the current literature, which emphasizes the importance of preserving the aesthetic characteristics and cultural spirit of the original works. In this view, the translation of Tang poetry is seen as an act of re-creation and re-shaping of cultural imagery from one era into another. For example, Zhang Chuiming (2009) focuses on the imagery art of Tang poetry and addresses the challenge of maintaining the charm and depth of the original poems in translation. Zhang’s research provides theoretical support for the practice of image construction in translation, highlighting the importance of capturing the original’s essence. Li Yingjun (2011) approaches poetry translation from a broader perspective, treating it as an artistically creative activity. This view holds that translators, like Rewi Alley, must recreate the artistic charm of the original poems in the target language, emphasizing the translator’s subjectivity and creativity in this endeavor. Wei Jiahai (2019) is instrumental in highlighting this aspect by analyzing Stephen Owen’s translations of Tang poetry, which reveal the reconstructed cultural image of the Hu people in the translated works. This reconstruction demonstrates that the act of translating poetry involves a creative process that goes beyond linguistic conversion to include a re-imagining of cultural eras. Liu Jinhui (2021) delves into the English translations of *The Complete Poems of Li Qingzhao*, focusing on the construction methods of literary imagery. Liu underscores the critical role that translation strategies play in crafting cross-cultural images, suggesting that the choices translators make can significantly influence how imagery is perceived by readers of the target language. Wang Sa’s (2021) exploration of the poetic functions of symbolic female images in Tang poetry and their translation strategies further supports the notion that these strategies directly impact the transmission of cultural features. Through strategic choices, translators can either enhance or diminish the cultural resonance of these images. Wei Jiahai’s subsequent study

(2022) on Stephen Owen's reconstruction of cultural images in the translation of Du Fu's painting poems, as well as Wu Huifang's (2022) analysis of Xu Yuanchong's translations of Tang poetry with a focus on the treatment of allusions, both stress the significance of translation strategies for cultural transmission and image construction.

To sum up, current research on Tang poetry translation has laid significant groundwork by investigating various translational methods and their cultural implications, recognizing translators as both linguistic experts and cultural intermediaries. However, this research often overemphasizes literary and aesthetic aspects, potentially overlooking broader socio-cultural and pragmatic contexts. There is also a notable gap in exploring the cognitive processes that underlie the translation of such sophisticated literary forms. Embodied cognitive translation studies, which suggest that cognitive processes are shaped by physical and cultural experiences, offer a valuable framework to fill these gaps. This approach could enhance our understanding of how translators manage the interplay between language, culture, and cognition, providing a more comprehensive view of the translation process and potentially leading to translations that resonate more deeply across cultural divides. The current paper is aimed at exploring Rewi Alley's translation strategies and methods of Tang poetry. It specifically analyzes the portrayal of Chinese female characters in his Tang poetry translations and their cognitive mechanisms. This research reveals how Rewi Alley enhances the depiction of Chinese characters through cross-cultural communication, effectively conveying the aesthetic and cultural connotations of Chinese poetry.

3. What Imagery of Chinese Female Characters Are Presented in Rewi Alley's Translation of Tang Poetry?

The intricate endeavor of translating classical Chinese poetry, such as the works of Li Bai, Du Fu, Bai Juyi, and their contemporaries, demands a profound respect for the source material's emotional depth, aesthetic finesse, and cultural significance. Alley's engagement with the task transcends mere linguistic conversion; it encompasses the nuanced shaping and re-creation of the rich tapestry of character imagery found within these poems. This imagery, deeply rooted in Chinese history, mythology, and the very fabric of Tang Dynasty society, presents a challenge that goes beyond the mere selection of words—it requires a translator to delve into the cultural psyche and the ethos of an era.

3.1 Hsi Shih: An Example of Historical Female Characters

Tang Dynasty poets depicted Hsi Shih, an ancient Chinese beauty, with a rich tapestry of literary techniques and profound insights. The poets, through their work, offered a multidimensional artistic construction of her persona, reflecting their deep artistic vision and delicate perception of her inner qualities.

Li Bai, one of the most renowned poets of the Tang Dynasty, portrayed Hsi Shih in several poems, including the “烏棲曲” and “口號吳王美人半醉,” where she is presented as a symbol of decadence and delicate beauty within the court life. Li Bai's portrayal emphasizes her charming beauty and demeanor, often highlighting

her intoxicated state and the grace of her dance movements. This depiction serves not only to provide a visual image of Hsi Shih but also to convey the atmosphere of the court and the indulgences of the era.

In poems such as “詠苧蘿山” and “子夜吳歌,” Li Bai takes an approach that harmonizes Hsi Shih with her surroundings. The blending of her beauty with the natural landscape creates an image of a beauty that is both part of and transcends the material world. Such descriptions connect the human form with the aesthetics of the natural world, suggesting that Hsi Shih’s beauty is as timeless and profound as nature itself.

The technique of using contrasts to highlight Hsi Shih’s unique beauty is evident in Li Bai’s “玉壺吟” and Bai Juyi’s “青塚,” where her unmatched allure is accentuated by juxtaposing it with that which is considered less beautiful. This approach not only magnifies Hsi Shih’s beauty but also elevates it to a standard against which all others are measured.

Bai Juyi, another prominent Tang poet, in works like “山石榴寄元九” and “和微之春日投簡陽明洞天五十韻,” revered Hsi Shih as an ultimate aesthetic standard. By describing other objects of beauty as incomparable to her, Bai Juyi underscores an exceptional level of praise for Hsi Shih’s beauty, establishing her as an epitome of elegance and splendor.

The representation of Hsi Shih as a commemorative figure is further explored by Li Bai in “效古二首” and by Du Fu in “贈崔十三評事公輔.” Du Fu, in particular, likens her to an ancient mirror, serving as a symbol for the enduring memory and inheritance of beauty. This metaphor elevates Hsi Shih from a historical figure to an icon of beauty whose legacy persists through time.

The portrayal of Hsi Shih by Tang Dynasty poets is not only multifaceted and layered but also interweaves various literary techniques such as praise, contrast, and symbolism. Their poetry provides a rich and complex artistic representation of Hsi Shih, celebrating her image and significance in Tang literature, and offering insight into the cultural values and aesthetic perceptions of that era. Here are several examples.

Chinese: 姑蘇臺上烏棲時, 吳王宮裏醉西施.

English Translation: Evening shadows began to fall over Kusu Terrace, as the King of Wu and the beauty Hsi Shih played together in the Chunhsiao Palace (Li & Rewi, 1989: 36).

Rewi Alley’s translation of Li Bai’s poem “烏棲曲 (To the Tune of ‘Wu Chi’)” showcases his unique translation methodology that goes beyond literal interpretation to encapsulate the emotional depth and artistic essence of the original work. Alley’s approach to translation is characterized by his ability to adapt the source text to fit the cultural and linguistic sensibilities of the target audience, which in this case is the English-speaking reader.

In his translation, Alley chooses to employ a method of free translation. This approach allows him to focus less on a word-for-word replication and more on conveying the poem’s mood, imagery, and rhythm to the reader. He does not merely translate the Chinese characters directly but rather interprets the overall poetic scene and translates that interpretation, ensuring that the English version resonates with the same emotional impact as the original Chinese text.

In the specific line “姑蘇臺上烏棲時, 吳王宮裏醉西施”, Alley transforms “烏棲”, which literally refers to crows roosting, into “Evening shadows began to fall over Kusu Terrace,” painting a vivid picture that implies the coming of dusk. This subtle shift from a literal translation of crows to the more abstract ‘evening shadows’ allows English readers to connect with the scene in a more familiar way, creating a serene atmosphere that is evocative of the original poem’s setting.

Furthermore, when translating “吳王宮裏醉西施”, Alley does not simply describe the King of Wu as being in a state of drunkenness with the beauty Hsi Shih. Instead, he says, “as the King of Wu and the beauty Hsi Shih played together in the Chunhsiao Palace,” which emphasizes their joyful interaction and the beauty of Hsi Shih. Rewi Alley’s translation choice to use “played together” instead of directly referencing intoxication subtly shifts the narrative focus from Xi Shi’s potential inebriation to a mutual and interactive engagement with the King of Wu. This alteration not only lessens the focus on intoxication but also enriches the narrative, suggesting a consensual and possibly joyful connection. By opting for “played together,” Alley likely aims to capture a broader, culturally resonant dynamic, reflecting a deeper understanding of both English literary expression and the cultural context of the original text. This choice not only portrays Xi Shi with greater agency but also opens up interpretations of a deeper, perhaps romantic relationship, illustrating Alley’s nuanced approach to translation for English-speaking audiences.

Alley’s translation strategy demonstrates his profound grasp of the original text, as he is able to distill the essence of Li Bai’s poetry and recreate it in a way that is accessible and emotionally engaging for readers unfamiliar with the cultural context of the Tang dynasty poetry. His deep understanding of the source language and culture, combined with his knowledge of the target language’s literary traditions and reader expectations, allows him to produce a translation that is both faithful to the spirit of the original and resonant with the target audience.

Chinese: 西施越溪女, 出自苧蘿山。

English Translation: Hsi Shih was a lass of Yueh brought up beside rivers; born by Chulo Hill. (Li & Rewi, 1989: 35)

Rewi Alley’s translation of Li Bai’s “西施 (Hsi Shih)” provides an excellent example of how a translator can navigate the delicate balance between fidelity to the source text and the conveyance of poetic meaning and cultural connotations. His approach to translating the line “西施越溪女, 出自苧蘿山” as “Hsi Shih was a lass of Yueh brought up beside rivers; born by Chulo Hill” showcases an astute and nuanced understanding of both the source culture and the target audience.

In his translation, Alley maintains the succinctness and evocativeness of the original poem. By directly transliterating “西施” as “Hsi Shih,” Alley preserves the phonetic beauty of the name and introduces an element of exoticism and authenticity to the English reader, which could evoke curiosity and a desire to learn more about this classical figure. This decision to retain the original name without translation respects the cultural significance and historicity of the legendary beauty.

The phrase “越溪女” is rendered into English as “a lass of Yueh brought up beside rivers,” which is a form of free translation. This choice goes beyond a literal translation, capturing the essence of Hsi Shih’s origins and her intrinsic connection with the natural waterscapes of her home. It speaks to the pastoral beauty and simplicity of her upbringing and underscores her relationship with the natural environment, which is a significant element in classical Chinese poetry.

For the portion “出自苧蘿山,” Alley translates it as “born by Chulo Hill.” Here, Alley employs a combination of direct and free translation methods. “Chulo” retains the sound of the original place name, while “Hill” replaces “Mountain” to perhaps better suit the English-speaking audience’s expectations of a poetic landscape. The use of “born by” instead of a more direct “from” emphasizes the notion of origin and belonging, creating a strong sense of place and suggesting that the very essence of the locale is an integral part of Hsi Shih’s identity.

Alley’s translation exemplifies how a translator can preserve the original text’s brevity while effectively conveying its cultural and aesthetic richness. His word choices and sentence structures are both poetic and accessible, contributing to the readability and enjoyment of the translation for an English-speaking audience. By doing so, Alley serves as a bridge for cross-cultural understanding, allowing the reader to appreciate the classical beauty of Hsi Shih’s image and the natural splendor of her surroundings. His work embodies a deep reverence for the source culture and a sophisticated approach to making it resonate with readers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Chinese: 西施宜笑復宜顰,醜女效之徒累身。

English Translation: Hsi Shih was good at smiling as well as frowning. useless for ordinary girls to try and imitate her (Li & Rewi, 1989: 72).

Rewi Alley’s translation of Li Bai’s “玉壺吟 (Song of the Jade Cup)” is an exemplary case in the art of cultural translation. His approach to the poem demonstrates a deep appreciation for the subtleties of the original Chinese text and an acute awareness of the cultural context in which it was written. In translating the image of Hsi Shih, Alley had to navigate the complexities of conveying ancient Chinese aesthetics to a Western audience, which required both linguistic dexterity and cultural sensitivity.

The “Song of the Jade Cup” features the legendary beauty Hsi Shih, known for her ability to convey a multitude of emotions through her expressions. Li Bai’s original text uses phrases like “宜笑” (suitable to smile) and “宜顰” (suitable to frown) to capture the nuanced essence of her charm. Alley’s translation, “good at smiling as well as frowning,” showcases his skill in adapting these phrases in a way that is accessible to Western readers while preserving the original’s intent. The choice of words not only encapsulates the elegance of Hsi Shih’s expressions but also reflects an understanding of Western literary practices where brevity and clarity are often valued.

Alley’s particular phrase “useless for ordinary girls to try and imitate her” further enhances Hsi Shih’s image by emphasizing her unique and unattainable beauty, a quality that transcends cultural boundaries. The translation

does not simply replicate the original text; it expands upon it, giving Western readers insight into the high esteem in which Hsi Shih is held. This highlights Alley's ability to not just translate words, but to translate culture, a task that requires an intimate knowledge of both the source and target cultures.

In light of this, we can appreciate that Alley's translation of the "Song of the Jade Cup" is an act of cultural sensitivity that goes beyond the surface level of language. He brings Hsi Shih to life for Western readers not as a mere historical figure but as a timeless embodiment of grace and beauty, encouraging a deeper understanding and respect for Chinese cultural heritage. Rewi Alley's work as a translator reflects his broader mission to foster cultural understanding and his belief in the power of literature to connect people across cultural divides.

In his translations, Alley also pays attention to the rhythm and flow of the language, which is crucial in poetry. He aligns the translated poem with the conventions of English poetic form, making strategic omissions and additions where necessary to maintain the poem's musicality and emotive power. This sensitivity to the target language's poetics ensures that the translation is not only accurate in meaning but also in spirit.

3.2 Hu dancers: An Example of Realistic Female Characters

In the rich tapestry of Chinese poetry, female Hu dancers are one of the recurring motifs that evoke themes of exoticism, beauty, and the transient nature of life. Both Li Bai and Bai Juyi, two of the most celebrated poets of the Tang Dynasty, have depicted these characters in ways that reflect their own poetic styles and the cultural context of their times.

Li Bai, known for his romanticism and celebration of life's pleasures, often portrays female Hu dancers as embodiments of beauty and indulgence. His poetry frequently captures moments of conviviality, where the Hu dancers are central characters in scenes of drinking and merriment. In one of his verses, Li Bai invites the reader to visualize a scene where he is drawn to the Hu dancer, suggesting her allure is irresistible, especially during a time when nature itself seems to be in a state of celebration with the falling flowers of spring. This image of the Hu dancer as a beacon of warmth and hospitality is further enhanced when Li Bai compares her to the flowers, noting her laughter that seems to echo the vitality of the spring breeze. The poet's use of nature as a backdrop to the Hu dancer's beauty and laughter creates a vivid and dynamic scene where human connection and the natural world are intertwined.

Li Bai also emphasizes the active role of the female Hu dancer in inviting others to join in the revelry, portraying her as a figure who takes initiative and exudes enthusiasm. This depiction of Hu dancers as spirited and engaging companions in leisure activities adds depth to their character, moving beyond mere exotic decoration to active participants and even facilitators of joy and celebration.

Bai Juyi, on the other hand, often infuses his poetry with a sense of historical consciousness and moral reflection. While he acknowledges the skill and grace of the female Hu dancers, his depiction also involves a deeper commentary on the social and political circumstances of the time. In his work, the Hu dancer is not only presented as an artist of great talent whose movements are compared to the swirling of snowflakes, but also as a

symbol of historical events that impacted the Tang Dynasty. Bai Juyi alludes to the Huxuan dance as performed by characters such as An Lushan and Yang Guifei, hinting at the seductive power such performances held over Emperor Xuanzong—a power that, through the favor shown to Yang Guifei and the treacherous acts of An Lushan, contributed to the chaos and decline of the empire. Here, the Hu dancer is a metaphor for the enchantment that can lead to a kingdom's downfall, reminding readers of the impermanence of glory and the dangers of succumbing to external allure.

Both poets, through their depictions of the Hu dancers, engage with themes of impermanence and the fleeting nature of life's pleasures. While Li Bai seems to celebrate the momentary joy and encourages the reader to partake in the beauty of the present, Bai Juyi offers a cautionary reminder of the consequences that such indulgence can have on a larger scale, especially when it blinds leaders to the realities of their rule. The Hu dancers, in their poetry, thus become complex characters that not only represent cultural exchange and aesthetic pleasure but also serve as symbols of the cyclical rise and fall of human fortunes.

Chinese: 胡旋女,胡旋女。心應弦,手應鼓。弦鼓一聲雙袖舉。回雪飄飄轉蓬舞。左旋右轉不知疲,千匝萬周無已時。人間物類無可比,奔車輪緩旋風遲。曲終再拜謝天子,天子為之微啟齒。胡旋女,出康居,徒勞東來萬裏餘。中原自有胡旋者,鬥妙爭能爾不如。天寶季年時欲變,臣妾人人學圓轉。中有太真外祿山,二人最道能胡旋。

English Translation: A dancer from afar, her heart beating with the music, hands moving in harmony, raising her arms when the melody dictates, together with her fellow dancers looking like snowflakes or leaves dancing in the air; tirelessly she glides and endlessly she sways, graceful beyond compare; turning cart wheels, she swishes like a cyclone; when the dance is over, she bows to the Emperor, who smiles. A dancer has come from her distant Central Asian home; yet here in the Middle Kingdom, there are also swaying dancers, and she is surely unequal to them in performing skillful movements; towards the end of the Tianbao Period, when began to change, ministers and palace ladies learned to look sweet in order to hide their cunning; within the palace, we find Yang Gui Fei, outside was An Lushan: together the best “Swaying Dancers” of them all (Bai & Alley, 1983: 67).

In translating the poem “胡旋女 (Swaying Dancers from Central Asia)”, Rewi Alley displays a profound sensitivity to the cultural essence and the nuanced connotations present in the original Chinese text. His translation choices reflect a deep engagement with the themes of beauty, pleasure, historical resonance, and the ephemeral nature of joy that are so often explored by poets like Li Bai and Bai Juyi.

Alley's translation of “胡旋女” as “a dancer from afar” and “swaying Dancers” is a prime example of how he captures the exotic allure and the unique cultural identity of the Huxuan dancers. By choosing the term “swaying,” which carries connotations of grace and rhythmic movement, Alley allows English-speaking readers to appreciate the beauty and elegance of the dance without requiring them to understand the specific cultural background of the term “胡旋.” This decision demonstrates a translation strategy aimed at universal understanding while still honoring the cultural specificity of the original.

The translation of “心應弦, 手應鼓” as “her heart beating with the music, hands moving in harmony” shows Alley’s ability to convey the dancer’s intimate connection with the music through verbs that carry a strong sensory and emotional charge. While the literal references to strings and drums are omitted, the essence of the dancer’s responsiveness to the music is preserved, highlighting the theme of pleasure and the full immersion of the senses in the art form.

Alley’s use of vivid metaphors and descriptions to portray the Huxuan girl enriches the translation with dynamic and captivating imagery. Phrases like “like snowflakes or leaves dancing in the air” and “turning cartwheels, she swishes like a cyclone” not only provide a strong visual impact but also enhance the rhythm and movement, drawing the reader into the dance and reinforcing the theme of beauty.

Moreover, Alley’s translation does not shy away from embedding the Huxuan girl within the broader historical and social context. By mentioning the Tianbao Period, and linking the fate of the Huxuan girl to characters like Yang Gui Fei and A Lushan, Alley situates her as a symbol of both cultural splendor and political upheaval. This inclusion adds depth to the translation, as the dancer becomes a representation of the transient nature of life’s joys, with her story reflecting the rise and fall of a dynasty.

Rewi Alley’s translation strategies, which combine free translation and creative adaptation, achieve a portrayal of the Huxuan girl that transcends the literal and enters into the symbolic. He presents her not just as a performer of exceptional skill but as an emblem of a culture that is both beautiful and fleeting. Through his translations, Alley invites readers to experience the interplay of artistic expression and the inevitable passage of time, a theme that is central to the poetry of Li Bai and Bai Juyi and one that resonates with the human condition universally.

3.3 *Xi Wangmu: An Example of Mythical Female Characters*

The Tang Dynasty’s poetic portrayal of Xi Wangmu, the Queen Mother of the West, was one of reverence and complexity, combining elements of divinity and humanity to create a multifaceted literary image. The poets of this era, including luminaries such as Li Bai and Bai Juyi, crafted their verses to highlight the celestial nature and the enduring authority of Xi Wangmu, while also rendering her approachable and relevant to the mortal realm.

Li Bai, one of the most celebrated poets of the Tang Dynasty, often infused his work with images of the divine and immortal. In his poetry, he sculpted an image of Xi Wangmu that spoke of eternal life and supreme power. For example, Li Bai’s poems that reference peaches from Xi Wangmu’s garden are symbolic of immortality, a theme that is recurrent in Chinese mythology surrounding the Queen Mother of the West. The peaches, often associated with the elixir of life, underscore Xi Wangmu’s role as the dispenser of immortality.

Furthermore, Li Bai and Bai Juyi both painted Xi Wangmu’s abode, the Jade Pond, with vivid literary strokes. They depicted a celestial landscape that was both resplendent and harmonious, invoking a sense of awe and yearning in their readers. The detailed and picturesque descriptions served to elevate Xi Wangmu’s stature to

that of a revered deity with a dwelling fitting her divine status.

In lines such as Du Fu's "Looking West to the Jade Pond, the Queen Mother Descends," the poets endowed Xi Wangmu with both godlike grandeur and a sense of approachability. The imagery of the Queen Mother descending suggests her willingness to interact with the world of mortals, bridging the gap between heaven and earth. This portrayal emphasizes her significance in both the celestial and earthly domains, reinforcing her role in festive and ceremonial occasions.

Xi Wangmu is also depicted in an interactive context with the mortal world, as seen in Li Bai's and Bai Juyi's works, where the poets present her as engaging with humans rather than remaining aloof. This interaction creates a more dynamic and relatable image of Xi Wangmu, contributing to the complexity of her literary character. The Tang poets achieved a delicate balance, presenting Xi Wangmu as a divine figure who is simultaneously distant, exalted, and intimately involved in mortal affairs.

Tang Dynasty poets constructed a literary image of Xi Wangmu that was rich in symbolism and themes. They portrayed her as an immortal figure of great authority and beauty, associated with the celestial realm, yet they did not shy away from depicting her in a manner that allowed for interaction with the temporal world. The result was a portrayal of Xi Wangmu that was both lofty and accessible, leaving an indelible mark on the literary history of female deities.

Chinese: 西望瑤池降王母,東來紫氣滿函關。

English Translation: Looking west, one thinks of The Jade Lake of the Queen of the Western Heavens; then east and thinks of Lao Zi riding Through the purple mist of the Pass (Du & Alley, 2016: 360).

In translating the line in Du Fu's poem "秋興八首 (Autumn Feelings)," Alley's strategy reflects a nuanced balance between literal fidelity and capturing the essence of the original poetry, an approach evident in his rendering of "瑤池" as "The Jade Lake." This choice preserves the literal meaning while also conveying the cultural significance and imagery associated with the Queen Mother of the West. By opting for "The Jade Lake," Alley retains the original's reference to a specific mythological place known for its beauty and connection to the Queen Mother, a figure of great importance in Chinese mythology.

The word "Jade" conveys the sense of purity, clarity, and value that jade holds in Chinese culture. It is a material often associated with nobility and virtue, making it an effective word choice to suggest the regal and sacred nature of the place where the Queen Mother resides. This translation allows Western readers to appreciate the luxurious and divine connotations that "瑤池" carries within the Chinese cultural context.

Alley's use of "Queen" in conjunction with "The Jade Lake" serves to bridge cultural gaps by employing a term that resonates with Western audiences. The title "Queen" is universally understood to denote a female ruler of the highest rank, and its use here helps convey the preeminent status that the Queen Mother holds in the Eastern mythological pantheon. This enables Western readers to draw parallels with their own cultural understandings of royalty and divinity.

By translating "王母" as "the Queen of the Western Heavens," Alley ensures that the celestial and

authoritative nature of the Queen Mother is not lost. The phrase “Western Heavens” suggests a mystical and distant realm, further enhancing the exotic and otherworldly impression of the Queen Mother’s domain.

Alley’s translation does more than just communicate the literal meaning; it also preserves the poetic rhythm and atmospheric qualities of Du Fu’s verse. The original poem’s cadence and structure are mirrored in the English translation, which is crucial for maintaining the aesthetic and emotional resonance of the poem. The imagery of looking westward to the Jade Lake and eastward to the purple mists of Hangu Pass invokes a sense of vastness and the passage of time, themes that are at the heart of Du Fu’s poetry.

Chinese: 仙人琪樹白無色,王母桃花小不香。

English Translation: Compared with the fabled beauties in the gardens of fairyland, these are lovelier (Bai & Alley, 1983: 96).

Rewi Alley’s translation of Bai Juyi’s “牡丹芳 (The Fragrant Peony)” is a prime example of how a translator can capture the aesthetic essence of a poem while making it approachable to an audience that may not be familiar with the cultural and historical context of the original work. In his translation, Alley navigates the cultural nuances by reimagining specific Chinese cultural references, such as the image of the “Queen Mother” or “王母,” which is steeped in Chinese mythology and could be obscure to Western readers.

Alley’s profound grasp of Chinese culture and history, enriched by his years living in China, enabled him to capture the unique aesthetic essence of Bai Juyi’s poetry. This essence often involves contrasting elements to highlight beauty or stir emotions. In “The Fragrance of Peonies,” for example, Alley delineates this theme through the juxtaposition of the fleeting allure of peonies against the timeless elegance of the Queen Mother, a mythical figure celebrated for her eternal grace in Chinese mythology.

To make the image of the Queen Mother more accessible, Alley chose to generalize the reference by substituting it with a term that conveys a sense of mysticism and beauty that can be universally recognized. Instead of translating “王母” directly, he used phrases like “fabled beauties” within a “fairyland,” which are evocative and resonate with Western imagery of mythical enchantment. This creative choice allows readers from different cultural backgrounds to connect with the imagery and the emotions it is intended to evoke, without requiring them to understand the specific connotations of the Queen Mother in Chinese mythology.

Alley’s translation reflects his comprehensive knowledge of both China’s past and present and his ability to make comparisons with ease, which is a characteristic feature of his writing. His approach exemplifies a creative and thoughtful engagement with the source text, where understanding the poem’s conceptual structure is as crucial as conveying its semantic elements. By integrating his understanding of Chinese aesthetics with a global sensibility, Alley’s translation maintains the poetic spirit of Bai Juyi’s work while extending its reach to a broader audience.

Furthermore, Alley’s dedication to learning Chinese and his ongoing exploration and translation of Chinese poetry underline his commitment to introducing Chinese history and ancient culture to the world. Through his translations, Alley sought to “arouse interest about China in Western countries” and to capture the imagination of

a diverse readership by writing in a “simple and human way”. This commitment is evident in his translation of “The Fragrance of Peonies,” where he uses language that is both evocative and relatable, thus bridging the gap between the rich cultural heritage of China and the Western reader’s understanding.

Alley’s translation of “The Fragrant Peony” captures the poem’s aesthetic spirit through his skillful use of universal imagery and his sensitivity to the cultural and historical context of the original work. By reimagining specific references and employing universally resonant terms, Alley provides a translation that is both faithful to the original’s emotive power and accessible to readers unfamiliar with the Chinese cultural milieu. His work exemplifies the translator’s role as an intermediary who not only conveys meaning but also facilitates cross-cultural understanding and appreciation of literary beauty.

From the above discussions, it is easy to observe that when Alley approaches the translation of these emblematic characters, he aims to preserve the original’s artistic conception and its emotive currents, endeavoring to convey the resonance of the characters, whether they are storied historical characters, reflections of the poets’ contemporaries, or even denizens of myth and legend. His translations are not simply textual manifestations but are replete with the spirit and the character temperaments that the Chinese poets had masterfully embedded in their work. The task involves intricate cognitive blending, where the translator must integrate concepts across cultures, ensuring that the emotional and artistic landscapes are as evocative in the target language as they are in the original.

Alley’s translations seek to allow these character images to transcend their linguistic and cultural origins, thereby transforming them into a shared cultural heritage that readers across the globe can appreciate and connect with emotionally. By achieving this, he enables Western readers to not only comprehend the literal meaning of the poems but also to resonate with the spiritual demeanor and the subtle nuances of the historical, realistic, and fictional characters that populate these classic works. It is in this delicate balance of faithful representation and creative interpretation that Alley’s translations serve as a bridge, inviting global readers to partake in the timeless elegance and profound emotional landscape of classical Chinese poetry.

4. How are the Images of Chinese Female Characters Created in Rewi Alley’s English Translations of Tang Poetry?

4.1 Embodied-Cognitive Translatology (ECT): The Theoretical Framework

Embodied-Cognitive Translatology posits that translation is a unique, multi-faceted cognitive activity. Its core principle is “Embodied-Cognition,” which refers to the triad of reality (體)—cognition (認)—language (Wang, 2021: 115). Reality encompasses the cultural, social, and contextual environment depicted by the source text. This reality includes not only the objective content described by the written words but also the background knowledge and cultural assumptions associated with it. Cognition refers to the mental activities of the

translator during the translation process, including understanding, interpreting, remembering, and conceptualizing the source text. It determines how translators handle and comprehend source text information and how they select appropriate target language expressions. Language refers to the linguistic forms of both the source text and the translated text. It serves as the medium for expressing reality and cognition and is the central object of translation activity, involving equivalence conversion between different languages, the translation of semantic structures, and the reproduction of style. In the translation process, translators need to comprehend the real-world background of the original text (the reality dimension), process this information with their cognitive abilities (the cognitive dimension), and then express it accurately in the target language (the language dimension).

Firstly, the REALITY component in Embodied-Cognitive Translatology acknowledges the cultural, social, and contextual environment of the source text. It is not limited to the explicit content within the text but also includes the implied background knowledge and cultural assumptions that are inherent within the language and expressions used. This means that translators must have an acute awareness of the source culture to accurately interpret the meanings and nuances present in the text. The understanding of reality thus requires translators to engage in a form of intercultural communication, where they mediate between the source and target cultures, often performing acts of bodily mimesis to bridge gaps in conventional communicative modes.

The COGNITION aspect refers to the mental activities involved in the translation process. Translators must understand, interpret, remember, and conceptualize the source text. This cognitive process involves extracting conceptual structures from the semantic structures of the source text and transforming them into the target language. Embodied-Cognitive Translatology highlights the complexity of this process, describing it as a two-way blend of mental spaces and schemas. The cognitive processes also include image schema blending, where the translator must navigate through different mental constructs to arrive at an understanding of the source text.

The third component, LANGUAGE, is the vehicle for expressing the intersection of reality and cognition. It involves the linguistic form of the source text and the challenge of reproducing these forms in the target text. Translation is, therefore, a dynamic interplay of linguistic forms and conceptual structures. Each culture has its communicative modes, which are deeply embedded in linguistic forms and conceptual structures. The translator acts as a mediator, tracing connections between linguistic forms and conceptual structures to convey the intended schemata of the source text to the target audience. The translation is seen as creating a “third culture” where the translated version exists in the target language but with emergent cultural frames. The act of translating involves blending personal visions—shaped by both the source language’s culture and the translator’s unique experiences and education—with the conceptual blending processes, which can result in the creation of new, integrated meanings. In conclusion, Embodied-Cognitive Translatology views translation as a complex cognitive activity that requires translators to navigate and integrate elements from the source culture, their own cognitive processes, and the linguistic demands of both the source and target languages. This integration is achieved through sophisticated mental processes such as blending, which allows for the creation of meaning that is sensitive to the nuances of both cultures involved in the translation.

ECT views translating as a dynamic, emergent process whereby the translator engages in conceptual blending, where elements from both the source and target cultures are woven together to create a coherent and culturally sensitive translation. This involves a continuous negotiation of meaning, where the translator's cognitive processes, which include perception, memory, attention, and imagination, are in constant interaction with the linguistic and cultural elements of the text.

Embodied-Cognitive Translatology provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the translation process. It foregrounds the importance of the translator's embodied cognition, the cultural context of the source text, and the linguistic forms of both source and target languages. This multilayered interplay is what makes translation a sophisticated cognitive activity that requires not only linguistic proficiency but also cultural empathy and cognitive flexibility.

4.2 An Embodied-Cognitive Analysis of Chinese Character Imagery Creation in Rewi Alley's English Translation of Tang Poetry

Rewi Alley's extensive experience and profound comprehension of Chinese history, geography, and cultural customs significantly augmented his capacity to construct and reproduce the "real world" of Tang poetry in his translations, a concept that aligns with the principles of Cognitive Translation Studies. This field asserts that translation is more than a linguistic exercise; it involves the understanding and re-creation of the source text's reality within the translated work. Alley's tenure in China, spanning over six decades, saw him living through wars, revolutions, and immense social change alongside the Chinese people. This immersive experience allowed him to gain an intimate knowledge of China's historical progression, its diverse landscapes, and the intricate tapestry of its cultural practices. His work often reflected his personal journey and interactions within China, offering him a unique vantage point from which to approach the translation of Chinese literature. His passion and dedication to translating Chinese literary works are well-documented, with at least 17 translations to his credit, underscoring his deep engagement with the language and cultural expression. Alley was not merely a translator but also an active participant in China's cultural evolution, having established a readership and using his writings to bridge the understanding between China and Western audiences. His translations are, therefore, infused with not just linguistic competence but also a rich contextual knowledge that only someone so deeply embedded in the culture could provide. Alley's approach to translating Tang poetry was rooted in his philosophy that a poet—and by extension, their poetry—must be understood within the full context of the historical, geographical, and socio-political milieu in which they lived and created. By doing so, he engaged with the source texts at a level that went beyond literal translation, striving to convey the essence of the era and the lived experiences of the poets.

In his translations, Alley used English names for places and cultural elements, as seen in examples where "姑蘇臺" and "春曉宮" are adeptly translated as "Kusu Terrace" and "Chunhsiao Palace". This technique not only provides a direct translation of the terms but also allows Western readers to visualize and conceptually map these locations within their own cognitive frameworks. Even if English readers are unfamiliar with the original

Chinese names, the translated terms offer enough detail for them to imagine the scenes depicted in the poetry. Moreover, his translation of “瑶池” as “The Jade Lake” exemplifies his ability to convey the mythological and cultural nuances of the original texts. Such translations showcase Alley’s profound understanding of the historical characters, real characters, historical events, mythological culture, and geographical names mentioned in the source text. In doing so, he skillfully reproduces the “real world” within the poet’s creation, making it accessible to a Western audience that might lack the direct experience of the Chinese cultural context. Alley’s translations are more than just textual renditions; they are reconstructions of the realities that shaped the Tang poets’ experiences. His deep understanding of both the macrocosm of China’s historical and cultural journey and the microcosm of individual human experiences within that context allowed him to translate not just words, but worlds—a feat that is the hallmark of a masterful translator and cultural intermediary.

Professional translation is a complex activity that transcends the simple transposition of words from one language to another. It requires a deep understanding of the source text, a creative reimagining of its contents, and the ability to navigate the cultural nuances of both the source and target languages. Alley’s translation strategy, which places a strong emphasis on creativity and cross-cultural cognition, enriches this multifaceted process in several ways. Firstly, creativity in translation is akin to the production of new meanings that might not have been explicitly intended by the original author. Alley recognizes that, like poetry, a text can be interpreted in diverse ways that go beyond the author’s original imagination. This means that the translator’s role is not just to convey information, but to recreate the essence of the text, infusing it with new life that resonates within the cultural context of the target audience. This creative act of translation is a “re-creation” in the truest sense, as noted by Mao Dun in the context of Alley’s translations of Chinese poetry and is a potent demonstration of the translator’s interpretative role. The cognitive aspect of translation, as highlighted by Alley’s approach, involves a two-way blending of mental processes. When reading the source text, translators engage in a reverse blending process to understand the schemata of the communicated event, and then search for the appropriate communicative mode in the target culture to convey this event. This is followed by a transfer into the conceptual structure represented by the target language that is grammatically and culturally appropriate. The sophisticated relations between linguistic forms and conceptual structures in translation underscore the importance of cross-cultural cognition in achieving effective communication.

Furthermore, the process of translation is a unique act of cognition and communication, as it bridges interlingual gaps and sometimes involves mimetic representation, where conventional communicative modes are not shared between the source and target languages. This necessitates a translator’s integration of their bodily mimesis, communicative sign function, volition, and cross-modality in order to extract and transfer conceptual structures from one semantic framework to another. Translators, thus, become active agents in shaping the translation, blending their own experiences and cultural understanding into the process. Alley’s strategy also acknowledges the role of reader interpretation, recognizing that a text may evoke different images in readers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This means that translators must not only comprehend the text as it

is but also anticipate the various ways it may be received by the target audience, adjusting their translations accordingly.

In addition, the cognitive blending theory proposed by Fauconnier and Turner provides insight into the conceptual blending that takes place in translation. This involves integrating information from the source text with target linguistic forms, transforming textual features, and reconfiguring syntactic structures. The translator must navigate these complex cognitive networks to produce a translation that is both faithful to the original and comprehensible to the target audience.

Finally, the innovative aspect of Alley's strategy is evident in how it allows for the creation of novel ideas and representations during the translation process. This innovation is not just a byproduct of the challenges posed by differences in linguistic structures but also a testament to the translator's ability to overcome cultural barriers and convey meaning in new and often enlightening ways.

Alley's translation strategy, with its focus on creativity and cross-cultural cognition, contributes significantly to the art of professional translation. It goes beyond linguistic conversion, engaging translators in a dynamic process of cognitive blending, representation integration, and innovation, all of which are essential for the transmission of meaning across cultural boundaries.

In the delicate and nuanced art of translation, Rewi Alley's approach provides a fascinating case study of how the interplay of creativity, cross-cultural cognition, and the transmission of meaning across cultural boundaries can elevate the practice of professional translation. Alley's work on translating the poems of Tu Fu, a task requiring not just linguistic proficiency but a deep conveyance of spirit and feeling, illustrates the essence of a strategy that transcends mere linguistic transference. Alley's translations embody the cognitive act of translation as an interlingual communication, which is inherently an act of negotiation amongst diverse cultural conventions. The translation process involves a blending of source text information with the target linguistic forms, effectively integrating both semantic and conceptual structures. This is not a simple one-to-one conversion but rather a complex cognitive operation where the translator must extract the conceptual structure from the semantic structure of the source text and adapt it to the target cultural context. Alley's strategy reflects an understanding of translation as a two-way blend of mental processes, where the translator must comprehend the schemata of the communicated event from the source text and find the appropriate communicative mode within the target culture. This sophisticated relationship between linguistic forms and conceptual structures is pivotal in ensuring that the translated work resonates within the target culture while retaining the essence of the original.

The art of translation, as Alley demonstrates, requires a translator to blend their own embodied cognition with the text. This means they must actively engage with the text, reading it in a way that may differ from the original intent and presenting their unique interpretation of it. Alley's translations do not passively adopt what is presented in the source text; instead, they are a re-creation that integrates the translator's understanding as both a reader and a writer, resulting in a work that is a blended conceptual figure crafted by the translator. Alley's translation of “西施越溪女, 出自苧蘿山” exemplifies this approach. He does not simply seek formal equivalence

but aims to convey the spirit of the original poem. The translation adapts to the linguistic habits and cultural background of the English-speaking audience, maintaining the regional background of Hsi Shih while ensuring that the English expression remains natural and accessible. Furthermore, when translating narrative poems like “The Song of Everlasting Regret,” Alley employs a coherent narrative structure and vivid language. This not only recreates the legendary story but does so in a way that is harmonious with the aesthetic preferences and narrative styles familiar to English-speaking readers. His ability to convey Yang Guifei’s beauty through descriptions such as “her skin shone milky white” showcases a translation that is both culturally sensitive and appealing to the target audience.

Rewi Alley’s translation of Tang poetry is a remarkable example of profound cultural understanding and adept cross-cultural communication. His work serves as a conduit through which the nuances of Chinese classical literature are introduced to the Western audience. Through his translations, Alley has successfully transformed historical and mythological characters such as Hsi Shih, Huxuan dancers, and Xi Wangmu into symbols that transcend cultural boundaries. These characters, embodying beauty, emotion, intelligence, and divinity, are presented in a manner that captures the charm and depth of ancient Chinese poetry, thereby building a bridge for Western readers to explore and appreciate the unique appeal of Chinese classical aesthetics.

On an operational level, Alley’s translation strategies include interpretative translation, which goes beyond literal word-for-word translation, aiming to convey the underlying meaning and spirit of the original text. He has also employed techniques of addition and omission, where he may add or omit elements to better align with the target audience’s cultural expectations and understanding. Furthermore, Alley’s creative translation approach allows him to render the poems in a way that resonates with foreign cultures, while still retaining the emotional essence of the originals. These strategies are indicative of Alley’s interactive experience and cognitive processing, which are influenced by factors such as reality, cognition, and language.

Alley’s translations deftly capture the ancient aesthetic emotions embedded in the original Chinese poems, while also adeptly narrowing the cultural divides between the source texts and their translations. His deep immersion in Chinese culture and historical context enriches his translations, making the subtle nuances and emotional depths of classical Chinese poetry accessible to a global audience. His work preserves the emotional core of the Tang poems while simultaneously expanding their influence and interpretative space within Western culture. This has significantly contributed to the promotion of cross-cultural transmission of Chinese classical literature, fostering dialogue and integration between Chinese and Western cultures.

5. Conclusion

Rewi Alley’s approach to translation epitomizes the intricacies and depth that the art of translation demands, transcending mere lexical substitution to encompass a broad understanding of the source and target cultures. His translations extend beyond the conventional realm, as they are not just linguistic conversions but rather a nuanced



intercultural dialogue that bridges the cognitive and cultural chasm between the original and the target audience. Alley's work underscores the importance of the translator's role as an active agent in the translation process, one who must not only have mastery over the linguistic aspects of both the source and target languages but also a profound understanding of the cultural and historical contexts from which the text emerges and into which it will be received. His emphasis on creativity in translation allows for a more dynamic engagement with the text, fostering a space where new meanings can blossom, and cultural nuances can be navigated with finesse.

In a broader perspective, the principles Alley embodies in his translation methodology resonate with contemporary translation theories that advocate for the translator's visibility and the creative, transformative act of translation. His approach, which harmonizes creativity with cross-cultural cognition, adds a rich layer of depth to the professional practice of translation, emphasizing the translator's interpretive role and the cognitive processes involved in translating meaning and experience across cultures. This is not simply about finding corresponding words in another language but about re-creating experiences, emotions, and atmospheres in a way that is meaningful to the target audience while honoring the source text. As such, Alley's work serves as an exemplary model for professional translators who strive to produce translations that do not just communicate the surface meaning of a text but also its underlying spirit and cultural essence. The lasting impact of Alley's translation approach on the art of professional translation lies in its affirmation of the translator's role as a cultural mediator, an intellectual artisan, and a creative interpreter, shaping the way in which texts are experienced and understood across linguistic and cultural divides.

It is important to note, however, that the current study of Rewi Alley's translations may have certain limitations. The documents retrieved do not provide an exhaustive analysis of the different translation strategies that Alley employed over his entire body of work, nor do they offer a systematic evaluation of the reception of his translations among Western readerships. Additionally, there is a lack of critical engagement with the potential discrepancies between Alley's interpretations and the expectations of contemporary scholarship in translation studies. Furthermore, there is no in-depth discussion of the possible influence that Alley's political and cultural views may have had on his translation choices, a factor that could provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play in his work. While Alley's translations of Tang poetry are undoubtedly an important contribution to the introduction of Chinese classical literature to the Western world, further research is needed to thoroughly understand the full range of his translation strategies, the impact of his work on different audiences, and the influence of his personal beliefs on his translations.

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