

Research Article

# Reproduction, Variation and Reconstruction of the Bashu Regional Image in the English Translation of Tang Poetry

Yu Xia\*

School of Foreign Languages, Chengdu College of Arts and Sciences, Chengdu, China

## Abstract

This study explores the reproduction, variation, and reconstruction of the "Bashu regional image" in the English translations of Tang poetry, particularly focusing on the works of the esteemed poet Li Bai. Unlike traditional poetic imagery, regional images possess distinct local characteristics that reflect the unique cultural and geographical context of their origin. The Bashu region, known for its rugged landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and inclusiveness, serves as a quintessential example of this phenomenon. Li Bai's poetry, especially in pieces such as "On the Flowery Tower in the Town of Silk" and "The Moon over the Eyebrow Mountain," is infused with vivid Bashu cultural images that merit scholarly attention. This paper examines how these regional images are reproduced, altered, and reinterpreted in English translations, particularly considering the timeline of Li Bai's experiences in Bashu. By analyzing the nuances of translation, this research aims to elucidate the complexities involved in conveying regional imagery to a global audience. Ultimately, it seeks to highlight the significance of maintaining the essence of local culture in translation, thus enhancing our understanding of both the source material and its adaptations across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Through this investigation, the study contributes to the broader discourse on the interplay between language, culture, and poetic expression in the context of ancient Chinese literature.

## Keywords

Regional Image, Reproduction, Variation

## 1. Introduction

Regional image refers to the portrayal of specific regions' cultural landscapes and local characteristics. Due to extensive and long-term usage, regional image become carriers of local experiences, historical memories, and cultural heritage, spreading widely around the world [1]. "Region" does not merely refer to a specific geographical area but also encompasses the poet's inherited, understood, and imagined space, encompassing the poet's perceptions, emotions, subjective situational understanding, and value judgments when observing this space [2].

The poem "On the Flowery Tower in the Town of Silk" was composed by Li Bai during his revisit to Chengdu in 722 AD (the tenth year of the Kaiyuan era) at the age of 22 [3]. The poem unfolds with the timeline, from the morning light to the evening rain, spreading outwards to Shuangliu City in the south and the Three Gorges in the east. With vivid image and an ethereal artistic conception, this poem expresses the joy of ascending the tower. "The Moon over the Eyebrow Mountain" was composed by Li Bai during his journey out of Bashu in the thirteenth year of the Kaiyuan era (725 AD).

\*Corresponding author: 315429252@qq.com (Yu Xia)

**Received:** 14 October 2024; **Accepted:** 30 October 2024; **Published:** 9 January 2025



Copyright: © The Author(s), 2025. Published by Science Publishing Group. This is an **Open Access** article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

[4]. It is a seven-character quatrain that depicts a night with clear autumn air and bright moonlight. The poet travels downstream on a small boat from Qingxi Post, expressing his lingering affection for his homeland and old friends upon leaving. Previous studies of these two famous poems by Li Bai primarily focused on analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of their translations using translation theories and strategies, while there is little research on the translation of regional images in the poetry. Focusing on the reproduction, variation and reconstruction of regional images in Tang poetry, this paper adopts the comparative analysis method to compare the English translations of regional images in two English versions of Xu Yuanchong and Alley's "On the Flowery Tower in the Town of Silk". And this paper adopts the case analysis method to discuss the rationality of regional images in Xu Yuanchong's translation of "The Moon over the Eyebrow Mountain". It aims to explore and reveal the relationship between the original poem and the translated poem, that is, to explore whether the translated poem maximally restores the regional image of the original poem.

## 2. Bashu Regional Image

"Image" is an important category in traditional Chinese aesthetics, referring to the fusion and interpenetration of subjective life sentiments and objective natural landscapes, creating a vivid and profound artistic realm [5]. In the study of traditional Chinese poetry image, "regional images" are a unique and noteworthy category [6]. For example, traditional images, such as "flowers," "birds," and "moon" gradually became specific symbols with significant connotations in poetic creation due to their natural attributes and their resonance with human joys and sorrows [7]. The Bashu region, with its majestic and treacherous natural features, profound and rich cultural connotations, has formed a typical "Bashu regional image" in ancient Chinese poetry [8].

The relative "Bashu image" refers to the imagery that appears in literary works that depict or relate to Bashu. The absolute "Bashu image" refers to the image that has been branded with the Bashu brand, it has a unique regional color of the Bashu, and has become a symbol of the Bashu region. The Bashu regional image belongs to the absolute Bashu image, such as "Wushan", "Shushan", "Emei", "Three Gorges", and "Monkey Song", which have always been synonymous and symbolic symbols for the land of Bashu [9]. No matter what type and theme of literary works it appears in, people unconsciously associate it with the land of Bashu.

## 3. Analysis of Regional Image in "On the Flowery Tower in the Town of Silk"

In the poem "On the Flowery Tower in the Town of Silk", the poet Li Bai vividly depicts the magnificent and majestic scenery of the tower bathed in the morning glow. The poet's

gaze extends to the vast sky, bringing a sense of tranquility and joy. He observes the drizzling rain falling towards the Three Gorges in the distance and the spring river winding around the city below. Afterward, the poet plans to travel eastward to the Three Gorges, and at this moment, ascending the tower feels like a playful journey in the clouds. The lines "Into green clouds a flight of stairways soars, The gloom's dispelled at such sunny outlooks" are crucial in conveying the poet's exaggerated style and his sense of joy. Within this exaggerated depiction, regional image appears to be the most stable element. In the following analysis, we will examine the expressions of regional image in this poem and compare their representation in the translations by Xu Yuanchong and Alley.

Line 1:

Xu: Into green clouds a flight of stairways soars, The gloom's dispelled at such sunny outlooks. [10]

Alley: but its stairs were so steep it was as if I climbed right up into the clouds; then when I arrived at the top and looked over the land troubles were washed from my heart. [11]

In ancient Chinese dictionaries, "LǜYun" has three meanings: referring to green-colored clouds, metaphorically describing dense foliage, or symbolizing a woman's black and dense hair. In this poem, Li Bai describes himself standing atop the Scattered Flowers Tower, overlooking the entire city with lush and verdant trees, while high buildings soar up to the sky. The poet's gaze extends far into the distance, and a sense of joy surges within him. Therefore, "LǜYun" here should be understood as dense vegetation. Xu Yuanchong's translation, "green clouds" in English, can refer to either "dark clouds" that indicate bad weather or a potential environmental benefit provided by the internet. Both interpretations may confuse readers and fail to achieve the best image restoration for "LǜYun," resulting in variation. Alley, on the other hand, employs a metaphorical translation, emphasizing the height of the Scattered Flowers Tower with the phrase "but its stairs were so steep it was as if I climbed right up into the clouds." Furthermore, after reaching the top, the poet's troubles disappear. This continuation of the image of ascending the tower and gazing into the distance partially reproduces the original image.

Line 2:

Xu: The evening rain towards Three Gorges flies, Around the town wind rivers crystal-clear. [10]

Alley: as evening came and rain fell; from here in spring, gazing over to where the great rivers meet. [11]

The original lines employ parallelism as a rhetorical device, succinctly depicting the magnificent scenery of the drizzling rain at dusk and the flowing rivers around the city. The noun "evening rain" corresponds to "wind rivers," and the verb "flies" corresponds to "crystal-clear." The "Three Gorges" matches "the town," and together they create a picturesque scene of a rainy spring evening, with rivers flowing through the city, embellishing it with vibrant spring colors.

While the English translations lack a similar structure, Xu Yuanchong's translation, "The evening rain towards Three Gorges flies; Around the town wind rivers crystal-clear," maintains a rhyming structure, with "The evening rain" and "rivers crystal-clear" echoing each other. The addition of "crystal-clear" as an adjective describing the spring river enhances the aesthetic quality of the translation, creating a beautiful picture of the Town of Silk in the readers' minds and strengthening the restoration of the original image. Alley's translation, "from here in spring, gazing over to where the great rivers meet", slightly deviates from the original intention by using "spring" instead of the intended "spring river," and his interpretation of "Shuang Liu" as "where the great rivers meet" is also inaccurate. In fact, it should refer to the river diversion, and the river is divided into two, not refers to "great rivers meet".

Line 3

Xu: The sun shines on the Town of Silk, the Tower is steeped in morning glow as strewn with flowers. [10]

Alley: Sun drenched the tall Chengtu city gates, so that the San Hua Tower shone brilliantly. [11]

The original poem features two terms: "Jincheng" and "Sanhualou." Xu Yuanchong translated these as "the Town of Silk" and "the tower," effectively capturing the imagery that connects the city to the tower, moving from a broad perspective to a more focused one. Both translators' renditions nearly recreate this imagery combination.

Chengdu has had many aliases since ancient times, among which the most important are three: Guicheng, Jinguan City, and Rongcheng. Jincheng is also known as Jinguan City. During the Western Han Dynasty, Chengdu was not only the political center of the Sichuan region at that time, but also one of the famous five major cities in China. At that time, the brocade industry in Chengdu was particularly developed, and the Sichuan brocade, which is a specialty of Chengdu, had a long history and was well-known throughout the country. It has always been an important tribute of the court. During the Eastern Han Dynasty, the imperial court specifically appointed officials to manage it and built the "Jinguan City". As a result, later generations referred to Jinguan City as a nickname for Chengdu, abbreviated as "Jincheng". "Jincheng" refers to Jinguan City, which is synonymous with Chengdu in Sichuan province, a key area for sericulture in China. Ancient texts describe Chengdu as having "beautiful and magnificent scenery." During the Shu Han Dynasty, an official responsible for brocade lived in Jinguan City, leading to the name Jincheng. Xu Yuanchong translates "Jincheng" as "Town of Silk," rather than using the modern name "Chengdu," thereby preserving the original meaning. This choice prompts readers to associate the city with its renowned silk production. In contrast, Alley's translation "Chengtu city gates" narrows the broader concept of "city" to the more specific "gate," creating a concrete imagery combination with another specific reference. This allows readers to connect their memories with tangible elements, enhancing their un-

derstanding of Chengdu.

Line 4:

Xu: By golden windows and embroidered doors, The pearly curtains hang on silver hooks. [10]

Alley: its windows like gold, doors like bits of embroidery, bamboo curtains as if made of pearls. [11]

The poet does not describe the architectural scale, construction characteristics, location, and layout of the Scattered Flower Tower, but instead highlights the specific image combinations in the regional imagery through the changes and reflections of color, light, form of objects such as gold windows, embroidered doors, pearl foil, silver hooks, and stairs, showcasing the elegant and unique grandeur of the scattered flower building. These objects are all artifacts from ancient China, where "golden windows" and "embroidered doors" refer to exquisitely decorated windows and doors, and "pearl foil" are curtains adorned with pearls, while "silver hooks" represent hooks made of silver. These artifacts symbolize the abundant material culture of ancient China. Xu Yuanchong employs a literal translation for "Golden Windows", "Embroidered doors", "The pearly curtains" and "silver hooks", allowing readers to associate them with the splendor of the Town of Silk, thereby effectively reflecting the historical characteristics of the source culture. Alley's translation, on the other hand, strives to maintain the syntactic structure of the entire poem, omitting "silver hooks" and "bamboo curtains as if made of pearls" resulting in a lack of specific image in the translated poem. The translation also fails to better reconstruct the original poetic image, which is regrettable.

Line 5:

Xu: Today I come to feast on this my eyes, As if I visited Celestial Sphere. [10]

Alley: it is as if I had climbed right up to heaven to sport there. [11]

The poem employs metaphorical language, likening the Jincheng Scattered Flower Tower to "Jiu Tian," or the "Nine Heavens," a concept crafted by poets to evoke regional imagery. In Chinese Taoist tradition, these nine heavens are believed to exist, with the ninth being the residence of the Jade Emperor, which later became a metaphor for lofty realms. Li Bai, a proponent of Taoism, was significantly influenced by its cultural aspects. In the poem, the poet does not literally ascend to the sky but rather uses this imagery to emphasize his feelings of ecstasy. Given the contrasting religious contexts between the East and the West, Xu Yuanchong chose to translate "Jiu Tian" as "Celestial Sphere." The British Concise Encyclopedia describes the "Celestial Sphere" as the perceived surface of the sky, where stars appear to be affixed. Alley, on the other hand, translated "Jiu Tian" as "heaven," which conveys the idea of the highest point in the sky and a realm of bliss. This interpretation aligns closely with the original meaning, making it easier for readers to grasp the poet's intended message and the joyous sentiment of "As if I visited the Celestial Sphere" without much difficulty.

To sum up, Xu Yuanchong and Alley have different expressions in terms of the translation of the regional image in the poem "On the Flowery Tower in the Town of Silk". Xu Yuanchong adopted more literal translation to maintain the characteristics of images, while Alley preferred free translation to enhance the readability and beauty of translation through metaphor and other means. But in dealing with some details, both of their translations have some deviations or regrets.

#### 4. Analysis of Regional Image in "The Moon over the Eyebrow Mountain"

The poem "Song of the Moon on Mount Emei" features five place names, presenting a picturesque journey along the Shu River for hundreds of miles through the image of the mountain and the river. The poem unfolds a beautifully crafted and serene scene. The poet passes through the following locations in sequence: Mount Emei, Pingqiang River, Qingxi, Yuzhou, and the Three Gorges. The poem gradually unveils a picture of a journey along the Shu River for hundreds of miles. The moon is described as a "half-crescent," evoking the elegant image of the moon shining over the green mountains [12]. To the northeast of Mount Emei lies Pingqiang River, which is the present-day Qingyi River. It originates from Lushan County in Sichuan Province and flows into the Min River in Leshan County. The phrase "shadow" refers to the moon's reflection, and the verbs "enters" and "flows" form a compound predicate, indicating that the moon's reflection enters the river and flows along with it. The poet, Li Bai, sets off from Qingxi Station during the night and travels towards the Three Gorges on the Min River.

The entire poem conveys the poet's journey through the river while connecting it with the symbolic artistic image of the mountain and the moon, harmonizing vast space and a relatively long time [13]. The treatment of place names in the poem is also varied. "Mount Emei" and "Pingqiang River" are used metaphorically, representing virtual expressions of the scenery. On the other hand, "Qingxi," "Three Gorges," and "Yuzhou" are used literally and hold different positions within the sentences. The four lines of "The Moon over the Eyebrow Mountain" embed Mount Emei, Pingqiang River, Qingxi, Three Gorges, and Yuzhou. The organization is exquisite, and the scenes come to life without any trace of forced composition, showcasing the ethereal beauty of Li Bai's quatrain. Among them, the translators use different methods to translate the regional image of Mount Emei, Pingqiang River, Qingxi, and Yuzhou. By examining the reconstruction of these images, we can gauge the accuracy of their restoration.

Title: "The Moon over the Eyebrow Mountain"

Line 1: "The crescent moon looks like old Autumn's golden brow."

Mount Emei is a famous mountain in China. When viewed

from afar, the twin peaks resemble painted eyebrows. In the cognitive world of Chinese readers, "Emei" is associated with the beautiful eyebrows of classical Chinese beauties, evoking a sense of beauty. The translator, however, realized that a simple translation could not convey the poet's intended reality [14]. Therefore, the translator opted for a transformative approach, replacing "Emei" with "Eyebrow Mountains" and translating the line "The crescent moon looks like old Autumn's golden brow", "old Autumn's golden brow" combined the two images and then to create a picturesque moonlit scene. However, in terms of restoring the regional image, Western readers may not fully understand Mount Emei mentioned in the original poem, and they may not even be aware of the name "Emei." Thus, the translator's transformation only restores the beauty of the mountain and the moon but fails to capture the unique style of the regional image. Considering the reconstruction of the image, the translator could refer to other translated poems and add a footnote such as "Mont Emei" to better reproduce the regional image in the original poem.

Line 2: "Its deep reflection flows with limpid water blue."

The second line does not translate the place name "Pingqiang River." The translator believes that Pingqiang River is just a part of the river, and the poet only intends to depict the image of traveling on the river. The translation "Its deep reflection flows with limpid water blue" indicates that when looking at the moon's reflection in the water, no matter how the river flows, the moon's reflection remains still. Only by going downstream can one appreciate the exquisite scenery of "its deep reflection flows." Thus, this line only depicts the beautiful scene of the moon reflecting on the clear river and does not translate "Pingqiang River," resulting in the loss of regional image. To restore the regional image of Pingqiang River, the translator could directly translate "Pingqiang River" in the translated poem.

Line 3: "I'll leave the town on Clear Stream for Three Gorges now"

The third line, "I'll leave the town on Clear Stream for Three Gorges now" is a sentence without a subject. Following English conventions, an English subject should be added in the translation. The phrase "Qingxi" is directly translated as "Clear Stream" by Xu Yuanchong. However, this literal translation deviates from the original image. In the poem, "Qingxi" refers to a place name, which represents regional image in the poem and not simply the scenery of a clear stream. According to the "Leshan County Annals," it is recorded that "Banqiao Creek is five miles away from the gorge's mouth, with over ten households residing by the riverbank. The Qingyi magistrate received the high priest at this location. During the Tang Dynasty, this place was renamed Qingxi Station, which became Pingqiang Station in the Song Dynasty. It was an important location from Leshan to Chengdu." Based on this, Qingxi refers to the location of Qingxi Station, not just a clear stream. Therefore, if the translator pays attention to Qingxi Station when translating, the regional image in the original poem could be reproduced more accurately.



Line 4: "O, Moon, how I miss you when you are out of view!"

Yuzhou refers to Chongqing, which is located in the southwestern inland and upper reaches of the Yangtze River. It is situated on the eastern edge of the Sichuan Basin, bordered by the Daba Mountain, Wu Mountain, and Da Lou Mountain to the north, east, and south, respectively. During the Shang and Zhou dynasties, Chongqing belonged to the ancient Ba State. After the Qin Dynasty conquered Ba, it established Ba Commandery there. In the first year of the Kaihuang era (581) of the Sui Dynasty, Emperor Wen of Sui changed Chuzhou to Yuzhou, and Chongqing began to be called "Yu." However, the translator believes that "Yuzhou" is simply a destination downstream, so it can be omitted in the translation. Therefore, the translation only expresses the sentiment, where the character "Jun" represents the moon. In this translation, the word "you" is used, as if it is a dialogue between the poet and the moon. In this case, Xu Yuanchong did not translate "Yuzhou." As the translation does not reconstruct the original poem based on the regional image, it results in the loss of regional image.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, we can conclude that the regional image in both translated poems has undergone reproduction, variation, and reconstruction. The translations of the regional image in "Ascending the Flower Tower in Jin City" by the two translators do not adhere strictly to the form of the original text. Although there are variations in the reproduction of the regional image, they still convey some of the intended meaning. In "The Moon over the Eyebrow Mountain" the translator used transliteration for "Mount Emei," literal translation for "Qingxi," partial translation for "Pingqiang", and omission translation for "Yuzhou". The different translation methods resulted in variations and inaccuracies in the reconstruction of the regional image, failing to fully restore the regional image in the original poem, which may hinder readers' comprehensive understanding [15]. In order to maintain the essence of classical Chinese poetry, the transmission of regional image in the original poems is somewhat lacking in the translated works due to the significant differences between the language of ancient Chinese poetry and English poetry. During the translation process of regional image, translators should approach the origins of regional image with a rigorous attitude to maximize the restoration of the regional image in the translated poems.

## Author Contributions

Yu Xia is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Funding

This article presents the phased research findings of the 2024 project "Study on the English Translation of Tianfu Cultural Images in Ancient Poetry and Its Dissemination Path" (Project Number: LSKJ24G05) by the Collaborative Innovation Base for the Internationalization of Science and Technology and Industry in Leshan City. It also includes the phased research findings of the 2024 research project "Study on the English Translation and Dissemination of Li Bai's Poetry by Japanese Scholar Kaoru Obata" (Project Number: 24ZBGJ-B001) from the Center for Research on China's Neighboring Countries.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declare no conflicts of interest.

## References

- [1] Pan Ling. Different shapes of regional images by poets in the south and north during the Han and Tang Dynasties - centered on Yuefu Poems [D]. Shanghai: East China Normal University, 2015.
- [2] Zheng Ling. The "Bashu Image" in the Poetry of Chen Zi'ang [J]. *Jingchu Academic Journal*, 2021, 22(04).
- [3] Obata, Shigeyoshi. The Works of Li Po, The Chinese Poet [M]. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co, 1922: 1-12.
- [4] Tan Yongli. A Study on the English Translation of Bashu Culture in the Landscape Poetry of Li and Du [J]. *Cognitive Poetics*, 2023(02).
- [5] Zong Baihua. Artistic Conception [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1987.
- [6] Chen Zhie. Poetic Image Theory [M]. Qinhuaugdao: China Social Sciences Press, 1990.
- [7] Zhang Fuqing, Chen Yunjie. On the Natural and Cultural Images and Spiritual Orientation in Lu You's Bashu Poetry [J]. *Chinese Rhythm Literary Journal*, 2020, 34(04).
- [8] Li Shan, Zhao Qianqian. Interpretation and Explanation of Bashu Geographical Imagery in Du Fu's Poetry from the Perspective of Cultural Schemas [J]. *Cognitive Poetics*, 2022(02).
- [9] Zhao Qianqian, Li Shan. An Analysis of English Translation Strategies for Bashu Geographical Imagery in Du Fu's Poetry Based on Cultural Schema Theory [J]. *Writers' World*, 2022(28).
- [10] Xu Yuanchong. 300 Tang Poems [M]. Beijing: China Translation and Publishing Corporation, 2014.
- [11] Alley, R. Li Pai: 200 Selected Poems [M]. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1981.
- [12] Zhou Ziyun. Textual Research on the Place Name of "The Moon over the Eyebrow Mountain" [J]. *Journal of Nanchong Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 1980(03).

- [13] Meng Die. Image Translation of Tang Poetry Guided by Cognitive Linguistics: Taking "The Moon over the Eyebrow Mountain" as an Example [J]. English Square, 2015(08).
- [14] Obata, Shigeyoshi. The Art of Translation [M]. Tokyo: Translation Publishing House, 2015.
- [15] Weng Xianliang. Ancient Poetry Translation [M]. Beijing: Beijing Press, 1985.

## Biography

**Yu Xia**, associate professor, the School of Foreign Languages, Chengdu College of Arts and Sciences. Research interests: Translation Theory and English Teaching.