

# A Comparative Study and Appreciation of Translations of *Slow, Slow Tune* from the Perspective of Translation Aesthetics

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Under the perspective of translation aesthetics, the article studies three Chinese-to-English translations of *Slow, Slow Tune* as research objects, comparing and contrasting the differences between the different translations under the perspective of translation aesthetics. The study finds that: Kenneth Rexroth's translation is poor in textual understanding, with a lot of errors, and is too shallow in emotional expression, remaining only on the surface of the text; Lin Yutang makes occasional mistakes in understanding individual words, and is able to explore the implicit feelings of the lyricist, and his translation focuses on textual and phonological beauty; Xu Yuanchong's translation is not only capable of conveying the meaning of the original work, but also of conveying the lyricist's feelings more vividly and focusing on the phonological beauty. Xu Yuanchong's translation not only conveys the meaning of the original work, but also vividly conveys the emotion of the lyricist, and pays attention to the beauty of sound.

*Keywords:* translation aesthetics, *Slow, Slow Tune*

## Introduction

Chinese poetry has a long history of development, and in the flood of time, many outstanding poetic authors have emerged, and some excellent works have been passed down through the ages, so that they can be circulated and appreciated by later generations. As a bridge between different languages, translation plays an important role in the interaction of language and culture. Most Chinese poems are concise and condensed in form, using rhetorical devices such as metaphor, simile, personification, etc. The words are rich in rhyme and rhythm, and the feelings of the authors are hidden in the works, so it is not an easy task to translate the poems and to restore the beauty of the meanings, words, and feelings of the poems. *Slow, Slow Tune* has a neat format and subtle expression with a sense of beauty. In this paper, the author will compare and analyze the three English translations of *Slow, Slow Tune* from the perspective of translation aesthetics.

## Introduction to the Author and the Work

The author of *Slow, Slow Tune* is Li Qingzhao, a renowned female lyricist of the Song Dynasty and a representative of the graceful and restrained style, often hailed as the "foremost talented woman of all ages." Her father achieved great literary success, and through constant exposure to literature from a young age, Li

Qingzhao developed profound skills in poetry, prose, and lyrical composition. At the age of eighteen, she married Zhao Mingcheng, and the couple enjoyed a deep and affectionate relationship during their marriage, living through a period of great happiness. However, during the Jingkang Incident, Zhao Mingcheng died of illness in the war. Since then, the poetess began a life of solitary wandering, spending her remaining years in loneliness and desolation. After conducting online research, the author found that there is no definitive date for the creation of this poem. However, the academic community agrees that it is a masterpiece from the poetess's later years. The poem vividly portrays the desolate scenery of late autumn, highlighting the poetess's miserable and desolate state after being displaced and experiencing the loss of her family.

### An Overview of Translation Aesthetic

Translation aesthetics, as the name suggests, is the integration of translation and aesthetics. It represents the aesthetic experience of readers when engaging with a translated work, an experience determined by the translator's ability to convey the original text. All aesthetic judgments in translation are formed through a careful reading of the work, and then elevated into an aesthetic experience (周红, 2016). The first Chinese scholar to advocate translation aesthetics was Liu Miqing, whose theory emphasizes the translator's subjectivity. He posits that the aesthetic object in translation consists of both formal and non-formal systems. On one hand, the translator must reproduce the original text's language, vocabulary, phonetics, and syntax. On the other hand, they must convey the intentions and emotions embedded in the original (胡艳红, 李文慧, 2022).

Therefore, this paper selects three English translations of *Slow, Slow Tune* by Kenneth Rexroth, Lin Yutang, and Xu Yuanchong (arranged with foreign authors first, Chinese authors second, and in alphabetical order of their surnames; referred to as Rexroth's translation, Lin's translation, and Xu's translation respectively) for comparative analysis and appreciation from the above two aspects (樊孟轲, 2021).

声声慢	A Weary Song to a Slow Sad Tune	Slow slow tune	Autumn Thoughts To the Tune of "Slow, Slow Tune"
①寻寻觅觅，冷冷清清，凄凄惨惨戚戚。	①Search. Search. Seek. Seek. Cold. Cold. Clear. Clear. Sorrow. Sorrow. Pain. Pain.	①So dim, so dark, So dense, so dull: So damp, so dank, so dead!	①I look for what I miss, I know not what it is, I feel so sad, so drear, So lonely, without cheer.
②乍暖还寒时候，最难将息。	②Her flashes. Sudden chills. Stabbing pains. Slow agonies.	②The weather, now warm, now cold. Makes it harder than ever to forget!	②How hard is it To keep me fit in this lingering cold!
③三杯两盏淡酒，怎敌他晚来风急？	③I drink two cups, then three bowls, Of clear wine until I can't stand up against a gust of wind.	③How can a few cups of this wine bring warmth against The chilly winds of sunset?	③Hardly warmed up By cup on cup Of wine so dry, O how could I endure at dusk The drift Of wind so swift?
④雁过也，正伤心，却是旧时相识。	④Wild geese fly over head. They wreck my heart. They were our friends in the old days.	④I recognize the geese flying overhead. My old friends bring not the old memories back!	④It breaks my heart, alas! To see the wild geese pass. For they are my acquaintances of old.
⑤满地黄花堆积，憔悴损，如今有甚可裨？	⑤Gold chrysanthemums litter The ground, pile up, faded, dead. This season I could not bear To pick them.	⑤Let fallen flowers lie where they fall. To what purpose And for whom should I decorate?	⑤The ground is covered with yellow flowers. Faded and fallen in showers. Who will pick them up now?
⑥守着窗儿，独自怎生得黑？	⑥All alone, Motionless at my window, I watch the gathering shadows.	⑥By the window shut, Guarding it alone, To see the sky has turned so black!	⑥Sitting alone at the window, how could I but quicken The pace of darkness which won't thicken?
⑦梧桐更兼细雨，到黄昏、点点滴滴。	⑦Fine rain sifts through the weeping trees, And drips, drop by drop, through the dusk.	⑦And the drizzle on the kola nut Keeps on dripping: Plop-a-plop, plop-a-plop!	⑦On plane's broad leaves a fine rain dripdrip As twilight grazes.
⑧这次第，怎一个愁字了得！	⑧What can I ever do now? How can I drive off this sorrow - Hopelessness?	⑧In this the kind of mood and moment, To be expressed by one word "sad"?	⑧O what can I do with a grief/Beyond belief?
李清照	Kenneth Rexroth	Lin Yutang	Xu Yuanchong

Figure 1. The original text and translations of *Slow, Slow Tune*.

First of all, the translation of the name of the word, Lin's translation is a word-for-word translation, without further explanation of the meaning of the name of the word; Lei's translation and Xu's translation have translated the direct meaning of the name of the word, taking care of the form of the original text, and based on which, both of them have also carried out additional translations. The word "weary" in Lei's translation means "fatigued, tired", which is not exactly the same as the lonely and desolate emotion the lyricist wanted to express; while the word "Autumn Thoughts" in Xu's translation not only specifies the approximate time of the composition of the lyrics, but also adds words that are in line with the characteristics of the Chinese poetic diction, which indirectly conveys the lyricist's feelings. In Xu's translation, "Autumn Thoughts" not only indicates the approximate time of composition, but also adds words in line with the characteristics of Chinese poetic diction.

There are seven sets of overlapping words in the first line of the opening stanza, which tell the story of the lyricist who is searching around, but unexpectedly the scenery before her is all cold and desolate, thus making her heart even more desolate, reflecting the beauty of rhyme in classical Chinese poetry. Lei's translation strives to retain the original form, using six groups of adjectives, in an attempt to restore the beauty of the overlapping rhymes and characters of the words and phrases. However, imitating the overlapping words in Chinese in English does not seem to get the beauty of the form (刘宓庆, 2005). Overlapping words are reflected in both Chinese and English languages, but due to the different systems of the two languages, only pursuing the unity of the textual form in the translation process will cause other problems. Chinese belongs to the language of meaning and language, in this sentence, although there is no indication of the subject, but the meaning is consistent with the subject of the following author himself, Lei translates this sentence as a non-subjective statement, in English such a sentence is usually an imperative sentence, the subject of which is "you", then Lei translates the meaning of the sentence as "you go to seek", which is obviously different from the original text. "which is obviously different from the meaning of the original. Lin's translation uses seven consecutive "so" structures to restore the overlapping words of the original text, forming double consonants and head rhymes, and the seven adjectives used are more profound than one another, skillfully conveying Li Qingzhao's feelings of loneliness, sadness, and despair, which not only retains the original textual structure, but also conveys the meaning of the words in a subtle way; Xu's translation doesn't reproduce the form of the original text, but adds more words according to the meaning of the words and phrases. Xu's translation does not rigidly copy the form of the original, but adds the subject "I" according to the meaning of the words and phrases, and utilizes two-line rhymes to compensate for the superimposed rhymes of the original, which conveys the meaning of the original in a more natural way. Compared with the three translations of this sentence, Lin's translation is the best in restoring the structure and expressing subtlety; Lei's translation tries to do a better job in the structure but makes mistakes in understanding the original text; Xu's translation better reflects Li Qingzhao's feeling of loneliness after the destruction of her country and the death of her family.

In the second sentence, the words "乍暖还寒" describe the weather conditions at that time, a "warm" and a "cold", the strong contrast here is to highlight the cold weather, and the author wandered alone, The strong contrast here is to emphasize the coldness of the weather and to set off the author's lonely and desolate situation. Lei's translation explains the weather without highlighting the word "cold", and only restores the surface meaning of the word; Lin's translation of "warm" and "cold" also directly points out the weather without highlighting the coldness of the weather; Xu's translation uses the word "cold" to emphasize the

coldness of the weather; and Xu's translation uses the word "cold" to emphasize the coldness of the weather. The word "lingering", meaning "slowly disappearing; slow to go", highlights the fact that the weather is warming up, but the coldness is more intense and persistent, but the word "warm" is lost. The original meaning of the words "it is most difficult to rest" is that it is difficult for people to rest in the above-mentioned unpredictable weather. Lei's translation misunderstands the meaning of the original text, which reflects the author's pain hidden behind these four words; Lin's translation also misinterprets the meaning of the original text, interpreting it to mean that the unpredictable weather makes it more difficult for the author to forget everything; Xu's translation accurately conveys the meaning of the original text, and utilizes the end rhymes in the format, which makes the text catchy and has a melodic beauty.

In the third sentence, 三杯两盏 is an imaginary reference, and Lei's translation of "two cups, then three bowls" is obviously a word-for-word translation, without understanding the original "three" and "two". "two" is obviously a word-for-word translation, and does not understand the meaning of the original 'three' and 'two', thus losing the beauty of the original text; Xu's translation of 'cup on cup' has the meaning of 'real' to 'virtual', which well reflects the meaning of the original text, and is a good reflection of the meaning of the original text. Xu's translation of "cup on cup" reflects the concept of virtual reference very well; Lin's translation of "a few cups" also reflects the concept of virtual reference, but is a little inferior to Xu's translation in terms of wording. Xu Yuanchong's choice of the word "dry", meaning "(wine) without sweetness, dry", conveys the idea of "light wine" appropriately. The word "dry" chosen by Xu Yuanchong means "(wine) without sweetness, dry", which aptly conveys the concept of "light wine"; Lin's translation of "thin wine" refers to wine with low alcohol content, which is different from the meaning here; Lei's translation of "clear wine" refers to filtered wine with a lighter color, which is different from the meaning here. Lei's translation of "clear wine" refers to filtered wine with a lighter color, which is not the same as the meaning here. The translation of the second half of the sentence, in both Lin's and Xu's translations, uses a question sentence to deal with the question, which is very good at restoring the tone of the speaker, while Lei's translation uses a declarative sentence, which is a little less good. As for the words "the wind is swift in the evening", which emphasize the "swiftness" of the wind, Xu's translation of "so swift" is more expressive than Lei's translation of "a gust of wind" and "a gust of wind". Xu's translation of "so swift" corresponds to the original text and is more expressive than Lei's "a gust of wind" and Lin's "chilly winds of sunset". As far as formatting is concerned, Xu's handling of end rhymes is better.

In the fourth line, there is a scene: "雁过" and a lyric: "伤心". Chinese people emphasize on euphemistic and subtle expressions, especially in poetry. Poetry writers like to use objects to express their aspirations and scenes to express their feelings, and they also express their own feelings while completing their works. Therefore, in the process of translation, we should not stick to the surface form of the original text, and we should dig deeper to find out the deep feelings that the writers want to express behind their works. In the scene of "sadness" and "geese passing by", the lyricist triggers his sadness by seeing geese flying by, because the geese are his friends from the old days, and the implicit logic of the words should be taken into account in the translation process. Lei's translation follows the order of the original text, and "Wild geese fly over head" well reproduces the scene of the geese flying over the lyricist's head, presenting a three-dimensional picture in the reader's mind, but it does not reflect the logic of the original text when connecting with the later text, and it only presents the surface meaning of the words in a plain and straightforward way. The meaning of the word

“geese” is only referring to the friends of the lyricist, not to all readers, meaning the friends of the readers; Xu’s translation is out of the order of expression of the original text, and adds the word “alas” to express the sadness of the lyricist, which skillfully expresses the feelings of the lyricist, and at the same time takes into account the end rhymes, and presents the rhythm better, and at the logical level, the word “alas” is a very good expression of the meaning of the word. On the logical level, the addition of the prepositions “To” and “For” flexibly translates the logic of the original text; Lin’s translation is even more ingenious here, anthropomorphizing the geese to bring the memories of the old days and his own sadness.

In the translation of the first half of sentence 5, Lei uses “litter”, while Lin and Xu use “fallen”, both reflecting the withering of the yellow flowers. The treatment of “黄花” is usually considered to be yellow chrysanthemums, which is indicated by Lei’s translation of “gold chrysanthemums” and Xu’s translation of “yellow flowers”. Lei’s translation of “gold chrysanthemums” and Xu’s translation of “yellow flowers” both indicate this; while Lin’s translation of the word “flower” is too broad; when dealing with “pile up”, Lei’s translation uses “pile up”, which is the same as Lin’s translation of “yellow flowers”. When dealing with “pile up”, Lei uses “pile up”, which is less natural and more rigid than “lie” in Lin’s translation and “covered” in Xu’s translation. When translating “haggard”, the word “flower” in Xu’s translation turns motion into stillness, giving a sense of yellow flowers withering, which makes the expression more vivid, and the words “flowers” and “showers” are similar to the words “flowers” and “showers”. The word “flowers” and “showers” have the same end rhyme, which makes the translation more rhythmic. “Who can pick it now?” Lei’s translation paraphrases the meaning of the word and treats it as “I can’t bear to pick”, which is not based on the original format and loses the original context; Lin’s translation of “To what purpose And for whom should I decorate?” deviates from the meaning of the original; Xu’s translation retains the tone of the original, and although it is a question, it does not need to be answered.

Sentence 6 describes the lyricist sitting alone by the window, but it is hard for him to talk about his inner misery, so he has a feeling: How can he stay alone until nightfall? Lei’s translation of “Motionless” means “motionless, static”. The original text only expresses that the lyricist is sitting alone by the window, but does not state that the lyricist is motionless, so the translation here is obviously not in line with the meaning of the word; Lin’s translation treats the word “守” as “Guarding”, meaning “guarding, guarding”, which is not appropriate in this case. Lin’s translation treats “guarding” as “Guarding”, meaning “guarding, guarding”, which is not appropriate in this context, and the addition of “shut” to indicate that the window is closed is also mentioned in the original text for some reason. The second half of the sentence, “How can it be black alone?”, is a sentiment expressed by the lyricist, and Lei’s translation of this part as a declarative sentence obviously fails to understand the sentiment the lyricist is trying to express here; Lin’s translation of “To see the sky has turned so black!” is also a misunderstanding of the meaning of the word; Xu’s translation conveys the lyricist’s emotion while adding the word “quicken” to vividly depict the lyricist’s anxiety, conveying a profound meaning and a higher level in the treatment of rhyme.

In the seventh sentence, Lei translates “Fine rain sifts through the wutong trees”, which is translated according to the surface meaning of the word, meaning: fine rain drops fall on the wutong trees; Lin Yutang translates “梧桐” to “wutong trees”. Lin Yutang translated “wutong” as “kola nut”, meaning “kola fruit”, which deviated from the meaning of the word. Xu translates “On plane’s broad leaves a fine rain drizzles” as

“raindrops fall on trees”, adding the word “leaves”. leaves”, which materializes the picture into “raindrops falling on the leaves”, which can better present a sense of picture to the readers. The three translators have different ways of dealing with the word “drips”. Lei’s choice of “drip” and “drop” is far inferior to Xu’s “drizzles” and “grizzles”. The word “drizzles” and “grizzles” are far inferior to Xu’s “drizzles” and “grizzles” in terms of form and rhythm, which convey the beauty of the sound of the original text, while Lin’s “droning” vividly conveys the beauty of the sound of the original text. The word “droning” in Lin’s translation vividly conveys the dullness of the autumn rain, and the onomatopoeia “Pit-a-pat” suggests that the rain keeps falling, which is more aptly corresponding to “dripping” in the original.

In the last sentence, the word “次第” does not have a clear meaning in Chinese, so it needs to be interpreted according to the meaning of the original text. All three translators have dealt with the word appropriately, vividly showing the author’s thoughts and sorrows, but there is nothing he can do about it. In the second half of the sentence, Lei translates “Hopelessness” as “disappointment” and Lin translates “sad” as “disappointment”. and Lin’s translation of “sad” do not fully express the meaning of “sorrow” in the original text; Xu’s translation of “grief Beyond belief” expresses both the meaning of “sorrow” and the meaning of “sadness” in the original text. Xu’s translation of “grief Beyond belief” not only expresses the meaning of “sorrow” but also conveys the beauty of rhyme.

### Conclusion

Chinese poetry and prose are highly meticulous in their choice of words and sentence structure, demanding neat antithesis and tonal balance with rhyme. In conveying emotions, they tend to be more implicit, often expressing feelings through scenery or embedding emotions within natural imagery. Therefore, when translating poetry, it is essential not only to convey the original meaning but also to strive to restore the “beauty” of the poem in both form and meaning. Although “seeking beauty” is not the sole criterion for poetry translation, in essence, the translation of poetry remains a reproduction of aesthetics (曾文雄, 2007). Through comparison, it is found that Kenneth Rexroth’s translation falls short in the depth of semantic understanding, with occasional misunderstandings and errors in certain phrases. His rendition only captures the surface-level emotions of the poem. Lin Yutang’s translation also has occasional errors in semantic understanding, but his version places greater emphasis on the beauty of the language and the harmony of sound. Xu Yuanchong demonstrates a more thorough understanding of the poem and is more flexible in handling the information embedded within it. His translation also pays close attention to the beauty of form and sound.

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