

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Rethinking Fei Bai's Stylistic Translation: A Case Study of Chinese Translation of English Poetry

Received: 24 March 2025; Revised: 03 June 2025; Published: 22 July 2025

**Jin Tao**

University of Macau, Macau, China

Email: [yc17711@connect.um.edu.mo](mailto:yc17711@connect.um.edu.mo)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2291-078X>

**Kexin Du**

Beijing Jiaotong University, Beijing, China

Email: [kxdu1@bjtu.edu.cn](mailto:kxdu1@bjtu.edu.cn)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0828-7711>

---

---

### Abstract:

Poetry translation presents a daunting challenge compared with other literary forms, with the reproduction of poetic form constituting a central scholarly concern. Confronting this challenge, eminent Chinese translator Fei Bai proposed the stylistic translation method aimed at representing the original style. Nonetheless, empirical studies of this method remain limited, necessitating further investigation. This study addresses this gap through an in-depth analysis of Fei's Chinese translations of English poetry, specifically scrutinizing formal elements—rhetorical devices, rhythmic patterns and rhyme schemes. Contrary to his stated objective, the analysis reveals that Fei frequently deviated from retaining the original's stylistic features. However, his translating method has transcended the clichéd dichotomy between form and meaning. Building upon this insight, this study integrates Geoffrey Leech's stylistic theory to generate a revised framework that highlights linguistic foregrounding to transcend the traditional dichotomy. It is expected that this research can contribute to the theoretical refinement of stylistic translation and enhances conceptual understanding of poetry translation.

**Keywords:** Fei Bai, poetry translation, stylistics, foregrounding

## 1. Introduction

Untranslatability has been a perennial issue in translation studies (Bassnett, 2005; Sun, 2012; Glynn & Hadley, 2021), especially in poetry translation. Among all literary genres, poetry is thought to be the most delicate combination of aesthetic effects and creative manipulation of language (Leech & Short, 2007, p. 2). The language of poetry is so distinctive that it is widely acknowledged that a faithful translation of an original poem is nearly impossible. Jakobson (2004, p. 118) remarks that “poetry by definition is untranslatable”. Likewise, Robert Frost asserts that “poetry is what gets lost in translation” (as cited in Robinson, 2010, p. 23). This assertion is a well-known observation about the inherent challenges of translating poetry. While some may consider it a cliché due to its frequent citation, it encapsulates a significant truth about the nature of poetic language and its translation. The truth is that the essence of poetry—its rhythm, sound, connotations, and cultural context—often cannot be fully captured in another language.



Despite the ongoing debate over whether to prioritize meaning or form, translators remain undeterred in their endeavor to translate poetry (see Ress, 1990; Wang, 2010; Boase-Beier, 2013; Wittman, 2013). Some scholars contend that the meaning of the original text should be given a higher priority. Dryden (2014, p. 173) states that “since every language is so full of its own properties, that what is beautiful in one, is often barbarous, nay sometimes nonsense, in another”, suggesting that a translator should not be limited “to the narrow compass of his author’s words” and could select his own expression that “does not vitiate the sense”. Similarly, Tytler (2014, p. 209) maintains that a good translation needs to follow “that the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work” and that the style and manner of the original text are “secondary in importance”. This perspective implies that form should be sacrificed in the interest of meaning. Likewise, Nida and Taber (1982, p. 5) affirm their advocacy of the preeminence of meaning in translation, arguing that “to preserve the content of the message the form must be changed”. Such statements appear to underscore the significance of prioritizing meaning during the translation process. Yet Benjamin (2004, p. 15) argues that the only function of information dissemination signals the “hallmark of bad translation”, suggesting that the artistic form, or “the poetic” should be accorded a higher level of importance. Such a view that focuses on the artistic form of the original text has gained support from other scholars (e.g., Lu, 2009; Schleiermacher, 2014; Venuti, 2008). The disagreement among scholars indicates that translators have to strike a balance between the form (or style) and meaning in the belief that translators owe perpetually indebted to the original text (Derrida & Venuti, 2001). Nonetheless, the primary objective here is not to establish a definitive determination regarding the ranking between form or meaning. Instead, the main aim is to engage in a deconstruction of the form-meaning dichotomy. Translators, acknowledging an enduring “debt” to the original text, should strive for a balanced integration that accurately conveys both the meaning and the artistic elements of the source text.

Given the often conflicting nature of meaning and form in poetry translation, various approaches have been proposed to address this challenge (see Catford, 1965; Nida & Taber, 1982; Newmark, 2001; Benjamin, 2004; Nord, 2018). Within this context, the work of Chinese translator Fei Bai is particularly relevant to the present study, as he proposes the method Stylistic Translation (风格译) specifically conceived for poetic texts, aiming to reconcile the form-meaning dichotomy. Unlike literal or free translation, in which the form and content tend to be separated, stylistic translation, as argued by Fei (2016), attaches great emphasis to the overall style and artistic effect of a poem, which helps present the original style and aesthetic effect to a greater extent. Notwithstanding the effectiveness of stylistic translation that Fei implies, there is a lack of empirical analyses to testify that his translation method indeed maintains the original style. By scrutinizing Fei’s translation method through a detailed analysis of his Chinese translations of English poems, it can be argued that Fei’s stylistic translation method is inherently subjective and inadequately preserves the original style. Moreover, it potentially engenders the target reader’s misinterpretation of the original content. To address these limitations, this study advances an analytical framework, integrating the concept of foregrounding. Subsequent discussion explores the methodological synthesis of foregrounding with Fei’s stylistic translation method in the context of the Chinese translation of English poetry.



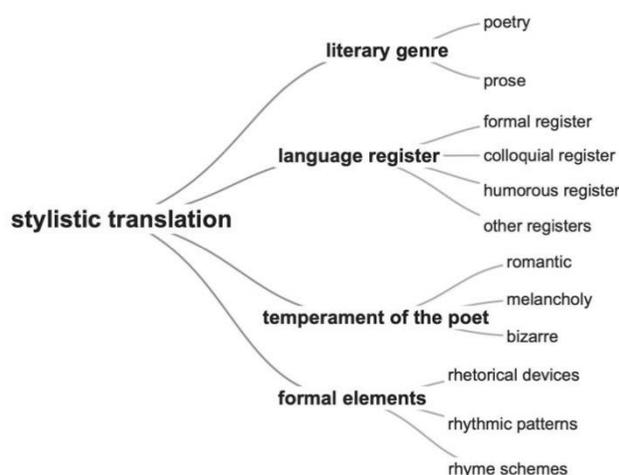
## 2. Fei Bai and Stylistic Translation

Having published many translated poems such as “Кому на Руси жить хорошо” (“Who lives happy and free in Russia”), *An Anthology of Victorian Poetry* and “Хорошо!” (“Very Good”), Fei Bai is known as an “explorer sailing on the oceans of poetry” (Zhao, 2016, p. 382). In 2024, he was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award in Translation by the Translators Association of China in recognition of his indelible contribution to poetry translations. In his book *Essays about Translation of Poetry*, Fei (2016) notes that he advocates neither literal translation nor free translation but stylistic translation.

There is no doubt that the translation of style merits special attention in translation studies. Fei’s stylistic translation, as mentioned above, focuses on the overall style and artistic effect of the original poem. He (2010) argues that a translator needs to value and reproduce the style of the original text to convey its excellence. Poetry is described as “the mode of composition which is par excellence” (Leech, 1969, p. 12), the style of which has attracted great scholarly attention. As discussed below, a large number of scholars have given their definitions of “style” from different perspectives. Style is generally considered as how language is used by a particular person in a given context for a specific purpose (Leech & Short, 2007), yet in literature, style is an abstract and equivocal concept that eludes precision (Enkvist, 1973). Baker (2000, p. 245), on the other hand, considers style as the “thumb-print” of a translator through expressions of linguistic features. This notion of style concentrates on the characteristics particular to the translators, which share similarities with the views of Crystal and Davy, who define style as the “language habits of one person or shared by a group of people” (2013, pp. 9-10). For Leech and Short, however, the focus shifts to the style of texts. They argue that style may be regarded as “the linguistic characteristics of a particular text” (2007, p. 11), which can be examined through “the stylistic values associated with stylistic variants; that is, with forms of language which can be seen as equivalent in terms of the ‘referential reality’ they [writers] describe” (2007, p. 32). By integrating both the temperament of the writer with the style of texts, Fei (2016) argues that the style could be examined by the literary genre, register, the temperament of the poet, and formal elements including rhetorical devices, rhythmic patterns, and rhyme schemes as shown in Figure 1.

In terms of its literary genre, Fei contends that “the style of poetry lies not merely in the line arrangement, rhythm or rhyme, but in simplicity and implicitness of the language” (Fei, 2016, p. 316). Therefore, translators should avoid unnecessary interpretation in the rendered texts so that the excessive explication will not impair the simplicity of the poetry, thereby preventing the translated text from becoming prose-like. Concerning the concept of register, as per Fei’s perspective, it encompasses language registers such as formal, colloquial, and humorous registers. The stylistic translation method posits that translators are obliged to faithfully convey the original language register within the translated poems. With regard to the poets’ temperament, Fei argues that translators should assume the role of an actor tasked with conveying the poet’s disposition, be it romantic, unfettered, melancholy, or bizarre.





**Figure 1. A Map of Fei Bai's Stylistic Translation Method**

Previous studies on Fei Bai's stylistic translation mainly concentrate on his Russian poetry translations, centering on the methodological dichotomy between literal and free translation methods. Through a comparative analysis of his translation with that of Fei's, Yu rethinks Fei's translation method, and argues that "Fei's change of original content to cater to the end-rhyme has already misled readers about the original content" (1982, p. 18). Zhi (1982) also criticizes Fei for his deliberate rewriting of the original poem in translating Mayakovsky's "Верлен и Сезанн" ("Verlaine and Cezanne"), in which Fei translates *индейка* (turkey) as thrush because of the end-rhyme. In view of this, Zhi comments that "Fei's translation deviates from the original form and content, which distorts readers' understandings about what Mayakovsky wants to convey" (1982, p. 80). Yu (1984) writes another essay criticizing Fei's translation method. He states that although Fei does not consider his stylistic translation method as free translation, his translation is nevertheless in accordance with free translation. Yu insists that the aim of translation is not to distort the original meaning or mislead readers, although he contends that the original content might be impaired for the sake of rhyme. Guo (2017) explores Fei's stylistic translation method in terms of Fei's classification of texts. He argues that Fei's classification of text types, which includes informative text, artistic text, and functional text, provides a theoretical basis for the stylistic translation method. Guo believes that Fei's categorization of text types is more applicable and recognizes that the stylistic translation method enjoys great practical and theoretical significance, as it enables translators to focus on the style of source texts, which might help better present aesthetic effects. Apparently, Yu and Zhi are still confined to the dichotomy between literal and free translation, which diverges from Fei's original proposal of stylistic translation. Compared to Yu and Zhi, Guo is relatively positive about Fei's stylistic translation method, but has not provided empirical evidence for it. Guo and Gao (2022) contend that Fei Bai's stylistic translation method is of vital importance in guiding translators through poetry translation, yet the insufficient understanding of his translation method within academia "underlines the need of elucidating his translation method" (2022, p. 91). Thus far, Fei Bai's stylistic translation method has not drawn adequate scholarly attention regarding both systematic theoretical analysis of his translation method and empirical research on stylistic translation, constituting a research gap in translation studies, especially in poetry translation.



Fei's stylistic translation method emphasizes formal elements, which contain rhetorical devices, rhythmic patterns, and rhyme schemes: he will change the original meaning for the sake of the rhyme in his translations. The significance of rhyme can also be gauged from Harmon's statement: "Rhyme and poetry are almost synonyms: what rhymes is a poem, and a poem is what rhymes" (1987, p. 365). Meanwhile, it is acknowledged that the line of poetry is "not just a run of syllables, but is articulated" (McAuley, 1996, p. 50), which implies that "all the things we call rhythmic are articulated" (Hasty, 1997, p. 67). Attridge (1990, p. 1016) duly recognizes the importance attributed to rhythm in poetry, stating that rhythm plays a more dominant role in the complex interplay of linguistic features that constitutes all verse. The aforementioned observations underscore the significance of formal elements in translations of poetry. Thus, the present study aims to examine Fei Bai's stylistic translation from the perspective of formal elements, a vital yet less-discussed part of his translation method.

### 3. Fei Bai's Chinese Translations of English Poetry

By comparing formal elements in original English poetry with those in Fei's Chinese translations, this section seeks to investigate whether Fei's translation method can represent the original style of English poetry through extracts from his translated work—*An Anthology of Victorian Poetry*.

#### 3.1 An analysis of formal elements of stylistic translation

Example 1:

` x ` x ` x

Oh, to \be in \England

` x ` x `

Now that \April's \there,

` x ` x ` x ` x

And who\ever \wakes in \England

` x ` x ` x `

Sees, some \morning, \una\ware,

` x ` x ` x x ` x `

That the \lowest \boughs and \the brush\wood sheaf

` x ` x ` x x ` x `

Round the \elm-tree \bole are \in ti\ny leaf,

` x ` x ` x x ` x `

While the \chaffinch \sings on \the or\chard bough

x ` x `

In Eng\land—now!





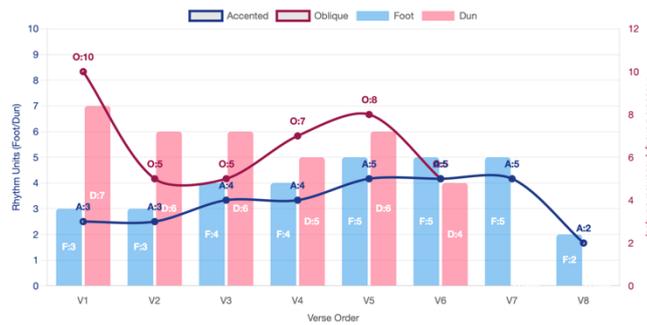


Figure 2. Comparative Metrical Patterns of Example 1

The visualization integrates dual axes to simultaneously represent three dimensions of metrical patterns: the X-axis denotes verse line sequencing, the left Y-axis quantifies metrical foot and dun distribution per line, and the right Y-axis encodes the density of accented syllables and oblique tonal patterns. As shown in the figure, the number of duns in the translated text is not equal to that of feet in the original poem. Furthermore, as mentioned above, there is a change in line length in the original stanza; in Fei’s translation, however, an obvious regular pattern of the change of the dun numbers cannot be found. Meanwhile, the original poem exhibits foot-accent alignment, evidenced by coincident blue bars and trendlines, indicating a strict sound pattern regulation. In contrast, Fei’s translation demonstrates a significant divergence between dun and oblique tones, diluting the original rhythmic cadence.

Table 1. Comparative Rhyme Schemes of Example 1

	Rhyme scheme	Middle rhymes	Rhyming words
Original	ABABCCDD	assonance	April/wakes
		semi-consonance	wakes/sees
		alliteration	boughs/bole
Translation	AABBCC	end-rhyme	英 (ying)/醒 (xing)

The original stanza employs the ABABCCDD rhyme scheme, wherein rhyming pairs such as *there/unaware*, *sheaf/leaf*, and *bough/now* establish a pattern of rhymed recurrence. Beyond end-rhymes, the original stanza also integrates middle rhymes. The assonance between *April* and *wakes* echoes vowel consonance, while *wakes* and *sees* demonstrate semi-consonance. The rhyming pair *boughs/bole* represents alliteration in the original text. Rhetorically, the stanza uses personification to animate the chaffinch through the word *sing*, eschewing mere onomatopoeic words. Fei’s translation, however, restructures the original prosody, in which the original rhyme scheme is condensed to AABBCC. While the original evokes fluctuating emotional shifts, Fei’s translation conveys a more restrained sense of nostalgia. Additionally, Fei’s translation partially retains the middle rhymes, such as the pairing of 英 (ying)/醒 (xing), and 丛 (cong)/葱 (cong), thereby somewhat preserving the original musicality.



Example 2:

` x ` x ` x ` x ` x ` x ` x

Love will \hover \round the \flowers \when they \first a\waken;

` x ` x ` x ` x ` x ` x ` x

Love will \fly the \fallen \leaf, and \not be \over\taken;

` x ` x ` x ` x ` x ` x ` x

Low, my \lute! oh \low, my \lute! we \fade and \are for\saken—

` x x `

Low, dear \lute, low!

(Tennyson, 2013, p. 3088)

` x ` x ` x x x x ` x `

爱情\在初醒地\花间\飞舞\沉醉,

` x ` ` x ` x ` ` x x x

爱\如落叶\飘落, \谁也\不能\追回。

x x ` x x x ` x ` x ` x ` x `

低声, \我的\琵琶! \我们\被遗弃, \一旦\凋萎。

x x ` x ` x x x x x

低声, \我亲爱的\琵琶, \低声!

(translated by Fei, 1985, p. 58)

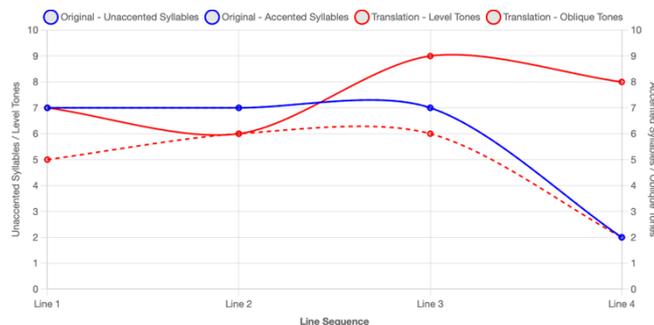


Figure 3. Comparative Metrical Patterns of Example 2

The first three lines of the original stanza are composed of seven disyllabic meters, with every meter comprising one stressed and one unstressed syllable, thus establishing a trochaic heptameter pattern. However, the final line deviates from the established pattern by adopting a dimeter structure, wherein a trochee is substituted for an iamb, thus signifying a metrical variation marked by the substitution of feet. In Fei’s translation, the original stanza’s three heptameter lines are only partially preserved, which



indicates a deliberate departure from the original rhythmic structure. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 3, the uniform alignment of blue lines contrasts with the irregular fluctuating red lines, reflecting a consistent metrical pattern in the original stanza, whereas Fei's translation demonstrates erratic sound patterns.

Table 2. Comparative Rhyme Schemes of Example 2

	Rhyme scheme	Middle rhymes	Rhyming words
Original	AAAB	end-rhyme	hover/flowers
		alliteration	love/leaf/low/lute; first/fallen/fade/forsaken
Translation	AAAB	end-rhyme	情 (qing)/醒 (xing)

The original rhyme scheme follows an AAAB pattern, demonstrated by the words *awaken*, *overtaken*, and *forsaken*. Notably, the stanza also features middle rhymes: an end-rhyme is formed between *hover* and *flowers* in the opening line; alliteration is reinforced by the repetition of consonant sounds in words such as *love*, *leaf*, *low* and *lute*, as well as *first*, *fallen*, *fade* and *forsaken*. Such phonological repetition imparts a sense of musical artistry in the stanza, leading to the euphony and anticipated pleasure of readers. In terms of rhetorical devices, *love* and *flowers* are personified through expressions such as *awakes* and *fly the fallen leaves*. In Fei's translation, however, the characters 醉 (zui), 回 (hui) and 菱 (wei) share the same vowel sound, reflecting adherence to the original AAAB rhyme scheme. Similarly, his translation preserves the middle rhymes, as evidenced by the rhymed pairings 情 (qing)/醒 (xing), and 飘 (piao)/凋 (diao). Furthermore, the stanza employs two figurative devices: personification is used in the first line, where beauty and flowers are personified through the Chinese phrases 飞舞沉醉 (dance and enjoy) and 初醒 (wake up); and a simile in the second line, likening 爱 (love) to 落叶 (falling leaves).

Example 3:

× ` × ` × ` × ` × ` × `   
My ser\penti\ning beau\ty, rounds \on rounds!

× ` × ` × ` × ` × ` × `   
—How could \you e\ver prick \those per\fect ears,

× ` × ` × ` × ` × `   
Even \to put \the pearl \there! oh, \so sweet—

(Browning, 1979, p. 185)

` × ` ` × × × ` × ` × ` × `

这模样，\我的\盘旋\缠绕的\蛇美人！

` ` × × × × ` × ` × ` ` ×



——你怎么能扎穿如此美好的耳朵，  
 ‘ ‘ ‘ ‘ × ‘ ‘ × × ‘ ‘ ‘ ‘ × × ‘  
 哪怕是为了戴珍珠？啊，这么甜美——  
 (translated by Fei, 1985, p. 97)

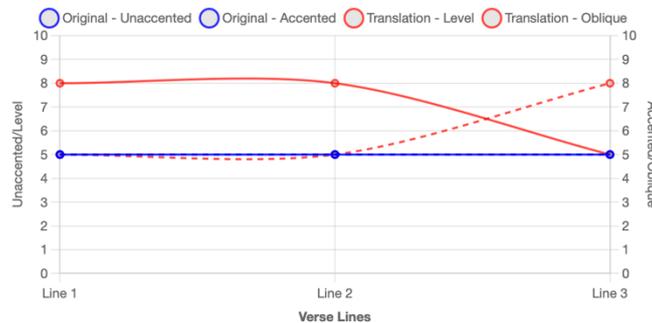


Figure 4. Comparative Metrical Patterns of Example 3

The metrical pattern of Robert Browning’s dramatic monologue “Andrea del Sarto” is characterized by an adherence to iambic pentameter. This structural regularity accounts for the complete overlap of the blue lines, as the original stanza maintains a consistent and predictable rhythmic pattern. In contrast to the original stanza, Fei’s rendition mirrors the pentameter structure, maintaining an exact correspondence between the number of duns and metrical feet. Figure 4 demonstrates that the red lines intersect sharply in the final line with level tones descending while oblique tones ascending, which implies the structural dissonance in Fei’s translation.

Furthermore, the original verse aligns with blank verse conventions, characterized by the absence of an end-rhyme scheme. However, in the selected excerpt, a particular emphasis is placed on the judicious use of alliteration. Notably, the recurrence of consonantal sounds, such as /s/ in words like *serpentina*, *so* and *sweet* alongside /p/ in words such as *prick*, *perfect* and *pearl*, coalesces to engender a distinctive cadence. This phonetic repetition enhances the lyrical quality, thereby underlining Andrea’s obsession with and unwavering subservience to his wife. However, an important distinction arises in his translation, as it fails to capture the stylistic device of alliteration that is present in Browning’s original work. Furthermore, a noteworthy difference emerges in that the Chinese translation introduces a metaphor that cannot be found in the original text. This is exemplified when Fei translates *serpentina beauty* as 蛇美人, which has the potential to mislead Chinese readers regarding the characterization of Andrea. In Browning’s poem, *serpentina beauty* symbolizes a beauty who is sinuous and full of sexual attraction; on the contrary, 蛇美人 in Chinese culture occasionally relates to a woman possessing a seductive appearance but also carries negative connotations of being morally corrupt or deceitful (Liu & Xiang, 2020). As a result, cultural default may be generated in comprehending the image of *serpentina beauty* and 蛇美人 because of divergent cultural backgrounds.

Example 4:

× ‘ × ‘ × ‘ × ‘



For me, \I touched\ a thought, \ I know,

× ` × ` × ` × `

Has tan\alized\ me ma\ny times,

× ` × ` × ` × `

(Like turns\ of thread\ the spi\ders throw

` × × ` × ` × `

Mocking\ across\ our path)\ for rhymes

× ` × ` × `

To catch\ at and\ let go.

(Browning 1979, 217)

× ` × ` ` ` × × ` ` × ×

而我呢, \我触及了\一缕\游思,

× ` ` ` ` ` × × × × × ×

它老是\让我\徒劳地\追求,

` ` × × × × × × × ×

(就象\蜘蛛\抛出的\游丝

× ` ` ` × ` × ` ` `

横在\路上\把我们挑逗, )

× × × ` × ` ` ` ` ` × ×

诗\刚捉到它, \转瞬\又丢失!

(translated by Fei 1985, 88)

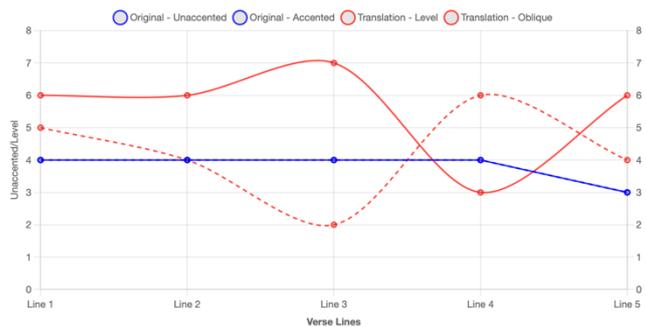


Figure 5. Comparative Metrical Patterns of Example 4

The original stanza contains four iambic tetrameter lines and one iambic trimeter line. A remarkable metrical deviation is observed in the initial foot of the fourth line, where a trochee is substituted for an



iamb. In addition to the substitution of feet in this stanza, there is also a change of line length in the last line, wherein the tetrameter line is changed into the trimeter line. Compared to the original stanza, Fei's translation contains four duns in each line, thus deviating from the original stanza, where the last line comprises three feet. Meanwhile, the line patterns in Figure 5 parallel those in Example 3, reflecting the original stanza's rhythmic regularity. However, the red lines exhibit persistent fluctuations and recurrent intersections, deviating markedly from the original sound patterns.

Table 3. Comparative Rhyme Schemes of Example 4

	Rhyme scheme	Middle rhymes	Rhyming words
<b>Original</b>	ABABC	consonance	touched/thought; has/times; turns/spiders; at/let
		alliteration	tantalized/times; thread/throw
<b>Translation</b>	ABABC	end-rhyme	触 (chu)/徒 (tu); 诗 (shi)/失 (shi)

Moreover, the original stanza employs an ABABC rhyme scheme, with middle rhymes between lines. For instance, consonance emerges in rhymed pairings such as *touched/thought*, *has/times*, *turns/spiders*, and *at/let* through shared consonants. Additionally, pairings such as *tantalized/times*, and *thread/throw* create middle rhymes through alliteration. Notably, Browning uses a simile in this stanza, associating thought with spider silk, which stimulates readers' imagination of such a simile, prompting a vivid mental connection between the abstract concept of thought and the intricate fragility of spider silk. In Fei's translation, the rhyme scheme is preserved through characters such as 思 (si)/丝 (si) with 求 (qiu)/逗 (dou). Meanwhile, middle rhymes of end-rhyme are represented with paired words 触 (chu)/徒 (tu), and 诗 (shi)/失 (shi). Regarding the rhetorical devices, Fei retains the original simile, likening 游思 (thought) to 蜘蛛抛出的游丝 (spider thread).

The above analyses reveal notable disparities between Fei's translations and the original texts, stemming from his employment of the "dun for foot" translation strategy to render the original metrical patterns. It is observed that even when the quantity of duns per line is the same as the number of feet, as illustrated in Example 3 and 4, each dun does not have a restricted number of Chinese characters, which ultimately results in irregular time-value of rhythm (Wang, 2014). This indicates that Fei cannot demonstrate the original rhythmic pattern. The metrical foot that comprises unstressed and stressed syllables generates a regular sound pattern structure through syllabic pitch variation. This presents a parallel to the Chinese tonal system ping (平, level tone) and ze (仄, oblique tone), which similarly produces rhythmic regularity via the flat-sharp tonal contrast. Consequently, a corresponding relationship emerges between the two sound patterns (Wang, 2019). In Fei's translations, however, each character in different duns does not adhere to the flat-sharp tone. Therefore, this inconsistency disrupts the regular pitch pattern inherent in the original text. As a result, Fei's translation fails to show the original metrical pattern in terms of the rhythmic and sound patterns.



With regard to the translation of the rhyme scheme, analyses show that Fei's ability to retain the original end-rhyme scheme, albeit occasionally deviating from the original phonological structure. For instance, his translations do not maintain middle rhymes such as alliteration and consonance as shown in the aforementioned examples. Such deviations have the potential to alter the original rhythmic cadence. It is noteworthy, however, that the challenge of translating these specific forms of rhyme into Chinese is rooted in the nature of the Chinese language itself, where rhymes predominantly hinge on the rhyming vowels. Consequently, rhymes such as alliteration, consonance, and pararhyme are essentially untranslatable. Furthermore, analyses reveal that although Fei is able to maintain the original rhetorical devices, there are instances, as in Example 3, where he opts to substitute them with different forms of figurative expressions. Such alterations, while maintaining an element of figurative language, can potentially lead to translation loss and change of the original meaning.

It is beyond doubt that such formal elements mentioned by Fei Bai are of vital importance to Chinese translators in their translations of foreign poetry. However, it merits our attention that some other formal elements are omitted in his structure of stylistic translation method, such as the change of word formation in Example 3 and the asyntactic feature in Example 4. The disjointed syntax in Example 4 undergoes a stylistic transformation characterized by the absence of subject and article, resulting in a style devoid of conventional grammatical structures, which evokes a feeling of uncertainty and a loss of sense for Browning to depict the relationship with his love. Unfortunately, Fei fails to present such features in his translations. Furthermore, style plays a pivotal and even central role in Fei Bai's translation method, yet his understanding of style oversimplifies the inherent complexities. Therefore, a modified definition of the style and structure of his stylistic translation method is necessary in the present research. What should be underlined before embarking on our discussion is the concept of style and foregrounding.

### 3.2 Incorporating foregrounding into stylistic translation method

Leech and Short (2007) propose three approaches to the analysis of the style: the monist approach, the dualist approach, and the pluralist approach. The dualist approach tends to separate content from form, which restricts styles to choices "which are choices of manner rather than matter, of expression rather than content" (p. 13), suggesting that there can be stylistic variants with different "stylistic values" (p. 28). Dualists consider style as an "optional additive", indicating that a writing can achieve "a style of absence" (pp. 15-16). However, the problem of the dualist approach thus arises that one cannot decide when the style is absent, and therefore dualism "must be firmly rejected" (p.16). The pluralist approach holds that language is "intrinsically multifunctional", which is the "result of choices made on the different functional level" (pp. 24-25). According to Halliday (1996), all types of linguistic options bear meaning in which the style also resides. Such a view of pluralism can actually be considered as a type of monism, which insists that meaning and form are inseparable, and that any alteration of form entails a change of content.

Monism, which rejects the idea of form-meaning dichotomy, and considers a poem as "an autonomous verbal artefact" other than a message conveyor, has its "strongest ground in poetry", because "meaning becomes multivalued" (Leech & Short, 2007, p. 21), thereby confronting translators with translation and paraphrase problems through various rhetorical devices such as metaphor and



irony. However, such features that pose challenges for dualists are not restricted to poetry solely; they can also be found in other genres such as prose and everyday speech. Therefore, this necessitates a new approach—a multilevel approach that obviates the limitations inherent in both of them. As mentioned above, stylistic variants indicate that there are stylistic values, suggesting that the poetic function, distinguished by the foregrounding in stylistics, of which “the aesthetic exploitation of language” (p. 23) may be the predominant part in poetry. What should be contended then is that there can be various interpretations of the same stylistic variant. As such, from a multilevel view of style, Leech and Short (2007, pp. 31-32) differentiate two kinds of style: Style 1 and Style 2. Style 1 is the general notion of style, namely, the way in which language is used by a given person as mentioned above; and Style 2, or stylistic variation, is what they consider as the concept to explore the stylistic value against the language background. They further remark that style consists of a whole linguistic repertoire and is the sum of the linguistic features. However, problems arise through analyzing stylistic variants when it comes to more opaque innovative use of language, where the linguistic creativity of poetry is adopted.

Therefore, the concept of foregrounding needs to be incorporated into the study of the poetic style since “in the history of definitions of poetic style, the notion of foregrounding has played an important role” (Boase-Beier, 2013, p. 477). Leech and Short also advocate such a viewpoint, stating that the study of foregrounding is “a better guide to the aesthetic function of language than the study of stylistic variants” (2007, p. 32). Hence, borrowing the concept of style and foregrounding by Leech and Short, the current study operationalizes style as a general characteristic concerning “those aspects of linguistic choice which concern alternative ways of rendering the same subject matter” (p. 31), and is “measured in terms of linguistic deviations from the norm” (p. 35). The deviation “constitutes an unaccustomed extension to the range of choices” (Leech, 2013, p. 17), which exerts a special psychological effect on readers, and the psychological effect is called foregrounding (Short, 2013).

The concept of foregrounding is initially adopted from art criticism. Foreground, or artistically motivated deviation is the center of a painting in the views of art critics. Although the background also contributes to the painting, the subject in the foreground is the main focus. In language, however, the background is the ordinary part, the “linguistically normal—the rules, norms, and expectations which we associate with a particular kind of speaking or writing” (Short, 2013, p. 12); whereas the foreground is “the portion of text or talk which do not conform to these expectations” (p. 12). In stylistics, the concept of foregrounding is related to de-familiarization or de-automatization posited by Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky (1997) in the discussion of literary texts, especially in poetry. Familiarization or automatization is habitualization that has the tendency for everyday communication and over-familiarity, but the technique of de-familiarization is to make readers unfamiliar with ordinary objects, which increases the difficulty and length of perception of aesthetics in poetic language. Following Russian Formalism, Jan Mukarovsky, one of the main figures of Prague Structuralism, introduces the concept of foregrounding to denote de-automatization. In his article “Standard Language and Poetic Language”, he remarks that the act of expression other than communication is central in foregrounding as it is a way to “achieve maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication into the background” (2014, 44). In poetic language, foregrounding does not serve as a means of expression, but it pushes the communication to be part of the background. In this light, foregrounding as the opposite of familiarization represents the violation of the scheme, the special “psychological effect” (Short, 2013, p. 11) exerted on readers. Such a special psychological effect can be considered



as readers' appreciation of creative linguistic use of language, in which the aesthetic function or poetic function holds the utmost significance in poetry.

Poetic function “projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination” (Jakobson, 1987, p. 71). From Jakobson's viewpoint, the principle of equivalence is integral to poetry in that it exists in stress, syllables, words, and so on. As such, syllables in poetry are equalized with other syllables of the same sequence, so is word stress, pause, etc., which forms end-rhyme, alliteration, etc., and these structures are considered as parallelism (Jakobson & Pomorska, 1983; Jakobson, 1987). Leech develops Jakobson's functions of language and proposes the aesthetic function. His concept of aesthetic function, particularly prominent in poetry, exhibits certain resemblances to Jakobson's notion of poetic function, where words are considered as “linguistic artefact” (Leech, 1981, p. 48) which is only used for the sake of language itself with greater emphasis placed on the aesthetic qualities of words over their informational density. Parallelism as the structural repetition is absorbed into stylistics and is considered as one type of foregrounding (Leech, 1969).

### 3.3 A revised framework of stylistic translation method

Foregrounding can be both quantitative and qualitative, the former of which refers to parallelism, or deviance, from expected frequencies, and the latter indicates the deviation of language itself (Leech & Short, 2007). Linguistic deviation is caused by violations of the generally observed norms of language because any deviation “from expected patterns of linguistic behaviors will bring about a reaction of disorientation and surprise” (Leech, 1969, p. 10). Both linguistic deviation and parallelism possess a profound significance within the context of foregrounding, which determines the characteristics of poetic language (Leech, 1969). For the purpose of the present research, foregrounding is incorporated into Fei Bai's stylistic translation method to construct a new structure for such a method. The primary emphasis shall then be directed toward the applicability of various types of parallelism and deviation within the framework of Fei Bai's stylistic translation.

According to Leech, parallelism is categorized into syntactic parallelism, verbal parallelism, phonological parallelism, rhythmic parallelism, and semantic parallelism. Syntactic parallelism can be regarded as syntactic repetition. Additionally, verbal parallelism consists of an invariant part—the verbal repetition, and a variant part—the rest of the unit, which includes anaphora, epistrophe, symplece, anadiplosis, and so on. It is worth mentioning that verbal and syntactic parallelism exhibit a close interconnection because verbal repetition “is accompanied by some degree of repetition of syntactic structure” (Leech, 1969, p. 82). Phonological parallelism is parallelism between syllables in terms of phonemic level, which consists of alliteration, assonance, consonance, end-rhyme, etc. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that alliteration, assonance and consonance as discussed above, cannot be translated into corresponding rhymes due to the intrinsic restrictions of the phonetic system in the Chinese language. On the other hand, rhythmic parallelism or metrical parallelism is a metrical pattern in English poetry, which is usually translated through “*dun for foot*” method in Chinese translations. It is crucial to note, however, that such a translation method does not fully resolve the intricacies of replicating the rhythmic sound patterns inherent in English poetry. Hence, Wang (2019) introduces another translation method, namely, “*ping-ze for iamb*” (以平仄代抑扬). Notwithstanding the huge difficulty in presenting the rhythmic sound patterns, it provides a theoretical basis for Chinese

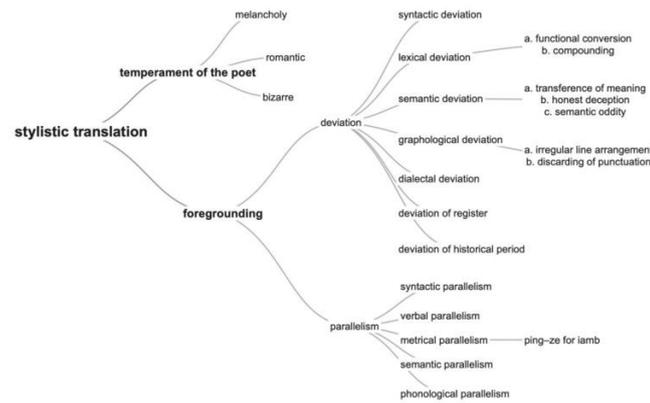


translations of rhythmic sound patterns for the time being. With regard to semantic parallelism, it can be considered as semantic reiteration or redundancy that contains pleonasm, tautology and periphrasis. In general, parallelism which exhibits the potential to manifest at every level of surface structure of English poetry, has its applicability extending to Chinese renditions through adopting parallel construction, similar rhyme schemes, and appropriate rhythmic translation methods.

Compared to parallelism which occurs in the surface structure, the deviation is “only of primal importance...when located in the areas of deep structure and semantics” (Leech, 1969, p. 73), which consists of lexical deviation, grammatical deviation, phonological deviation, graphological deviation, semantic deviation, dialectal deviation, deviation of register and historical period. Lexical deviation normally refers to neologism, or invention of new words, through affixation, functional conversion and compounding; but because the Chinese language is an isolating language that is “characterized by minimal morphology, with little or no affixation or other kinds of word-internal structure” (Gil, 2008, p. 109), indicating that affixation as one type of lexical deviation is not applicable to the Chinese language. However, compounding— “the joining together of two or more items to make a single compound one” (Leech, 1969, p. 43) and functional conversion that does not change the original form of the word but only adapts it to a new grammatical function can be achieved in the Chinese language. The grammatical deviation is generally classified as morphological and syntactic deviation, the former of which is related to word-internal structure, and therefore its applicability to the Chinese language is limited. The syntactic deviation as discussed in Example 4 is regarded as an asyntactic or disjointed style of how words pattern in a sentence, be it subjectless, articleless, verbless, etc. Phonological deviation indicates “irregularities of pronunciation” (p. 47), which cannot be presented because of differences in phonetic systems between the English and Chinese languages as mentioned above. Moreover, graphological deviation refers to irregular line arrangement and orthographic deviation— jumbling of words, discarding of capital letters, and punctuation omission. Whereas the first two types of orthographic deviation are associated with the internal structures within individual words, implying that only the discarding of punctuation can be presented in Chinese translations. Furthermore, Leech considers semantic deviation as the main focus of characteristic of the language of poetry, which consists of semantic oddity (paradox and oxymoron), transference of meaning (meaphor, metonymy, and simile, etc.), and honest deception (hyperbole, litotes, and irony). Dialectal deviation, however, refers to dialectism, or “the borrowing of features of socially or regionally defined dialects” (p. 49). In terms of the deviation of the register and the historical period, the former indicates borrowing of language from non-poetic registers, and the latter signifies archaism or linguistic anachronism. The deviation of register aligns closely with what Fei Bai has identified as language registers in his stylistic translation method, whereas Leech offers a more comprehensive elucidation compared to Fei Bai. From this perspective, the initially employed terms will be substituted with the corresponding terminology coined by Leech.

In general, through an examination of the formal elements present in the original stanzas and their corresponding Chinese translations, this study has identified certain limitations in Fei Bai’s stylistic translation method including omissions of original stylistic features and mistranslations, indicating that it is imperative to develop an updated framework. Consequently, this study advances a reconstructed framework as shown in Figure 6, which integrates Leech’s foregrounding principles into the stylistic translation method.





**Figure 6. A Revised Framework of Stylistic Translation Method**

The revised framework integrates literary genre and language registers of the original stylistic translation method with foregrounding, which offers a more organized and explicit guide for poetry translators to discern the artistically motivated deviation in the original texts, whereby they can present such use of foregrounding in the translated versions. However, the current structure, which primarily caters to the needs of Chinese translators, functions as a preliminary schema, open to further argumentation and additions within a broader academic context.

#### 4. Conclusion

This case study delves into the Chinese translations of English poetry by Fei Bai from the perspective of stylistic translation. It places a special emphasis on the formal elements, aiming to investigate how he presents the original style in his Chinese translations. Findings reveal that Fei's translation presents limitations in retaining the original stylistic features including rhetorical devices, rhythmic patterns, and rhyme schemes regarding the formal elements of stylistic translation. Although original rhyme schemes can be presented in Fei's translations, rhythmic patterns have been greatly changed because of "dun for foot" translation method. Additionally, mistranslations can also be found in his renditions. Furthermore, other stylistic features except for formal elements are omitted in his translated works. Therefore, the current study proposes a revised framework of the stylistic translation method informed by Leech's categorization of foregrounding, which is pivotal in analyzing poetic aesthetics. The revised framework extends the form-meaning dichotomy, prioritizing the aesthetic function in poetry translations. This advancement not only enriches theoretical discourse on poetry translation but also offers practical insights for translators seeking to balance stylistic fidelity with target language fluency. The present study, although discussed in the Chinese translations of English poetry context, could provide implications for translating foreign poetry in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts through rectifications and adaptations of the stylistic translation method.



## Declarations and Acknowledgment:

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## References

- Attridge D. (1990). Rhythm in English poetry. *New Literary History*, 21(4), 1015-1037. <https://doi.org/10.2307/469197>
- Baker, M. (2000). Towards a methodology for investigating the style of a literary translator. *Target*, 12(2), 241-266. <https://doi.org/10.1075/target.12.2.04bak>
- Bassnett, S. (2002). *Translation Studies* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Benjamin, W. (2004). The task of the translator: An introduction to the translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*. (H. Zohn, Trans.). In L. Venuti (Ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader* (pp. 15-23). Taylor & Francis eBooks.
- Bian, Z. (2002). 重新介绍奥顿的四首诗 [Introduction to Auden's four poems]. In, In R. Jiang. & Q. Qing (Eds.), 卞之琳文集（下卷） [Collected Works of Bian Zhilin] (pp. 571-576). Anhui Education Press.
- Boase-Beier, J. (2013). Poetry translation. In C. Millán & F. Batrina (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies* (pp. 475-487). Routledge.
- Browning, R. (1979). *Robert Browning's Poetry*. George J. McLeod Limited.
- Catford, J.C. (1965). *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, D. & Davy, D. (2013). *Investigating English Style*. Routledge.
- Derrida, J. & Venuti, L. (2001). What is a 'relevant' translation? *Critical Inquiry*, 27(2), 174-200. <https://doi.org/10.1086/449005>
- Dryden, J. (2014). The three types of translation: From 'preface' to Ovid's Epistles. In D. Robinson (Ed.), *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche* (pp. 172-175). Routledge.
- Enkvist, N. E. (1973). *Linguistic Stylistics*. Mouton & Co., Publishers.
- Fei B. (1985). 英国维多利亚时代诗选 [An Anthology of Victorian Poetry]. Hunan People's Publishing Press.
- Fei, B. (1989). 诗海——世界诗歌史纲 [Oceanus Poeticae: An Outline of World Poetry]. Lijiang Books.
- Fei, B. (2016). 译诗漫笔 [Essays about Translation of Poetry]. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Gil, D. (2008). How complex are isolating languages? In M. Miestamo, K. Sinnemäki & F. Karlsson (Eds.), *Language Complexity: Typology, Context, Change*, (pp. 109-131). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Glynn, D. & Hadley, J. (2021). Theorising (un)performability and (un)translatability. *Perspectives*, 29(1), 20-32.
- Guo, G. & Gao, S. (2022). 思想之窗:从翻译隐喻透视飞白的翻译思想 [Translation in metaphorical terms: A poetry translator's reflections on his own profession]. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 43(6), 84-91. <https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:ZGFY.0.2022-06-013>
- Guo, J. (2017). 飞白风格译翻译思想探索 [Exploring Fei Bai's stylistic translation]. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 38(5), 67-71.
- Halliday, M. (1996). Linguistic function and literary style: An enquiry into the language of William Golding's *The Inheritors*. In J. Weber (Ed.), *The Stylistic Reader* (pp. 65-86). Arnold.
- Harmon, W. (1987). Rhyme in English verse: History, structures, functions. *Studies in Philology*, 84(4), 365-393. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4174279>
- Hasty, C. F. (1997). *Meter as Rhythm*. Oxford University Press.



- He, W. (2010). The style of literary works in translation. *Perspectives*, 4(1), 137-144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.1996.9961280>
- Jakobson, R. & Pomorska, K. (1983). *Dialogues*. De Gruyter.
- Jakobson, R. (1987). *Language in Literature*. Harvard University Press.
- Jakobson, R. (2004). On linguistic aspects of translation. In L. Venuti (Ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, (pp. 113-118). Taylor & Francis eBooks.
- Leech, G. N. (1969). *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. Longman.
- Leech, G. N. (1981). *Semantics*. Penguin.
- Leech, G. N. & Short. M. H. (2007). *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (2nd ed.). Longman.
- Liu, J. & Xiang, B. (2020). 中国民间叙事中的美女蛇形象演变研究 [A study on the image evolution of the beauty snake in Chinese folk narrative]. *Journal of Hubei Minzu University*, 38 (6), 135-144. <https://doi:10.13501/j.cnki.42-1328/c.2020.06.016>
- Lu, X. (2009). 关于翻译 [On translation]. In X. Luo & Y. Chen (Eds.), *翻译论集 [The Anthology of Translation Studies]* (pp. 60-362). The Commercial Press.
- McAuley, J. (1996). *Versification: A Short Introduction*. Michigan State University Press.
- Mukarovskiy, J. (2014). Standard language and poetic language. In J. Chovanec (Ed.), *Chapters from the History of Czech Functional Linguistics* (pp. 41-53). Masaryk University Press.
- Newmark, P. (2001). *Approaches to Translation*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Nida, E. A. & Taber, C. R. (1982). *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. E. J. Brill.
- Nord, C. (2018). *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Ress, W. (1990). *The Penguin Book of French Poetry*. Penguin Books.
- Robinson, P. (2010). *Poetry & Translation: The Art of the Impossible*. Liverpool University Press.
- Schleiermacher, F. (2014). On the different methods of translating. (D. Robinson, Trans.). In D. Robinson (Ed.), *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche* (pp. 225-238). Routledge.
- Shklovsky, V. (1997). Art as technique. In K. M. Newton (Ed.), *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory* (pp. 3-5). Macmillan Education.
- Short, M. (2013). *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*. Routledge.
- Sun, Y. (2012). (Un)translatability and cross-cultural readability. *Perspectives*, 20(2), 231-247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2012.659746>
- Tytler, A. F. (2014). The proper task of a translator. In D. Robinson (Ed.), *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche* (pp. 208-212). Routledge.
- Venuti, L. (2008). *The Translators' Invisibility: A History of Translation* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Wang, D. (2010). 形式的复活:从诗学的角度反思文学翻译 [Resurrection of forms: Rethinking literary translation from a poetic perspective]. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 31(1), 6-12. <https://doi:CNKI:SUN:ZGFY.0.2010-01-005>
- Wang, D. (2014). 以逗代步 找回丢失的节奏——从 The Isles of Greece 重译看英诗格律可译性理据 [Retrieving the lost poetic rhythm: A poetic discussion after retranslation of 'The isles of Greece' into Chinese]. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 46(6), 927-938. <https://doi:CNKI:SUN:WJYY.0.2014-06-012>
- Wang, D. (2019). 以平仄代抑扬 找回遗落的音美: 英诗汉译声律对策研究 [Retrieving the lost musicality: A study of rhythmic sound pattern in poetry translation]. *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 42(01), 72-82. <https://doi:CNKI:SUN:WYXY.0.2019-01-006>



- Wittman, E. O. (2013). Literary narrative prose and translation studies. In C. Millán & F. Batrina (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studie* (pp. 438-450). Routledge.
- Yu, Z. (1982). 读飞白《译诗漫笔》漫笔 [Comments on “Essay about poetry translation”]. *Foreign Literature Studies*, (3), 115-119. <https://doi:10.19915/j.cnki.fl.s.1982.03.024>
- Yu, Z. (1984). 读飞白第二篇《译诗漫笔》漫笔 [Comments on “The second essay about poetry translation”]. *Foreign Literature Studies*, (1), 18-24. <https://doi:10.19915/j.cnki.fl.s.1984.01.005>
- Zhao, S. (2016). 远航诗海的老水手 [A sailor sailing on the oceans of poetry]. In Y. Zhao (Ed.), *译诗漫笔 [Essays about Translation of Poetry]* (pp. 382-399). Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Zhi, L. (1982). 火鸡与画眉——《译诗艺术的成年》和《译诗漫笔》读后 [Turkey and thrush: Thoughts after reading “The maturity of art of poetry translation” and “Essay about translation of poetry”]. *Book Reading*, (9), 78-82. <https://doi:CNKI:SUN:DSZZ.0.1982-09-021>

### About the Authors:

Jin Tao obtained her B.A. and M.A. in English literature from Sun Yat-sen University. She is currently studying for her PhD in translation studies under the guidance of Professor Sun, Yifeng at the University of Macau. Her main research interests include literary translation, translation theories and comparative literature.

Kexin Du is currently serving as Assistant Professor at Beijing Jiaotong University with a PhD degree in Literary Studies (English) obtained from University of Macau. She has authored several research papers in refereed journals, such as *Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice* (SSCI&AHCI), *Babel* (SSCI&AHCI), *Textual Practice* (AHCI), and *Chinese Translators Journal* (CSSCI). Her research interests include translation theories, literary translation, and translation history.

