

# Analysis of Peiji Zhang's Translation of *Fond Memories of Peiping* Based on the Translation Aesthetics Theory

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**Abstract:** *Fond Memories of Peiping* is a prose created by She Lao. Through the description of Peiping City in his memory, the author expresses his deep longing for this city. The prose is simple and unpretentious, coupled with the delicate emotion expressed in prose, which is representative and implies research significance. In order to solve the problem of differences between Chinese and English in the translation of this prose, Peiji Zhang has polished and modified the translation to convey “beauty” to the target readers while ensuring the original characteristics as much as possible. Under the theory of translation aesthetics, the author will analyze Peiji Zhang’s translation from two aspects: lexical and syntactic aesthetics.

**Keywords:** Translation aesthetics theory; Prose translation; *Fond Memories of Peiping*

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## 1. Background

### 1.1. Background of prose creation

*Fond Memories of Peiping* is a prose work created by She Lao in Jinan, Shandong Province in 1936; originally published in *Cosmic Winds*, Issue 19, June 16, 1936. At that time, the Japanese imperialists stepped up their aggression on the Chinese mainland, and the establishment of the “Hebei-Chahar Political Council” made the situation in Peiping and even the entire North China precarious. As a patriot, She Lao lived in a different place in the years of war, he expressed his nostalgia. In this article, he compares Peiping with the world-famous city of Paris, describing the flowers, fruits, and scenery of Peiping. It expresses the author’s deep affection for his hometown.

### 1.2. Background of translation aesthetics theory

Miqing Liu believed that translation aesthetics is an indispensable part of Chinese translation theory and one of the important characteristics of Chinese translation studies. The combination of translation theory and literary aesthetics is also the basic feature of Chinese traditional translation theory <sup>[1]</sup>. Most translation theories in

Chinese translation history have made a brief comment on aesthetics<sup>[2,3]</sup>. It is precisely because of the combination of aesthetic thought and translation theory that the research field of translation theory and translation practice has been broadened, and the research on translation theory has been enriched and deepened<sup>[4,5]</sup>. Ronggui Mao, in his book *The Theory of Translation Aesthetics* published in 2011, mentioned that translation aesthetics is a fundamental way to improve the quality of translation<sup>[6,7]</sup> and advocates “translatology returns to the study of aesthetics” in the preface of the book<sup>[8]</sup>. In addition, the expression of literary style should be emphasized in translation<sup>[9,10]</sup>.

## 2. Example analysis

Prose text is a special style, it is not as difficult to understand as classical Chinese; it does not require formal formatting like government documents or press releases as well as unlike the neatly matched Tang and Song poems. The format of prose is free, it cradles the writer’s thoughts and feelings at the time of creation. In his translation, Peiji Zhang (hereinafter referred to as Zhang) fully grasped the characteristics of prose as an emotional carrier. There were no gorgeous words or obscure sentence patterns, but only ordinary words conveyed She Lao’s intense feeling of homesickness.

### 2.1. Lexical level

Prose translation is not only translation but also translation re-creation. From the perspective of aesthetic theory, words, as an important carrier of aesthetic information, play an important role in the degree of “aesthetics” of an article. If a translator wants to achieve the beauty of morphology, the key is to find the true core meaning that the author wants to express from the literal meaning. The same is true in prose translation, the translator should capture the words rich in emotional information in the original text, and then use appropriate language to express the feelings that the author wants to convey, so as to realize the function of expression in the original text. Therefore, the choice of words determines the quality of the translation to a large extent. Zhang is very sophisticated in the choice of words, the following are a few highlights of the aesthetics of lexical translation.

She Lao used the word “爱” (*ai*) many times to express his strong yearning for Peiping City, but these “爱” (*ai*) or “喜欢” (*xihuan*) in Zhang’s translation has the following ways of translation, rather than simple “love” or “like.”

Example 1:

Source text: 可是，我真爱北平。

Target text: I do cherish, however, a genuine love for Peiping.

“真爱” (*zhenai*) in the source text is translated by Zhang as “cherish a genuine love.” The meaning of “cherish” in Chinese is “珍爱，珍惜” (*zhenai, zhenxi*), so the intention of using this word here is because the author wants to return to Peiping, but he is unable to do so due to the current situation. Therefore, She Lao cherishes not only the time that he lived in Peiping before but also the opportunity to return to Peiping in the future. Therefore, Zhang’s word “cherish” is very vivid and immersive, as if Zhang was in the war period and fully brought himself into this literary work.

“Cherish” and “genuine love” are not simple words to express his love and longing for Peiping. The combination of “cherish” here and “genuine love” later on can better reflect the importance of Peiping in his mind. “Cherish,” coupled with the auxiliary verb “do,” also emphasizes his homesickness as much as possible.

Example 2:

Source text: 我不能爱上海与天津。

Target text: I can never become attached to either Shanghai or Tianjin.

Zhang translated “爱” (*ai*) as “attached to.” This fixed phrase means to develop a strong liking or attachment for someone or something. She Lao likes Peiping so much that he relies on it. His sense of belonging in his prose is truly felt in the text. It is a sense of belonging that cities like Shanghai and Tianjin cannot offer. Therefore, processing as “attached to” is appropriate to the meaning of the original “love,” but also to convey She Lao’s nostalgia.

Example 3:

Source text: 好学的，爱古物的，人们自然喜欢北平 / 我却喜爱北平的花多菜多果子多。

Target text: Those who are fond of studying or collecting curios will naturally be drawn to Peiping / But I am keen on the flowers, vegetables, and fruit that grow in rich abundance in Peiping.

In this example, there are two “喜欢” (*xihuan*), the object of these is Peiping, but the subject is different. The subject of the first “喜欢” (*xihuan*) is “爱古物的” (*aiguwude*), and Zhang used “be drawn to” to express the feeling. However, Zhang treated the “喜爱” (*xiai*) of “我却喜爱北平” (*woquexiaibeiping*) as “keen on.” From these two examples, it can be seen that the word “喜欢” (*xihuan*) with the same semantic meaning can express completely different thoughts and feelings when combined with different subjects. Zhang also keenly captured this point, and gave two different translation results.

Firstly, the people who love antiques like Peiping because “北平书多古物多” (*beipingshuduoguwuduo*). They regard Peiping as the place that attracts them to visit, but the sincere feeling they have with Peiping is not the main reason. Therefore, it is more appropriate to use “be drawn to,” which means “被某物所吸引” (*beimouwusuoxiyin*) in Chinese.

Secondly, She Lao likes Peiping. Although in the article, it is because “花多菜多果子多” (*huaduocaiduoguoqiduo*), it is not difficult to find that his sincere love for Peiping comes from all aspects. As She Lao loves Peiping, as well as “我” (*wo*) is the subject of “like” here, so the word “keen on” is more appropriate.

Example 4:

Source text: 而我的北平大概等于牛的一毛。

Target text: What little I know about it is probably a mere drop in the ocean.

In this paragraph, She Lao describes his awe for Peiping City, and at the end of the paragraph, he uses an exaggerated rhetorical device “牛的一毛” (*niudeyimao*) to express this emotion. However, in the history of English literature, there is no such concept as “牛的一毛” (*niudeyimao*). If “牛的一毛” (*niudeyimao*) is translated into “a hair of a cow,” the translated text will confuse the target readers, and they may even think about the relationship between Peiping City and cow hair. This is why cultural differences cause translation to be unable to accurately reproduce the meaning expressed in the original text.

A simple example can be given of a case where there is ambiguity due to cultural differences. “白的像雪” (*baidexiangxue*) is a biased phrase that is often used or appears in our daily life. It can literally be translated as “white as snow.” Although native English speakers can understand what the author wants to express after seeing such a phrase, this treatment is not authentic, nor is it their idiomatic usage. If the translation is changed to “white as cotton,” then the degree of “white” can be understood by native English speakers.

Zhang uses “a mere drop in the ocean” to translate “牛的一毛” (*niudeyimao*), the target readers cannot understand “a hair of a cow” but “a mere drop in the ocean.” In this way, the target readers can accurately receive the emotional content that the author wants to express, and understand that Peiping is so grand in She Lao’s mind, and he is so small, and at the same time, it is also in line with the expression habits of English language.

Example 5:

Source text: 巴黎有许多地方使人疲乏，所以咖啡和酒是必要的。

Target text: While Parisians have to turn to coffee or wine for the relief of boredom caused by so many wearisome places in their city.

Zhang uses the word “turn to” here, which means “求助于” (*qiuzhuyu*) in Chinese, and does not make a special translation of the “必要的” (*biyaode*) in the source text. The word “求助于” (*qiuzhuyu*) can fully express the Parisian’s strong desire for coffee and wine in the face of fatigue, and coffee and wine are life-saving things for Parisians. In this way, “咖啡和酒” (*kafeihejiu*) are extremely important to Parisians and are necessary things in Parisian life. Therefore, the seemingly unrelated words “求助于” (*qiuzhuyu*) and “turn to” have a strong logical connection in Zhang’s translation.

## 2.2. Syntactic level

There is a great difference between English and Chinese in phrasing habits. For example, English emphasizes long sentences while Chinese emphasizes paratactic short sentences; English sentences are mostly inanimate subjects, while Chinese sentences are mostly animate subjects. Therefore, in the process of translation, it is necessary to make appropriate adjustments to the original sentences, so that the expression is more in line with the English expression habits and reflects the syntactic aesthetic.

Example 1:

Source text: 面向着积水潭，背后是城墙，坐在石上看水中的小蝌蚪或苇叶上的嫩蜻蜓，我可以快乐地坐一天。

Target text: I can spend a whole day enjoying myself sitting on a rock to observe tiny tadpoles in the water or tender dragonflies on reeds while facing me lies Ji Sui Tan Pond and right behind me rises the high city wall.

This sentence includes not only the scene description in She Lao’s memory, but also his own state at that moment, which is a typical Chinese paratactic sentence. First of all, the sentence structure should be analyzed. This sentence mainly highlights the fact that the author can “快乐地坐一天” (*kuailedezuoyitian*), so the main sentence should be made clear first, and the reason the author can “快乐地坐一天” (*kuailedezuoyitian*) is “看蝌蚪和蜻蜓” (*kankedouheqingting*), which is treated as an accompanying structure. Thus, these two short sentences are translated into “I can spend a whole day enjoying myself sitting on a rock to observe tiny tadpoles in the water or tender dragonflies on reeds.”

Although the positions of the two sentences “面向着积水潭，背后是城墙” (*mianxiangzhejishuitan, beihoushichengqiang*) are in the first part of the source text, the meaning of this translation group is not important, so it needs to be placed at the end of the target text to do clause processing. From the translation of this sentence, we can see the difference in sentence structure between Chinese and English. Zhang expressed these four short sentences in the form of a long sentence, with clear logic and meaning, which conforms to the English language expression habit and reflects the aesthetic at the syntactic level.

Example 2:

Source text: 巴黎有许多地方使人疲乏，所以咖啡和酒是必要的。

Target text: While Parisians have to turn to coffee or wine for the relief of boredom caused by so many wearisome places in their city.

The subject of the source text is “巴黎” (*bali*), and Zhang treats “Parisians” as the subject of the sentence. The translation is treated in this way in order to connect smoothly with the latter phrase and avoid unnecessary redundant translation. The reason “咖啡和酒是必要的” (*kafeihejiushibiyaode*) is because “巴黎让人疲乏” (*balirangrenpifa*), so the coffee and wine refer to Parisians, not Paris, and the subject is “Parisians.”

“Parisians” use “coffee or wine” to “relieve boredom,” and the cause of “boredom” is “many wearisome places in their city” as an adjoint structure. The three sentences are interlinked, talking first about the person, then about the thing that the person does, and finally about the reason the person does it. After dealing with the change of subject, Zhang made a sentence without subject become logical and smooth and clearly convey the source text.

It is worth mentioning that She Lao’s source text did not mention the word “relief,” but only a few words said that coffee and wine are necessary. The addition of words here can achieve aesthetic representation in the target text <sup>[4]</sup>. The logical implication is that “Parisians” ease their fatigue by drinking “coffee and alcohol,” so “relief” echoes “boredom.” After adjusting the sentence, Zhang clearly translated this logical relationship, which is in line with the English idiom and reflects the syntactic beauty of prose translation.

Example 3:

Source text: 况且街上还可以看见北山和西山呢。

Target text: And the Northern and Western hills are visible to people in the open streets.

There is no subject in the source text, which is very common in Chinese expression, belongs to the Chinese “no subject sentence,” but this situation does not exist in English expression. Therefore, the translator changed the active voice to the passive voice when translating and replacing the hidden subject “people” in Chinese with “Northern and Western hills,” which also conforms to the English sentences with inanimate subjects.

### 3. Conclusion

As a derivative of translation studies, translation aesthetics has emerged in modern China and has been continuously improved with time <sup>[11]</sup>. *Fond Memories of Peiping* is concise in language and delicate in emotion. Zhang’s translation is not only full of emotion as the source text, but also has a unique choice of words. However, there are huge differences between Chinese and English languages, so we can only reproduce the source text as far as possible <sup>[12,13]</sup>. This essay only selected some of Zhang’s exquisite translation examples for appreciation and analysis <sup>[14]</sup>, but the full-text translation quality is very high, and there are countless outstanding translation examples that have not been listed, so there are still a lot of areas for further study <sup>[15]</sup>.

In addition, we should continue to learn to appreciate and analyze excellent literary works and translations, learn the handling methods of excellent translators, and constantly improve our ability to translate and appreciate in terms of aesthetic thinking in lexical and syntax levels.

### Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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