



On Literary Cadence and Emotional Expression in Prose Translation: A Comparative Analysis of Human and Machine Translation

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Abstract

Modern Chinese prose takes “loose in form, unified in spirit” as its core trait, its language combining pictorial narrative, rhythmic beauty and restrained lyricism. The central demand of prose translation is therefore not merely the transfer of meaning, but the reproduction of the distinctive layers of literary cadence and the deep-lying emotion of the source text. Artificial-intelligence translation is now easily accessible, yet in the field of literary prose a marked aesthetic gap remains between machine output and the translations of experienced human translators. This paper selects three classic lyric prose works — Zhu Ziqing's “The Sight of My Father's Back”, “Transient Days” and Yu Dafu's “Autumn in the Old Capital” — and takes Zhang Peiji's authoritative human translation and the machine translation produced by the AI model DeepSeek as its comparative corpus. Grounded in Nida's theory of functional equivalence, it carries out close reading and comparative analysis along two core dimensions: the reproduction of literary cadence and the expression of emotion. The study finds that Zhang Peiji's human translation attends at once to sentence rhythm, rhetorical texture and stylistic temperament, restoring both the outward cadence of the prose and the implicit emotions concealed beneath scenery, action and narrative. DeepSeek's machine translation, while guaranteeing basic semantic accuracy and grammatical fluency, is generally characterised by flattened syntax, loss of rhetorical beauty, thin emotional layering and an absence of imaginative openness, so that it can hardly achieve the aesthetic functional equivalence that literary translation demands. Drawing on cases from several types of prose, this paper summarises the differences between human and machine translation and proposes a practical pathway for literary prose translation and for human-machine collaborative translation, thereby offering a reference for research on modern Chinese prose in English translation and for the practice of literary translation.

Keywords— prose translation; literary cadence; emotional expression; Zhang Peiji; DeepSeek; human-machine translation comparison

I. INTRODUCTION

Artificial-intelligence translation technology is maturing with every iteration. Intelligent translation

tools such as DeepL, DeepSeek and GPT are widely used in the translation of all kinds of everyday texts thanks to their outstanding efficiency and low cost.

Unlike ordinary text translation, however, literary translation imposes exceptionally high and specialised requirements on linguistic aesthetics, the creation of imaginative atmosphere and the transmission of emotion — and this is precisely the bottleneck that machine translation has so far been unable to break through. Prose differs in essence from practical genres such as scientific writing and news reporting: it does not pursue straightforward information output, but relies on sentences of alternating length, delicate and varied rhetoric and a lyricism built on blank space to shape a distinctive cadence and emotional atmosphere. Zhang Peiji's *Selected Modern Chinese Essays in English Translation* is a benchmark version in the field of Chinese prose rendered into English; its language is elegant and condensed and fits the spirit of the original works closely, making it a classic model of human literary translation. Setting this classic human translation against DeepSeek's machine output can reveal directly the gap between human and machine translation in handling the cadence and emotion of prose, and therefore possesses ample research value^[2].

At the level of theoretical research, existing comparative studies of human and machine prose translation are mostly confined to the analysis of lexical and syntactic correctness, and their research dimension is relatively narrow. Focusing on the core aesthetic elements of prose translation and taking literary cadence and emotion as its point of entry, this paper further refines the evaluative system and criteria of literary translation and effectively broadens and enriches the research perspective and content of studies on modern Chinese prose in English translation. At the level of practical application, by systematically comparing the merits and shortcomings of human literary translation and AI machine translation, this paper clarifies the inherent limitations of machine translation in the field of literary translation and explores human-machine collaborative approaches suited to prose translation, so as to provide realistic and workable reference for the translation practice of students of literary translation and for their polishing and optimisation of translations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of Core Concepts

Literary cadence (文韵) refers to the aesthetic quality of language produced by the rhythm of composition, the cadence of sentence patterns, the texture of rhetoric, stylistic temperament and sensory

description. It is the central manifestation of the outward literary beauty of prose and an important feature distinguishing prose from practical texts. Emotional expression encompasses both the explicit lyricism stated directly in a text and the implicit emotion concealed in scenery, action and narrative, covering multi-layered states of mind such as kinship, melancholy, loneliness and attachment; it is the key to the literary value and affective power of prose.

The choice of literary cadence and emotional expression as the core evaluative concepts of this study follows from two considerations: the nature of the text itself and the current state of research. As far as prose is concerned, practical texts take the transfer of information as their primary goal and are judged chiefly on accuracy of information and clarity of logic, whereas prose writing is not limited to the statement of events and facts: on the one hand it shapes a distinctive cadence of language by arranging sentence patterns and the polishing rhetoric, and on the other it moves the reader through the expression of emotion at several levels. Literary cadence and emotion correspond precisely to the “form” and the “spirit” of prose, so that grasping these two dimensions is to grasp the most central yardstick for evaluating Chinese prose in English translation.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This paper is grounded in Nida's theory of functional equivalence. According to Nida, a translation should achieve equivalence on four levels — lexical, syntactic, textual, and stylistic — and the ultimate criterion for translation quality is that the target-language reader should enjoy a reading experience identical to that of the source-language reader. When this framework is applied to prose translation, a well-executed human translation is capable of attaining functional equivalence in three dimensions: meaning, style, and emotion, thereby reproducing the tone and atmosphere of the original. Machine translation, by contrast, tends to achieve only surface-level equivalence at the lexical and syntactic levels, while falling short at the higher levels of stylistic beauty and emotional resonance. As a result, it can scarcely satisfy the demands of literary prose translation^[7].

2.3 Current Research at Home and Abroad

Scholarship on the English translation of prose and on the comparison of intelligent human and machine translation has already accumulated a certain number of results. In the study of human prose translation, existing research has focused largely on the translation

style and aesthetic reproduction of Zhang Peiji's prose translations, generally acknowledging that his versions are elegant and expressive and reproduce the spirit of the originals to a high degree, making them benchmark versions of modern prose in English [2]. As for the three classic essays "The Sight of My Father's Back", "Transient Days" and "Autumn in the Old Capital", previous research has largely focused on the translation techniques of the human version, its handling of lexis and syntax, and the analysis of artistic mood in a single text. At the level of translation technique and stylistic reproduction, Yu Yuanling used "The Sight of My Father's Back" as a case to demonstrate the translatability of prose style and analysed the specific techniques by which Zhang Peiji's version reproduces the style of the original [14]. At the level of lexical and syntactic treatment, drawing on a quantitative, corpus-based approach, Wang Weihua and Lei Pengfei examined the lexical and syntactic features of the English translation of "Transient Days" [15], while Liu Rui compared the differences in rhythm and syntax between Zhang Peiji's and Zhu Chunshen's versions of the same essay from the perspective of literary stylistics [16]. Jiang Hui and Yu Miao appreciated the art of diction in Zhang Peiji's translation of "Autumn in the Old Capital" against Liu Miqing's aesthetic criteria of "accuracy, beauty and refinement" [17]. At the level of artistic-mood analysis, He Jiandi and Tang Lijun explored, in terms of reception aesthetics, the strategies by which the translation of "Autumn in the Old Capital" conveys its emotional tone and artistic conception [18], while Pan Xing analysed the reproduction of beauty in sound, form and meaning in that version on the basis of Xu Yuanchong's theory of the "three beauties". [19] These studies, however, either focus on translation technique itself or are limited to the case analysis of a single text, and their perspectives remain fairly traditional and one-dimensional.

In the study of machine translation and human-machine translation comparison, existing results mostly take practical texts such as news and scientific writing as their object, and specialised comparative studies devoted to the prose genre are relatively rare. The comparative studies of human and machine prose translation that do exist are mostly confined to surface-level linguistic analysis such as lexical correctness and syntactic normativity, and very few of them focus on the cadence, compositional rhythm and implicit emotional expression that lie at the core of prose. Although Guo Wanyu and Wang Honghua used "The

Sight of My Father's Back" as their corpus to compare the differences in emotional expression between Zhang Peiji's human translation and a large-language-model translation [20], they addressed only the single dimension of emotion and did not undertake a systematic examination at the level of literary cadence. It is generally acknowledged in the field that although AI translation is efficient and accurate in its semantic output, it suffers from stiff syntax, absent rhetoric and weakened artistic mood, and can hardly achieve the aesthetic and emotional equivalence required of literary translation.

Overall, a systematic comparative analysis of benchmark human translations and machine translation organised around the two core dimensions of literary cadence and emotional expression offers an innovative point of entry and considerable room for research.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND CORPUS

3.1 Objects of Comparison

This paper selects two kinds of translation as its comparative corpus. For the human translation it adopts the standard version in Zhang Peiji's *Selected Modern Chinese Essays in English Translation*, a version widely recognised in Chinese academia as the authoritative model for rendering modern prose into English [2]; for the machine translation it uses the standard output generated by DeepSeek, currently a mainstream general-purpose artificial-intelligence translation model.

3.2 Corpus Selection and Classification

This paper selects three classic modern prose works — "The Sight of My Father's Back", "Transient Days" and "Autumn in the Old Capital" — as its research corpus, with the following specific passages: from "The Sight of My Father's Back", the classic episode in which the father climbs over the railway tracks to buy oranges for "me"; from "Transient Days", the opening landscape parallelism built on swallows, willows and peach blossoms, together with the passage of self-reflection at the end; and from "Autumn in the Old Capital", three passages — the contrast between northern and southern autumn, the description of the autumn scene in the courtyard, and the closing expression of feeling. All the passages selected are the core fragments of each essay that display the greatest richness of cadence and the highest concentration of emotion, fully embodying the literary qualities of prose in sentence rhythm,

rhetorical devices and emotional expression, and providing a representative corpus for the subsequent comparative analysis of human and machine translation.

3.3 Dimensions of Comparative Analysis

This paper carries out its comparative analysis of the translation along two dimensions. The first is the reproduction of literary cadence, focusing on the rhythmic effect of parallel structures, the compositional rhythm created by the alternation of long and short sentences, the textual texture produced by various rhetorical devices and sensory description, and the overall stylistic temperament of the text. The second is emotional expression, analysing chiefly the explicit and direct lyricism in the translations, the implicit emotion concealed in the description of scenery and action, and the degree to which the overall atmosphere and multi-layered emotions of the original are reproduced.

3.4 Research Content and Methods

This paper takes three pieces of classic modern prose works of different kinds — "The Sight of My Father's Back", "Transient Days" and "Autumn in the Old Capital" — as its corpus, covering respectively the narrative of family affection, philosophical lyricism and landscape lyricism. By comparing the specific differences between Zhang Peiji's classic human translation and DeepSeek's machine translation in the reproduction of literary cadence and the expression of emotion, it explores in depth the internal causes of the differences between human and machine translation and, on that basis, summarises an optimised pathway suited to the English translation of modern prose. The overall research methodology combines documentary research, comparative textual analysis, and empirical case analysis.

IV. A HUMAN-MACHINE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EXPRESSION OF LITERARY CADENCE IN PROSE TRANSLATION

Each of the following examples consisted five elements including the source text in Chinese; the literal rendering (baseline) which is provided not as a competing translation but as a baseline against which the stylistic choices of the human translator and the machine translation system can be measured; Zhang Peiji's translation, representing the human translation in this study, which is cited from *Selected Modern*

Chinese Essays in English Translation published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press in 2007; DeepSeek's translation version which is AI translation; and a comparative analysis of the two versions.

4.1 Cadence of the Parallel Structures Opening in "Transient Days"

Source Text (Chinese)

燕子去了，有再来的时候；杨柳枯了，有再青的时候；桃花谢了，有再开的时候。但是，聪明的，你告诉我，我们的日子为什么一去不复返呢？——是有人偷了他们罢：那是谁？又藏在何处呢？是他们自己逃走了罢：现在又到了那里呢？

Literal rendering(Baseline): Swallows have gone, but there is a time when they come back; willows have withered, but there is a time when they turn green again; peach blossoms have faded, but there is a time when they bloom again. But tell me, you who are wise, why do our days go by and never return? — Perhaps someone has stolen them: who is it? And where are they hidden? Perhaps they have run away of their own accord: and where are they now?

Zhang Peiji's Human Translation

If swallows go away, they will come back again. If willows wither, they will turn green again. If peaches shed their blossoms, they will flower again. But, tell me, you the wise, why should our days go by never to return? Perhaps they have been stolen by someone. But who could it be and where could he hide them? Perhaps they have just run away by themselves. But where could they be at the present moment?

DeepSeek's Machine Translation

Swallows may depart, yet they return in time; willows may wither, yet they green again; peach blossoms may fall, yet they bloom afresh. But, O wise one, tell me—why should our days be gone never to come back? Could it be that someone has stolen them away? But who, and where are they hidden? Or have they fled on their own? And where, then, have they now arrived?

Comparative Analysis of Literary Cadence

The three sets of parallel short sentences in the source

text are neatly symmetrical, and their recurrence and return create a slow, lingering rhythm that is the signature cadence of "Transient Days". Zhang Peiji reproduces the parallel structure with a uniform "If..." conditional clause, balancing the length of his sentences so that the rhythm fits the cyclical beauty of the original; the syntax is orderly and gentle and preserves the warm, mellow verbal cadence of the prose.

DeepSeek retains the parallel structure, but the sentences are joined stiffly, with heavy use of the adversative conjunction "yet" splitting the lines apart and breaking the smooth, unhurried rhythm of the original when read aloud; its word choice is bookish and stiff, losing the natural, plain prose style of the original, and its rhythmic layering is weaker than that of the human version. The human translator actively reshapes English syntax to match the sentence rhythm of the original, whereas the machine merely replicates the literal parallelism mechanically and cannot attend to the beauty of the rhythm when read aloud.

4.2 Cadence of Narrative-Action Rhythm in the Orange-Buying Scene of "The Sight of My Father's Back"

Source Text (Chinese)

我看见他戴着黑布小帽，穿着黑布大马褂，深青布棉袍，蹒跚地走到铁道边，慢慢探下身去，尚不大难。可是他穿过铁道，要爬上那边月台，就不容易了。他用两手攀着上面，两脚再向上缩；他肥胖的身子向左微倾，显出努力的样子。这时我看见他的背影，我的眼泪很快地流下来了。

Literal rendering(Baseline): I saw him wearing a small black cloth cap, a black cloth mandarin jacket and a dark blue cotton-padded gown, hobbling to the edge of the railway track and slowly stooping down, which was not yet too difficult. But for him to cross the track and climb up onto the platform on the other side was not easy. He clutched the top with both hands and drew his feet up; his stout body leaned slightly to the left, showing the effort he was making. At this moment I saw his back, and my tears quickly streamed down.

Zhang Peiji's Human Translation

I watched him hobble towards the railway track in his black skullcap, black cloth mandarin jacket and dark blue cotton-

padded cloth long gown. He had little trouble climbing down the railway track, but it was a lot more difficult for him to climb up that platform after crossing the railway track. His hands held onto the upper part of the platform, his legs huddled up and his corpulent body tipped slightly towards the left, obviously making an enormous exertion. While I was watching him from behind, tears gushed from my eyes.

DeepSeek's Machine Translation

I watched him, wearing a small black cloth cap, a black mandarin jacket, and a dark blue cotton-padded gown, as he hobbled to the edge of the railway track. He bent down slowly to step onto the tracks—that was not too difficult. But crossing over and climbing up the opposite platform was no easy feat for him. He grasped the upper edge with both hands, then drew his feet up; his stout body leaned slightly to the left, straining with effort. At that moment, as I gazed at his retreating figure, tears welled up and streamed down my cheeks.

Comparative Analysis of Literary Cadence

The continuous action description of the source text alternates long and short sentences, its rhythm slow and heavy, heightening the pictorial sense of the father's age and clumsiness. Zhang Peiji selects graded verbs such as "hobble", "huddled up" and "enormous exertion"; his sentences are neither too loose nor too tight — the long sentence lays out the whole figure while the short sentences highlight the effort of climbing, so that the rhythm of the writing rises and falls with the action and the slow, oppressive narrative cadence of the original is restored.

DeepSeek's version chops the syntax into fine fragments, and a large number of short sentences and dashes break the fluency of the narrative; its verbs, such as "grasp" and "straining with effort", are plain and monotonous and do not distinguish between the weight of different actions. The rhythm is uniform throughout, without rise or fall, dissolving the pictorial rhythm inherent in the original action description; the writing is plain and lacks layering, and its literary cadence is thin.

4.3 Stylistic Texture of the Courtyard Landscape Description in "Autumn in the Old Capital"

Source Text (Chinese)

在北平即使不出门去罢，就是在皇城人海之中，租人家一椽破屋来住着，早晨起来，泡一碗浓茶，向院子一坐，你也能看得到很高很高的碧绿的天色，听得到青天下驯鸽的飞声。从槐树叶底，朝东细数着一丝一丝漏下来的日光，或在破壁腰中，静对着像喇叭似的牵牛花（朝荣）的蓝朵，自然而然地也能够感觉到十分的秋意。

Literal rendering(Baseline): In Beiping, even if you do not go out, living in a rented broken-raftered house amid the sea of people in the imperial city, when you rise in the morning, brew a bowl of strong tea and sit down in the courtyard, you can still see the very high, very high azure sky and hear the flight of the tame pigeons under the clear heavens. Counting strand by strand the sunlight that leaks down from beneath the leaves of the locust trees towards the east, or quietly facing the blue trumpet-shaped blossoms of the morning glory on the broken wall, you will naturally and spontaneously feel autumn to the full.

Zhang Peiji's Human Translation

Suppose you put up in a humble rented house inside the bustling imperial city, you can, on getting up at dawn, sit in your courtyard sipping a cup of strong tea, leisurely watch the high azure skies and listen to pigeons circling overhead. Turn eastward under locust trees to closely observe streaks of sunlight filtering through their foliage, or quietly watch the trumpet-shaped blue flowers of morning glories climbing half way up a dilapidated wall, and an intense feeling of autumn will of itself well up inside you.

DeepSeek's Machine Translation

Even if you never set foot outside the door in Peiping—living in a ramshackle rented room amid the vast sea of humanity within the imperial city—you can still, upon rising in the morning, brew a bowl of strong tea, sit in the courtyard, and gaze up at the immensely high, azure sky, while listening to the sound of tame pigeons circling overhead. Look

eastward from beneath the locust trees and count, one by one, the thin threads of sunlight filtering through the leaves; or quietly fix your gaze upon the blue, trumpet-shaped blooms of morning glories climbing along a broken wall—and before you know it, a full measure of autumn feeling will arise quite naturally within you.

Comparative Analysis of Literary Cadence

Yu Dafu's original is cool, light and elegantly restrained in style, creating a relaxed and quiet atmosphere out of small, ordinary scenes. Zhang Peiji selects refined and controlled vocabulary such as "humble", "azure" and "dilapidated", and differentiates states of action with distinct verbs such as "sipping", "leisurely watch" and "quietly watch"; his sentences are unhurried and leave space, fitting the light, solitary style of the original.

DeepSeek's version piles up vocabulary, with words such as "ramshackle" and "immensely high" exaggerated and blunt, and its many dashes and semicolons destroy the relaxed, unhurried rhythm of the prose. The writing is heavy and congested, losing the simple, cool and reserved cadence that is unique to Yu Dafu's prose, and the aesthetic texture of the landscape writing drops sharply.

4.4 Summary

Human translation can adjust sentence rhythm, differentiate levels of verbs and match the stylistic texture of the original according to the generic features of prose, preserving intact the rhythm and verbal cadence unique to prose; DeepSeek's machine translation completes only the literal transfer of information, with fragmented syntax, homogeneous vocabulary and poor stylistic fit, and is generally marked by a flattening of literary cadence and a loss of aesthetic beauty^{[7][9]}.

V. A HUMAN-MACHINE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION IN PROSE TRANSLATION

5.1 The Orange-Buying Scene in "The Sight of My Father's Back": Restoration of Implicit Family Affection

Source Text (Chinese)

我看见他戴着黑布小帽，穿着黑布大马褂，深青布棉袍，蹒跚地走到铁道边，慢慢探下身去，尚不大难。可是他穿过铁道，要爬上那边月台，就不容易了。他用两手攀着上面

，两脚再向上缩；他肥胖的身子向左微倾，显出努力的样子。这时我看见他的背影，我的眼泪很快地流下来了。

Literal rendering(Baseline): I saw him wearing a small black cloth cap, a black cloth mandarin jacket and a dark blue cotton-padded gown, hobbling to the edge of the railway track and slowly stooping down, which was not yet too difficult. But for him to cross the track and climb up onto the platform on the other side was not easy. He clutched the top with both hands and drew his feet up; his stout body leaned slightly to the left, showing the effort he was making. At this moment I saw his back, and my tears quickly streamed down.

Zhang Peiji's Human Translation

I watched him hobble towards the railway track in his black skullcap, black cloth mandarin jacket and dark blue cotton-padded cloth long gown. He had little trouble climbing down the railway track, but it was a lot more difficult for him to climb up that platform after crossing the railway track. His hands held onto the upper part of the platform, his legs huddled up and his corpulent body tipped slightly towards the left, obviously making an enormous exertion. While I was watching him from behind, tears gushed from my eyes.

DeepSeek's Machine Translation

I watched him, wearing a small black cloth cap, a black mandarin jacket, and a dark blue cotton-padded gown, as he hobbled to the edge of the railway track. He bent down slowly to step onto the tracks—that was not too difficult. But crossing over and climbing up the opposite platform was no easy feat for him. He grasped the upper edge with both hands, then drew his feet up; his stout body leaned slightly to the left, straining with effort. At that moment, as I gazed at his retreating figure, tears welled up and streamed down my cheeks.

Comparative Analysis of Emotion

Not a single sentence in this passage expresses feeling directly; all the fatherly love, guilt and heartache are embedded in the series of details of the father's climbing, making it a typical passage of implicit

lyricism. Zhang Peiji precisely selects words such as "hobble" (walking unsteadily), "corpulent" (bulky and aged) and "enormous exertion" (straining to the utmost) to portray the father's aged and laborious bearing, and the closing word "gushed" vividly captures the surging burst of tears, giving concrete form to the intense guilt and gratitude buried in the narrator's heart and building up, layer by layer, the reserved and deep affection between father and son; the emotional layering is delicate and full.

DeepSeek's machine translation, by contrast, merely renders the surface actions in a flat, literal way; words such as "stout" and "straining with effort" are plain and weaken the image of the father's aged helplessness, while "tears well up" is only an objective description of the act of crying and lacks the explosive force of feeling, so that it cannot convey the restrained and weighty guilt behind the words: the expression of family affection is thin and weak and can hardly move the reader.

5.2 The Closing Introspection of "Transient Days": Melancholy over Time and Self-Reflection

Source Text (Chinese)

过去的日子如轻烟，被微风吹散了，如薄雾，被初阳蒸融了；我留着些什么痕迹呢？我何曾留着像游丝样的痕迹呢？我赤裸裸来到这世界，转眼间也将赤裸裸的回去罢？但不能平的，为什么偏要白白走这一遭啊？你聪明的，告诉我，我们的日子为什么一去不复返呢？

Literal rendering(Baseline): The days past are like light smoke, dispersed by the breeze, like thin mist, melted away by the early sun; what traces have I left behind? Have I ever left a trace like a gossamer thread? I came into this world stark naked, and in the twinkling of an eye I shall go back stark naked too? But what I cannot accept is this: why must I pass through this once for nothing at all? You who are wise, tell me, why do our days go by and never return?

Zhang Peiji's Human Translation

The bygone days, like wisps of smoke, have been dispersed by gentle winds, and, like thin mists, have been evaporated by the rising sun. What traces have I left behind? No, nothing, not even gossamer-like traces. I have come to this world stark naked, and in the twinkling of an eye, I am to go back as stark

naked as ever. However, I am taking it very much to heart: why should I be made to pass through this world for nothing at all?

O you the wise, would you tell me please: why should our days go by never to return?

DeepSeek's Machine Translation

The days that are past—like wisps of smoke, they have been scattered by the light breeze; like thin mists, they have been dissolved by the morning sun. What trace have I left behind? Have I ever left so much as a gossamer thread? Naked I came into this world, and in the blink of an eye, naked I shall return. Yet I cannot reconcile myself to this—why should I have to make this journey through life for nothing at all?

O wise one, tell me—why should our days be gone never to come back?

Comparative Analysis of Emotion

The source text uses the two metaphors of light smoke and thin mist together with a series of self-questionings to express the unwillingness of time wasted and a spiritual self-anxiety; the emotion is restrained and deep, hidden beneath the surface of the words. Zhang Peiji uses "gossamer-like" to restore the elusive, insubstantial image of time, while "take it very much to heart" precisely conveys the regret of an unresolved knot in the heart, and the closing question preserves the melancholy of the original's repeated probing, fully reproducing the author's complex mood of self-examination and pervasive sorrow.

DeepSeek merely translates the metaphors and questions mechanically and literally, with no modifying vocabulary to heighten the emotion: it objectively states the surface facts of time passing and life being void, and cannot convey the tangled, unwilling self-reflection deep within the words. The intense sentimental atmosphere of the original is largely dissolved.

5.3 The Opening of "Autumn in the Old Capital": The Wanderer's Loneliness and Attachment to His Native Place

Source Text (Chinese)

秋天，无论在什么地方的秋天，总是好的；可是啊，北国的秋，却特别地来得清，来得静，来得悲凉。我的不远千里，要从杭州赶上青岛，更要从青岛赶上北平来的理由，也不过想饱尝一尝这"秋"，这故都的秋味。江

南，秋当然也是有的；但草木凋得慢，空气来得润，天的颜色显得淡，并且又时常多雨而少风；一个人夹在苏州上海杭州，或厦门香港广州的市民中间，浑浑沌沌地过去，只能感到一点点清凉，秋的味，秋的色，秋的意境与姿态，总看不饱，尝不透，赏玩不到十足。

Literal rendering(Baseline): Autumn, autumn wherever it is, is always good; and yet autumn in the North is especially clear, especially quiet, especially desolate. The reason I have not counted a thousand miles far in hurrying from Hangzhou to Qingdao, and then from Qingdao to Beiping, is no more than a wish to savour this "autumn" to the full, the autumn flavour of the old capital. In Jiangnan autumn of course also exists; but there the plants wither slowly, the air is moist, the colour of the sky is pale, and it is often rainy and rarely windy; caught among the townspeople of Suzhou, Shanghai, Hangzhou, or Xiamen, Hong Kong and Guangzhou, one drifts along in a daze and can feel only a faint touch of coolness — the flavour of autumn, the colour of autumn, the mood and posture of autumn can never be seen to the full, tasted through, or enjoyed completely.

Zhang Peiji's Human Translation

Autumn, wherever it is, always has something to recommend itself. In North China, however, it is particularly limpid, serene and melancholy. To enjoy its atmosphere to the full in the onetime capital, I have, therefore, made light of travelling a long distance from Hangzhou to Qingdao, and thence to Peiping.

There is of course autumn in the South too, but over there plants wither slowly, the air is moist, the sky pallid, and it is more often rainy than windy. While muddling along all by myself among the urban dwellers of Suzhou, Shanghai, Xiamen, Hong Kong or Guangzhou, I feel nothing but a little chill in the air, without ever relishing to my heart's content the flavour, colour, mood and style of the season.

DeepSeek's Machine Translation

Autumn—wherever it is found—is always a

season to be cherished. Yet autumn in the North comes upon one with a peculiar clarity, a stillness, a melancholy all its own. The reason I have traveled all the way from Hangzhou to Qingdao, and then from Qingdao on to Peiping, is simply to drink in this very "autumn"—the very essence of autumn in the former capital.

To be sure, autumn exists in the South as well. But there the plants wither more slowly, the air is more humid, the sky paler, and the weather more rainy than windy. Drifting along in a daze among the city crowds of Suzhou, Shanghai, Hangzhou, or for that matter Xiamen, Hong Kong, one feels only a faint touch of coolness—never quite feasting one's eyes on the hues of autumn, never quite savouring its flavours, never quite absorbing its moods and postures to the full.

Comparative Analysis of Emotion

The three parallel phrases "clear, quiet and desolate" establish the solitary undertone of the whole essay, and the journey of a thousand miles to Beiping to enjoy autumn conceals the particular obsession and homesickness of a wandering son. Zhang Peiji chooses the three progressively deepening adjectives "limpid, serene and melancholy", precisely delineating the cool sadness unique to northern autumn; "make light of travelling" highlights the author's obstinate insistence on reaching the old capital whatever the distance, fully restoring the wanderer's complex state of mind — his loneliness and his attachment to his native place.

DeepSeek's version makes no distinction of level in its vocabulary and simply translates "clear, quiet, sad", while stating the act of travelling flatly; it cannot convey the deep feeling that leads the author to cross a thousand miles for a single taste of autumn, and stays only at the surface description of scenery, losing the loneliness and obsession of the wanderer that underlie the words.

5.4 The Ending of "Autumn in the Old Capital": Intense Lyricism of Extreme Attachment

Source Text (Chinese)

秋天，这北国的秋天，若留得住的话，我愿把寿命的三分之二折去，换得一个三分之一的零头。

Literal rendering(Baseline): Autumn, this autumn of the North, if it could be kept, I would be willing to cut away two-thirds of

my life and exchange it for the remaining one-third.

Zhang Peiji's Human Translation

Autumn, I mean Northern autumn, if only it could be made to last forever! I would be more than willing to keep but one-third of my life-span and have two-thirds of it bartered for the prolonged stay of the season!

DeepSeek's Machine Translation

Autumn—this autumn of the North—if only it could be kept from passing! I would willingly trade away two-thirds of my allotted years, if only to keep the remaining one-third in an eternal autumn.

Comparative Analysis of Emotion

This sentence is the emotional climax of the whole essay, directly expressing the ardent depth of feeling that would give up more than half of one's lifespan to keep the autumn of the North, a love tinged with a faint desolation. Zhang Peiji uses an exclamatory sentence pattern to strengthen the inner expectation, with "be more than willing" and "bartered" highlighting the intense emotion of willing sacrifice; the exclamatory tone fits the ardent yet sorrowful lyrical key of the original.

DeepSeek's version is flat in syntax, and the phrase "trade away" is cold and objective, weakening the tension of subjective feeling: it merely states objectively the act of exchanging one's lifespan and can hardly convey the author's almost obsessive, deep attachment, so that the intense lyricism is greatly diluted.

5.5 Summary

Human translators possess literary empathy and can precisely capture both explicit lyricism and the implicit emotions hidden in action, scenery and blank space, heightening the emotional atmosphere at several levels through vocabulary, syntax and tone; machine translation can recognise only the surface emotion words of a text and cannot interpret the deeper state of mind that lies beyond the words. Its emotional expression is single and flat, and it loses the core charm of the restrained lyricism of prose^{[6][13]}.

VI. CAUSES OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HUMAN AND MACHINE TRANSLATION AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR PROSE TRANSLATION

6.1 Internal Causes of the Differences between Human and Machine Translation

The internal causes of the differences between human and machine translation lie mainly in the following aspects. First, the underlying operating logic differs. DeepSeek's machine translation relies on probability matching over large data sets and recognises only linguistic symbols and literal meaning; it has no capacity for literary aesthetics or human empathy and cannot perceive sentence rhythm, the blank space of imagery or stylistic mood. Zhang Peiji, as a professional literary translator, possesses a deep literary accumulation, can read the cadence and state of mind behind the words, and actively adjusts syntax and vocabulary to restore the aesthetics and emotion of the original^{[8][10]}.

Second, the translation goals differ. The core goal of AI translation is to ensure semantic accuracy and grammatical fluency and to complete the transfer of information, whereas the core goal of human literary translation is to achieve Nida's functional equivalence and to take account of the multiple literary values of meaning, style, emotion and artistic conception.^{[1][10]} Finally, the two differ in text-processing capacity. Machines excel at standardised practical texts that make no aesthetic demands; prose, by contrast, is a highly implicit, highly subjective and highly aesthetic kind of text in which a great deal of emotion lies beyond the words and depends on the translator's subjective aesthetic interpretation — a natural weak point of AI translation^[11].

6.2 Practical Implications for Literary Prose Translation

Comparing Zhang Peiji's human translation with DeepSeek's machine output has yielded a number of profound insights into prose translation. On the one hand, in the translation of purely literary prose, human translation is irreplaceable. For classic prose that relies on literary cadence and restrained lyricism, relying on AI output alone will cause a double loss of beauty and emotion, and the aesthetic interpretation and literary polishing performed by a human translator cannot be replaced by a machine. On the other hand, artificial-intelligence translation can serve as an auxiliary tool, making it possible to build a model of human-machine collaborative translation^{[11][12]}. AI is suited to rapidly generating a basic draft and completing the basic semantic conversion, while the human translator can adjust sentence rhythm, improve rhetorical texture, supply implicit emotion and restore the style of the

original on that basis, balancing efficiency with literary aesthetics. Finally, the evaluation of Chinese prose in English translation needs to establish a dual standard of "literary cadence + emotion". Judging the quality of a prose translation cannot be a matter of checking lexical and grammatical correctness alone; two aesthetic dimensions — the rhythm of the writing, the fit of the style, and the restoration of implicit emotion — must be added, so as to be closer to the essence of literary translation^[9].

VII. CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH OUTLOOK

7.1 Conclusion

Taking three typical modern prose works — "The Sight of My Father's Back", "Transient Days" and "Autumn in the Old Capital" — as its corpus, this paper compares Zhang Peiji's human translation with DeepSeek's machine translation and draws conclusions along the two dimensions of literary cadence and emotion.

First, at the level of literary cadence, human translation can precisely reproduce the parallel rhythms of prose, the narrative rhythm of long and short sentences, the stylistic quality of landscape writing and the texture of rhetoric, preserving intact the aesthetic cadence of the prose; DeepSeek's machine translation has rigid syntax, homogeneous vocabulary and a fractured style, and generally suffers from a loss of literary cadence^[7].

Second, at the level of emotion, human translators can capture both explicit lyricism and the implicit emotions hidden in scenery and action, building a multi-layered emotional atmosphere through vocabulary, syntax and tone; machine translation can interpret only literal emotion and cannot handle the restrained lyricism of blank space, so that its emotional expression is flat and thin^{[6][13]}.

Third, at the level of causes, the gap between human and machine translation stems from differences in operating logic, translation goals and text-interpretation capacity; AI can complete only the transfer of information, whereas human translators possess literary aesthetics and empathy and can satisfy the multiple aesthetic demands of prose translation.

7.2 Limitations

The corpus of this paper is limited to three modern lyric essays, and the range of subject matter covered is narrow; only one AI model, DeepSeek, was used, so that no horizontal comparison of several translation tools could be made. In future work the study could be extended to prose genres such as familiar essays and

travel writing, and a wider range of AI models could be included for comparative research.

7.3 Outlook

Artificial-intelligence translation technology will continue to iterate, and the fluency of machine output will continue to improve; literary aesthetics, human empathy and the creation of artistic conception, however, will remain the core strengths of human translation. Human-machine collaborative translation will become the mainstream model for literary prose translation^{[8][11]}: in this model the machine undertakes the basic translation work while the human translator concentrates on polishing literary cadence and restoring emotional and imaginative atmosphere, balancing translation efficiency against literary aesthetic value.

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