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视觉诗歌中图形-背景关系的多维认知

A Multi-leveled Approach to the Figure-ground Relations in Visual Poetry

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Abstract

Studies of the interface between linguistics and literature have been further enriched by Cognitive poetics. As a special literary genre, poetry has attracted much attention for its regular poetic organization and simple but rhythmic language. Visual poetry, possessing a characteristic poetic shape, not only adds to the categories, but also provides a new angle in the study area of its form.

Traditionally, visual poetry has been mainly studied from two perspectives, namely the literary and the stylistic perspective. Researchers taking the literary perspective ignore the distinction between visual poetry and common-type one and pay more attention to the poetic characteristics of visual poems, such as the rhyme, figures of speech and diachronic development. On the other hand, from the stylistic perspective, criticism and linguistic theories have converged to find out more linguistic evidence to account for the poetic meanings and aesthetic effects. Despite the exclusive concentration on texts in traditional fashion, poetry studies, especially visual poetry studies, take both poets and readers into consideration, which suggests a shift of focus from pure formalism to the common inner mechanism underlying the construction and interpretation of poems. Although poetry studies have developed maturely, most of them either exclude visual poems as boundary literature or simply neglect their distinctive forms, equalizing them with traditional poetry without truly differentiating its uniqueness.

Based on previous studies, this thesis adopts the figure-ground theory to make an in-depth exploration into visual poetry from the perspective of cognitive poetics. This thesis utilizes a combined method of introspective study and empirical study, the former trying to estimate the commonly immediate feelings in reading process and the latter analyzing typical examples to discover clues that can explain constructive and affectual differences. Analysis of figures and grounds in this study are not confined to linguistic level. Instead, they are considered through a multileveled approach,

involving essential elements related to a poem. In visual system, the figure-ground alignment occurs when people organize spatial relations. In language, it is realized through skillful arrangements of poetic images and in visual poems, a special poetic pattern. And considered as a whole, the poetic analysis also concerns texts, poets and meanings intended. It is found that static figure-ground relations are found between poems and common descriptions; between poets and social backgrounds; between poetic meanings and forms. Dynamic changes occur among images depicted through poetic language, for example, the figure-ground segregation, occlusion, reversal and so on. Compared with other poems, Visual poetry is more prominent for its form. When visually impacted, readers will find the emotional effects much more strengthened.

Through the application of this theory, the poet, the text and inner mechanisms are all addressed, which can render a more inclusive and comprehensive perspective to visual poetry studies. The findings prove that the figure-ground alignment exists not only in embodied experience, but also in visual poetry the poetic shape of which facilitates theme disclosure and enhances the literary effects.

Key Words: Cognitive poetics; figure-ground relation; multi-leveled approach; visual poetry; poetic form

摘 要

随着认知诗学的发展，语言学与文学之间的界面研究越来越丰富。作为一种特殊的文学体裁，诗歌因其规律的组织结构、简洁而富有节奏的语言而成为研究焦点。其中，因诗歌形式凸显而发展的视觉诗歌不仅丰富了诗歌的种类，也为诗歌语言形式的研究提供了新的视野。

前人对视觉诗歌的全面研究主要囊括了两大角度。文学角度研究无异于一般诗歌，关注视觉诗歌的文学性，如韵脚、修辞、历时研究等。将文学批评理论与语言学理论相结合而发展的文体学研究视野更多关注真实的语言实据，从语言特点中寻找视觉诗歌生成的含义及审美效果。此外，文体学与形式、功能、认知三大语言范式的融合实现了视觉诗歌从纯粹的形式研究到意义生成的内在机制研究的转换，使得诗歌，尤其是视觉诗歌研究不再囿于文本，而是转向诗人、文本、读者的多元关系。虽然视觉诗歌研究已日臻成熟，但是大部分研究不是将视觉诗歌作为边缘诗歌排除在研究之外，就是忽略其诗形特点，将其等同于一般诗歌研究，并没有严格辨析它相对于传统诗歌的"特殊"之处。

因此，沿用认知诗学中的图形-背景理论于视觉诗歌研究，内省及实证研究相结合，一方面概括读者阅读时的即时效应，一方面实例分析视觉诗歌异于一般诗歌的构诗差异及引发不同视觉体验的内在机制。基于研究的图形背景关系不止于诗歌语言，还包括其它要素。图形、背景是对视觉场的有效选择，在语言层得到反映。整体看来，静态的图形背景关系体现在诗歌文本与一般语言，诗人与社会背景，诗歌意义与形式三个层次。动态关系变化则集中在诗歌语言所表现的意象间，如图形背景分离、融合、切换等。其中，视觉诗歌由于诗形（背景）差异而得到更多关注；其凸显由此引发不同的视觉体验与审美效果。

本研究沿用认知诗学中的图形-背景理论，不仅限于语言分析，而是多维认知与诗歌相关的关键元素，诸如诗人、文本及内在机制研究，分析更全面，不仅证实了图形-背景一致在人们日常经验及视觉诗歌构建、解读中的认知普遍性，也体现了诗形特征在揭示文学主题、加强文学效果方面的重要价值。

关键词：认知诗学 图形-背景关系 多维角度 视觉诗歌 诗形

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Research

As a special kind of literature, poetry has been the focus of studies for its unique linguistic structure and simplified language. Langer (1953: 245) mentions in his book that "every successful art of literature is not a representation, expression and imitation of life, but is wholly a creation......an illusion of life". This coincides with the essence of cognitive poetics, an interdisciplinary study of literature and cognitive linguistics, which highlights the initiative participation of both poets and readers. Poetry, in this sense, revolves around not only the poet who creates, the reader who appreciates, but also the worlds which provide inspiration for the writing and clues for the reading. Poets will infuse their works with their own thoughts and emotions. Meanwhile, the moment poetry is generated, the role of the reader has also been envisaged (Eco, 1979: 3). An estimation of the readers' participation in interpretation is part of poetic production. Further, both the constructing and comprehending process is inseparable from worldly experiences. Generally, the more people experience, the more varied their feelings become, and the more easily they understand. A common cognitive mechanism works in those processes. Therefore, whatever one deliberately chooses to be included in a poem, it will be comprehended, sooner or later.

Visual poetry is greatly noted for its "unruliness" compared with traditional poetry, largely due to its form which has aroused much more attention in poetic studies. Liu Yu (刘煜, 2000) says that visual poetry could be categorized as imagist poetry, but unlike imagist poetry whose images are shown only by standard language, visual poetry complements the description by pictures or graphological features, but poems with pure pictures are not targeted in this thesis because without language, there is no point in talking about figures and grounds in most cases. Unique graphological manipulations provide a new way to contribute to the poetic meanings. Among them, the poetic shape and the printing features are most frequently seen.

Firstly, the uniqueness of the shape is achieved by taking advantages of Chinese characters or English letters to mirror the exact contours of physical objects. Hence, the poem is exhibited exactly same as or a symbol of the image to be discussed in the poem. Secondly, the great popularity of visual poetry mainly results from poets' innovation in methods of expressions thanks to the development of printing technology. Common types of printing ways include capitalization, italics and line breaks. The representative connotations of these changes require readers to be sharper in imagination and association because they may not show direct relations of the printed parts to the poetic meanings. Therefore, unlike imagic representation, printing deviations turn out to be more difficult for understanding. A heated debate around visual poetry has arisen because of the doubt about the degree to which a poem should enjoy the freedom in choosing concrete pictures or skillfully arranging its verses. What rhythms to traditional poetry are what pictures to visual poetry. Although visual poetry breaks through the shackles of rigid principles, it still succeeds in conveying implications and realizing aesthetic functions. As long as the reader can recognize linguistic signs and, triggered by them, come up with associative experiences, emotional stimulus will then occur (黎志敏, 2008). To make a complementation for the whole thesis, traditional poetry and visual poetry in this thesis is not strictly categorized by time. As what will be mentioned, visual poetry in this research mainly includes free verse in western literature and the New Poetry in China. If considered by historical stage, some poems which have existed in ancient times also belong to visual poetry. Especially in western literature, before the wide popularity of free verse, many researchers and poets have already tried to diversify poetic shapes influenced by a strong visual impact. Therefore, "traditional" in this thesis is used to describe the poetry that is produced according to the widely acknowledged standards, such as the sonnets, couplets and octaves. Poems that are changed in the aspects of organizational arrangements and printing characteristics belong to visual poetry in this paper.

This thesis centers on the study of visual poetry in order to discover how the common cognitive mechanism works despite its differences in poetic forms. It takes the figure-ground theory as the major theoretical foundation mainly because of the

following reasons. Firstly, comparatively speaking, visual poetry is still rich in images, elaborately selected from the outside world and closely related with people's sensory system. Similarly, the figure-ground segregation concerns dealing with common visual experiences. Hence, it is assumed to have great explanatory power. Besides, visual poems differ from common ones in that their forms are intentionally designed. It is worth investigating whether the figures and grounds within this type of poems work in the same way. Hence, the commonalities and differences between visual and traditional poetry from the perspective of cognitive poetics will be clearer.

The combination of literature and linguistics practically proves to be effective in exposing the writers' as well as readers' experiences in the world through the analysis of the text. And mappings between form and mind have also been widely studied by linguists. Although the language of poems is simpler, it is more demanding for realizing common life regularities. This thesis not only concentrates on the inner rationality, but also makes a comparative study. Based on cognitive studies in traditional poetry, it tries to decode the working process in visual poems, through which the tacitly admitted common mechanism is further affirmed and the enormous contribution of the deviated form in visual poetry to strengthening underlying poetic meaning is simultaneously clarified.

This study, furthermore, promotes cognitive theories in poetic studies, which also provides a more comprehensive angle in raveling out the relations among the four elements: world, text, poet and reader. It goes beyond a simple linguistic analysis of themes or aesthetic values. Moreover, visual poetry is no longer regarded as a boundary subject in this study. Its innovative aspects are placed more emphasis.

Besides, difficulties in explaining example poems chosen from visual poetry indirectly prove that excessive freedom in structuring a poem or employing pictorial materials will hinder readers' interpretation to some extent, which helps explain why there are so many writers against portions of visual poems, especially the school of Chinese New poetry. This study believes that despite the pictorial distinctness of visual poems, the fundamental elements, such as rhythm, cohesion and coherence should be contained in a poem so that visual poems will not be regarded as a total

violation against rules in poetic generation since the primary features of poems are still possessed.

1.2 Literature Review

The watershed in poetic development shall be the Imagist Movement in the west and the May 4th Movement in China. Roughly speaking, the former sets up a clear barrier between metrical poetry and free verse while the latter gives rise to the New poetry against the classical poetry. Among the free verse and the New poetry, a systemic way of innovation in linguistic deviation of poems differentiates them from traditional ones. The newly-born type is known as visual poetry. Although it has already existed for a long time, especially in western literature, those poems are not viewed as the focus since the materials are scattered and there is no agreeing norm in deviations. With a wider popularity of linguistic analysis in poems, the uniqueness of visual poems catches much more attention. Correspondingly, the focus of poetic studies has changed greatly, similar to traditional poems, mainly around four ingredients: world, poet, text and reader.

1.2.1 Traditional Way of Poetic Studies

Generally speaking, poetry has been explored mainly from literary perspective and stylistic perspective based on different theoretical focuses.

Literary critics advocate what they call "close reading", a close examination of the language and form of any literary text (Hall, 2014: 154). Briefly, they highlight what are presented directly by poetic texts. Case studies are one of the characteristics among traditional paradigms. Different aspects of a poem have been selected as the focus of study in different periods.

Before the liberation of poetic forms, a very intensive reading of poems mainly concentrates on rhyming with the goal of summarizing the characteristics of melody and then categorizing poems into different sorts of styles, such as sonnets, quatrains or octaves. They make a clear distinction between right or wrong pattern which help

form a set of rules for poetic generation. One of the famous works is *A History of English Rhythms* which offers a thorough study of the rhythmical features of almost all well-known poems. Besides, some domestic scholars similarly categorize the principles of rhythm in both traditional Chinese poetry and Chinese New poetry.

Another salient feature of this perspective is that readers are excluded in analysis. Instead, researchers tend to concentrate on poets and what they convey in poems. As a matter of fact, every poet is born within a certain social context, so is the poem. Those implications in a poem will reflect the world behind it including its social and economic environment as well as its ideology. Apart from probing into the poet's social life, every concrete detail in the poem expresses thoughts and feelings. So, the ultimate motivations of generating a poem, also the themes, are there to be discovered. Examples are everywhere to be found both in Chinese and western literary studies and always representatives in typical periods are goal-oriented. Generally speaking, themes are reflections of poets' own ideas influenced by exact social or cultural contexts. For example, in *Images and Themes in Five Poems by Milton* by Rosemond (1957), the author presents a social overview behind those images. Chen Xiangchun (陈向春, 2008) concentrates on Chinese classical poetry, particularly Tang poetry, and discusses those themes by combining poetic lines and evolutionary history.

Other researches center on how poets succeed in transmitting their own information. What strategies they use in real texts shall prove their writing skills. This aspect simply includes the internal organization of the poem. Differing from the "form" which is mainly realized by the arrangement of lines, "organization" means not only the lines, but also the rhyming, rhythm, repetition, alliteration, paralleled structures and so on. Many scholars are keen to adopt these techniques in order to reveal what's underlined. Visual poetry also relies much on techniques to realize aesthetic effects, such as capitalization, italics and so on.

Since poetry has developed such a long history, differences and similarities gradually appear. Every school defines themselves with certain characteristics that contribute to styles. A flow of researches aim to separate one from another by entitling a group of poets according to those common features found in their poems,

particularly shown by similar themes in the same period. Examples of famous schools include romanticism, naturalism and imagism in the west; the bold and unconstrained school or the graceful and restrained school in China. However, these classifications are based on certain yardsticks. Different angles might give rise to different groups, for instance, in Chinese, the pastoral and scenic poems are noted for their images rather than styles.

Besides, a diachronic investigation tries to roughly sketch the historical development of poetry as one of the means to neaten numerous materials, take notes and comment so as to clear up the way for further research. China embraces a very long history of literature, the development of which is closely linked with the social and political development of the exact dynasty then. The research of poetic histories is assumed to have flourished in the 20th century which has witnessed greater importance attached to classical literature. For example, Tang dynasty boomed with many distinguished poets and remarkable poems that hence, become the subjects in many diachronic studies. They tend to be staged for doing research. *An Introduction to Tang Poetry* written by Su Xuelin (苏雪林, 1933) is regarded as the first dynastic history of literature. In this book, Su makes a thorough study of the development of Tang poetry, utilizing detailed historical data and taking each poet as a social being. Bohn (2001) has roughly made a sketch of the development of visual poetry, the booming periods of which are mainly included in his studies, from about World War One to the 20th century. He traces visual poetry back to France, Russia and America where visual poetry has experienced changes not only in its source or name, but also in effectual aspects.

For its selective and impressionistic nature, literary criticism, though striking people with its close scrutiny of emotions and feelings generated by the text, is still criticized for "being too quick to flatter themselves that they can write as historians or move insights in social and cultural studies without having formally trained and practiced in those areas" (Hall, 2014: 157). That means rules in explaining are explicitly shown, yet not organized scientifically and systemically. There is no ultimate motivation accessible to researchers of this kind of analysis.

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