



A Comparative Study on the English Translation of The Sight of Father's Back from the Perspective of Human-Machine Translation

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How to cite this paper: Han, J. (2026). A Comparative Study on the English Translation of The Sight of Father's Back from the Perspective of Human-Machine Translation. *Literature, Language and Cultural Studies*, 5(3), 11–25. ISSN Print: 3079-5095, ISSN Online: 3079-5109. <https://doi.org/10.63313/LLCS.9170>
Published: 2026-06-04

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Abstract

Zhu Ziqing's *The Sight of Father's Back* is a classic work of modern Chinese lyrical prose. With plain and delicate language and implicit profound emotions, it boasts both literary aesthetic value and traditional cultural connotations. This paper takes Zhang Peiji's human translation (HT), alongside machine translations produced by DeepL (NMT) and DeepSeek (LLM) as research objects. It conducts a comparative analysis of the differences, strengths and limitations of human and machine translation in the translation of literary prose across four dimensions: lexical richness, sentence structure, emotional expression and cultural value transmission. The study finds that machine translation possesses practical advantages such as semantic accuracy, standard grammar, translation efficiency and regular sentence structure, and is capable of meeting basic information transmission needs. However, it has obvious shortcomings in terms of literary aesthetics, empathy for implicit emotions, and the in-depth interpretation of cultural connotations. Human translation, relying on literary perception, emotional empathy and cultural interpretation, can better restore the lyrical characteristics and cultural essence of lyrical prose. Based on the findings, this paper puts forward corresponding implications for prose translation practice, human-machine collaborative translation models, machine translation optimization, and the communication of Chinese culture, so as to provide references for the English translation practice of Chinese lyrical prose and the overseas communication of Chinese culture.

Keywords

The Sight of Father's Back; Human translation; Machine translation; Human-machine collaboration; Lyrical Prose

1. Introduction

Against the background of globalization, the translation of Chinese literature has become a vital channel for the dissemination of Chinese culture abroad. Lyrical prose, with its implicit artistic conception, delicate emotions, and distinct national

cultural traits, serves as a vital carrier to show Chinese aesthetic modes and values to the world. Zhu Ziqing's *The Sight of Father's Back* depicts a scene of parting between father and son in simple language, weaving Chinese-style reserved familial affection, the ethics of filial piety, and a sense of attachment to the countryside into everyday details. Possessing both literary aesthetic value and cultural significance, it stands as a representative text in the study of the English translation of modern Chinese prose. With the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence technology, machine translation tools driven by large language models—such as DeepL(NMT) and DeepSeek(LLM)—have been widely adopted in translation practice due to their efficiency, convenience and semantic accuracy. Whilst these tools offer new technical pathways for literary translation, they have also sparked academic debate regarding their suitability for literary works.

This paper selects the translations by Zhang Peiji, DeepL and DeepSeek as research samples. Zhang Peiji's translation is widely recognized in academic circles as a classic human translation, balancing literary merit, emotional resonance and cultural sensitivity; DeepL is a mainstream international commercial translation tool, representing the standard of mature, general-purpose machine translation; DeepSeek, based on domestic large language models, excels in syntactic restructuring and contextual understanding, representing the development direction of the new generation of intelligent translation. Together, they cover both mature overseas models and emerging domestic large models, offering a relatively comprehensive reflection of the typical characteristics of current machine translation.

From four dimensions of lexical richness, sentence structure, emotional expression, and cultural value transmission, this paper compares the translation effects of the three versions. It acknowledges the advantages of machine translation in terms of information transmission and translation efficiency, whilst also pointing out its shortcomings in literary quality, emotional expression and cultural sensitivity. Meanwhile, it objectively analyzes the strengths and limitations of human translation, explores the feasibility of the human-machine collaborative translation model in literary texts, provides a reference for the English translation practice of lyrical prose, and facilitates the overseas communication of national essences such as the culture of filial piety and nostalgia for homeland.

2. Core Dimensions of Comparison and Research Content

2.1. Comparison of Lexical Richness

Lexical richness is a core evaluative dimension in the translation of literary prose, and the selection of verbs, adjectives and culture-loaded terms collectively constitutes a multidimensional picture of the lexical richness of a translation. As a paradigmatic work of lyrical prose, *The Sight of Father's Back* features language that is plain yet delicate, with sincere emotions expressed in an implicit manner. This

unique stylistic feature imposes higher requirements on translators' lexical selection abilities.

2.1.1. Verbal Richness

Verbs directly determine the vividness and emotional tension of the narrative picture. In the classic paragraph of the father climbing the platform to buy oranges in *The Sight of Father's Back*, continuous actions form the emotional climax of the whole text. Different translations show significant differences in the diversity, accuracy, and literariness of verb selection, which centrally reflect the lexical gap between human and machine translation.

Original: 蹒跚地走到铁道边，慢慢探身下去……他用两手攀着上面，两脚再向上缩；他肥胖的身子向左微倾……

Zhang Peiji: hobble towards the railway track... climb down... held onto... huddled up... tipped slightly towards the left

DeepL: shuffling to the edge of the tracks... leaning down... gripped... pulling up... tilted slightly to the left

DeepSeek: hobble towards the railway track... climb down... clutched... heave up... tilted slightly towards the left

Zhang Peiji uses a set of non-repetitive verbs to layer by layer restore the father's faltering, laborious, and clumsy movements. "Hobble", a literary written term, is more appropriate for the image of an old and fat man struggling than the colloquial shuffling. "Held onto", "huddled up", and "tipped" carefully restore the whole process of laborious clinging, cramped drawing-up of feet, and slight tilting, balancing the sense of reality of movements and the pity for the father, and conforming to the implicit and restrained style of the prose. DeepL's verb selection tends to be popular and general; "shuffling" and "pulling up" only convey basic actions with monotonous and plain vocabulary, lacking literary modification and weakening the clumsy and difficult texture of the father. DeepSeek repeats the first two verbs with Zhang Peiji, showing certain traces of imitation, reflecting the powerful retrieval and application capabilities of AI algorithms, but also insufficient innovation in independent word selection. For example, "clutched" and "heave up" convey excessive force, focusing on struggling and deviating from the slow and restrained movement state of the original text, destroying the warm and sad lyrical atmosphere. It can be seen that human translation features delicate and layered verb selection with prominent aesthetics; while machine translation, though accurate and standardized with strong readability and practicability in general scenarios, is significantly inferior to human translation in literary processing for literary works.

2.1.2. Adjectival and Adverbial Richness

Adjectives and adverbs undertake the functions of modifying actions, depicting

states, and setting off emotions. The Sight of Father's Back is known for implicit and restrained lyricism, and expressions such as irony, self-mockery, and euphemistic moods highly rely on the accurate transmission of adjectives and adverbs.

Original: 聪明过分、太聪明; 家中光景很是惨淡; 老境却如此颓唐

Zhang Peiji: smart aleck、smarty; in reduced circumstances; downcast in old age

DeepL: rather too clever for my own good、far too clever; in dire straits; decline in old age

DeepSeek: smart aleck、smart-alecky; a bleak time; downcast in old age

Zhang Peiji balances stylistic appropriateness and emotional delicacy in the use of adjectives and adverbs. "Smart aleck" and "smarty" accurately restore the self-mockery and guilt in irony, and elegant written words such as "in reduced circumstances" and "downcast" conform to the literariness of the prose with restrained and delicate emotional expression. DeepL's wording is relatively straightforward and popular with certain practical advantages, but "in dire straits" is relatively strong in tone, destroying the plain and restrained tone of the original text; "rather too clever for my own good", though completing semantic conversion, is slightly plain in handling the implicit charm of irony. DeepSeek can reproduce high-quality modifiers from human translations, showing strong learning ability. However, it also suffers from repeated forms and single meanings of modifiers. The near-synonym reuse of "smart-alecky" and the foregoing "smart aleck" indicates insufficient lexical flexibility and relatively single lexical levels. It can be seen that human translation takes into account stylistic adaptation and emotional appropriateness of modifiers to achieve euphemistic and delicate emotional transmission; while machine translation either has unbalanced tone or monotonous vocabulary, making it difficult to fit the implicit expression style of the prose.

2.1.3. Culture-Loaded Terms

Culture-loaded terms refer to words, phrases, and idioms that signify things unique to a certain culture. These terms reflect the unique ways of life gradually accumulated by a specific nation in the long historical process, different from other nations (Liao Qiyi, 2000). Bearing specific historical context and national cultural connotations, the translation of culture-loaded terms is not only lexical conversion but also tests cultural adaptability and lexical appropriateness.

Original: 赋闲; 大去之期; 黑布大马褂、深青布棉袍

Zhang Peiji: unemployment; depart this life; black cloth mandarin jacket and dark blue cotton-padded cloth long gown

DeepL: unemployed; my time is drawing near; black cloth overcoat and dark blue cotton robe

DeepSeek: unemployment; depart on the Long Journey; black mandarin jacket and black blue cotton-padded gown

Zhang Peiji adopts the translation strategy combining domestication and

foreignization, with appropriate, elegant, and complete translations of culture-loaded terms. The Chinese euphemistic expression for death “大去之期” is translated as “depart this life”, conforming to English euphemistic expressions; traditional costume terms completely retain the culturally specific concepts of “mandarin jacket” and “cotton-padded gown”, retaining the original cultural characteristics of the era to the maximum extent while adapting to English readers’ cognition. DeepL mostly adopts literal translation; “overcoat and cotton robe” weaken the cultural characteristics of costumes and do not correspond accurately to “mandarin jacket” and “cotton-padded gown” in the original text; “my time is drawing near” is plain and straightforward, lacking literariness and cultural connotations. DeepSeek suffers from unbalanced cultural context adaptation. “Depart on the Long Journey” is rigid literal translation under Chinese thinking, inconsistent with English idiomatic expressions, with forced rhetoric and distorted cultural information transmission, failing to achieve the lexical appropriateness and cultural balance of human translation. It can be seen that human translation balances cultural connotations, stylistic appropriateness, and reader acceptance to achieve accurate translation of culture-loaded terms; while machine translation either generalizes and simplifies or rigidly translates literally, easily causing cultural information loss or incoherence.

2.2. Comparison of Sentence Structures

The artistic handling of sentence structure is crucial in literary prose translation. The Sight of Father’s Back forms a soothing and gloomy lyrical rhythm through the alternation of long and short sentences, connects narration and emotion through paratactic expression, and conveys implicit and sincere father-son affection via lyrical sentence patterns. Whether the translation can restore the rhythm of short sentences, rationalize the logic of long sentences, and adapt to lyrical sentence patterns directly determines the reproduction effect of narrative charm and emotional atmosphere.

2.2.1. Comparison of Short Sentence Rhythm

The rhythm of short sentences refers to the translator’s ability to recreate the original narrative charm through sentence length, pause density, and sentence tightness. The Sight of Father’s Back is mainly characterized by short clauses and concise short sentences, with a slow and restrained rhythm forming an implicit and restrained lyrical tone. The translation should retain the original rhythm within the English syntactic framework to avoid mechanical splitting and emotional compression.

Original: 我赶紧拭干了泪，怕他看见，也怕别人看见。

Zhang Peiji: I quickly wiped them away lest he or others should catch me crying.

DeepL: I quickly wiped them away, afraid he might see, and afraid others might see.

DeepSeek: I quickly wiped them away so that neither he nor anyone else might see them.

Zhang Peiji uses “lest” to introduce an adverbial of purpose, compressing three short Chinese clauses into a single English sentence with few pauses and stable emotions, fitting the restrained psychology of “holding back tears” in the original text. The rhythm is steady and implicit, completely replicating the restrained emotional tone of the original text, with high unity of sentence structure and emotion. DeepL adopts the parallel structure “afraid... and afraid...”, formally retaining the “parallel” sense of the original text but resulting in lengthy sentences and fragmented rhythm, making the translation mechanical and flat with increased pauses and broken rhythm, contrary to the original’s slow and restrained tone—a typical mechanical splitting of Chinese short sentences in machine translation. DeepSeek uses “so that” adverbial of purpose to integrate sentence structures with clear logic and standard grammar, but the overall sentence is slightly long and formal. Though “neither he nor anyone else” compresses the object, the referent of “see them” becomes “tears” rather than “my crying”, deviating from the emotional focus of the original text. It can be seen that machine translation mainly excels in rigorous overall grammar, clear logic, and regular sentence patterns without grammatical errors, but is deficient in emotional rhythm processing.

2.2.2. Comparison of the Logic in Long Sentences

Chinese long sentences are mainly paratactic with few connectives and rely on semantic connection; while English long sentences are hypotactic at the core, relying on main predicates, clauses, participles, and absolute constructions to build logical levels. The ability to construct long-sentence logic is a key indicator of translation quality, reflecting whether the translation conforms to English expression norms and maintains movement coherence and narrative integrity.

Original: 那年冬天，祖母死了，父亲的差使也交卸了，正是祸不单行的日子，我从北京到徐州，打算跟着父亲奔丧回家。

Zhang Peiji: Misfortunes never come singly. In the winter of more than two years ago, grandma died and father lost his job. I left Beijing for Xuzhou to join father in hastening home to attend grandma’s funeral.

DeepL: That winter, my grandmother passed away and my father lost his post -- truly a time when one misfortune followed another. I travelled from Beijing to Xuzhou, intending to accompany my father home for the funeral.

DeepSeek: That winter, my grandmother passed away, and my father lost his job as well. Truly, misfortunes never come singly. I traveled from Beijing to Xuzhou, planning to follow my father back home for the funeral.

Breaking free from the original word order, Zhang Peiji adopts a general-to-specific narrative structure, starting with a proverb to summarize, then sequentially explaining family misfortunes and personal trips, realizing natural conversion from

parataxis to hypotaxis. Meanwhile, it specifically specifies “in the winter of more than two years ago”, echoing the foregoing “I have not seen my father for more than two years” in the original text—a detail processing unavailable in machine translations. The overall sentence structure is steady and soothing, conforming to English narrative logic and balancing narrative integrity and literary beauty. DeepL adopts a single integrated long sentence, connecting events and evaluations with a dash, and introducing an adverbial of purpose with the participle “intending to”, compressing multi-layered information of the original text into one sentence and retaining the coherent characteristics of Chinese long sentences. The structure is compact but internal logic relies on punctuation connection, favoring a literal-style long-sentence construction, reflecting machine translation’s tendency to prioritize formal correspondence over syntactic reconstruction. DeepSeek reorganizes the original long sentence into two standard compound sentences: first connecting parallel events with “and”, then independently introducing an evaluative sentence, and finally connecting subsequent actions with the participle “planning to”. The word order and cohesive devices conform to English hypotactic rules, with clear main predicates and explicit logical relations within long sentences. Compared with DeepL, DeepSeek conducts more reasonable grammatical reconstruction of the original structure, reflecting the syntactic reconstruction ability and translation efficiency of large language models. It can be seen that human translation focuses on literary word-order reconstruction and contextual echoing, while machine translation prioritizes grammatical norms and structural rigor.

2.2.3. Adaptability of Translating Lyrical Sentences

The lyricism of *The Sight of Father’s Back* is characterized by implicitness, restraint, and retrospection, conveying emotions through sentence rhythm and semantic tone. The adaptability of translating lyrical sentences is not only related to semantic accuracy but also determines whether the emotional intensity, literary atmosphere and aesthetic quality of the original text can be effectively conveyed, thereby achieving a unity of imagery, emotion and style.

Original: 我读到此处，在晶莹的泪光中，又看见那肥胖的，青布棉袍，黑布马褂的背影。

Zhang Peiji: Through the glistening tears which these words had brought to my eyes I again saw the back of father’s corpulent form in the dark blue cotton-padded cloth long gown and the black cloth mandarin jacket.

DeepL: Reading this, through glistening tears, I saw once more that stout figure clad in blue cotton robes and a black cloth jacket.

DeepSeek: I read the letter amidst the glistening tears, and again I seemed to see the back of father in his blue cotton-padded gown and black mandarin jacket, a big stout man waddling across the railway track.

Zhang Peiji adopts a stretched long sentence with prepositional phrases fronted and attributive clauses embedded, integrating the emotional process of “reading the

letter—shedding tears—recalling the back sight” into a coherent hypotactic structure. The sentence pattern is calm and prolonged with solemn and delicate wording, fitting the nostalgic and sentimental lyrical atmosphere and achieving high adaptation of image, emotion, and English prose sentence patterns with strong literary appeal. Machine translation generally has the advantages of conciseness, clarity, and low reading burden, suitable for lightweight fast-reading scenarios. Specifically, DeepL constructs a concise sentence pattern with participle phrases as adverbials, compact and straightforward overall, facilitating readers to quickly obtain information but greatly weakening lyrical meaning and deleting detailed descriptions of costumes. For classic literary works, simplification is not necessarily beneficial. DeepSeek adopts active addition in translation, supplementing dynamic details of “a big stout man waddling across the railway track”. This addition is reasonable to a certain extent: it enriches the sense of imagery at the information level, concretizes the abstract back sight, lowers the understanding threshold for overseas readers, and makes the character image more vivid and straightforward, reflecting the practical logic of large language models—“easy to understand and complete information”—as well as the ability to actively supplement scenes and improve narration. However, from the standpoint of stylistic requirements for lyrical prose, this addition proves detrimental rather than beneficial. The unauthorized insertion of dynamic action disrupts the original text’s tranquil, sentimental, and reserved emotional tone, forcibly transforming a static subjective recollection into dynamic narrative. According to Nida’s functional equivalence theory, translation should approximate the source text as closely as possible on two levels: first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style (Nida & Taber, 1969). DeepSeek’s active addition can be regarded as an excessive domestication strategy, which prioritizes fluent transparency in the target language, yet such an approach often comes at the cost of sacrificing the source text’s distinctive stylistic features and aesthetic atmosphere (Venuti, 1995). Consequently, this unwarranted addition exceeds the semantic boundary of the original work, violating the principle of literary translation that emphasizes fidelity not only to what is said but also to how it is expressed.

2.3. Comparison of Emotional Expression

The emotional expression of *The Sight of Father’s Back* conveys profound father-son affection, nostalgia, and guilt through implicit emotions, detailed actions, and moods. The cross-lingual transmission of emotional connotations is not only related to the integrity of literal information but also determines the effective reproduction of implicit emotions, literary texture, and lyrical charm of the original text.

2.3.1. Implicit Transmission of Profound Father-Son Affection

The father-son affection in *The Sight of Father’s Back* is centered on implicitness,

restraint, and reservation. Emotions are not directly expressed but hidden in actions, details, and scenes, reflecting the lyrical characteristic of Chinese family affection—“valuing deeds over words, meaning beyond words”.

Original: 我的眼泪又来了。

Zhang Peiji: My eyes were again wet with tears.

DeepL: My tears came again.

DeepSeek: only to have my eyes wet with tears again.

Zhang Peiji conveys profound emotions with euphemistic writing, restrained yet full. “Wet with tears” weakens the sense of movement and strengthens the emotional atmosphere, fitting the original restrained lyrical way and showing deep affection in plainness. DeepL strictly corresponds to the literal sentence pattern, only objectively stating the fact of “shedding tears” with plain and straightforward tone and no emotional layers, simplifying implicit lyricism into factual description without emotional processing. DeepSeek shows traces of imitating human translation expressions, reflecting strong learning ability, but adding the adversative conjunction “only to”, forcibly constructs an unexpected and abrupt semantic logic, inconsistent with the calm retrospective context of the original text. The sentence connection is stiff, destroying the slow and restrained lyrical rhythm of the original text, dissolving the restrained emotional tension and significantly losing implicitness. It is evident that human translation is capable of adhering to the aesthetics of Chinese lyricism, creating emotional resonance through the careful selection of words and sentence structures; while machine translation focuses on surface information transmission, mostly staying in literal semantic correspondence, with straightforward or stiff emotional expression and rigid emotional processing, losing the implicit beauty of the original text.

2.3.2. Transmission of Nostalgia

Nostalgia is the emotional background running through the whole text, originating from the author’s retrospection, longing, and melancholy after years, relying on sentence rhythm and lexical texture to create a sense of time thickness.

Original: 唉！我不知何时再能与他相见！

Zhang Peiji: Oh, how I long to see him again !

DeepL: Alas! When, I wonder, shall I see him again ?

DeepSeek: Oh, when will I ever see him again ?

On the surface, the original sentence is a question, but actually hides infinite longing and melancholy of not knowing when to meet again. The core is not to seek answers but to express nostalgic sentiment. Breaking away from the interrogative form of the original sentence, Zhang Peiji uses an exclamatory sentence pattern, with “long to” accurately conveying long-term inner expectation and attachment, weakening direct questioning, and implicitly pushing the long-term longing separated by years and the melancholy of nostalgia to a climax with a gloomy and soothing tone, fitting

the retrospective lyrical tone of the whole text with a strong sense of time thickness. Both DeepL and DeepSeek strictly retain the original interrogative sentence pattern, translating literally in direct questions, only conveying the surface doubtful tone without capturing the deep emotions of long-term separation and unquenchable longing behind the words, dissolving the nostalgic melancholy precipitated by time. It can be seen that human translation focuses on emotional sublimation and strengthening nostalgic implications; while machine translation needs to deepen emotional mining on the basis of high objectivity, faithfulness, and formal restoration.

2.3.3. Transmission of Guilt

Guilt is the author's self-reproach and introspection when looking back in adulthood, mainly embodied in the irony of "smarty". As an implicit emotion of the text, it requires the translator's empathic understanding to decode implicit irony and deep guilt and complete emotional transcoding for accurate restoration.

Original: 那时真是太聪明了!

Zhang Peiji: I can see how smarty I was in those days!

DeepL: I was far too clever then!

DeepSeek: I can see how smart and smart-alecky I was!

Zhang Peiji chooses the word "smarty", which means "overly clever and playing petty tricks" with derogatory connotations. The implied self-mockery in "smarty" euphemistically conveys regret and guilt, with delicate emotions fitting the original context. DeepL directly translates it as "too clever", only retaining the literal meaning without in-depth thinking about the emotions behind the original text, lacking the self-mockery implied in the original context and completely losing guilt. DeepSeek excessively superimposes derogatory colors, deliberately strengthening the accusatory tone, deviating from the euphemistic and introspective guilt tone of the original text. Most AI applications struggle to translate sarcasm accurately, particularly when humor depends on local cultural contexts, wordplay, and emotional intonation. Some translations become literal and lose their desired rhetorical effects (Cahyaningrum, 2025). DeepSeek's excessive negative coloring similarly deviates from the original text's reflective and self-aware emotional register. Therefore, the human translator's empathic ability and aesthetic judgment in decoding implicit emotions remain irreplaceable core advantages of current machine translation; while machine translation is more suitable for the conversion of explicit information—translating basic information of the text straightforwardly, objectively, and efficiently.

2.4. Comparison of Cultural Value Transmission

As a classic work of modern Chinese lyrical prose, *The Sight of Father's Back* embodies two core cultural connotations: traditional Chinese filial piety and

nostalgia for homeland. The cross-lingual transmission of cultural connotations is not only the conversion of literal information but also the complete recreation of national sentiments, ethical concepts, and the underlying spirit of the era.

2.4.1. Traditional Chinese Filial Piety Culture

Filial piety is the core cultural value of *The Sight of Father's Back*, manifested in the child's awakening of filial piety from not understanding the father in youth, to looking back at father's back in adulthood with guilt and gratitude. The emotions are implicit and value deeds over words, a typical expression of Oriental family ethics. Filial piety is not directly expressed but triggers inner transformation through the image of "the sight of father's back", requiring the translator to recognize the ethical connotations behind it. Human translation can grasp the spiritual core of filial piety culture; while machine translation only stays at literal semantics, prone to simplification and superficiality, leading to the loss of cultural connotations.

Zhang Peiji translates the core image as "the sight of father's back", adding "the sight of" to highlight the author's perspective of gazing, retrospection, and reflection. It is at the moment of gazing at his father's back that the author completes inner transformation, understands his father's deep love, breeds guilt, understanding, and filial piety, and realizes the awakening of filial piety. By supplementing the perspective, the translation elevates simple body description to the emotional node of child's filial piety awakening. With restrained narrative tone, it implicitly conveys the ethical core of Chinese-style "gratitude for parental kindness and belated filial piety". DeepL and DeepSeek directly simplify the core image to "father's back", only corresponding to body parts, ignoring the ethical significance of "the sight of father's back" triggering the author's filial piety awakening and its cultural connotation as a symbol of fatherly love and carrier of filial piety. They degrade cultural images to ordinary nouns, making it difficult for Western readers to understand why "the sight of father's back" becomes the emotional and cultural core of the whole text and leading to the loss of ethical orientation of cultural images and defective cultural semantics. It can be seen that with aesthetic perception, emotional empathy, cultural understanding, and syntactic ingenuity, human translation is more suitable for translating texts focusing on artistic conception, emotions, and cultural connotations such as lyrical prose than cold machines.

2.4.2. Nostalgia for Homeland

Nostalgia for one's native land in *The Sight of Father's Back* is rooted in the Chinese cultural psyche characterized by a deep attachment to one's homeland, an prioritization of home, and a reluctance to leave one's native soil. It manifests as a longing for a stable home, a sense of melancholy at leaving one's homeland to wander, and an attachment to one's family roots, often conveyed implicitly through the narrative setting. The cross-linguistic transmission of this sense of attachment

relies on the translator's understanding of the cultural logic of "home-homeland-stability".

Original: 近几年来, 父亲和我都是东奔西走。

Zhang Peiji: In recent years, both father and I have been living an unsettled life.

DeepL: In recent years, both Father and I have been constantly on the move.

DeepSeek: In recent years, both my father and I have been constantly on the move.

Zhang Peiji chooses the phrase "unsettled life", which not only refers to physical wandering but also conveys the cultural melancholy of homelessness, physical and mental unease, and reluctance to return to native land, accurately fitting the deep Chinese psychology of "attachment to homeland" and implicitly expressing the pain of wandering and longing for home stability. In translating this sentence, DeepSeek and DeepL are highly consistent, only using "on the move" to directly describe the surface action of "constant moving and wandering", completely stripping the sense of instability and local attachment contained in this phrase. They simplify the expression full of cultural emotions into objective behavioral statements, completely losing local feelings, failing to understand the cultural connotation of family decline and far away from homeland behind this phrase, lacking emotional warmth and cultural thickness, and only completing translation at the information level. It can be seen that human translation can accurately select words to convey cultural roots, while machine translation only conducts literal action translation, lacking cultural and emotional cognition, leading to serious dilution of cultural implications.

3. Conclusions and Implications

3.1. Research Conclusions

Taking Zhu Ziqing's classic lyrical prose *The Sight of Father's Back* as the text, this paper compares and analyzes the translation effects of Zhang Peiji's human translation(HT), DeepL translation(NMT), and DeepSeek translation(LLM) from four dimensions: lexical richness, sentence structure, emotional expression, and cultural value transmission. It explores the differences, advantages, and disadvantages of human and AI machine translation in literary prose translation, drawing the following main conclusions.

In terms of machine translation performance, both DeepL(NMT) and DeepSeek(LLM) boast evident edges in semantic accuracy, grammatical standardization, rigorous sentence pattern and translation efficiency, capable of realizing fast basic language conversion with high information fidelity and minor semantic deviation. DeepL(NMT) features fluent wording and natural expression that conform to Western readers' reading habits; DeepSeek(LLM) shows strong competence in sentence restructuring and high-quality vocabulary learning and reuse, embodying the great potential of large language model translation. Nevertheless, machine translation reveals prominent deficiencies in literary lexical refinement, sentence rhythm reconstruction, implicit emotional perception and in-depth interpretation of

culture-loaded terms. It tends to adopt plain generalized vocabulary, rigid literal sentence splitting, superficial emotional literal rendering and oversimplified or mechanically literal translation of cultural images, easily resulting in the loss of literary flavor, subtle emotional implication and cultural connotation, which limits its application in classic lyrical prose translation.

By contrast, human translation represented by Zhang Peiji holds irreplaceable literary aesthetic and cultural advantages. With delicate literary perception, emotional empathy and profound cultural literacy, human translators can precisely grasp layered lexical collocation, original sentence rhythm, restrained implicit emotion and the ethical and nostalgic connotations behind cultural imagery. Human translation excels in polishing lexical literariness, optimizing hypotactic logic of long and short sentences, reproducing nostalgic and guilty emotional undertones, and balancing domestication and foreignization in cultural term translation, presenting higher aesthetic value, artistic conception and cultural depth suitable for classic literature appreciation and cross-cultural communication. Meanwhile, human translation is constrained by long working cycles, strong subjectivity and relatively low output efficiency in practical translation practice.

From an overall perspective, human translation and machine translation are not mutually exclusive but complementary in strengths and application scenarios. Machine translation is more suitable for standardized, efficient and surface-level information transmission, while human translation dominates in profound aesthetic expression, emotional nuance reproduction and cultural value inheritance. Over-reliance on machine translation will dilute the literariness and cultural implication of prose works, whereas pure dependence on human translation leads to low efficiency and high cost. Accordingly, human-machine collaborative translation has become an inevitable developmental direction for future literary prose translation.

3.2. Translation Implications

Based on the above comparative research findings, combined with the stylistic features of lyrical prose and the current development status of AI translation technology, this section summarizes practical implications for lyrical prose translation practice, translator competence cultivation, machine translation model optimization and Chinese cultural overseas communication.

Lyrical prose translation should prioritize the integration of emotional reproduction and cultural inheritance on the premise of ensuring semantic accuracy. As lyrical prose features implicit sentiment and profound cultural accumulation, translation is far more than simple linguistic symbol conversion. Translators need to deeply interpret the original text, distinguish the subtle differences of lexical implication, sentence rhythm and emotional tone, avoid blind literal equivalence, and adapt to the reserved and introverted writing style of Chinese prose in diction, sentence construction and mood rendering, so as to achieve the integration of linguistic

beauty, emotional resonance and cultural connotation.

It is essential to establish a scientific human-machine collaborative translation mechanism tailored to literary texts. The translation industry should view machine translation dialectically and fully exert the unique advantages of human translation in aesthetic judgment and emotional empathy. For lyrical prose and other emotion-oriented literary works, machine translation can serve as a powerful auxiliary tool to complete draft generation, vocabulary proofreading and information retrieval by virtue of its high efficiency and standardization, effectively improving overall translation progress. Translators, in turn, should give full play to subjective initiative, conduct literary polishing, emotional refinement and cultural compensation on machine-translated versions, so as to make up for AI's inherent weaknesses in identifying implicit irony, subtle emotions and deep cultural connotations.

It is urgent to optimize machine translation models oriented to literary discourse scenarios. In view of the characteristics of lyrical prose with delicate emotion and rich cultural imagery, it is necessary to strengthen the model's modules of literary aesthetic recognition, subtle emotion identification and cultural connotation understanding. Targeted optimization should be made in refined lexical selection, sentence rhythm control and the processing of irony and implicit expressions, so as to improve the model's ability in handling culture-loaded terms and literary sentence patterns, enhance the literariness and contextual adaptability of AI translation in literary works.

Importantly, under the background of Chinese cultural external dissemination, literary translation should maintain a proper balance between cultural fidelity and cross-cultural adaptation. Translators should accurately excavate core cultural elements such as traditional filial piety ethics and homeland nostalgia embedded in the text, and adopt a combined strategy of domestication and foreignization. On the premise of retaining the unique cultural characteristics of Chinese prose, translators should conform to the language cognition habits of overseas readers, so as to realize the effective overseas dissemination of Chinese lyrical prose and traditional Chinese culture.

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