

# Reading Poems: An Empirical and Intercultural Study

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## Abstract

This article aims to reveal in a comparative and empirical way how subjects with English cultural backgrounds or Chinese cultural backgrounds read, engage with and interpret literary texts and how they respond to the culturally loaded discourse by writers from the same or different cultural backgrounds. The study is made to see if the Chinese subjects are more responsive to the imagery poems than English subjects and if there are different sequences in their image formation. It intends to reveal how different cultural and linguistic schemata are used by subjects from both Chinese and English cultures when they read culturally sensitive literary materials and to exemplify how the subjects read and respond in terms of their different schemata which result in the differences and similarities in their interpretations and responses in their literary reading.

## Introduction

In literary studies, images and cultural connotations have always been the researched domain of the field. Cognitive linguistics has challenged the traditional ways of literary studies and paved the way for the cognitive study of images and semantics of literary texts such as English poems. It is assumed that images constitute the dominants of poetic text messages especially in Chinese poems, that text formations and functions of textual elements are regulated by some cognitive mechanisms, and that a verse represents a poetic image space that can be regarded as the medium where everyday concepts undergo modifications and become poetic images. In a text there exists a program of its interpretation, the strategies and tactics of correlation of text semantics with the knowledge about the structure of communication that are embodied in the text. It is claimed that image space exploration can be treated as a cognitive strategy in poetic texts interpretation. The image interpretations of poetic texts vary from one another from different cultural backgrounds.

The study is made to see if the Chinese subjects are more responsive to the imagery poems than English subjects and if they have different sequences in their image formation. It intends to reveal how different cultural and linguistic schemata are used by these subjects when they read the culturally sensitive materials.

## Method

### Subjects

This empirical and intercultural study is based on the data collected through questionnaires from thirty English and Chinese postgraduates. Fifteen of the Chinese MA students are English majors in one of the key universities in Beijing. Fifteen British MA students are English majors in one of the key universities in England. They both major in literary studies in English. But there are different variables between the two subject groups. The former takes three years to get their master degrees while the latter takes one year to accomplish their MA study. Besides, their MA courses vary to a large extent. However all these uncontrollable variables will not affect much of their competence in answering the questionnaires.

### Materials

There are four poems used in this quantitative study. They are:

**Poem 1: Remember Younger Brothers by Du Fu**

Not a single soul around while sentries beat drums,  
A lone swan cries somewhere at the autumn boundary;  
Commencing tonight dews are supposed to turn white,  
The moon at home must be very much brighter by now,  
All my younger brothers thus far are still missing,  
After homeless I can't tell they are dead or alive;  
All the letters I sent home were found undelivered,  
What else can I do when no truce is still in sight?

**Poem 2: An Untitled Poem by Li Shangyin**

'Tis excitedly unbearable to meet as well as to depart,  
Easterly wind weakens while all kinds of flowers faded,  
Spring silk worm died after it ended fibre productions,  
A candle turns to ashes when shedding of tears dries up;  
Looking at morning mirror I worry my temple is changed,  
Humming verse at night moonlight appeared to be chilly,  
As the legendary Mount Penglai isn't far from my place,  
I asked the blue bird to convey you my kindest regards.

**Poem 3: Meeting at Night by Robert Browning**

The grey sea and the long black land;  
And the yellow half-moon large and low,  
And the startled little waves that leap  
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,  
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,  
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;  
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;  
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch  
And blue spurt of a lighted match,  
And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,  
Than the two hearts beating each to each!

**Poem 4: Metaphors by Sylvia Plath**

I'm a riddle in nine syllables,  
An elephant, a ponderous house,  
A melon strolling on two tendrils,  
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!  
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.  
Money's new-minted in this fat purse.  
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.  
I've eaten a bag of green apples,  
Boarded a train there's no getting off.

*The questionnaire design*

The questionnaire consists of three parts. Both Sections I and II are preliminary steps. Though they can offer some useful information for the backgrounds of the subjects, they are mainly used to keep the subjects from knowing the real purpose of the research, which hopefully will be achieved in Section III, the prime focus of the questionnaire. The four poems have been displayed

separately without either titles or names of the poets. A question framework has been used for the reading of all four poems for easy comparison and contrast. The questions in this section deal mainly with images, cultural references, metaphors, narrative sequences of the poems, visual references, identification of cultural tendency of poems and the entitling for each poem. The data analysis in this paper will basically focus on some aspects in Section III.

## Discussion of results — Understanding images in the four poems

### *Images in these poems*

All of the four poems (see Poems 1-4) used in this questionnaire are full of imagistic signs that can form images. If each poem is analysed according to the categories of visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and kinaesthetic images, different images can be found in it (Raffel, 1984).

Most of the images in Poem 1 are visual and auditory as shown below.

- Visual : a lone swan, *White Dew*, homeless, younger brother's missing, brighter moon at home
- Auditory : a lone swan cries, sentries beating drum

In Poem 2, most of the images are visual and kinaesthetic.

- Visual : spring worm, burning candles and tears, bird to convey regards, humming verse at moonlight, wind and flowers' reflection in the mirror
- Kinaesthetic: meet and part, spring worm, burning candle and tears, bird to convey regards, humming verse, reflection in the mirror

In Poem 3, the images are much more varied. There are visual, auditory, gustatory, tactile and kinaesthetic images. Even within visual images there are images typical of forms and colours. The combinations of different images provide readers with different ways of perception.

- Visual (forms): the long . . . land, the . . . half-moon, the . . . little waves in . . . ringlets . . . spurt of the . . . match
- Visual (colour): the grey sea, the . . . black land, the yellow . . . moon, the startled . . . waves in fiery . . . blue . . . the lighted match
- Auditory and kinaesthetic: pushing prow, a tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch of a . . . match, a voiceless louder than the two hearts beating
- Gustatory : sea-scented beach
- Tactile : warm . . . beach

Poem 4 consists of images that are superficially irrelevant to each other. It seems as if each of the images stands by itself. Like a riddle, it puzzles most of its readers, because it is difficult for them to find out the common connecting feature of these images. The images in Poem 4 can be classified into the following categories:

- Visual : an elephant, a ponderous house, a melon, red fruit, ivory, fine timbers, loaf, money, the fat purse, a stage, a cow in calf, a bag of green apples, a train
- Auditory : O
- Kinaesthetic: a melon stroking on two tendrils, this loaf's big with its yeasty rising, I've eaten a bag of green apples, boarded on a train there's no getting off

*The images the subjects have formed in their reading*

Can these subjects catch hold of all images in their reading? Can they understand all the imagistic signs? The answer can be seen in the following tables (Hereafter, E stands for English subjects while C stands for Chinese subjects.) which display how many images they have grasped in their reading and which of the images are scaled as the most important in their understanding.

IMAGES	Total numbers		Most important		IMAGES	Total numbers		Most important	
	E	C	E	C		E	C	E	C
War	14	14	10	6	Brothers missing	7	5	0	0
A lone swan	5	11	0	3	Bright moon ...	5	8	1	2
White Dew	3	9	0	0	Undelivered letter	7	8	1	0
Homeless	11	7	3	3	Sentries beating...	5	7	0	1
					(Total)	57	69		

Table 1: Poem 1

IMAGES	Total numbers		Most important		IMAGES	Total numbers		Most important	
	E	C	E	C		E	C	E	C
Meet and part	8	11	5	9	Bird to convey...	7	12	3	0
Mount Penglai	5	9	1	1	Humming verse...	2	11	0	0
Spring worm	5	14	1	3	Wind and flowers	6	14	0	0
Burning candle...	6	15	1	1	Reflection in the...	6	13	1	1
					(Total)	45	99		

Table 2: Poem 2

IMAGES	Total numbers		Most important		IMAGES	Total numbers		Most important	
	E	C	E	C		E	C	E	C
A tap at the pane	6	12	2	0	Beach	8	13	0	1
Moon	11	13	0	2	Farm	4	12	0	0
Wave	8	13	2	0	Sea and land	10	10	5	3
Ringlets	5	8	0	0	Blue spurt	9	12	0	1
Cove	6	7	1	1	Low voice	5	9	0	0
Two beating hearts	6	12	4	7	Slushy sand	5	10	0	0
					(Total)	85	131		

Table 3: Poem 3

IMAGES	Total numbers		Most important		IMAGES	Total numbers		Most important	
	E	C	E	C		E	C	E	C
A riddle	9	3	5	2	Money	5	4	0	0
An elephant	9	6	1	3	A melon	10	6	1	0
A non-stop train	10	8	3	4	Green apples	7	6	0	0
Red fruit	3	6	1	2	Cow	8	4	0	0
leaf	9	3	0	0	(Total)	70	46		

Table 4: Poem 4

It appears that the Chinese subjects have grasped more images than the British subjects in their reading of all the poems except Poem 4 (see Table 1, 2, 3, 4). In the readings of Poem 1 (see Table 1) in these two groups, the striking difference in the number of the images is marked by 'a lone swan' and 'White Dew'. More Chinese subjects understand such images, because in their culture the sad cry of a swan signifies loneliness and sadness. 'White Dew' per se is the seasonal period in the Chinese lunar calendar. It is the time to become chilly. The word *white* is the colour Chinese people wear at a funeral. *Dew* is transient and temporal. (Anon, 1987) All these cultural-specific schemata provide the Chinese subjects with enough material to form images. The colour word *white* has quite different cultural connotations in English culture. It implies 'purity' and is used for marriage (Hirsch et al, 1988). It does not give the clue that might stimulate the schemata of 'loneliness' easily as in Chinese culture.

Almost all the subjects from both groups claim that they have the image of 'war' and it is the most important image in their understanding. As a matter of fact the word war per se does not appear in the poem. Its image is formed by means of interrelated schemata with different images indicating 'war', such as *sentries beating drums*, *a lone swan*, *homeless brothers missing*, *undelivered letter*. The density of such images is tinted with an atmosphere of war. However both groups understand the poem and come to an appropriate conclusion. But the result tends to show that these Chinese subjects rely on more images than the British subjects in their reading as partially identified in some qualitative studies by the researcher (c.f. Chang, 2002, 2004 & 2005).

The images the British subjects grasp in Poem 2 (see Table 2) is half less than the images obtained by the Chinese subjects. One of the reasons for such a result is that most of the images are culture-oriented. *Mount Penglai* comes from a Chinese legend. Poetic lines like *Spring silk worm died...* *A candle turns to ashes...* have become culturally fixed expressions in Chinese culture to symbolize full devotion and contribution. *The withering flowers*, *humming verse*, *reflections in the mirror* are all stereotyped in Chinese culture for their specific meanings (Anon, 1987). Since the poem is dense with culturally loaded images, it is very difficult for the British subjects to process it logically. Their conclusive remarks about the theme of the poem are quite different and diverse.

The result of Poem 3 (see Table 3) further shows that Chinese subjects form more images than the British subjects do. Though it is an English poem, they try to interpret it by means of forming seemingly appropriate images in their mind so long as the textual and semantic components in the poem for image forming are not very culturally bound. If some connotative differences do appear in their cultural connotations, they are slight and not as striking as those appear in Poem 4. They share many overlapping cultural features, which result in the convergence of the native culture schemata and English culture schemata of the Chinese subjects.

However, the images the English subjects get in their understanding of Poem 4 (see Table 4) are more than the Chinese subjects. The latter fail in grasping the suitable images because in composing her poem, Plath jigsawed the clues that can stimulate their schemata to form relevant images, and embedded the stimulating clues deeply in the semantic density of the poems. Lack of relevant English culture schemata and confined by their own culture, the Chinese subjects fail in breaking the cultural bondage to form the necessary images. The difficulties they meet in their image formation for understanding Poem 4 bring them frustration. Finally most of them fail to understand the poem. Without images as media, their comprehension comes to a halt and they are at loss what to do.

#### *The words that offer visual references in the poems*

Almost half of the English subjects do not think Poem 1 (see Table 5) has a visual impact. They do not see any of the words that offer visual references. The rest, who do think positively of the poem in this respect, concentrate on only few words. These words are *swan*, *moon*, *white* and *bright*. Most of the Chinese subjects think that the words *swan*, *dew* and *moon* offer visual references. Three of them do not think that the words in the poem bring them many visual references.

Words that offer visual references	Total numbers		Words that offer visual references	Total numbers	
	E	C		E	C
Sentries	1	3	White	6	3
Swan	5	11	Bright	5	3
Dew	3	11	Drum	2	4
Moon	6	10	Beat	0	2
Brothers	0	2	Cries	0	1
Letter	0	4	Homeless	2	2
Lone	3	2	Missing	1	0
Autumn	0	1	Undelivered	0	2
Turn	0	1	(Total number)	34	65
(No)*	7	3	*No words that offer visual references		

Table 5: Poem 1

Only three from the English group and two from the Chinese group show a negative attitude to the vividness of Poem 2 (see Table 6). More than half the native subjects say that the words *flower*, *ashes* and *blue bird* are most likely to present them with vivid pictures. The *flowers* in the context of the poem are associated with withering flowers. The word *ashes* is also related to 'ending', as in a western funeral, people often say 'earth to earth; ashes to ashes; dust to dust' (Widdowson, 1975). The *blue bird* is a small American bird akin to the warblers (Hirsch et al, 1988). It is more prototypical to the English subjects than the Chinese subjects. When the term in the poem is translated from Chinese *qingniao* (a blue coloured bird), it takes on a more English tint. Few Chinese subjects know what kind of bird it is.

Table 6 shows that most Chinese subjects focus on such phrases as *wind*, *flowers*, *spring silk worm*, *candle* and *moonlight*. *Wind* is the word they use very often for symbolism. The East wind represents revolutionary force. It means something that brings back life and freshness. The West wind means reactionary force that destroys life. The *withering flowers* share the same connotation as in western culture. *Spring silk worm* is a model of self-devotion for the benefit of others. *Candle* is associated with either misery or self-devotion. The *candle* here has nothing to do with 'church' or 'party'. In one sense, it symbolises sadness, because it has drops like the shedding of tears. In the past, people used red candles for their wedding evening. If the marriage is not voluntary or unhappy, the bride's secret shedding of tears is referred to as a *red candle shedding tears*, because the bride is usually dressed in red on this occasion like a red candle. Its symbolic meaning of self-devotion has been used ever since the appearance of the poem. It originated from a routine phenomenon which could be seen in every household where candles burnt themselves out in order to provide light for others. And *moonlight is brighter at home* is rather an idiomatic expression to show one's patriotic feelings. One loves one's home so much that one feels that the moon in one's home town/village is the brightest and fullest. (Anon, 1967) It is like the English saying 'East, west, home is best.' Most of the Chinese subjects are familiar with the connotative meanings of the words. They have complete native cultural schemata to form vivid pictures in their minds.

Words that offer visual references	Total numbers		Words that offer visual references	Total numbers	
	E	C		E	C
Wind	1	8	Chilly	2	1
Flowers	7	12	Tears	2	4
Spring silk worm	1	10	Mount Penglai	2	2
Candle	3	13	Humming	1	0
Ashes	9	3	Shedding	2	3
Temple	0	5	Legendary	1	0
Mirror	2	5	Excitedly	1	0
Moonlight	5	6	Unbearable	1	0
Blue bird	8	5	Dries up	2	2
Appeared	1	1	Worry	0	1
(No)*	3	2	(Total number)	51	83

\*No words that offer visual references

Table 6: Poem 2

There are fifty-six content words and thirty-seven function words in Poem 3. Among its content words, there are nineteen adjectives, twenty-five nouns, five verbs and seven pronouns. Usually the content words are more susceptible to image formation. The result of these groups show that five content words in this poem stimulates more than half of the English subjects' visual references while five content words do the same thing to the Chinese subjects. If one compares the words that achieve this effect, one can find that these words are different in their parts of speech. The five words that are stimulating to the English subjects are adjectives. They are *grey*, *black*, *yellow*, *fiery* and *blue*. These adjectives can offer them visual references. Among these five words four of them are straight colour words. Though *fiery* is not a pure colour word, it is closely related to it. The five content words that attract the interests of the Chinese subjects in this respect are four nouns and one adjective. They are *sea*, *land*, *half-moon*, *waves*, and *grey*. The four nouns are content words of concrete signs. But they do not offer the English subjects as much visual reference as they do to the Chinese subjects. The difference is very striking as shown in the table below.

Words that offer visual references	Total numbers		Words that offer visual references	Total numbers	
	E	C		E	C
Sea	1	8	Half-moon	6	9
Land	1	7	Waves	2	7

Table 7

The comparison of the nouns that offer most of them visual pictures in the previous poems can throw light on the difference in numbers of subjects between the two groups (see Table 8).



Words that offer visual references	Total numbers		Words that offer visual references	Total numbers	
	E	C		E	C
Swan	5	11	Candle	3	13
Dew	3	11	Ashes	9	3
Moon	6	10	Moonlight	5	8
Wind	1	8	Blue bird	8	5
Flowers	7	12	Spring silk worm	1	10

Table 8

The summary seems to indicate that the Chinese subjects are more sensitive to the nouns of concrete sign than the English subjects in their imagery formation. The precondition for their sensitivity is that they are familiar with these concrete things and can understand them in a given context. If they cannot understand the concrete things in a given context, they are not sensitive to these nouns. This can be exemplified with the result of Poem 4 (see Table 9 below). Six English subjects read visually to the word *melon* against only two Chinese. A similar thing happens to the word *tendrils*. Four of the Chinese subjects realize the hugeness of the *elephant*. This can be traced in their answers. However both groups do not find as many visual references as they do in reading other poems. Its cause may lie in their failure in understanding the poem.

Words that offer visual references	Total numbers		Words that offer visual references	Total numbers	
	E	C		E	C
Melon	6	2	Tendrils	8	4
Ivory	4	0	Apples	3	2
Loaf	2	2	Train	3	1
Purse	2	2	Elephant	1	4
Cow	1	3	Fine timber	1	1
Money	1	0	Fruit	0	1

Table 9

Unlike the Chinese subjects, the English subjects seem to be more sensitive to the adjectives. The number differences of these words between the two groups are also very obvious.

Words that offer visual references	Total numbers		Words that offer visual references	Total numbers	
	E	C		E	C
Grey	9	7	Fiery	10	1
Black	11	6	Blue	12	3
Yellow	12	4			

Table 10

Such a phenomenon appears not only in the reading process of Poem 3. Similar examples can be found in those of other poems (see Table 11).

Words that offer visual references	Total numbers		Words that offer visual references	Total numbers	
	E	C		E	C
White	6	3	Bright	5	3
Ponderous	6	2	Yeasty	4	0
Red	5	0	Green	7	1
Fat	6	2			

Table 11

Besides, most of the subjects are sensitive to the visual images, which are likely to be formed. In contrast, Chinese subjects appear to be more susceptible to the visual image formation than the English subjects. Such evidence can be found in their formation of images like *a lone swan*, *spring worm*, *burning candles*, *wave and beach* in the tables (Table 5, 6, 12) for Poem 1, 2 and 3.

All these phenomena throw light on the fact that these English subjects tend to resort more to analytical thinking in their poetry reading because the adjectives they are more aware of are more abstract than those concrete nouns. The Chinese subjects tend to rely more on their image formations in their way of reading poetry. They form their images on the basis of concrete nouns. Without them as a medium, they would not proceed in their processing of the poems as well as the English subjects.

Words that offer visual references	Total numbers		Words that offer visual references	Total numbers	
	E	C		E	C
Grey	9	7	Beating	1	0
Sea	1	8	Voice	1	1
Black	11	6	Sand	2	2
Land	1	7	Lighted	2	1
Yellow	12	4	Little	2	0
Large	2	0	Waves	2	7
Startled	3	2	Low	1	0
Leap	1	0	Star	0	2
Fiery	10	1	Beach	1	5
Slushy	4	0	Farm	1	2
Long	5	1	Pushing prow	1	1
Ringlet	7	3	Match	1	1
Blue	12	3	Scratch	1	4
Half moon	6	9	Tap	0	1
Sea-scented	3	0	Field	1	1
Spurt	8	5	Heart	1	1
Sea	1	3	(Total number)	116	88
(No)*	0	2	<i>*No words that offer visual references</i>		

Table 12: Poem 3

Words that offer visual references	Total numbers		Words that offer visual references	Total numbers	
	E	C		E	C
Ponderous	6	2	Fat	6	2
Melon	7	4	Purse	2	2
Tendrils	8	4	Cow	1	3
Yeasty	4	0	Rising	0	1
New-minted	3	1	Strolling	3	1
Red	5	0	Elephant	1	4
Ivory	4	0	Fine timber	1	1
Green	7	1	Money	1	0
Apples	3	2	Fruit	0	1
Loaf	2	2	House	0	1
Train	3	1	(Total number)	67	33
(No)*	4	10	<i>*No words that offer visual references</i>		

Table 13: Poem 4

### Images, imagistic ways of thinking—Analysis of individual cases

Examining the feedbacks of the Chinese group, one can find that their image formation, the roles their images play in their understanding of the poems and their conclusive remarks are all closely related. The way they rank their images according to their scaled importance indicate that their understanding is apparently related to images. The following tables display results of individual image formation and understanding for each poem.

No	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (conclusive remarks)
1	f g d e a h c b	<i>Lamentation Over the War</i> . The war causes the poet's misery.
2	b c d f h a	<i>Loneliness of a Soldier</i> . The poem describes the loneliness of a soldier on a battlefield who longs to go home.
3	a b c e	<i>Missing home</i> .
4	f a b c g d	<i>Lonely Night in the Army</i> . The title I choose reveals the situation of the speaker and contains elements of the contents.
5	a b e d g f h	<i>Homesickness</i> . It's the subject matter of this poem.
6	d b f g e c h a	<i>The Mourning of a Soldier</i> . (1) The war image, which suggests at least the speaker's reluctant detainment on the front. (2) the mourning and the feeling of missing his families are clear.
7	d a e h f b g c	<i>Moonlit Night</i> .
8	b c f g h a d e	<i>Missing My Younger Brothers</i> . Since I've known the name of the original Chinese poem, I find it difficult to produce an English one. Maybe <i>Sleepless</i> , with regard to its contents.
9	a g f c	<i>The Soliloquy of a Homeless</i> . It best covers what is said in the poem.
10	a g b	<i>Thought on the Battlefield</i> .
11	a h d g e c b	<i>Lonely Soldier at the borderline</i> . The scene of the poem and the reason of loneliness are provided.
12	h a d f b g c	<i>Missing at Night</i> . This poem is about a soldier's missing his family, especially his missing brothers at night.
13	b c h f e g d a	<i>A Song of Solitude</i> . It expresses silent anger beneath overt homesickness of a young soldier.
14	a f g h b c e d	<i>Undelivered Letters</i> . I choose this title because this image reflects the poet's painful feeling about the war.
15	a d e g b h c	<i>Missing</i> . Missing bears two meanings. One meaning is that someone loses something. And another is that someone longs for, mourns for and yearns for something. It meets the double meanings in the poem.

a. war

b. a lone swan

c. White Dew

d. homeless

e. younger brothers missing

f. bright moon at home

g. undelivered letter

h. sentries beating drums

Table 14 Poem 1 (from Chinese subjects)

On one hand, all of the Chinese subjects think that the image of war is important in their understanding, even though they put it in different orders of importance. On the other hand, most of the Chinese subjects refer back to words that are relevant to war either in their suggested titles or in their reasons for these titles.

Fourteen out of fifteen Chinese subjects include the image of a lone swan in their important images. Eight of them show that they detect the feeling of loneliness either in their concluding remarks. Three of them consider the image as the most important one. One of them had read the poem before, so he has not provided any traceable concluding remarks. Both the remaining two subjects however stress the loneliness feeling in their suggested titles, such as *Loneliness of a Soldier* and *A Song of Solitude*. Only one person ignores the image, and does not mention such a feeling in his suggested title, *The Soliloquy of a Homeless Person*. Categorisations of the titles proposed by the Chinese subjects can be put into three focal types: loneliness, missing home and war.

However the observation of the result of the British group (see Table 15) shows that fourteen subjects put the war image among what they consider important. Only five of them refer back to the war relevant words. The one that does not include war among his important images summarises the title of the poem as *Casualty of War*. Three of the subjects suggest respectively such titles for the poem as *Swan Song*, *The Lone Swan*, and *A Lone Swan*. But the image of a lone swan does not appear as their most important image at all. Its position in the order of importance is far lower. It is difficult to find any traceable hints that indicate the existent possibilities of relation between images and their concluding remarks.

Even though one (No. 3 in Table 15) of the British subjects claims that s/he suggests the title *Beyond the Boundary* because the poem is full of images of boundary, s/he still shows her/his apparent analytical thinking instead of imagistic thinking with such examples as 'beating drums (war)—truce, home-homeless, dead-alive, sent-undelivered, younger brothers—speaker, & the 'autumn boundary''. Besides, the title categories of this group are varied. They range from war, loneliness, separation, home, resignation, eldest son, and vigilance to time passing. They look at the poem from different perspectives. All these things indicate that their ways of thinking are not as image-oriented as the Chinese subjects in their poetry-reading process.

No.	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (conclusive remarks)
1	a d e g h b c f	<i>Swan Song</i> . 1) about war 2) about loss 3) about loneliness 4) it's a plea from heart.
2	f h a e g b d c	<i>Absence of War</i> . The emptiness that war creates e.g., personal, social, political emptiness.
3	a d e g b f h c	<i>Beyond the Boundary</i> , because it is full of images of boundaries: beating drums (war)—truce, home-homeless, dead-alive, sent-undelivered, younger brothers—speaker, & the 'autumn boundary'.
4	a e	<i>Alone</i> . The images repeatedly reinforce the idea of being alone, deserted.
5	a g f	<i>Cut Off</i> . It describes the person's situation.
6	d a h c b f e g	<i>Home</i> . (Where he wants to be?)

No.	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (conclusive remarks)
7	d b a f g	<i>Night Migrations</i> . -> Reflecting the sense of solitary revolving thought, in a bleak dispossessing night-time scenario.
8	a d e	<i>Resignation</i> – the situation seems so hopeless for the poet, but he can do nothing to change it. The final rhetorical question suggests resignation.
9	g e f c d h	<i>Casualty of War</i> —Poet seems to suggest loss (or possibly death?) of brothers and others, causing sadness on the part of the persona of the poem.
10	a h e g d b f c	<i>The Lone Swan</i> —to epitomise the isolation & desolation of war.
11	a d	<i>Eldest Son</i> —due to the identity of the speaker.
12	a e d b	<i>The War Goes on</i> . This sums up the essential theme of the poem.
13	d a b g e f h c	<i>Midnight Vigil</i> —the poem appears to describe a soldier awake in a camp when all other are asleep; hence he is alone and lonely. He has no family to comfort him and cannot sleep as a result.
14	a h b g d e f c	<i>A Lone Swan</i> — if the swan symbolised the person, & his isolation.
15	a d g e	<i>Time Passing or The Distance Travelled</i> : poem seems to look back to a distant, earlier time and place.

- a. war                                      b. a lone swan                      c. White Dew                      d. homeless  
 e. younger brothers missing                      f. bright moon at home  
 g. undelivered letter                                      h. sentries beating drums

Table 15: Poem 1 (from British subjects)

The argument about the fostered schemata and the images that come out of them (Chang, 2004:318) can be supported by the collected data from the subjects' understanding of Poem 2. *Spring silk worm died after it ended fibre productions. A candle turns to ashes when shedding of tears dries up.* The two lines from the poem have become a stereotyped expression in Chinese culture. Some people are familiar with the expressions without knowing the poem. It is used as moral motto, calling for self-devotion and persistence in pursuing some aim (Anon, 1987). A hardworking person, such as a conscientious teacher, is compared to a silk worm or a candle that offers everything for the benefits of others. When these two expressions are used, they often go hand in hand. Such usage of expressions stereotypes people so much that it is easy to find its twining in the image formation process of most Chinese subjects. As marked in Table 16, ten out of fifteen Chinese subjects put the two images together in their stereotyped order.

As Hewstone and Giles point out in their work (Hewstone and Giles, 1986), a stereotype is considered as a 'structural framework', which has the properties of a schema (Kelly, 1972) (Markus, 1977). It influences information processing in a variety of ways. Stereotypes generate expectancies. Perceivers seem to want to see expectancies confirmed. They tend to ignore disconfirming evidence (Rothbart, M., Evans, M., and Fulero, S. 1979).

As for the English subjects, they are not affected at all by such a cultural convention, which does not exist in their culture. Therefore not even a single coupling of the two images can be found in their answers.

The Chinese subjects offer three kinds of titles, which are dealt with departure, the unified and love. The total number of images, which they think are important, is one hundred and three. It ranges from the lowest frequency of eleven to the highest of fourteen.

The English subjects suggest more than seven types of titles as shown in Table 16, such as death, age, time, love, parting etc. The total of important images for the whole group is fifty-four. The highest frequency is eight and the lowest is six. These data show that English subjects come to their understanding without relying as much on images as the Chinese subjects.

No	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (conclusive remarks)
1	f g d e a h c b	<i>Lamentation Over the War</i> . The war causes the poet's misery.
2	b c d f h a	<i>Loneliness of a Soldier</i> . The poem describes the loneliness of a soldier on a battlefield who longs to go home.
3	a b c e	<i>Missing home</i> .
4	f a b c g d	<i>Lonely Night in the Army</i> . The title I choose reveals the situation of the speaker and contains elements of the contents.
5	a b e d g f h	<i>Homesickness</i> . It's the subject matter of this poem.
6	d b f g e c h a	<i>The Mourning of a Soldier</i> . (1) The war image, which suggests at least the speaker's reluctant detainment on the front. (2) the mourning and the feeling of missing his families are clear.
7	d a e h f b g c	<i>Moonlit Night</i> .
8	b c f g h a d e	<i>Missing My Younger Brothers</i> . Since I've known the name of the original Chinese poem, I find it difficult to produce an English one. Maybe <i>Sleepless</i> , with regard to its contents.
9	a g f c	<i>The Soliloquy of a Homeless</i> . It best covers what is said in the poem.
10	a g b	<i>Thought on the Battlefield</i> .
11	a h d g e c b	<i>Lonely Soldier at the borderline</i> . The scene of the poem and the reason of loneliness are provided.
12	h a d f b g c	<i>Missing at Night</i> . This poem is about a soldier's missing his family, especially his missing brothers at night.

No	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (conclusive remarks)
13	b c h f e g d a	<i>A Song of Solitude</i> . It expresses silent anger beneath overt homesickness of a young soldier.
14	a f g h b c e d	<i>Undelivered Letters</i> . I choose this title because this image reflects the poet's painful feeling about the war.
15	a d e g b h c	<i>Missing</i> . <i>Missing</i> bears two meanings. One meaning is that someone loses something. And another is that someone longs for, mourns for and yearns for something. It meets the double meanings in the poem.

a. meet and part    b. Mount Penglai    c. spring worm    d. burning candle and tears  
 e. bird to convey regards    f. humming verse and moonlight    g. wind and flowers  
 h. reflection in the mirror

Table 16: Poem 2 (from Chinese subjects)

No	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (concluding remarks)
1	c b d g h e f	<i>Death</i> 1) about dying. 2) about leaving.
2	b a f g d c h e	<i>Encroachment of age</i> —Poem uses messages of objects ending their lives and the poem progresses towards that.
3	a e h d c g f b	<i>Postcard</i> . Since the form & rhythm of the poem make it sound like a postcard and the poem describes places & feelings together & anticipates a meeting in the near future.
4	a	<i>Coming and going</i> —ideas are juxtaposed of flourishing and dying.
5	h g b	<i>Time</i> seems to sum up the person's thoughts.
6		<i>China</i> —think that's what it's about.
7	a c g e d	<i>Parting Is Such Sweet Sorrow</i> —twin themes of death and grace.
8	e b d h	<i>Ending</i> —it seems there are many endings, the relationship, the flowers, the wind, the silkworm, the candle, the poet's peace of mind.
9	a	<i>Ageing towards Autumn</i> —I think the references to 'parting' and to the end of spring, as well as the changed temple in the mirror indicate that the speaker, like the season, is dying.



No.	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (concluding remarks)
10		<i>Degeneration</i> — all grows old & moves on.
11		<i>Time passed in absence</i> — simply on extrapolation for primary themes.
12	e g	I would take the first line of the poem as the title because I find it evocative.
13	d a	<i>Meeting a lost love</i> —The poet is looking forward to meeting a loved one. The imagery suggests a person nearing the end of their life who expects to encounter a lost love in the afterlife.
14	e a h c f b d g	<i>The blue bird</i> —as carrier of the message (/person) from the person to the addressee?
15	a c b g h d f c	<i>Age? Greying at the temples?</i>

a. meet and part    b. Mount Penglai    c. spring worm    d. burning candle and tears  
 e. bird to convey regards    f. humming verse and moonlight    g. wind and flowers  
 h. reflection in the mirror

Table 17: Poem 2 (from British subjects)

When the two groups read Poem 3 (see Table 18, 19), their totals of important images are different as well. The total for the Chinese group is more than that for the English group. It is 134 vs. 93. It is noticeable that most of the Chinese subjects who entitle the poem with a love theme have the image of *two beating hearts* as their most dominant image in their understanding. They are six out of eight. But only one such instance can be traced from the British group. It is the only one out of eight.

The image-dependent features of Chinese subjects can be further illustrated by observing in detail one of the subject's arrangement of important images in her/his understanding. The reason to choose her/his as an example is that her/his proposed title is different from the others. It is called *Beach Farm*. The important images are thematically put together to form the scene of a farm on a beach— *sea and land, beach, farm, a tap at the pane, moon, wave, ringlets, slushy sand*.

No.	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (conclusive remarks)
1	f i k a b c e g h j l d	<i>Tryst</i> . This poem is about the tryst of two lovers.
2	i g h a b c d l	<i>Beach Farm</i> . This is where the scene is.
3	i b c g f h a k l	<i>Going Home</i> . This poem describes the way home and the anxious desire to see the beloved face.
4	f a b c e g h i j k	<i>Meeting</i> . I think this title tells us the main point of the poem.

No.	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (conclusive remarks)
5	f i d a c e k b l g h j	<i>Across the Sea, across the Land.</i> (1) the light lyrical atmosphere. (2) the journey through the darkness of night to a 'blue spurt', a parallel to the religious journey.
6	f k i g l c e a h j d b	<b>Meeting at Night</b>
7	b c g h f l	<i>Meeting at Night.</i> (Sorry, I've read this poem before.)
8	e c g h j	
9	g b h j	<b>Across the Sea/Meeting Tonight</b>
10	f k a l c b d	<i>Meeting at Night</i> Reason: The motivation of the poem. The scene of the poem.
11	f a i c g b l h j	<i>Meeting at Night.</i> I have read this poem by Robert Browning.
12	b g i c a j f	
13	i b c e l g h d a j k f	<i>Going Home</i> I chose this title because it is a poem of the feeling of going home.
14	f a i b j k l g h d e k	<i>Meeting,</i> because it describes the scene before & when friends meet.
15	j k a h g l b c e	<i>Meeting of lovers.</i> The poem describes the eagerness of a young man to meet his beloved woman.

a. a tap at the pane    b. moon    c. wave    d. ringlets    e. cove  
 f. two beating hearts    g. beach    h. farm    l. sea and land    j. blue spurt  
 k. low voice    l. slushy sand

Table 18: Poem 3 (from Chinese subjects)

No.	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (conclusive remarks)
1	c l e b h j a g	<i>Return of a loved one.</i> 1) about being reunited. 2) about love. 3) about fears of joys.
2	a b c d e f g h i j k l	<i>Meeting point</i> —several meetings in the poem: sea meets the land; boat meets the shore; two people meet etc.
3	f k j a d c l l e g b h	<i>Meeting At Night</i> —because it seems to me that the whole poem is made to build up to the moment of a lover's meeting in the middle of the night. The poem works through anticipation of that moment.

No.	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (conclusive remarks)
4	i b j	<i>Secret Assignment</i> – it has a period feel and is an obvious narrative poem.
5	i j b a c l d g f	<i>The Return</i> —encapsulates with specifying too much.
6	i f j k d b	<i>Return</i> (Sorry it's a bit literal.)
7	c g b f l i k a j e d h	<i>The Grey Sea and the Long Black Land</i> —capturing the marriage of contrasting elements throughout the poem's sequence.
8	i e b j	<i>The Secret Visit</i> —obviously the story of a lover visiting his lover. They are trying to keep quiet, hushing the noise of the boat and their voices.
9	a k f	<i>Meeting at Night</i> is its real title. (I know the poem.)
10		<i>The Meeting</i> —the moment of loves.
11	f j b h	<i>Homecoming</i> —due to the rift of the journey and the conclusive ending of the poem.
12	e g c	<i>Two Hearts</i> —these words form the climax of the poem.
13	f b j	<i>Homecoming</i> —the poem describes two lovers getting together after one has been away to sea for some purpose.
14	f k i b c a d g j	<i>Two Hearts Beating</i> —assuming it's about a longing to be together, & the persona's imaginative evocation of this.
15	i h c g l e	<i>Sea and Land: meeting point of both? Meeting of strangers from sea with the farm?</i>

a. a tap at the pane      b. moon      c. wave      d. ringlets      e. cove  
 f. two beating hearts      g. beach      h. farm      i. sea and land      j. blue spurt  
 k. low voice      l. slushy sand

Table 19: Poem 3 (from British subjects)

It seems that it is too difficult for both groups of subjects to understand Poem 4. Some of their evaluation of the images goes to two opposite extremes (see Table 20, 21). Four of the Chinese subjects and one of the English subjects do not think there are any important images. Most of the subjects fail in their understanding of the poem with the exception of one or two in each group. So there is no obvious pattern.

No.	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (conclusive remarks)
1	c a d e f g h i b	<i>Growing Up</i> . The poet leaves what he/she lives in during his/her growing up.
2		<i>A Riddle</i> , because I can't understand it.
3	a c b d f g h i	<i>A Riddle</i> , because it is a riddle.
4	a	<i>A Riddle</i> .
5	d c i h b d e f g	<i>A portrait of Myself</i> , the self-referential nature of the poetry.
6	b g d i e a h c f	<i>Waiting</i> .
7	b g d i c	I know the original title <i>Metaphors</i> .
8	d h b c g	
9	c	
10		
11		<i>A Riddle</i> . This poem is a riddle.
12		
13	c a e f a b h i d	
14	c f a b d e i h j	<i>A Fruitful Woman</i> , because it describes a pregnant woman.
15	b c d f g h	<b>A Riddle about Myself</b>

a. a riddle      b. an elephant      c. a non-stop train      d. red fruit      e. loaf  
 f. money      g. a melon      h. green apples      i. cow

Table 20: Poem 4 (from Chinese subjects)

No.	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (conclusive remarks)
1	All unusually important.	<i>The riddle</i> . – 1) It's just a list of things probably to enable the reader to work out the riddle.
2	a b d g f e i h c	Image of a Syllable.-- The first line (for me) is the most essential, therefore, the title should lead itself to that.

No.	Images in order of importance	Suggested title for the poem (conclusive remarks)
3	d	<i>What Am I ?</i> —Since the poem is based upon discovering the answer to the riddle, which is asked by the thing (the object of the riddle) itself personified in the poem's voice.
4	a i b	<i>Meaning?</i> —The essence of the poem is the riddle nature so you can't 'give anything away' in the title but the metaphors beg for interpretation by the reader in order to 'solve the riddle'.
5	I don't think there is an order of importance.	A riddle shouldn't have a title! Otherwise it would have to be something like 'Expecting', or you might just call it 'Riddle No. 1'.
6	c i b g a d e f h	<i>I'm a riddle. (sorry). Because it is.....</i>
7	a e g	<i>A Question of Metaphor</i> — The poem, largely comprised of metaphors, poses as a riddle.
8	c a h e	Confusion – I don't know the answer to the riddle. A melon strolling --- also a good title as this image is very strong.
9	a c	<i>Pregnant</i> —in my interpretation, this is the answer to the 'riddle in nine syllables'.
10	b e g	<i>A Riddle</i> —that is what it is & it is very obscure.
11		<i>Impossible Riddle</i> —because it is.
12	Unable to separate them in order of importance.	Unable to find a title, as I have no idea what the poem is about.
13	g b c	<i>A Riddle</i> —I feel this best describes the poem; a single, straightforward, no-nonsense title.
14	c a b i g e h	<i>I'm A Riddle</i> —as it's a riddle about the riddle of understanding oneself.
15	a i e f c	<i>What Am I?</i> Something or some feeling initiated by various comparisons and identifications in each line: don't know <u>what</u> , however!

a. a riddle    b. an elephant    c. a non-stop train    d. red fruit  
 e. loaf    f. money g. a melon    h. green apples    i. cow

Table 21. Poem 4 (from British subjects)

For Poem 1 (see Table 22), the subjects from both groups offer the following answers when they are asked which lines they think are crucial to understanding the main point of the poem. Both groups follow the same pattern: line 1 > line 5 line 6 > line 8. For convenience of easy reading, the poetic lines are listed as follows:

1. Not a single soul around while sentries beat drums,  
▼
5. All my younger brothers thus far are still missing,  
▼
6. After being homeless I can't tell they are dead or alive;  
▼
8. What else can I do when no truce is still in sight?

Though both of the groups follow the same pattern in reaching their final understanding of the poem, it is noticeable from the table that more English subjects think that these lines are crucial to their understanding. These sentences might provide key evidence for their analytical thinking. Comparatively, fewer Chinese subjects rely on these crucial lines as shown in the following table.

Which lines do you think are crucial to understanding the main points of the poem?

Lines		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Total numbers	E	13	4	3	2	10	9	7	14
	C	9	4	2	5	6	9	5	9

Table 22: Poem 1

Similar things happen with their reading of Poem 2 (see Table 23). Both groups follow the pattern of line 1 > line 8. To show them in poetic lines, they are,

1. 'Tis excitedly unbearable to meet as well as to depart,  
▼
8. I asked the blue bird to convey you my kindest regards.

The number of Chinese subjects who consider these lines to be crucial is smaller than that of English subjects. But two of the poetic lines in this poem are more striking to the eyes of the Chinese subjects (see Table 23). They are line 3 and line 4. (3. *Spring silk worm died after it ended fibre productions*, 4. *A candle turns to ashes when shedding of tears dries up*). The reason for them to think they are crucial to their understanding is that they are affected by the cultural connotations of these two lines as mentioned before.

Which lines do you think are crucial to understanding the main points of the poem?

Lines		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Total numbers	E	13	2	5	2	5	0	4	14
	C	13	4	6	8	4	2	3	10

Table 23: Poem 2

For the English subjects, they think there are four crucial poetic lines in their understanding of Poem 2.3. They are Line 5 > Line 8 > Line 11 > Line 12, as shown below,

5. As I gain the cove with pushing prow,  
 ▼  
 8. Three fields to cross till a farm appears,  
 ▼  
 11. And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,  
 ▼  
 12. Than the two hearts beating each to each!

The pattern of their crucial lines indicates that their realization of the meanings of the poem start from the important point of the addresser's arrival at the cove, then the addresser's travel over the fields to the farm, the suppressed talk of the lovers and their excitement and joyfulness. The pattern itself is logical and coherent. All the steps in it are logically connected.

Which lines do you think are crucial to understanding the main points of the poem?

Lines		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Total numbers	E	3	1	4	4	10	2	5	8	4	2	10	15
	C	3	1	1	1	6	6	2	8	2	1	3	5

Table 24: Poem 3

As shown in Table 24, most of the Chinese subjects only give consideration to Line 8 in terms of the importance of the poetic lines in their understanding, which provides the setting for the love meeting to take place. Some of them find no crucial lines at all. However the line itself cannot form a logical unit which enables them to reach their final understanding. Table 25 shows that they see many images in this poem, such as *two beating hearts* (12 subjects), *a tap at the pane* (12 subjects), *blue spurt* (12 subjects) and *low voice* (9 subjects).

IMAGES	Total numbers		Most important		IMAGES	Total numbers		Most important	
	E	C	E	E		E	C	E	C
A tap at the pane	6	12	2	0	Beach	8	13	0	1
Moon	11	13	0	2	Farm	4	12	0	0
Wave	8	13	2	0	Sea and land	10	10	5	3
Ringtlets	5	8	0	0	Blue spurt	9	12	0	1
Cove	6	7	1	1	Low voice	5	9	0	0
Two beating hearts	8	12	4	7	Slushy sand	5	10	0	0
					(Total)	85	131		

Table 25

The figures far surpass those of English subjects. Therefore the possible explanation for their understanding is that they achieve it with something like Line 8 as the base and all the images they have as steps leading to it.

Since many of the subjects fail in understanding the poem, it is difficult to find out their distinctive features in their reading of this poem in Table 26 for Poem 4.

Which lines do you think are crucial to understanding the main points of the poem?

Lines		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Total numbers	E	13	7	7	5	6	6	9	6	10
	C	9	1	2	1	4	4	5	7	2

Table 26: Poem 4

However, some useful findings can still be obtained from individual cases. There is one subject from the English group, who comes to her/his proper understanding finally. S/he chooses Lines 1 3 5 6 7 9. All these lines are embedded with meanings of features of a pregnant woman. One of the English subjects claims that s/he gets completely confused. S/he chooses only Line 1 as her/his crucial line, which leads her/him nowhere. One subject from the Chinese group arrives at an understanding of the poem. S/he only chooses Line 3 and 8.

The fact shows that most of the English subjects are inclined to come to their understanding by analysing logically while the Chinese subjects rely more on images. To them the crucial sentences are like threads that pull all the images together. But it does not mean that there is an absolutely distinctive line between their ways of thinking. Sometimes their use of these two ways is syntactical and simultaneous. Some of them from both groups tend to resort to the opposite way. What the present study tries to find out is their likely tendency in thinking when they comprehend and appreciate the poetry.

### Summary and concluding statements

When the subjects read the poems, they made evaluations of the poems by resorting to their past knowledge. When either an unexpected linguistic item or an unfamiliar cultural item occurred, they would use their schemata to make at least a seemingly sound explanation for the item.

Chinese subjects seemed to show a feature—the image-making activity—when the lines of a poem appeared before their eyes. While they read, they tended to keep constructing images before they came to a fuller understanding of each line. Once an image was produced, it was not very often modified and reconstituted or adapted to its cultural context. As a result, they were too constrained to go any further. Being faced with an alien experience in the poem, they failed in jumping out of their cultural circle to get a ‘panorama’ of the whole poem and to discover an inner world of which they were not conscious. They seemed to be relatively more sensitive and responsive to the images in the poems than the English subjects. From the images they had received, they were more inclined to the formation of established images, which came out of their pre-existent cultural and linguistic schemata. However, such preferences restricted their way of thinking. Once they were put in an unfamiliar discourse situation with striking cultural differences, frustration and puzzlement were more likely to befall them. Additionally, the Chinese subjects obtained visual images by focusing on the content words, especially nouns. They were more sensitive to the



nouns of concrete signs than the English subjects, for nouns, referring to things, could more directly evoke images than other parts of speech (MacCormac, 1990; Goatly, 1997: 84).

On the other hand, the English subjects did not show any obvious evidence that they were image-dependent. They tended to think more logically and analytically by using their linguistic and cultural schemata. Though they could come to their final interpretations of the poems from Chinese culture, they faced difficulties in figuring out their meanings when they met with the culture-loaded expressions.

The collected data shows that the reading of culturally sensitive discourse among these subjects is markedly culture-oriented. That means the understanding of such poems requires the correlation of their cultural schemata. Their understanding of the same targeted discourse with different schemata correlation results in their different interpretations of the discourse.

However, it is a pity that the present research is done only on a small scale due to insufficient funding. Therefore, the facts it reveals have to be further ascertained by future research on a larger scale.

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