

A Corpus-Based Study of Musicality in Zhu Shenghao's Translation of Shakespeare's Four Great Tragedies

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How to cite this paper: Liu, Y., & Luo, Y. M. (2026). A Corpus-Based Study of Musicality in Zhu Shenghao's Translation of Shakespeare's Four Great Tragedies. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 14, 425-438. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2026.141026>

Received: December 24, 2025

Accepted: January 19, 2026

Published: January 22, 2026

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Abstract

This study examines the musicality of Zhu Shenghao's translations of Shakespeare's four great tragedies through the analysis of rhyme, rhythm, and intonation via a parallel corpus. The findings reveal that Zhu's translation employs alliteration, internal rhyme, alternating-line rhyme, end rhyme, and other rhetorical devices to relive the original meter in William Shakespeare's four great tragedies. It features prominent pause syllabiques and sonic rhythms, with rich manifestations of semantic group rhythms, though the use of tonal patterns remains relatively limited. Drawing upon his profound understanding of textual musicality and grounded in his extensive knowledge of classical Chinese poetry, Zhu Shenghao creatively adapted and innovated the original Shakespearean meter and rhythm. Zhu's approach forged a distinctive translation style, making an outstanding contribution to the Sinicization of Shakespeare.

Keywords

Corpus, Musicality, Zhu Shenghao, Translation, Shakespeare's Four Great Tragedies

1. Introduction

Shakespeare was a great poet and playwright of the English Renaissance. His works constitute a monumental artistic treasure trove in literary history. Among them, the four great tragedies "emerged during Shakespeare's most prolific period, marking the pinnacle of the playwright's artistry" (Wang, 1988). Internationally renowned Shakespeare scholar, Professor David Scott Kastan (2003: p. 4), contends "It is the pillars of the great tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*—that Shakespeare's reputation most securely rests". For over 400 years,

Shakespeare's four great tragedies have been translated into countless languages, performed on stages worldwide, and enjoyed widespread popularity.

Since Shanghai Dawen Press released in 1903 the first Chinese version of Shakespearean plays, *Hai Wai Qi Tan*, the translation and introduction of Shakespeare's works in China have lasted over 120 years. Among the multitude of translators involved, Zhu Shenghao stood out with more than 1,000,000 copies of translated Shakespeare's plays in circulation. His translations are lucid, refined, and distinctive in musicality, which is precisely why they have gained the widest dissemination. In light of this, this paper examines Zhu Shenghao's translations of Shakespeare's four great tragedies via a parallel corpus of the original English texts and Zhu's Chinese translations, conducting quantitative surveys and qualitative analyses across 3 dimensions—rhyme, rhythm, and intonation—to reveal the intrinsic qualities of Zhu's translations, elucidate their textual musicality, and thereby enrich the scope of the Chinese translation research of Shakespearean plays.

2. The Establishment of Bilingual Parallel Corpus

2.1. Text Selection

As mentioned earlier, Zhu Shenghao's translations of Shakespeare's plays have been widely circulated in China. However, with the exception of the first edition, all subsequent editions have been revised by other scholars or translators. Therefore, the edition that most faithfully preserves Zhu Shenghao's original translations is the 3-volume *Shakespeare: The Complete Works of Plays* published by The World Book Company in 1947, and the authors chose the four great tragedies appeared in its second volume as the source of Chinese textual corpus.

In the "Translator's Preface" to the first edition of *Shakespeare: The Complete Works of Plays*, Zhu Shenghao (1947: pp. 1-2), as the translator, candidly stated that he used a "single volume" of the Oxford *Shakespeare's complete works* as his source text. It can thus be deduced that the "volume" Zhu Shenghao used while translating Shakespeare's plays was *Oxford Standard Authors edition of Shakespeare's Works* published by Oxford University Press in 1905. This edition, comprising 1172 pages in a single volume, aligns with Zhu Shenghao's own account. In addition, according to Cataloging-in-Publication data, it was reprinted nearly every two years starting from 1905, reaching 14 reprints by 1935. Considering the timeframe and the historical and social realities of the translator's era, this edition is the most probable English text available to the translator. Therefore, this study selected the four great tragedies from the 1905 *Oxford Standard Authors edition* as the English source texts, enabling the most comprehensive and precise examination of the correspondence between source texts and translated texts.

After identifying the source materials in both Chinese and English for the corpus, the authors located the four great tragedies from 1947 edition of Zhu Shenghao's translation of *Shakespeare: The Complete Works of Plays* (Volume II) and *Oxford Standard Authors edition of Shakespeare's Works*, and then converted them into plain text format. To ensure corpus quality and research relia-

bility, we also performed manual proofreading on the input data to avoid other encoding issues.

2.2. Word Segmentation and Annotation

The authors employed the NLP/ICTCLAS word segmentation system developed by the Institute of Computing Technology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, to perform English-Chinese word segmentation and morphological tagging on Zhu Shenghao's translations of Shakespeare's four great tragedies and their corresponding Oxford English editions.

To examine the musicality of the texts, the authors conducted automatic Chinese phonetic annotation and marked intrasentential and intersentential rhymes in Zhu's translations, so as to calculate the numbers of strict, similar, and loose rhymes. In terms of rhythm, pause syllabiques, sonic rhythms and tonal patterns are taken as operational metrics. Statistical analysis of rhyme and rhythm in Zhu's translations of Shakespeare's four great tragedies reveals the translation's metrical, rhythmic, and rhetorical characteristics. Given the Zhu's linguistic blend of literary and vernacular Chinese, manual proofreading with the aid of reference materials is essential to avoid errors.

2.3. Alignment

To maintain a one-to-one correspondence between the source text and its translation at the linguistic level, the authors employed the ParaConc software to achieve parallel alignment between the Oxford English original and Zhu's Chinese translation. First, dialogues between characters in the play were aligned at the paragraph level. Subsequently, manual annotation was used to achieve sentence-level alignment.

The bilingual parallel corpus of Shakespeare's four great tragedies has thus been completed. It comprises 137,564 English words from the source text and 430,254 Chinese characters from Zhu's translation, totaling over 560,000 tokens.

3. Shakespeare's Polyphony: Textual Musicality of the Four Great Tragedies

From the successful staging of the historical play *Henry VI* in 1590 to the fire at the Globe Theatre during the performance of *Henry VIII* in 1613, Shakespeare composed 41 plays over a span of 23 years, encompassing 5 genres: comedies, tragicomedy, tragedies, histories and romances. While scholars worldwide have long debated on the writing periods of this great playwright—German literary critic Georg Gottfried Gervinus divided Shakespeare's writing career into 3 phases in his 4-volume work *Shakespeare* in 1849; Irish scholar Edward Dowden divided them into 4 phases in his 1877 *Shakespeare Primer*; Chinese professor Meng Xianqiang (1994) proposed 5 distinct periods—yet remarkably, they all concur on the creation period, influence, and value of Shakespeare's four great tragedies: Shakespeare's world-renowned “four great tragedies”—*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and

Macbeth—were all created during the peak of his artistic mastery. They represent not only the pinnacle of Shakespeare’s personal artistic achievement, but also the highest level of Renaissance English plays and indeed European theater as a whole.

More than half a century ago, renowned Chinese translator Wang Zuoliang (1964) attributed Shakespeare’s artistic achievements to the playwright’s agile wit and effusive eloquence. Specifically, this refers to the unique “musicality” created by the rhythm and cadence of dramatic language.

Where he (Shakespeare) clearly surpassed his contemporaries was also in the language of drama. ... And what Shakespeare mastered most was a special dramatic language—an iambic pentameter line composed of 10 syllables of alternating stress: lacking a rhyme scheme, it does not read entirely like poetry, yet it possesses a powerful poetic rhythm...

In Wang’s view, blank verse “doesn’t quite read like poetry”, because “it lacks rhyme,” unable to create that back-and-forth echo of overlapping sounds. Nevertheless, blank verse holds its own against rhymed verse, possessing a rigorous musical structure where 10 syllables form 5 feet based on sound intensity, generating powerful poetic rhythm through sonic momentum. In addition, blank verse became more flexible and more adept at capturing drama and amplifying musicality. To this end, it can break the constraints of line, allowing a single thought, image, or grammatical sentence to span multiple lines, creating richer melodies to depict greater emotional surges. Prose also enjoys the freedom to enrich the melodic contours of dramatic characters and heightening the tension of stage performances. From this perspective, poetic form plays a crucial role in shaping the textual musicality of Shakespeare’s four great tragedies.

3.1. Verse and Prose: An Observation of Quantity

When Shakespeare’s plays are performed on stages and screens, the actors’ delivery of lines is sonorous and rhythmically precise, possessing an inherent beauty of harmonious intonation. This is why Shakespeare’s plays are also called dramatic poetry, as their dialogues bear the distinctive characteristics of poetry. The four great tragedies, as works from Shakespeare’s peak of mastery, exhibit greater stylistic refinement, with a marked difference in the proportion of verse and prose.

British Shakespearean scholar Brian Vickers (2005: p. 433) conducted a rough statistical analysis of the proportion of verse and prose lines in Shakespeare’s plays. The data show that in the four great tragedies, verse constitutes over 75% of the text: *Macbeth* reaches 95%, *Othello* follows at 80%, while *Hamlet* and *King Lear* both feature 75%. 40 years later, Shewmaker (2008: p. 16), editor of *Shakespeare’s Language*, noted that approximately 3/4 of Shakespeare’s dramatic language consists of verse, with blank verse being the most prevalent form, followed by rhymed verse and ballads. The authors’ corpus reveals that the distribution of verse and prose in the four great tragedies of the Oxford Shakespeare edition is largely consistent with previous scholarly statistics, with only minor discrepancies in detail, as shown in **Figure 1**:

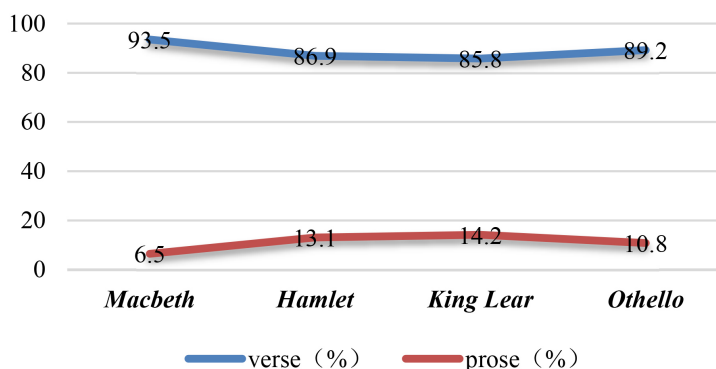


Figure 1. Distribution of verse and prose in the four great tragedies of the Oxford Stand Authors edition.

Zhu Guangqian, the founder of modern Chinese aesthetics, placed great emphasis on rhythm. He believed poetry is a language and a music as well. “In aesthetic terms, rhythm is a tool for creating ‘distance,’ elevating the ordinary and crude to the realm of the ideal. ... The greatest value of rhythm naturally lies in its musicality.” (Zhu, 1999a: p. 107) Statistics show that verse forms dominate the length of Shakespeare’s plays. Consequently, the unique rhythm inherent in verse constitutes a prominent formal characteristic of Shakespearean plays: Its musicality.

3.2. Verse and Textual Musicality

In Shakespeare’s four great tragedies, the poetic forms can be broadly categorized into 3 types: rhymed verse, ballads, and lines of blank verse. Take *Hamlet* as an example: the play-within-a-play in Act III, Scene II contains 149 lines of rhymed verse, all in the abab rhyme scheme—the most concentrated use of verse in the entire play. Additionally, the 4 lines of folk song Hamlet recites while feigning madness before Polonius in Act II, Scene II are also verse, featuring both alliteration and end rhyme. In Act V, Scene I, the first clown sings 3 stanzas totaling 12 lines in abab rhyme scheme. Though Ophelia’s song in Act IV, Scene V is fragmented, its musical rhythm remains discernible across 44 lines. Rhymed lines are especially prevalent at the end of scenes and acts. In Shakespeare’s four great tragedies, the dissonant sounds harmonize and resonant tones echo. Rhymed poetry and ballads enable the meaning of words to correspond with, reinforce, and permeate their sonic imagery, thereby creating an unparalleled beauty of literary music.

Unrhymed verse, also known as blank verse, is a form characterized by strict metrical foot patterns without rhyme or rhyme scheme. This poetic form gained popularity in Italy as early as the 13th century and was introduced to England in the early 16th century by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. Following the publication of Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* in 1587, blank verse gained widespread popularity in England, becoming the standard form for play writing of the era (Boyce, 1990: p. 16). Though Shakespeare adopted blank verse later than Marlowe,

he mastered it to perfection: whether conveying comic banter or lyrical narrative within his plays, he applied this unrhymed form with consummate skill. On stage, whether *dramatis personae* were ecstatic or furious, the iambic pentameter rhythm vividly captured their emotions. Hamlet's famous soliloquy "to be or not to be" stands as the most iconic example of this mastery.

American Shakespearean scholar George T. Wright, specializing in English poetic meter, argues (Wright, 1988: p. 289) that the iambic pentameter comprises syllables and a distinctive stress pattern. As a poetic language, it appears deceptively simple at first glance yet possesses remarkable power. Shakespearean blank verse, composed of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables in each line, "gains freedom across lines by being unshackled from rhyme and meter, preserving the distinct rhythmic character of verse while approaching the elasticity and expressive freedom of prose" (Lan, 2003). The continuum of lines wins the continuity of meaning—where lines end but thought continues. Driven by rhythm, this achieves the text's musicality while propelling the plot forward, offering audiences a multi-sensory aesthetic experience through both auditory and visual dimensions.

3.3. Prose and Textual Musicality

Statistics reveal that prose constitutes less than 1/5 of the text in each of the four great tragedies. To date, scholars (Vickers, 2005: p. 5; Wright, 1988: p. 109) have reached 2 consensus points regarding the prose in Shakespearean plays: First, the language in Shakespearean plays is tailored to the characters' status. For instance, well-educated nobles often speak in blank verse, while clowns, fools, servants, or other less educated characters speak in prose. Second, Shakespeare assigns different registers to characters depending on the situation. For example, Hamlet employs prose in public while feigning madness, yet his soliloquies consist of extensive blank verse.

The above analysis based on dramatic texts is not without merit. However, a broader and deeper examination of the prose in Shakespeare's four great tragedies demonstrates that it is not as insignificant as it may appear at first glance. On the contrary, the prose in these tragedies can also reflect the psychological shifts of the characters. The most typical example is the dialogue between Hamlet and Ophelia in Act III, Scene I, Lines 90 - 106. Hamlet and Ophelia started with polite small talk, conversing in blank verse that lent an air of solemnity. Soon after, Ophelia insisted on returning the gifts Hamlet had given her, believing that since the giver had changed his mind, the precious gifts had lost their value. Deeply wounded, Hamlet lashed out with scathing sarcasm, throwing Ophelia into utter disarray. Both then switched to prose. Similarly throughout this tragedy, Ophelia's lines before her madness were mostly in blank verse, while after her descent into madness, they were delivered in prose.

Shakespeare's prose dialogue often retains the rhythmic cadence of iambic meter, as seen in *King Lear*, Act II, Scene II, Lines 1 - 5. In this conversation, Oswald

inquires politely while Kent responds curtly and rudely. Oswald begins with a refined iambic pentameter, exuding elegance and possessing undeniable musicality in its intonation. In both *Macbeth* and *Othello*, the contents of the letters are rendered in prose, thereby emphasizing their “otherness” within the plot.

In summary, Shakespeare’s four great tragedies are primarily written in verse, with prose interspersed. The verse and prose in Shakespeare’s plays cannot be viewed through the lens of the modern distinction between metrical verse and prose. In other words, Shakespeare’s prose cannot be measured by simple criteria like syllable repetition or rhetorical devices, nor can its artistic and aesthetic value be dismissed merely because it lacks fixed meter or standardized syllabic patterns. Verse and prose intertwine and harmonize, portraying the myriad facets of *dramatis personae* in Shakespeare’s works. This is akin to 2 independent melodic lines within a musical composition, performed in distinct voices to create a polyphony rich in nuanced expression. In this sense, prose represents a profoundly valuable linguistic form. Alternating with verse, it jointly constructs the polyphonic texture within Shakespeare’s four great tragedies. If verse is the main melody in Shakespeare’s texts, then prose serves as its indispensable counterpoint.

4. Musicality in Zhu Shenghao’s Translation of Shakespeare’s Four Great Tragedies

In April 1944, while writing “The Translator’s Preface” for *Shakespeare: The Complete Works of Plays*, Zhu Shenghao recounted his decade-long immersion in translating Shakespeare’s works. Before commencing the translation, Zhu collected various editions of Shakespeare’s plays, studied and recited them over a dozen times, and came to believe he had gained a “fairly deep understanding” of Shakespeare’s works. He also purchased a substantial number of commentaries, critical studies, and scholarly works on Shakespeare—as many as “one or two hundred volumes”—for reference and research. In the spring of 1935, while serving as an English editor at Shanghai’s World Book Company, Zhu Shenghao began translating Shakespeare’s plays. His first Translation was *The Tempest*, followed by comedies, tragedies, histories, and romances.

Zhu (1947: p. 1) “devoted himself to Shakespearean plays”, By the time he translated Shakespeare’s four great tragedies in 1943, he had already undergone 7 years of exploration and entered a mature phase in his Shakespearean translations (Zhu & Wu, 1988). Naturally, he had gained profound insight into the linguistic characteristics of Shakespeare and intuitively grasped the musicality of the plays. His son Zhu Shanggang recalled that “The translator (Zhu Shenghao) has advanced toward proficiency and fluency, reaching the realm of consummate mastery” (Zhu, 1999b: p. 249). Since their publication, Zhu’s translations have garnered widespread acclaim. Yu Erchang of Taiwan University remarked: “In the autumn of 1947, when the first 3 volumes of *Shakespeare: Complete Works of Plays* (translated by Zhu) were published and reached overseas, the literary circles of Europe and America were astonished. Many Shakespearean scholars could scarcely be-

lieve that Chinese translators could produce such high-quality translations” (Zhu & Wu, 1996: p. 130). Gui Yangqing (1986) praised Zhu’s translations as “faithful to the original while remaining fluent, natural, and quite elegant.” Wang Dongfeng (2014) fully affirmed the “literary brilliance” of Zhu’s translations. Consequently, as the most celebrated works within Zhu’s translations, the four great tragedies particularly embody Zhu Shenghao’s translation style and aesthetic orientation.

In his seminal work *Language: an Introduction to the Study of Speech*, American linguist Sapir compared the prosodic features of English, French, and Chinese. Sapir (2004: p. 109) noted that Chinese syllables are more resonant than French syllables, yet their volume and intensity lack consistency, rendering them insufficient as a foundation for a prosodic system. Consequently, the most crucial controlling factors in Chinese prosody are rhyme, rhythm, and tone patterns. Therefore, this study applies empirical methods to analyze the prosodic characteristics of Zhu’s translated texts. In this way, the musicality of Zhu’s translations of Shakespeare’s four great tragedies is examined from the perspective of Chinese prosody.

4.1. Unified Rhyme: Loose in Form Yet Cohesive in Style

Zhu Shenghao described his translating in “Translator’s Preface” as follows:

“Upon completing each part, I would first imagine myself as the reader, checking whether the translation contained any ambiguous or unclear expressions. I also imagine myself as an actor on stage, scrutinizing whether the intonation flows smoothly and the syllables harmonize. Often, I agonize for days over a single word or phrase that doesn’t quite sit right” (Zhu, 1947: p. 2).

This account reveals Zhu’s commitment to achieving fluency in the translation and to ensuring the harmony of intonation and syllable arrangement.

4.1.1. General Rhyming Characteristics

A calculation of rhymed lines in Zhu’s translations of Shakespeare’s four great tragedies reveals that he extensively employs rhyming techniques, as shown in Figure 2:

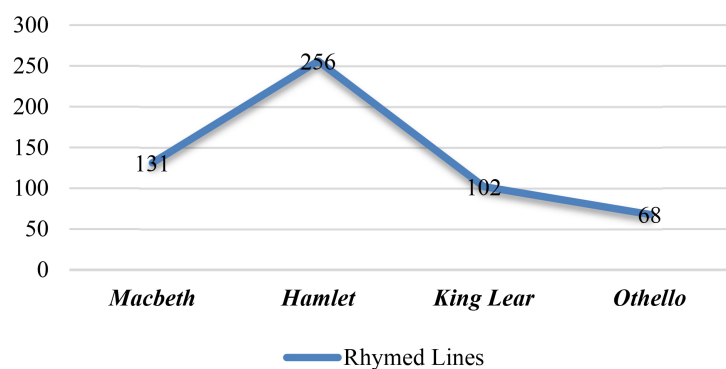


Figure 2. Data of rhymed lines in Zhu’s translation of Shakespeare’s four great tragedies.

In terms of rhyming lines, *Othello* has the fewest at only 68 lines; *Hamlet* has the most, reaching 256 lines; while *Macbeth* and *King Lear* fall in the middle. Upon close reading of the source texts and careful examination of the plays' verse patterns, it becomes evident that Shakespeare's four great tragedies exhibit distinctly different rhythmic characteristics.

In the English source text of *Othello*, where couplets share the same rhyme scheme, Zhu's translation not only strictly adheres to the original rhyme pattern, but even meticulously follows the musical measure, maintaining a high degree of consistency in both form and style. For instance, in the dialogue between the Duke and Brabantio in Act I, Scene III—comprising 18 lines of verse—the translation preserves the original rhyme scheme of aa bb cc dd (ee). Each line contains 10 syllables, perfectly matching the five-beat rhythm of the source text. In Act II, Scene III, Iago's song employs alternating-line rhyme: lines 1, 3, and 5 rhyme together, while lines 2 and 4 form a separate rhyme scheme. The translation faithfully maintains this alternating rhyme pattern.

In Act IV, Scene V of *Hamlet*, there are 4 verses in an aabb rhyme scheme. Zhu's translation not only preserves this alternating rhyme pattern but also maintains 10 syllables for each line, resulting in a meticulously crafted, elegant, and melodious effect. After Ophelia's descent into madness, she sings 8 stanzas totaling 42 lines, consistently employing the abab rhyme scheme throughout the ballad. This subtly enhances the translation's rhythmic flow and musical beauty.

Statistics indicate that Zhu's rhymes in *King Lear* and *Macbeth* are primarily concentrated in the original verse sections, demonstrating the prevalence of rhyming in verses. Beyond this, Zhu fully exercised his creativity by introducing rhymes into certain unrhymed prosed within the English source text. Overall, the rhyming lines in Zhu's translations of Shakespeare's four great tragedies include play-within-a-play monologues, sonnets, ballads, songs, dialogues, and closing verses. Zhu Shenghao demonstrated a strong emphasis on rhythmic quality in these translations, particularly through meticulous attention to feet: Beyond traditional regulated verse of four-foot, five-foot, and seven-foot, Zhu Shenghao also experimented with lines of 8, 9, 10, and even 12 feet, striving for matching syllables, and rhythms approximating the English source text in rhymed lines.

4.1.2. Specific Rhyme Scheme

In terms of distribution, Zhu's translation of Shakespeare's four great tragedies employs mainly two types of rhyme: intrasentential and intersentential rhymes. As the terms suggest, intrasentential rhyme occurs when a word within a sentence rhymes with the final word of that sentence, while intersentential rhyme involves the final words of several clauses rhyming, including consecutive rhyme and alternating rhyme. The translation of *King Lear*, Act III, Scene IV (Shakespeare, 1947: p. 66) exemplifies intrasentential rhyme, with “心” (pinyin: *xin*) rhyming with “您” (pinyin: *nin*) in the Renchen rhyme scheme, and “情” (pinyin: *qing*) rhyming with “令” (pinyin: *ling*) in the Zhongdong rhyme scheme. The translation of *Macbeth* Act I, Scene VI (Shakespeare, 1947: p. 15) employs intersentential

rhyme: “劳” (pinyin: *lao*) and “效” (pinyin: *xiao*) rhyme in the Yaotiao scheme, while “香” (pinyin: *xiang*) and “苍” (pinyin: *cang*) rhyme in the Jiangyang scheme. This translation comprises two distinct parts separated by a semicolon. Each part consists of 3 clauses: the first two maintain consecutive rhyme, while the third breaks the rhyme scheme, creating a deliberate estrangement effect. As the vowel openings in the rhymes gradually widen across the two parts, the vocal resonance progressively intensifies. The two parts combine musically to form a progressive relationship, amplifying Lady Macbeth’s deliberately grand display of gratitude toward King Duncan. This repeated open vowel at the end of lines carries an emphatic quality, enhancing the expressive impact. The integration of rhythm and timbre achieves coherence with the unfolding plot.

According to Qin Si’s (1979: p. 26) classification of rhyme schemes in modern Chinese poetry, Zhu’s translations of Shakespeare’s four great tragedies primarily employ 3 rhyme categories: strict rhyme, similar rhyme, and loose rhyme. Strict rhyme refers to those with identical consonants. When the consonants are partially shared by two characters, they constitute a similar rhyme. While different rhyme categories interchangeably used for rhyming, they belong to loose rhyme. These numbers of 3 rhyme categories for the Zhu’s translations are shown in **Figure 3**:

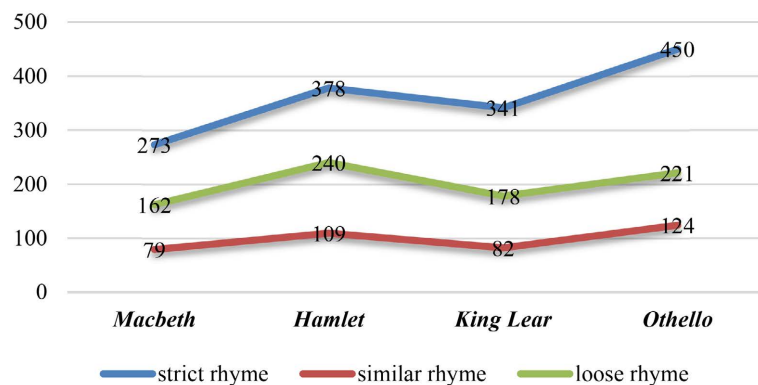


Figure 3. Rhyme categories in Zhu’s translation of Shakespeare’s four great tragedies.

Zhu primarily uses strict rhymes, with similar rhymes secondary and loose rhymes least. Take lines 87 - 117 of Act I, Scene 2 in *Hamlet* as an example: within 31 lines, there are 3 instances of rhyme: 1) strict rhyme with “起” (pinyin: *qi*) and “止” (pinyin: *zhi*); 2) similar rhyme with “心” (pinyin: *xin*) and “性” (pinyin: *xing*); 3) loose rhyme with “臣” (pinyin: *chen*) and “欣” (pinyin: *xin*).

Phonetics is one of the fundamental aesthetic characteristics of poetry. The translation examples above clearly demonstrate that rhyme is the most prominent and prevalent linguistic feature in Zhu Shenghao’s translations of Shakespeare’s four great tragedies. These recurring rhyme schemes create a sense of sonic repetition and musicality, serving both to convey content and express emotion. Among the 3 types of rhyme, strict rhyme exhibits the highest degree of sonic harmony and appears most frequently in Zhu’s translations. This partially com-

pensates for the lack of metrical structure in Shakespeare's original blank verse. While preserving the original rhyme schemes, Zhu also deliberately added rhythmic elements to prose. This enhances the translation's cadence and musicality while better aligning with the aesthetic expectations of Chinese readers.

4.2. Distinct Rhythm: An Integration of Meaning and Sound

China's renowned aesthetician [Zhu Guangqian \(1999a: p. 155\)](#) defines "rhythm" as "the rise and fall produced within roughly equal time segments of sound." These "roughly equal time segments" constitute the units of sound—such as the feet and lines in English poetry, or the sentence divisions in Chinese poetry—while "rise and fall" refers to variations in sound duration, pitch, and intensity. In English, every word with more than one syllable carries a distinct stress. The alternating pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables forms a foot, which constitutes the fundamental unit of English rhythm. Chinese, being a language dominated by monosyllabic morphemes, consists of syllables formed by initial consonants, finals, and tones. Consequently, the major rhythmic elements in Chinese are pause syllabique, sound, and the tone ([Ni, 1995: p. 105](#)).

4.2.1. Pause Syllabique

Pause syllabique is a French term referring to the rhythmic pattern formed by the arrangement of isosyllabic or isometrical phrases in the phonetic chain of speech ([Qin & Liang, 2009](#)). In other words, this cadence relies mainly on the artistic arrangement of words and sentences, utilizing flexible sentence order to create balanced antithesis, parallelism, and paired sentences. Its most prominent feature lies in the identical or nearly identical number of syllables or metrical feet. In Zhu's translations, such parallel structures abound.

It is evident that *Hamlet* contains the most cadence, since the translator believes that: *Hamlet* intends to emphasize introspection, where cadences employ repetitive phrasing to amplify the characters' mental processes and psychological shifts, progressively playing up the stage atmosphere.

4.2.2. Sonic Rhythms

For Chinese phrases, alliteration, assonance, and reduplication are the most common phonetic devices. The rhythmic alternation of Chinese phrases with similar or contrasting tones creates a cyclical beauty of sound and rhyme, a defining feature of the language's cadence. Zhu's translation exhibits particularly prominent use of this phonetic rhythm, especially through sentence structures built around the Chinese particles "的" and "了" with remarkable frequency: "的" has appeared 8694 times, while "了" ranks with 2019 occurrences. Further analysis of the position of "的"s within sentences shows it usually appears at the end (762 instances) or within the sentence (7932 instances). In Chinese syntax, "的" at the end of a sentence functions as a modal particle, often expressing affirmation, while "的" within a sentence acts as a structural particle, regulating sentence rhythm. In *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene IV, Hamlet says:

……一个冒充国王的丑角、一个盗国窃位的扒手，……

The above translation follows the “X + Y + 的 + disyllabic words” structure, where X represents “一个” (Pinyin: yige), a Chinese character combination of a numeral and a measure, and Y stands for Chinese character combination of 4 varying syllables. Clearly, “的” serves as a structural particle to regulate the sentence rhythm.

4.2.3. Tonal Patterns

Chinese is a tonal language and poetry primarily relies on the interplay of level and oblique tones, namely Ping-Ze Rhythm, to achieve syllabic harmony (Huang, 1992). Musical melodies typically comprise two layers: the underlying layer is rhythmic beat, formed by the regular pattern of sound duration and intensity; the upper layer is the “modal scale, composed of a fixed set of pitches in specific relative heights, governing the pitch relationships in music through regular repetition and variation” (Li, 2015). The sonic characteristics of music and the rhythmic patterns of language share certain similarities and mutual imitation. Therefore, when examining the musicality of a text, the principles of rhythm can be integrated with musical tonality.

The alternating pattern of level and oblique tones often achieves a dynamic, undulating musical effect. In the English source texts of Shakespeare’s four great tragedies, songs and rhymed verses convey tonal fluctuations through accentual patterns. In contrast, Zhu’s translation employs a relatively loose level-oblique rhythm to correspond with this.

Statistics of the corpus reveal that Zhu Shenghao’s use of tonal patterns is relatively limited, with only 14 instances, compared to his emphasis on pause syllables and sonic rhythms. On the one hand, this may stem from the inherent nature of the text type. Drama ultimately revolves around plot development, prioritizing narrative over lyricism. On the other hand, Zhu lived during the times when vernacular literature was gaining prominence, prompting translators to adhere to contemporary translation norms—specifically, favoring colloquial prose and vernacular verses.

The phonetic and rhythmic characteristics of language are closely tied to pronunciation and are also intertwined with word order and sentence structure. His translations exhibit diverse rhythms and pronounced rhythmic patterns, both adhering to and innovating upon the source texts.

5. Conclusion

In the Western artistic tradition, both poetry and music originated from Dionysian festivals: Priests and worshippers, adorned with foliage, sang in antiphonal style to the accompaniment of lyres and other instruments. This evolved into the recitation of hymns to the gods, and later into tragic performances—a progression documented in Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*. Among the various forms of ancient Chinese literature, poetry

maintains the closest relationship with music. China's earliest anthology of poetry, *The Book of Songs*, already contained hymns, string poems, and song poems. This profound integration of poetry and music established a unique literary tradition of China that continues to this day.

Shakespeare is a master of the English language. His most significant contribution to prosody lies in the fact that he refined the common speech and the vernacular English of the lower classes into a poetic language of exquisite beauty, and surprisingly embraced by the aristocracy. In four great tragedies, Shakespeare masterfully harnessed the phonetic qualities of poetic drama and its inherent musicality. Every language possesses unique phonetic characteristics and distinct means of creating textual musical beauty. As Chinese and English belong to different linguistic families, the complete transplantation of rhymes and rhythms during translating is virtually impossible—a challenge translators must confront head-on.

Through empirical research, this paper demonstrates Zhu Shenghao's relentless efforts in enhancing the musicality of Shakespeare's four great tragedies during translation: From the euphony and harmony of phonetics to the cadence and rhythm, from the rich use of rhyme to the brilliant presentation of tonal rhythm and harmonic rhythm, from meticulously following rhyme schemes to pioneering innovations in rhyming patterns, Zhu Shenghao not only pursued rhythm and cadence with diligence, but also ingeniously added phonetic elements nonexistent in Shakespeare's original plays. This served to compensate for the poetic essence that might otherwise be lost in the translation of blank verse. In terms of linguistic musicality, Zhu Shenghao was Shakespeare's kindred spirit: his translations not only faithfully recreated the original poetic style of Shakespeare's plays, but also skillfully blended modern and archaic language into a poetic form rich in musical beauty, enhancing both the translations and the source texts. In this sense, Zhu's translations of Shakespeare's four great tragedies provide a valuable model for the development of Chinese dramatic language, ushering in a new era for Chinese drama translation.

Funding

Chongqing municipality Philosophy and Social Sciences Planning Project: "Marxist Shakespeare Criticism" (2023NDYB157).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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