

A Cognitive Linguistics Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors in Li Bai's Landscape Poetry

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Abstract—The landscape poetry of Li Bai (701–762), China's revered “Poet Immortal,” is not only a cornerstone of classical Chinese literature but also a profound manifestation of his romanticism and unique cognitive worldview. While previous scholarship has predominantly analyzed his poetic imagery from rhetorical or literary appreciation perspectives, systematic investigations using cognitive linguistics remain scarce. This study applies Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, to analyze metaphorical constructions within Li Bai's landscape poetry. A corpus of 20 classic landscape poems was selected, and the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), supplemented by manual verification, was employed to identify and categorize the underlying conceptual metaphors. The analysis identified 72 distinct conceptual metaphors, which were classified into three primary types: ontological metaphors (n=28, including entity, container, and personification metaphors), structural metaphors (n=39), and orientational metaphors (n=5). Among these, personification, container metaphors, and structural metaphors are frequently employed to represent the grandeur of the natural landscape. Conversely, entity and substance metaphors, as well as orientational metaphors, are predominantly utilized to express Li Bai's abstract aspirations and emotional states. This study not only offers a new cognitive linguistic lens for interpreting Li Bai's work but also uncovers the profound cognitive mechanisms that underpin his enduring artistic genius, laying a foundation for future research in cross-cultural translation and communication.

Index Terms—Li Bai's landscape poetry, conceptual metaphor, cognitive linguistics, translation strategy, Xu Yuanchong's *Selected Poems of Li Bai*

I. INTRODUCTION

Li Bai (701–762), celebrated in Chinese literary history as the “Poet Immortal”, stands as one of the most influential figures in world poetry. His works, characterized by magnificent imagination, untrammelled emotional expression, and a profound aesthetic sensibility, epitomize the pinnacle of Tang Dynasty literature. Among his diverse themes, landscape poetry holds a paramount place. These poems are not mere mimetic representations of natural scenery; rather, they are dynamic canvases upon which Li Bai projects his philosophical reflections, personal aspirations, and unconstrained lyricism. Through his vivid depiction of mountains, rivers, and celestial bodies, he constructs a poetic world that transcends physical reality, imbued with unique cultural connotations and deep emotional resonance. This rich tapestry of imagery serves as a crucial window for understanding both the natural beauty of China and the complex inner world of its most revered romantic poet.

Despite the extensive scholarly attention Li Bai's work has received for centuries, the majority of research has approached his poetry from the perspectives of literary criticism or traditional rhetoric (Yan, 2002; Zhan, 2020). These studies have provided invaluable insights into his style, themes, and historical context. However, they have less frequently explored the underlying cognitive mechanisms that structure his poetic thought and give rise to his iconic imagery. While there has been a recent, growing interest in applying linguistic theories to classical Chinese poetry (Xia, 2016; Zhang & Liu, 2018), a systematic investigation of Li Bai's work through a cognitive lens remains a significant research gap. Existing cognitive-oriented studies are often fragmented, and as a review of the field reveals, there is a distinct lack of authoritative research focusing on the cognitive metaphors within Li Bai's landscape poems. This leaves the cognitive architecture of his creative genius largely uncharted.

In response to this gap, this study adopts the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). CMT initiated a paradigm shift in metaphor studies, proposing that metaphor is not simply a decorative linguistic device but a fundamental mode of human thought. It is a cognitive mechanism whereby an abstract or less-structured conceptual domain (the target domain) is systematically understood and experienced in terms of a more concrete or structured one (the source domain). By revealing the systematic mappings between domains (e.g., ARGUMENT IS WAR, LOVE IS A JOURNEY), CMT provides a powerful analytical tool for decoding the cognitive foundations of language and thought (Kövecses, 2010). Applying this theory to Li Bai's poetry allows for an analysis that moves beyond surface-level literary devices to uncover the deep, often unconscious, conceptual structures that informed his worldview and artistic expression (Lakoff & Turner, 1989).

Therefore, this paper aims to conduct a systematic cognitive analysis of the conceptual metaphors embedded within Li Bai's landscape poetry. The primary objective is to identify, classify, and analyze these metaphors to reveal the cognitive patterns that shape his unique poetic world. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What are the primary types of conceptual metaphors (ontological, structural, and orientational) present in Li Bai's landscape poetry?

RQ2: How do these metaphorical systems work to construct the sublime, dynamic, and emotive qualities characteristic of his work?

RQ3: What do these cognitive patterns reveal about Li Bai's perception of nature, human experience, and his own place within the cosmos?

By addressing these questions through an analysis of 20 representative poems, this study contributes to the scholarship in several ways. It expands the application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory to the field of classical Chinese poetry, offering a new interpretative lens for one of its most celebrated figures. Furthermore, it aims to provide a deeper, more systematic understanding of the cognitive foundations of Li Bai's genius, moving the discussion from what his poems say to how they mean. This approach not only enriches Li Bai studies but also offers insights for the broader fields of cognitive poetics and cross-cultural literary analysis.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarship on Li Bai, one of China's most celebrated poets, has historically been dominated by literary criticism and historical analysis. For centuries, researchers have provided invaluable insights into his biography, romantic spirit, stylistic innovations, and the thematic content of his work, particularly his iconic landscape poetry (Qian, 2022; Zhan, 2020). Within this traditional paradigm, his powerful imagery—the soaring mountains, roaring rivers, and celestial bodies—was primarily treated as a rhetorical device or an aesthetic object for appreciation. This approach has deep roots in Western thought; as Aristotle (1954) outlines in *Rhetoric and Poetics*, metaphor was long understood as functioning through shared similarities, a comparison rooted in likeness. This frames metaphor as a feature of literary embellishment rather than a core component of thought. Consequently, the conventional literary lens, while essential, has not fully illuminated the systematic cognitive patterns that govern his poetic genius.

The advent of cognitive linguistics, and specifically Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), offers a powerful alternative framework. Proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), CMT initiates a paradigm shift, positing that metaphor is not merely a decorative linguistic feature but a fundamental cognitive process of understanding one conceptual domain (the target) in terms of another (the source). This theory provides a powerful analytical tool for decoding the cognitive foundations of language and thought (Kövecses, 2010). The application of this framework to literary analysis was most influentially articulated in Lakoff and Turner's (1989) *More Than Cool Reason*. They coin the term “poetic metaphor,” arguing that “poetic thought uses the mechanisms of everyday thought, but it extends them, elaborates them, and combines them in ways that go beyond the ordinary” (p. 67). Building on this, scholars like Steen (1994) conduct empirical studies finding that literary metaphor, while rooted in common concepts, is both unique and comprehensive in its literary context. Stockwell (2002) further cements the field of cognitive poetics, contending that metaphor is central to how readers grasp a poem's meaning through cross-domain mappings.

This theoretical lens is subsequently adopted and developed by scholars in China. Geng (1993) writes *Metaphor*, the first book to apply Conceptual Metaphor Theory to the analysis of Chinese literature. This opens the door for new inquiries into the function of metaphor in Chinese poetry. Shu (2000) argues that metaphor constitutes the essence of poetry, achieving effects of “defamiliarization” and “vividness,” and famously proposes that “a metaphor is a poem in miniature” (p. 12). Similarly, Hu (2003) analyzes poetic metaphor's key features, such as its originality, aesthetic appeal, and symbolic integrity. This growing interest led to more specific applications; for example, Lan (2005) probes the metaphors in the poems of Qin Guan, a renowned poet of the Song Dynasty, while Gao (2011) uses CMT to examine the evolution of love metaphors in romantic poetry. These studies are part of a wider trend of applying linguistic theories to classical Chinese poetry, which includes analyses of the metaphorical representation of emotion (Zhang & Liu, 2018) and the conceptual structure of specific image categories (Xia, 2016). From the perspective of the Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Lan and Bai (2023) identify and analyze the ontological and appraisal metaphors on poetry in *Shipin*.

In summary, the existing literature reveals a significant gap at the intersection of Li Bai studies and cognitive linguistics. While traditional scholarship has masterfully detailed the literary and historical dimensions of his poetry (Qian, 2022), it has less frequently explored the underlying cognitive mechanisms that structure his unique poetic vision. Simultaneously, while cognitive linguistics offers a robust theoretical framework whose application to Chinese poetry has been demonstrated by a growing body of work (Xiao & Wen, 2023), its application to Li Bai's work has been limited and unsystematic. The cognitive architecture of his genius, particularly as manifested in his landscape poetry, remains largely uncharted territory. This study seeks to fill this gap by conducting the first systematic cognitive analysis of the conceptual metaphors in a representative corpus of Li Bai's landscape poems. By identifying and classifying the primary ontological, structural, and orientational metaphors, this paper aims to move beyond literary appreciation to reveal the deep conceptual systems that underpin Li Bai's enduring artistic power.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design, grounded in the framework of cognitive linguistics, to conduct a systematic analysis of conceptual metaphors in a representative corpus of Li Bai's landscape poetry. The methodology is designed to rigorously identify, classify, and analyze the cognitive patterns that underpin the poet's unique artistic vision.

A. Corpus Selection

The corpus for this study consists of 20 of Li Bai's most iconic and widely-circulated landscape poems. These works were selected based on their canonical status in Chinese literary anthologies and their rich depiction of natural scenery, ensuring they provide a fertile ground for metaphorical analysis. The selection aims to be representative of the major themes and stylistic features of Li Bai's landscape poetry, from majestic mountain vistas to dynamic river journeys.

B. Analytical Framework

The primary analytical framework for this study is Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and later applied to poetics by Lakoff and Turner (1989). CMT posits that metaphor is not merely a linguistic decoration but a fundamental cognitive mapping from a more concrete source domain to a more abstract target domain (e.g., a JOURNEY is used to understand LOVE). This study adopts CMT's tripartite classification of metaphors—ontological, structural, and orientational metaphors—as the primary coding scheme for categorizing the identified instances. This framework allows for a systematic examination of how Li Bai conceptualized abstract experiences like emotion, aspiration, and time through the tangible world of nature.

C. Procedure of Analysis

The analysis was conducted in a multi-stage process, centered on the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), a systematic method developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007) to ensure reliable identification of metaphorical language. The procedure was adapted for classical Chinese as follows:

Contextual Understanding: First, each of the 20 poems was read in its entirety to establish a holistic understanding of its contextual, thematic, and emotional meaning.

Lexical Unit Identification: Next, the text was broken down into individual lexical units (words or key phrases) relevant to the landscape depiction and emotional expression.

Metaphorical Identification: For each lexical unit, its contextual meaning was determined and compared against its more basic, literal, or historically primary meaning. If a unit's contextual meaning was distinct from but could be understood in relation to its basic meaning, it was identified as a metaphorical expression. For example, in the line “山衔好月来” (The mountain holds the good moon in its mouth), the basic meaning of “衔” (to hold in the mouth) is applied to a mountain, marking it as metaphorical.

Inference and Categorization: Once a metaphorical expression was identified, the underlying conceptual metaphor (e.g., MOUNTAIN IS HUMAN) was inferred and recorded. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, this procedural identification was supplemented by rigorous manual verification. The researcher cross-checked all identified metaphors against the poetic context and classical Chinese commentaries to confirm their metaphorical function. Finally, all identified conceptual metaphors (N=72) were categorized according to the CMT framework (ontological, structural, orientational), and their frequencies were tallied to reveal overarching patterns in Li Bai's cognitive style.

IV. RESULTS

As Table 1 shows below, the cognitive analysis of the 20 selected landscape poems by Li Bai yielded a total of 72 distinct conceptual metaphors. These metaphors were systematically identified, categorized, and quantified according to the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). The findings reveal a clear pattern in Li Bai's cognitive style, demonstrating his profound tendency to conceptualize abstract emotions, philosophical ideas, and personal aspirations through the tangible and magnificent imagery of the natural world. The distribution of these metaphors across the three primary categories—ontological, structural, and orientational—provides a clear map of his poetic mind. Structural metaphors were the most prevalent (n=39, 54.2%), followed by ontological metaphors (n=28, 38.9%), with orientational metaphors being the least frequent but thematically significant (n=5, 6.9%).

TABLE 1
THE TYPES AND QUANTITIES OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN THE SOURCE TEXT OF LI BAI'S LANDSCAPE POETRY

Types of conceptual metaphors		Quantity		Percentage		Examples
Ontological metaphors	Entity and substance metaphors	28	3	38.9%	4.2%	轻舟已过万重山；九江秀色可揽结；雁引愁心去
	Container metaphors		7		9.7%	楼观岳阳尽；江入大荒流；青冥浩荡不见底；
	Personification		18		25%	山月随人归；青萝拂行衣；白云处处长随君；
Structural metaphors		39		54.2%		白波九道流雪山；银河倒挂三石梁；青天削出金芙蓉
Orientational metaphors		5		6.9%		耐可乘流直上天；升沉应已定；难于上青天
Total		72		100%		

A. Ontological Metaphors: Animating the Inanimate World

Ontological metaphors, which involve understanding abstract experiences and non-physical entities in terms of concrete objects, substances, containers, or persons, were found in 28 instances. These metaphors are fundamental to Li Bai's poetic world, as they transform the static landscape into a dynamic and interactive realm. This category was further broken down into three sub-types: personification, container metaphors, and entity/substance metaphors.

(a). Personification

Most notably, personification (n=18) was the dominant form of ontological metaphor, accounting for nearly a quarter of all identified metaphors. This high frequency underscores Li Bai's characteristic impulse to animate nature, endowing it with human consciousness, emotions, and actions. Through this cognitive device, the natural world ceases to be a mere backdrop and becomes an active participant in the poet's experience.

A quintessential example is found in *Sitting Alone in Face of Peak Jingting* (《独坐敬亭山》): “相看两不厌，只有敬亭山” (We are not tired, the Peak and I, nor I of him, nor he of me). Here, the underlying metaphor MOUNTAIN IS A COMPANION maps human qualities of mutual gaze and companionship onto the mountain, transforming it from an inanimate object into a sentient friend who alleviates the poet's loneliness. Similarly, in *Ascending the Tower of Yueyang* (《与夏十二登岳阳楼》), the line “山衔好月来” (Green mountains throw the moon up from their mouth) employs the metaphor MOUNTAIN IS A LIVING CREATURE, mapping the human action of holding something in the mouth (“衔”) onto the mountain. This creates a vivid, almost mythical image of the landscape actively presenting the moon.

(b). Container Metaphors

Container metaphors (n=7) were also frequently used to delineate space and structure the poet's perception of the vast landscape. In these instances, abstract spaces or geographical features are conceptualized as bounded containers. For example, in *Farewell Beyond the Thorn-Gate Gorge* (《渡荆门送别》), the line “山随平野尽，江入大荒流” (Where mountains end begins the plain; The river rolls to boundless main) conceptualizes the vast plain as a container, with the river flowing into it (LAND IS A CONTAINER). This mapping gives the landscape a coherent structure and emphasizes its immense scale.

(c). Entity and Substance Metaphors

Finally, entity and substance metaphors (n=3) were employed to make abstract emotions tangible and quantifiable. In *Ascending the Tower of Yueyang* (《与夏十二登岳阳楼》), the line “雁引愁心去” (Taking away our sorrow, wild geese fly) relies on the metaphor SORROW IS A PHYSICAL OBJECT. Sorrow, an intangible emotion, is conceptualized as a portable object that the geese can physically carry away, vividly illustrating the poet's sense of emotional release and catharsis, which can be illustrated in Table 2.

TABLE 2
WORKING MECHANISM OF SORROW IS A PHYSICAL OBJECT

Source domain: Physical object	Mapping	Target domain: Sorrow
Can be taken away	→	Can be forgotten

B. Structural Metaphors: Building Worlds With Nature's Forms

Structural metaphors were the most prevalent category identified (n=39), constituting over half of the total instances. This type of metaphor, where one complex or abstract concept is systematically structured in terms of another, more familiar one, is the primary mechanism through which Li Bai builds his sublime and hyperbolic poetic world. He consistently maps the grand structures of the natural landscape—particularly mountains and water—onto abstract domains like time, emotion, and divinity.

(a). *Water Metaphors*

The most iconic example is found in *The Waterfall in Mount Lu Viewed from Afar* (《望庐山瀑布》): “飞流直下三千尺，疑是银河落九天” (Its torrent dashes down three thousand feet from high, as if the Silver River fell from the blue sky). This line is built on the powerful structural metaphor A WATERFALL IS THE MILKY WAY. The mapping is systematic: the waterfall’s verticality, immense height, shimmering whiteness, and overwhelming power are all understood in terms of the celestial river falling from the heavens. This does not merely compare the two; it structures our entire understanding of the waterfall’s grandeur in cosmic terms, achieving an effect of sublime hyperbole that is a hallmark of Li Bai’s style.

Furthermore, Li Bai frequently employs the metaphor WATER IS TIME, as in the line “大江茫茫去不还” (The never-returning waves of the River onward go). The river’s continuous, irreversible flow provides the concrete structure for understanding the abstract, unstoppable passage of time and life, just as Table 3 shows below.

TABLE 3
WORKING MECHANISM OF WATER IS TIME

Source domain: Water	Mapping	Target domain: Time
Flowing onward	→	Passing onward
Never-returning	→	Cannot be reversed

(b). *Mountain Metaphors*

Another powerful structural metaphor is A MOUNTAIN PEAK IS A FLOWER, as seen in *The Five Greybeard-like Peaks of Mount Lu Viewed from Afar* (《望庐山五老峰》): “庐山东南五老峰，青天削出金芙蓉” (Southeast of Mountain Lu, five Peaks of Greybeard stand as golden lotus carved by Heaven’s azure hand). Li Bai conceptualizes the Peaks of Mount Lu as a “golden lotus”, mapping the natural mountain structure onto a beautiful aquatic plant. By highlighting the delicate form of the lotus, the steepness and magnificence of the peaks are emphasized, enhancing their grandeur. This enables readers to perceive the sacredness of nature’s creation through the action of “carving”. It allows readers to have a more intuitive and emotional understanding of the Peaks of Lu Mountain.

C. *Orientational Metaphors: Charting Life’s Path*

While the least frequent category (n=5), orientational metaphors play a crucial role in grounding Li Bai’s abstract values, social status, and life ambitions in basic human spatial experiences like UP/DOWN and FRONT/BACK. These metaphors reveal the cognitive-axiological system underlying his worldview.

(a). *UP/DOWN Metaphors*

The UP/DOWN schema is consistently used to conceptualize social and personal trajectories. In *To a Friend Departing for Shu* (《送友人入蜀》), the line “升沉应已定” (Decided our rise and fall) clearly employs the metaphors PROMOTION IS UP and DEMOTION/FAILURE IS DOWN. The abstract concept of one’s career fortune is mapped onto vertical movement, a cognitive universal that immediately conveys the poet’s concerns with his and his friend’s political fates. Similarly, his ambition is often expressed with an upward orientation, as in the metaphor POLITICAL CAREER AMBITION IS UP, reflecting a desire to ascend to a higher social and influential plane.

TABLE 4
WORKING MECHANISM OF PROMOTION IS UP, DEGRADATION IS DOWN

Source domain	Mapping	Target domain
Rise	→	Achieving promotion in officialdom
Fall	→	Encountering degradation in officialdom
Change in height	→	Change in official status

(b). *FRONT/BACK Metaphors*

The FRONT/BACK orientation is primarily used to conceptualize time. A powerful example is found in *Invitation to Wine* (《将进酒》): “君不见黄河之水天上来，奔流到海不复回” (Do you not see the Yellow River come from the sky; Rushing into the sea and never come back?). The river’s unidirectional flow toward the sea, never to return, serves as a powerful vehicle for the metaphor THE PAST IS BACK. Li Bai draws on an intuitive understanding of the “BACK” movement in the spatial domain and maps it onto the abstract concept of time. This makes the abstract nature of past time tangible and reduces the difficulty of comprehension. Readers vividly comprehend that past time, like water

flowing backward, is unable to reverse its course. This metaphorical expression intensifies the poet's sense of helplessness and lamentation over the fleetingness of time.

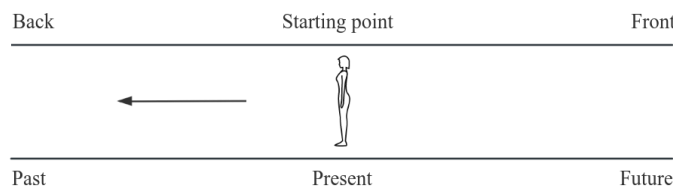


Figure 1. Conceptualization of THE PAST IS BACK

In summary, the results of this cognitive analysis demonstrate that Li Bai's poetic genius is not random but is underpinned by a systematic and coherent set of conceptual metaphors. The high prevalence of personification and structural metaphors reveals a cognitive process that consistently animates the natural world and uses its grand forms as a template for understanding life's most profound abstractions. The landscape in his poetry is, therefore, not merely a setting but the very source domain from which his unique and enduring vision of the world is constructed.

V. DISCUSSION

The cognitive analysis of Li Bai's landscape poetry reveals a profound and systematic metaphorical framework that underpins his celebrated artistic genius. The findings, which identify a landscape-centric cognitive model dominated by structural and ontological metaphors, move the scholarly conversation beyond describing the effects of his poetry—its romanticism, grandeur, and ethereal quality—to explaining the underlying cognitive mechanisms that produce them. In essence, this study demonstrates that the natural world is not merely a subject for Li Bai, but the fundamental and indispensable source domain through which he conceptualizes existence itself. This core finding, when placed in dialogue with existing literature, both reinforces traditional critical assessments and provides them with a new theoretical foundation.

A particularly salient finding is the high frequency of personification ($n=18$), which functions as the cognitive engine for what literary critics have long identified as Li Bai's Daoist-inflected sense of "communion with nature" (天人合一) (Qian, 2022). While traditional scholarship rightly points to his philosophical leanings (Zhan, 2020), our analysis provides the specific linguistic and cognitive evidence for this worldview. The metaphor MOUNTAIN IS A COMPANION in *Sitting Alone in Face of Peak Jingting* is not just a poetic device; it is the manifestation of a cognitive process that dissolves the boundary between the human observer and the natural world, transforming an inanimate object into a sentient partner. This provides a cognitive basis for the perceived intimacy and emotional resonance in his work, explaining how he achieves the effect of merging his consciousness with the landscape.

Furthermore, the dominance of structural metaphors ($n=39$) directly challenges older, Aristotelian views of metaphor as being based on simple comparison or substitution. The iconic line "飞流直下三千尺，疑是银河落九天" (Its torrent dashes down three thousand feet from high, as if the Silver River fell from the blue sky) is a powerful case in point. A simple "Comparison Theory" would suggest the waterfall is merely like the Milky Way. However, our CMT analysis shows a far more complex operation: A WATERFALL IS THE MILKY WAY is a structural metaphor that systematically maps the attributes of the celestial domain (cosmic scale, divine origin, overwhelming power) onto the terrestrial waterfall. This aligns perfectly with Lakoff and Turner's (1989) seminal argument in *More Than Cool Reason* that "poetic thought uses the mechanisms of everyday thought, but it extends them." Li Bai takes a basic, universal conceptual metaphor, like WATER IS TIME, and elevates it to a cosmic scale in *Invitation to Wine* with the image of the unstoppable Yellow River, thus demonstrating precisely the kind of conceptual extension that Lakoff and Turner described as the hallmark of poetic genius.

By applying this framework to Li Bai, our study builds upon the foundational work of Chinese scholars who first introduced cognitive linguistics to the study of Chinese literature. While pioneers like Geng (1993) and Shu (2000) established the theoretical viability of such an approach, and subsequent studies applied it to specific themes like love metaphors in Song dynasty poetry (Gao, 2011), this research represents one of the first systematic attempts to map the overarching cognitive worldview of China's most celebrated romantic poet through his most defining genre. Unlike fragmented analyses of specific images (Xia, 2016), this study reveals an integrated system where ontological, structural, and orientational metaphors work in concert to construct a coherent, if fantastical, reality. The finding that PROMOTION IS UP and DEMOTION IS DOWN governs his political anxieties and shows that even his most personal feelings are structured by the same universal cognitive principles that shape his cosmic visions.

The implications of this cognitive-centric view are significant. For literary studies, it provides a new analytical toolkit that moves beyond subjective labels like "unconstrained" (豪放) to identify the specific, repeatable cognitive operations that generate this aesthetic. For the field of translation studies, these findings are critical. As explored in the larger dissertation from which this study is drawn, a translator who only perceives the surface-level imagery without grasping the underlying conceptual mapping—for instance, seeing a mountain as just a mountain and not as a sentient being or a divine sculpture—will inevitably fail to convey the poem's deeper meaning. The cognitive equivalence is lost, and the

translation becomes a hollow echo of the original. Understanding that Li Bai thinks with mountains and rivers is paramount for any faithful cross-cultural transmission of his work.

Nevertheless, the study's limitations must be acknowledged. The corpus of 20 poems, while iconic, is not exhaustive, and a larger-scale analysis might uncover further metaphorical patterns. Moreover, the application of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) to classical Chinese presents unique challenges due to the language's conciseness and semantic density, requiring a degree of interpretive judgment. These limitations, however, open clear avenues for future research. A comparative cognitive analysis between Li Bai and a more "realist" poet like Du Fu could yield profound insights into the distinct cognitive styles that defined the High Tang era. Additionally, future studies could directly investigate the reception of translated metaphors among target-language readers to empirically test the cognitive effects of different translation strategies, building directly on the cognitive foundation established here.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has conducted a systematic cognitive analysis of Li Bai's landscape poetry, moving beyond traditional literary appreciation to uncover the fundamental cognitive mechanisms that structure his celebrated artistic genius. The analysis revealed a coherent and deeply ingrained metaphorical system, identifying 72 distinct conceptual metaphors. Of these, structural metaphors were the most dominant, followed by ontological metaphors, highlighting Li Bai's cognitive preference for using the grand forms of the natural world to understand more abstract concepts. These metaphorical systems work in concert to produce the sublime and dynamic qualities characteristic of his work. Specifically, structural metaphors like WATERFALL IS MILKY WAY and ontological metaphors, particularly the frequent use of personification (e.g., MOUNTAIN IS A COMPANION), are the primary cognitive tools that animate the landscape, endowing it with cosmic grandeur and a sentient personality.

The cognitive patterns identified in this study reveal a worldview where nature serves as the ultimate source domain for conceptualizing existence. Li Bai consistently maps the tangible world of mountains and rivers onto the abstract target domains of emotion, time, and ambition, as seen in metaphors such as SORROW IS A PHYSICAL OBJECT and PROMOTION IS UP. This demonstrates that even his most personal feelings and societal concerns were grounded in concrete, embodied experiences. Ultimately, this research suggests that Li Bai's unconstrained romanticism is not an arbitrary flight of fancy but the product of a systematic cognitive process that sees the human, the natural, and the cosmic as profoundly intertwined.

The implications of these findings are significant. For literary criticism, this study provides a new analytical framework that explains how the aesthetic effects of Li Bai's poetry are achieved, complementing traditional rhetorical analysis. For cognitive poetics, it serves as a valuable cross-cultural case study, reinforcing the thesis that poetic genius lies in the extraordinary extension of universal, everyday modes of thought. Finally, the findings hold practical importance for translation, underscoring that achieving true fidelity requires reconstructing not just linguistic meaning but also cognitive equivalence. A translator must grasp the underlying conceptual mappings—seeing the mountain as a companion, not just a landform—to convey the deep resonance of the original work.

While this study offers a new lens for understanding Li Bai's work, it is not without limitations. For one thing, the corpus of 20 poems, though representative, is a small fraction of the poet's extensive oeuvre, and the application of the Metaphor Identification Procedure to classical Chinese involves a degree of interpretive judgment. For another, metaphors in Chinese poetry are formed by its own unique culture. Thus when analyzing poetic metaphors deeply rooted in Chinese cultural traditions, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) may encounter interpretive constraints due to differences in cultural-psychological structures (Zhou, 2019). These limitations, however, illuminate clear pathways for future research. Larger-scale, corpus-based analyses could expand upon the patterns identified here, while a comparative cognitive study between Li Bai and a "realist" poet like Du Fu could yield profound insights into the distinct cognitive styles that defined their era. Such future work, building on the cognitive foundation established here, can further unravel the intricate relationship between thought, language, and artistic creation.

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