

# **Translatability of Tagore's *Stray Birds* into Chinese with Insights from Constrained Language**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Poetry has long been considered untranslatable. However, Walsh (2018) proposes a theory of “essentially translatable poetry”. To test the feasibility of Walsh’s framework, this paper applies it to Rabindranath Tagore’s (1861-1941) poems in *Stray Birds*. Based on an examination of all 325 poems of *Stray Birds* and their Chinese translations, there are four features greatly relevant to the translatability of poetry: dominance of imagery, absence of culture-specific items, free verse, and simple lexical and syntactic structures, in line with Walsh’s (2018) proposal. As *Stray Birds* comprises Tagore’s self-translations from Bengali into English and poems originally written in English, this study discusses the reasons for translatability from the perspective of constrained language, which refers to the language produced under prominent constraints. Readers’ reception is also examined to investigate the effects of Tagore’s strategies, which are found to contribute to the ease of cross-cultural understanding and the circulation of *Stray Birds* as world literature.

**KEYWORDS:** constrained language, essentially translatable poetry, poetry translation, *Stray Birds*, Tagore, translatability, world literature

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## **摘要**

詩歌長久以來被認為是不可譯的。然而，Walsh (2018) 提出了一個「本質可譯詩歌」的理論。為了探討Walsh框架的可行性，本文將其應用於羅賓德拉納特·泰戈爾 (Rabindranath Tagore, 1861 - 1941) 的詩集《飛鳥集》。透過對《飛鳥集》全部325首詩及其中文譯本的分析，發現有四項特徵與詩歌的可譯性密切相關：意象的主導地位、缺乏文化特定項、自由詩形式，以及簡單的詞彙與句法結構，這些皆借鑒於Walsh (2018) 的理論。由於《飛鳥集》包含了泰戈爾從孟加拉語自譯為英語的詩作以及原本以英語創作的詩作，本研究從受限語言的角度探討其可譯性的原因——即在明顯限制條件下所產生的語言。此外，本文亦考察了讀者的接受情形，以探討泰戈爾這些寫作策略的效果。結果顯示，這些策略有助於促進跨文化理解，並推動《飛鳥集》作為世界文學的流傳。

**關鍵詞：**受限語言、本質可譯詩歌、詩歌翻譯、《飛鳥集》、泰戈爾、可譯性、世界文學