

A Study On The English Translation Of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage From The Perspective Of Eco-Translatology

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Abstract:

This paper adopts eco-translatology as its theoretical framework and explores the English translation methods of China's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) from three dimensions: language, culture, and communication. By analyzing specific cases, the study aims to enhance the quality of ICH translation, promote its international dissemination, and contribute to global cultural diversity.

Keywords: *Eco-translatology, China's Intangible Cultural Heritage, English Translation methods*

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I. Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage is a treasure of human civilization, embodying the unique historical memories, cultural genes, and spiritual cores of a nation or group^[1]. As a country with abundant ICH resources, China has numerous items inscribed on UNESCO's Lists (Registers) of Intangible Cultural Heritage, ranking first globally in terms of quantity^[2]. These ICH items are not only the pride of the Chinese nation but also a shared asset of humanity^[3]. With the acceleration of globalization and increasingly cultural exchanges, there is an urgent need for Chinese ICH to "go global". As a bridge for cross-cultural communication, translation plays a crucial role in ICH dissemination. However, translating ICH faces challenges, such as profound cultural connotations, unique linguistic forms, and diverse translation purposes. Traditional translation theories often fall short in guiding ICH translation practice. Eco-translatology, an emerging translation theory, examines translation activities from an ecological perspective and emphasizes adaptive selection. Introducing eco-translatology into ICH translation studies provides new ideas and methods to address these challenges, improving translation quality and effectiveness and promoting ICH dissemination and inheritance internationally.

II. Eco-Translatology

The Origin and Development of Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology was first proposed by Hu Gengshen, a Professor at Tsinghua University in 2001. Its theoretical foundation integrates the knowledge from multiple disciplines, including ecology, translatology, and culturology. The emergence of this theory aligns with the global ecological trend, as well as the "cultural turn" and "interdisciplinary turn" in translation studies. After years of development, eco-translatology has achieved significant results in theoretical construction, empirical research, and application, gradually becoming an important school in translation studies.

Core concepts

Translation ecological environment

The translation ecological environment is a key concept in eco-translatology, referring to the world composed of the source text, source language, and target language. It encompasses various factors, including language, culture, communication, society, and nature^[4]. In the translation process, the translator is at the center of the translation ecological environment and must consider the impact of various ecological factors^[5]. For example, when translating ancient Chinese poems, the translator must address the poems' linguistic forms (e.g., rhythm, cadence, vocabulary) and understand the cultural images they contain (e.g., the noble character symbolized by pine trees, bamboo, and plum blossoms), the poems' creative background (e.g., the cultural characteristics of the era and the poet's personal experiences), and the communicative purposes (e.g., conveying the beauty of Chinese classical culture to Western readers).

Adaptation and Selection

Adaptation and selection are the core principles of eco-translatology^[6]. During the translation process, the translator must first adapt to the translation ecological environment^[6], by understanding the linguistic features, cultural backgrounds, and readers' needs of both the source and target languages. Then, based on this adaptation, the translator makes selections, including translation strategies, methods, vocabulary, and sentence patterns. For example, when translating unique terms in Chinese ICH, the translator must choose appropriate methods, such as literal translation with annotation, free translation, or transliteration, based on the target readers' acceptance level and cultural background. For example, "Taijiquan" can be directly translated as "Tai Chi Chuan", with annotations explaining its movement characteristics, cultural connotations, and fitness benefits. This approach preserves the source language's cultural characteristics while facilitating understanding for target language readers.

Multidimensional transformation

Eco-translatology emphasizes multidimensional transformation in the translation process, focusing on three main aspects: the linguistic dimension, the cultural dimension, and the communicative dimension^[7]. The linguistic dimension requires translators to address differences in linguistic forms, grammatical structures, and lexical collocations between the source and target languages and make appropriate adjustments. The cultural dimension requires translators to convey cultural connotations accurately and avoid misunderstandings. The communicative dimension requires translators to consider the translation's purpose and effect, ensuring the text aligns with target readers' communicative habits. For example, when translating introductions to traditional Chinese festivals, translators must accurately translate Chinese festival greetings into English, ensuring correct vocabulary and grammar usage. At the cultural dimension, they should clearly explain the customs' cultural implications. For instance, pasting Spring Festival couplets symbolizes saying goodbye to the old year, welcoming the new, and inviting good luck and happiness. At the communicative dimension, the translation should align with Western readers' reading habits, facilitating understanding and acceptance.

III. The Importance And Challenges Of Translating Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage

The Importance of Translating Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage

Promoting cultural exchange and dissemination

Chinese intangible cultural heritage embodies rich philosophical ideas, moral concepts, and aesthetic values. Translating these heritages into English enhances mutual understanding and cultural identity among different countries and ethnic groups, promoting cultural exchange and integration. For example, Peking Opera,

a quintessential Chinese art form, can be better appreciated globally through English translations, highlighting its unique performance styles, singing rhythms, and character portrayals. This serves as an excellent medium for promoting Chinese culture.

Protecting and Inheriting Intangible Cultural Heritage

Amid globalization, some intangible cultural heritages are at risk of being lost. Translating them into English and promoting them internationally can attract more attention and resources, providing new impetus for their protection and inheritance. For example, Suzhou embroidery, a traditional Chinese embroidery technique, has gained international attention through English translations and exhibitions, attracting enthusiasts and revitalizing this ancient craft on the global stage.

Enhancing National Cultural Soft Power

Intangible cultural heritage is a key component of a nation's cultural soft power. High-quality English translations of intangible cultural heritage can highlight the unique charm and profound heritage of Chinese culture, enhancing China's international cultural influence^[8]. For instance, Chinese paper-cutting art, with its exquisite designs and rich cultural connotations, has been disseminated globally through English translations. This showcases the creativity of Chinese folk art and enhances the appeal of Chinese culture.

Challenges in Translating Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage

Linguistic Differences

Chinese and English belong to different language families, with significant differences in vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure^[9]. Many terms and expressions in Chinese intangible cultural heritage have unique linguistic structures and cultural connotations, making it difficult to find direct equivalents in English. For example, traditional Chinese medicine concepts like “meridians and collaterals” and “qi and blood” lack direct English equivalents, posing significant translation challenges^[10].

Culture-loaded Words

Chinese intangible cultural heritage contains many culture-laden terms that carry rich historical, cultural, and religious connotations. The lack of direct equivalents in English poses a significant translation challenge^[11]. For example, the dragon symbolizes auspiciousness and authority in Chinese culture, but in Western culture, it is often seen as an evil and ferocious monster. This stark difference in cultural connotations can lead to misunderstandings if translated literally.

Diverse Translation Purposes

The purposes of translating intangible cultural heritage are diverse, including cultural dissemination, academic research, and commercial promotion. Different purposes impose different requirements on the translations, requiring translators to select appropriate strategies and methods. For instance, the translated introductory texts of intangible cultural heritage culture for tourism promotion lay more emphasis on the vividness and attractiveness of the language; while translations for academic research place greater emphasis on accuracy and professionalism.

IV. English Translation Methods Of Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage From The Perspective Of Eco-Translatology

Eco-translatology emphasizes multidimensional transformation in the translation process, focusing on three main aspects: the linguistic dimension, the cultural dimension, and the communicative dimension. Below are methods for translating Chinese intangible cultural heritage from the three dimensions.

Adaptive Selection and Transformation at the Linguistic Dimension

In the linguistic dimension, translators should adapt the linguistic forms of intangible cultural heritage texts to align with English language characteristics and expression habits. For example, consider the English translation of Kunqu, a traditional Chinese intangible cultural heritage. As an ancient Chinese opera genre known as the “ancestor of all operas,” its libretto lyrics are mostly seven-character or five-character verses with strict rhythms. For example, the line “原来姹紫嫣红开遍，似这般都付与断井颓垣” is translated as “So the garden is all abloom in pink and red, yet all abandoned to dry wells and crumbling walls.” This translation retains the original’s artistic conception while conforming to English expression habits by adjusting the sentence structure^[12]. Similarly, when translating traditional Chinese opera lyrics—typically rhyming poems—translators must adapt sentence structures and vocabulary to fit English rhythmic patterns or prose expression habits while retaining the original content.

Adaptive Selection and Transformation at the Cultural Dimension

Cultural transformation is crucial for translating intangible cultural heritage. Translators must deeply understand the source language's cultural connotations and use appropriate methods to accurately convey this information to target readers^[13]. For example, when translating culture-laden terms, methods such as literal translation with annotations, free translation, or substitution can be used. For instance, “qipao” can be translated as “Cheongsam (a traditional Chinese dress for women)”, with annotations explaining its style to help Western readers understand this aspect of Chinese clothing culture^[14]. In translating Kunqu, which contains many traditional Chinese cultural images, translators can use annotations or explanatory translations to convey these images' connotations. For example, “peony” can be annotated as “Peony, a symbol of wealth and prosperity in Chinese culture”.

Adaptive Selection and Transformation at the Communicative Dimension

The communicative dimension requires translators to consider translation purposes and effects, selecting appropriate language styles and expressions based on the target audience's characteristics and needs^[15]. For example, brochures targeting ordinary foreign tourists should use concise, clear, and vivid language with short sentences, while translations of research materials for professional scholars should prioritize term accuracy and logical structure. For example, translating Kunqu for different purposes and audiences requires varying approaches. For introducing Kunqu to Western audiences, the translation should be accessible and engaging. For academic research, it should focus on accuracy and professionalism, with detailed annotations for allusions and historical contexts.

V. Conclusion

Eco-translatology offers a novel theoretical perspective and research method for translating Chinese intangible cultural heritage^[16]. By adapting to the translation ecological environment and applying multi-dimensional transformation strategies, it effectively addresses language, cultural, and communication challenges, enhancing translation quality and promoting international dissemination. However, the application

of eco-translatology in translating intangible cultural heritage is still in its early stages of exploration and development. Future research should expand the scope of eco-translatology's theoretical application, deeply explore the unique connotations and translation principles of intangible cultural heritage, enhance empirical research, and integrate modern information technology and translation tools to improve translation efficiency and quality. Additionally, there is a need to cultivate more interdisciplinary talents proficient in translation theories and techniques, and knowledgeable about intangible cultural heritage and cross-cultural communication. This will provide a strong foundation for promoting Chinese intangible cultural heritage globally and enhance its visibility on the world stage.

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