

Original Paper

A Study on the C-E Translation of Words with Chinese
Characteristics in *The Handbook of the Belt and Road* from the
Perspective of Eco-Translatology

Jiazhen Geng & Shuwen Wang

School of Foreign Languages, Southwest Petroleum University, Chengdu, Sichuan, 610500, China

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Abstract

The translation of words with Chinese characteristics plays a crucial role in international communication and cultural exchange. It showcases the uniqueness of Chinese culture, promotes cross-cultural understanding and communication, and facilitates the global dissemination of Chinese culture. This paper takes The Handbook of the Belt and Road as a case study to explore the translation techniques of words with Chinese characteristics, based on Eco-Translatology. It also analyzes the factors influencing the choice of translation techniques, such as linguistic differences, cultural differences, and communicative purposes.

Keywords

Words with Chinese characteristics, Eco-Translatology, The Handbook of the Belt and Road

1. Introduction

With the deepening advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, the translation and dissemination of related literature have become crucial for fostering international understanding and cooperation. *The Handbook of the Belt and Road*, published by China Social Sciences Press, serves as a key text that systematically elaborates on the core concepts, cooperative framework, and achievements of the initiative. Its English translation aims to shape and expand the global discursive and operational influence of the Belt and Road Initiative, enabling people from various countries to gain a comprehensive understanding of the initiative while highlighting China's cultural confidence and cultural subjectivity. The text contains a significant number of words with Chinese characteristics, reflecting China's political, economic, cultural, and social phenomena, all of which carry distinct temporal and regional features. For example, policy coordination; open economy; peace is most precious; mass entrepreneurship and innovation.

Guided by Eco-Translatology, this study constructs a parallel corpus to systematically analyze the translation techniques employed for these words with Chinese characteristics in the English version of *The Handbook of the Belt and Road*. It further evaluates how the translation adapts to the target-language ecological environment while effectively preserving and disseminating the concepts and connotations unique to China. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for the practice of translating words with Chinese characteristics for international audiences.

2. Eco-Translatology

Eco-Translatology is an interdisciplinary study that incorporates the new perspective of “ecology”. In the words of Professor Hu Gengshen, it can be understood as “an ecological approach to translation studies” (Hu Gengshen, 2008: 11). Its foci include “translator centeredness”, “three-dimensional transformation”, and the “translational eco-environment” which represents the overall environment of the existential state of the translator and the translated text, etc. The application scope of Eco-translatology is remarkably broad, extending beyond literary translation to encompass non-literary fields such as scientific and technical documents, business texts, and news reporting. Moreover, it demonstrates strong practical value in multiple areas including language teaching, cross-cultural communication, and cultural dissemination (Cai Chunlin, 2025). For example, Hou Guanghai and Guo Lina (2025) analyzed the translational eco-environments of the English translation of *Love Under the Willows* from the perspective of Eco-Translatology. Wang Jing (2024) conducted an analysis of the international dissemination of ecological culture in the Yellow River Basin from the perspective of Eco-translatology, summarizing the issues present in the process of spreading Yellow River culture both domestically and internationally, and proposing corresponding strategies.

In Eco-Translatology, the “three-dimensional transformation” is an essential part. It emphasizes three dimensions—linguistic, cultural, and communicative—to achieve adaptive selection and transformation between the source and target languages (Hu Gengshen, 2004: 133). To be specific, the adaptive selection and transformation at linguistic dimension serves as the foundation of translation practice. It primarily involves choices related to language use, lexical selection, and syntactic structures. The adaptive selection and transformation at cultural dimension centers on the comprehension of diverse cultural contexts. This dimension emphasizes the need to address cultural differences, taking full account of the characteristics and acceptability of the target culture during the translation process to prevent cultural misinterpretation. The adaptive selection and transformation at communicative dimension represents the overarching goal of translation. On this level, translators must take into consideration the target readers’ responses and adapt to contextual variables such as social, political, and economic factors that may influence the communication. In recent years, empirical research on the “three-dimensional transformation” developed rapidly, extending into the field of text translation and encompassing areas such as literary translation, subtitle translation, and news translation (Wang Ashu & Shen Yuning, 2023). Long Xiang and Liu Yimeng (2022) took “three-dimensional transformation” as the theoretical guidance

to analyze the pros and cons of the English translation of *While Drinking (V)*, verifying that “three-dimensional transformation” can promote the proper transmission and reproduction of language, culture and information of the original poetry. Xiu Wenqiao and Jiang Tianyang (2018) took Ken Liu’s translation of *Folding Beijing* as an Example to evaluate and analyze the strategies adopted in the translation of science fictions from linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions.

In summary, Eco-Translatology draws an analogy between the environment of translation and the natural ecological environment, offering a new narrative to reinterpret the process, principles, and methods of translation.

3. The Belt and Road Initiative and Words with Chinese Characteristics

Since the proposal of the Belt and Road Initiative, related translation studies have grown significantly. Huang Youyi (2017) pointed out that the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative relies heavily on translation. There was a growing demand for translation in engineering and economics of the Belt and Road Initiative, promoting China’s translation sector from a primarily literary focus to an interdisciplinary one. Han Yang and Hu Kaibao (2023) made a contrastive analysis of English translations of “the Belt and Road” in China’s official documents and foreign media in different periods, based on the theory of critical translation studies and the corpus-based approach. With the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, the accurate translation of words with Chinese characteristics holds significant importance in cultural transmission, mutual communication between China and other countries, project implementation and shaping China’s image (Zhao Qian, 2024). In *The Handbook of the Belt and Road*, there are a lot of words with Chinese characteristics. Which strategy, method or technique can be adopted to translate them accurately? Wang Dongping (2020) analyzed words with Chinese characteristics in *Government Report*, proving that translator adopted the strategy of keeping cultural images to translate these words. Zhang Linlin (2013) have pointed out that domestic media primarily employ methods such as literal translation and free translation to translate words with Chinese characteristics. Eco-translatology can also provide strong support for the English translation of texts about the Belt and Road and words with Chinese characteristics. From the “three-dimensional” transformation, Ma Liwa (2024) explored the translation methods and techniques of the think-tank texts about the Belt and Road, demonstrating the feasibility and practicality of Eco-translatology to guide the translation of think-tank texts. Moreover, from the perspective of Eco-translatology, the translator can adopt methods such as literal translation and transliteration to translate words with Chinese characteristics (Yuan Xing, 2021).

Studies about English translation of words with Chinese characteristics focus mainly on the strategies or methods, rarely on the techniques. In the translation studies of the Belt and Road, a few studies focus on *The Handbook of the Belt and Road*, which explains the core concepts, cooperative framework, and achievements of the Belt and Road Initiative in detail. During the process of translating words with Chinese characteristics, the translator’s selection of techniques such as addition, omission and conversion is never solely based on converting linguistic forms between the source and target languages. It also

necessitates considerations of how to convey cultural connotations, achieve communicative goals, and convey China's voice. This corresponds to the "three-dimensional transformation" in Eco-Translatology. Therefore, this study chooses to analyze the translation techniques of words with Chinese characteristics in *The Handbook of the Belt and Road*, aiming to offer a new perspective or inspiration for the translation studies related to the Belt and Road Initiative.

4. Analysis of words with Chinese characteristics from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

In Eco-Translatology, the "three-dimensional" transformation serves as a key approach within the theory, focusing on the adaptive transformation between the source and target languages across the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. In specific textual contexts, what translation techniques can be utilized to achieve the adaptive transformation of words with Chinese characteristics within these three dimensions?

4.1 Adaptive Transformation at the Linguistic Dimension

The adaptive selection and transformation at linguistic dimension primarily refers to the translator's adaptive selection and transformation of linguistic forms during translation. In the process, there are significant differences in expression between English and Chinese. The English language tends to employ static nouns to express abstract thinking, whereas Chinese more frequently uses dynamic verbs to convey concrete thought (Liao Jinfeng, 2020). Therefore, translators need to make necessary choices and conversion in linguistic forms, like conversion of parts of speech (Xiu Wenqiao & Jiang Tianyang, 2018: 46). Moreover, the use of blending, which means combing the meaning of some words or phrases that cannot be separated as a whole (Fang Mengzhi, 2004), transforms the linguistic forms to some extent. So the techniques of conversion and blending can be adopted at the linguistic dimension.

4.1.1 Conversion

Example 1:

ST: 最后是“大众创业，万众创新”的孵化平台 (Cai Fang, 2018: 1)

TT: Third, the Belt and Road Initiative provides an incubation platform for "mass entrepreneurship and innovation". (Fu Yili, 2019: 2)

Analysis: "Mass entrepreneurship and innovation" was proposed at the 2014 Summer Davos Forum. It aimed to encourage and support the broad masses of the people to participate in entrepreneurship and innovation activities. In Chinese, "创业" and "创新" are two verbs. "创业" means to establish a some kind of businesses. "创新" refers to take a distinct thinking model as a guide and utilize extingting knowledge to improve or create new things for social needs. However, in the Collins Gem English Learner's Dictionary, "entrepreneurship" is defined as "the state of being an entrepreneur, or the activities associated with being an entrepreneur" , and "innovation" is defined as "the introduction of new ideas, methods, or things". These two words are both nouns. Eco-translatology proposes that the translation process should achieve harmony between the translator and the eco-environment of translation, which requires fully considering the divergences in Eastern and Western thinking patterns to keep the ecological

balance of language (Sun Bin & Han Caihong, 2021: 93). The translation of the verbs “创业” and “创新” into the nouns “entrepreneurship” and “innovation” by conversing their part of speech is in line with the micro translational eco-environment of the target language, that is, the linguistic environment. Moreover, English tends to use more nouns, and Chinese more verbs (Shao Weiyong & Shao Zhihong, 2015). Conversion of parts of speech not only makes the translation clearer and more precise, but also results in a more logically structured sentence (Xiu Wenqiao & Jiang Tianyang, 2018: 47), realizing the adaptive transformation in linguistic dimension.

4.1.2 Blending

Example 2:

ST: 国家之间是一种“你中有我、我中有你”“一荣俱荣、一损俱损”的关系，……(Cai Fang, 2018: 97)

TT: All countries of the world today have forged a relationship in which all are bound together for good or ill. (Fu Yili, 2019: 152)

Analysis: “你中有我、我中有你” emphasizes that the two sides are inextricably linked. “一荣俱荣、一损俱损” describes a relationship between nations characterized by high interdependence, close linkages, and a shared destiny in fields including economy, trade, and mutual interests. In Eco-Translatology, adapting the target text to the linguistic dimension refers to the adaptive selection and transformation of linguistic forms during the English translation process. This transformation encompasses aspects such as stylistic features, word selection, sentence structures, and writing style (Chen Gang, 2004). Blending means that there’s a semantic fusion when words, phrases, or even clauses, in relationships of coordination or modification, interpenetrate and influence each other to such an extent that their individual meanings cannot be separated in translation, necessitating a holistic expression of their combined sense (Fang Mengzhi, 2004: 106). When translating these words, the translator transformed the sentence structure of the original text by blending meanings of two phrases into one meaning, conveying the essence of “a community with a shared future”. The adoption of blending makes the target readers easier to understand the words and sentence.

In a word, the conversion of parts of speech and blending can help make the translation clearer and more precise and create a good language environment for the target readers.

4.2 Adaptive Transformation at the Cultural Dimension

The adaptive selection and transformation at cultural dimension entails that the translator need to focus on conveying and interpreting cultural meanings throughout the translation process. There are usually certain differences between the source language’s cultural ecology and the target language’s cultural ecology. Therefore, it is essential to transfer the cultural information embedded in words with Chinese characteristics into the target language. Corresponding is frequently employed when translating Chinese idioms (He Yongbin, 2016), its adoption can not only help to preserve cultural connotations but also make the translated text more vivid. Besides, for effective cross-cultural communication, it is often necessary to employ slight addition in C-E translation (Zhang Haoran & Zhang Xijiu, 2002).

4.2.1 Corresponding

Example 3:

ST: 中国是“一带一路”的倡导者和推动者，但中国绝不唱独角戏、不搞一言堂、不另起炉灶。
(Cai Fang, 2018: 90)

TT: China is the proposer and promoter of the Belt and Road Initiative, but China will never give a one-man show, practice the dictatorial rule or reinvent the wheel. (Fu Yili, 2019: 142)

Analysis: “另起炉灶” in Chinese means giving up the original and doing from beginning. “Reinvent the wheel” means “to waste time and effort trying to do something that someone else has already done well”. These two phrases express similar meaning that China is willing to share the experience and achievements and foster cooperation with other countries based on the existing international system rather than wasting time to build a new system. There are significant differences between Chinese idioms and English idioms in terms of cultural connotations. Therefore, corresponding is frequently employed when translating Chinese idioms (He Yongbin, 2016). Corresponding means to use English expressions with identical meanings or semantically equivalent terms with different imagery to convey the original Chinese meaning. It conforms to the cultural environment of the target language and does not cause ambiguity, realizing the spread of cultural connotations.

4.2.2 Addition

Example 4:

ST: 唐设市舶使，意味着在丝绸贸易中民间商业的重要性上升。(Cai Fang, 2018: 56)

TT: The appointment of the official who was usually set in Guangzhou to specially manage city ship business implied that the importance of private commerce in the silk trade had risen. (Fu Yili, 2019: 88)

Analysis: The adaptive transformation in the cultural dimension requires the translator to focus on the cultural connotations of both Chinese and English, and to flexibly employ strategies to fill the gaps and resolve the deviations in the source language references (Sun Bin & Han Caihong, 2021: 93). As a Chinese-specific word, “市舶使” is an official whose main duties are to collect customs duties from ships that come to trade, to procure a certain amount of foreign goods on behalf of the court, to administer the goods that merchants pay tribute to the emperor, and to supervise and regulate the merchant trade. Because this position is unique in ancient China, the target readers lack the necessary background knowledge, addition that can address readers’ cultural knowledge gaps was adopted by translator. By simply clarifying what categories the word belongs to and the duties of it, the target readers can understand the meaning of the word at a glance, rather than just treating it roughly and vaguely. It is conducive to the spread of Chinese culture.

In short, at the cultural dimension, the use of corresponding and addition can not only better preserve the cultural connotation of words with Chinese characteristic, but also improve the readability of the translation.

4.3 Adaptive Transformation at the Communicative Dimension

The adaptive selection and transformation at communicative dimension focuses on whether the

communicative intent in the source text is reflected in the translation (Hu Gengshen, 2011: 8), which requires the translator to convey the essence and meaning accurately and avoid that readers from vastly different linguistic and cultural backgrounds might receive inconsistent messages (Long Xiang & Liu Yimeng, 2022: 113). In Chinese, two or more synonymous words or phrases are used to enhance rhetorical effect, but in English, unless for deliberate emphasis or specific stylistic purposes, repetition is always being avoided (Zeng Jianping, 2018). Therefore, omission is often used when translating synonymous words. And to clarify potential ambiguities in the translated text for the reader, annotation can be adopted.

4.3.1 Omission

Example 5:

ST: 大国对小国要平等相待，不搞唯我独尊、强买强卖的霸道。(Cai Fang, 2018: 191)

TT: Big countries should treat small countries equally and shall not engage in arrogance and hegemony. (Fu Yili, 2019: 282)

Analysis: The word “强买强卖” literally denotes forcing unequal transactions through a dominant position. Here, it metaphorically depicts how major powers, leveraging their strength in international affairs, compel smaller nations into accepting unfair terms. The concept of “hegemony” in political and international relations discourse fully encapsulates this very behavior, as it inherently involves economic coercion, the imposition of unequal rules, and forcing one’s will upon others. So when dealing with “强买强卖”, the translator, in consideration of the target readers that English places a high premium on lexical precision and logical coherence, and tends to avoid repetition wherever possible (Zeng Jianping, 2018), consciously adopts the omission and thus discontinues further processing of the source text (Liu Xiaodong et al., 2023: 148). Now, this sentence is concise, clear and easier for readers to understand, realizing the communicative goal.

4.3.2 Annotation

Example 6:

TT: 大食、东罗马帝国也不断派使节到长安与中国相通。(Cai Fang, 2018: 51)

ST: Tazi (大食, the Arab Empire) and the Eastern Roman Empire also sent emissaries to Chang’ an to communicate with China. (Fu Yili, 2019: 79)

Analysis: “大食” is the name of the Arab Empire used in ancient China. The target readers who do not know Chinese history and culture will have difficulties in understanding to some extent, unable to grasp the meaning of the word itself. The translator adopts transliteration first to translate this name, and then adopts annotation to have a further explanation that “大食” refers to the Arab Empire. In the other words, the translator draws upon the target-language ecosystem to make appropriate adaptive selection and provide concise yet precise annotations, preventing the loss or distortion of the meaning behind words with Chinese characteristics (Yuan Xing, 2021: 138). It not only conforms to the micro eco-environment of the target language, but also helps target readers get closer to Chinese culture and let them feel freely the great charm of it.

In general, at the communicative dimension, the adoption of annotation and omission can clarify potential ambiguities and better achieve communicative purpose.

5. Factors Influencing the Selection of Translation Techniques from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

5.1 The Impact of Linguistic Differences

Linguistic differences are a significant factor influencing the choice of translation methods or techniques when translating words with Chinese characteristics. From the markers of Chinese nouns, the language often retains verbal structures in many contexts. With a relatively high frequency of verb usage, Chinese expression frequently exhibits a dynamic quality, reflecting its “verb-centric” nature (Lv Shuxiang, 2017). Therefore, translators need to flexibly employ various translation techniques to mitigate the challenges posed by these linguistic differences. From the perspective of Eco-translatology, conversion and blending are effective techniques in this regard. As is widely recognized, one of the important features of English is the extensive use of nouns (Xiu Wenqiao & Jiang Tianyang, 2018: 47). In such cases, conversion of parts of speech allows translators to adapt flexibly according to the characteristics of the target language. By transforming nouns in the source text into verbs or vice versa, this technique avoids the stiffness or awkwardness resulting from direct translation, thereby producing more natural and idiomatic translations. Furthermore, Chinese often features four-character idioms. When translating such expressions, the blending technique can help to make the target language readers easier to understand the original text, achieving adaptive transformation at the linguistic dimension.

5.2 The Influence of Cultural Differences

Chinese culture is generally influenced by collectivism, emphasizing the priority of family, society, and national interests over individual ones. In contrast, Western culture places greater emphasis on individualism, prioritizing personal freedom and independence. Individual choices and self-realization are often regarded as more important than collective needs. Moreover, some scholars point out that Chinese culture belongs to a high-context culture, while American culture falls into the category of a low-context culture (Hall, 1976). In high-context cultures, speakers/writers often convey information in an implicit, indirect, and ambiguous manner, where the literal meaning of words constitutes only a part of the overall message; in low-context cultures, speakers/writers tend to communicate in a direct and explicit way, where the linguistic form is the meaning itself (Wang Shuwen & He Sheng, 2018: 89). From the perspective of Eco-translatology, corresponding and addition can effectively bridge the gap in cultural understanding between the source and target languages. Corresponding selects relevant forms in the target language in terms of meaning, tone, and style, rather than adhering to word-for-word translation, thereby avoiding cultural conflicts or misunderstandings. Addition, on the other hand, fills in gaps in cultural background and social conventions between the source and target languages. By providing appropriate explanations, it helps target readers gain a comprehensive understanding of cultural information, thereby achieving adaptive transformation in the cultural dimension.

5.3 The Influence of Communicative Purpose

Translation is not merely about conveying information but also about achieving communicative goals. How to fulfill these communicative purposes is a key consideration for translators during the translation process. From the perspective of Eco-translatology, appropriate omission can efficiently achieve communicative objectives. In Chinese, two or more synonymous words or phrases are used to enhance rhetorical effect, but in English, unless for deliberate emphasis or specific stylistic purposes, repetition is always being avoided (Zeng Jianping, 2018). Therefore, the use of omission can convey the core content more accurately and efficiently. Removing unnecessary parts makes the translation more concise, avoids information overload, and aligns better with the linguistic habits of target-language readers, thereby enhancing the acceptability of the translated text. Annotation, by adding notes, explanations, or clarifications to the translation, helps target readers better understand words with Chinese characteristic, contextual backgrounds, or terms that are difficult to translate directly, thereby facilitating the swift achievement of communicative purposes.

6. Conclusion

The translation of words with Chinese characteristics serves as a vital means of disseminating traditional Chinese culture. Based on the theory of Eco-translatology and taking *The Handbook of the Belt and Road* as a case study, this study analyzes the English translation techniques applied to such terms and the factors influencing their selection. It explores how translators achieve adaptive transformation across the three dimensions—linguistic, cultural, and communicative—and examines the rationale behind these choices. The analysis reveals that during the translation process, translators should account for linguistic differences, cultural disparities, and communicative purposes between the source and target languages to select appropriate translation techniques. From the perspective of Eco-translatology, techniques such as conversion, blending, corresponding, addition, omission, and annotation can effectively render words with Chinese characteristics into English, facilitating adaptive transformation across the three dimensions. In summary, the English translation of words with Chinese characteristics not only helps the world better understand China's unique culture, promotes cultural confidence, and fosters cultural exchange, but also propels Chinese culture onto the global stage, deepening the positive image of China worldwide.

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