Study on Translation Strategies of Ancient Poetry Quoted in Chinese Political Documents

--Taking *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* as an Example

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Abstract. *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* is of great significance for the international community to have a more comprehensive and objective understanding of China's development concepts and methods in the new era. This dissertation explores the applicability of ecological translation theory to the translation of Chinese political documents by analyzing the English translation strategies of ancient poetry in the book. The study found that translators adapt, coordinate, and balance the ecological translation environment of language, culture, and communication in the specific translation process, enabling the English translation of ancient poetry to enhance the exchange and mutual learning between Chinese culture and world civilization, and interpret the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

Keywords: Ecological Translation Theory; Ancient Poetry; Translation Strategies

1 Introduction

In recent years, China's rapid development has attracted high attention from the international community, but also raised doubts or questions from some foreign countries. In this context, the translation of Chinese political documents can play a role in eliminating external doubts and strengthening communication and understanding. The English translation of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* (hereinafter referred to as *The Governance of China*) is a response and explanation from the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government to the reform and development issues that the international community is concerned about. Once published, it has caused a huge response internationally and become the most successful example of domestic political documents translation for external propaganda in recent years.

Ecological translation theory borrows Darwin's principles of adaptation and selection, proposing the proposition of translation's adaptation to selection theory, which points out that "translation is the selection activity of translators to adapt to the translation ecosystem so as to transplant texts".[1] It advocates that translators have sufficient

autonomy and achieving optimal translation results by selecting the best translation strategy in translation. This study focuses on the English translation of Chinese political documents represented by *The Governance of China*, explores the translation methods of ancient Chinese poetry with Chinese cultural characteristics, and evaluates the translation effects within the framework of ecological translation theory, in order to further demonstrate the guiding role of ecological translation theory in the translation of political documents, and analyze how the translation strategies adopted by the translators for the ancient Chinese poetry and prose cited in *The Governance of China* are conducive to improving the international promotion of Chinese and strengthening China's international discourse power.

2   Ecological Translation Theory and English Translation of Political Documents

2.1   The Framework of Ecological Translation Theory

Hu Gengshen proposed the concept of "ecological translation theory" in 2001. The research paradigm of ecological translation is based on ecological holism and Darwin's theory of adaptation and selection, systematically exploring how various factors in the translation ecological environment are interrelated and interact with each other. [2]The translation ecological environment is a collection of various factors that affect translation. These factors can be divided into two categories: the first category is the "translation community", which includes living subjects related to translation such as translators, authors, and readers; the second category is the external environment of the object, including language, culture, and communication. The translation ecological environment constrains the adaptation and selection made by translators in the translation process, which can be expressed by an equation:

Translation = Translator's adaptation + Translator's choice

In the process of translation, translators need to grasp the translation principle of "multidimensional adaptation and adaptive selection", adapt to different dimensions of the translation ecological environment, and then choose appropriate translation strategies based on this. Language, culture, and communication are the three dimensions that translators need to consider first.[3]

2.2   Applicability of Ecological Translation Theory to Translation of Political Documents

Traditional translation and linguistic theories focus on the correspondence between the word, phrase and sentence of the translated text and that of the original text, emphasizing the semantic and structural consistency between them.[4] For many years, domestic political documents translation has followed the absolute "faithfulness" to the original text or deliberately emphasized the "equivalence" between the translated text and the original text, resulting in a large number of mechanical translations that are difficult for target language readers to accept, affecting the effectiveness of the dis-

semination of political documents and even causing some misunderstandings about China in the international community. The ancient poetry quoted in *The Governance of China* has both literary and political properties. The translation of them is not a simple process of language conversion of the text content. Its essence should be that the translator fully exerts subjective initiative and adapts and selects various factors that affect the translation. In this process, the translator actively adapts to the process of cultural globalization and the needs of China's external propaganda in the new era, and uses appropriate translation strategies to introduce China's policies and concepts to English-speaking countries and societies, interpret China's development ideas, and promote Chinese cultural values. Therefore, the ecological translation theory is highly applicable to the translation of ancient poetry quoted in *The Governance of China*.

3 Analysis of English Translation Strategies for Ancient Poetry Quoted in *The Governance of China*

The translation principle of "multidimensional adaptation and adaptive selection" believes that translators should carry out multidimensional transformation of translation methods in the process of translation, but any transformation of translation methods should not deviate from the dimensions of language, culture, and communication, and should maintain the balance and harmony of the original text and the translation in the language, culture, and communication ecology. The translators' adaptive selection of the dimensions of language, culture, and communication can reveal the specific translation strategies and effects of the ancient poetry and prose quoted in *The Governance of China* in different contexts and occasions.

3.1 Language Dimension

Translation is the process of accurately expressing the meaning of a text in another language, and language is the primary dimension that translators need to consider in the translation process. The language dimension of translation involves two basic steps of language conversion: language form conversion and reproduction of the original meaning. Liu Miqing (1989) provided a detailed definition of language form: firstly, the surface of language form refers to the image or general performance characteristics of language symbols (such as phonetics); secondly, language form often refers to morphology and syntax; thirdly, language form also refers to the arrangement of long sentences, short sentences, simple sentences, complex sentences, and the use of various rhetorical devices in discourse. Language form is the carrier framework of language meaning, and language meaning is the internal basis of language form. The two are interdependent and mutually restrictive. Any language form, such as phonology, rhythm, word form, sentence structure, morphology, syntax, and various rhetorical devices, will have an impact on the expression effect of language meaning. In translation, it is necessary to pay attention to the problem of language form conversion in order to ensure comprehensive correspondence of language meaning.

In translating *The Governance of China,* the translator not only accurately converted between English and Chinese, but also paid attention to preserving and adjusting the language forms of ancient poetry and prose in the translation, and flexibly dealt with the differences between Chinese and English in vocabulary, syntax, rhetoric, and other aspects. In translation, the correspondence between the target text and the original text is presented at different levels in terms of form.

3.1.1 Formal Correspondence in Narrow Form

Formal correspondence in narrow form refers to being completely faithful to the meaning of the original words and sentences when translating, while also preserving the original form, so that the two languages correspond not only in conceptual meaning but also in language form.

Example 1

The original：“生于忧患，死于安乐。” (Xi Jinping, 2020)

Translation：“One prospects in worries and hardships, and perishes in ease and comfort.” (Xi, 2020)

The translator uses "prospect" to translate "生" and "perish" to "死", which adopts literal translation while making the rhythm harmonious; "worries and hardships" and "ease and comfort" fully express the meanings of "忧患" and "安乐". The translation strictly corresponds to the form and meaning of the original language. Meanwhile, for the word "生", the translator did not translate it as "born" according to its literal meaning, but used "prospect" to show China's prosperous development from hardships.

Example 2

The original: 横眉冷对千夫指，俯首甘为孺子牛。 (Xi Jinping, 2020)

Translation：Holding my head high in defiance of the enemy's attack, bowing my head low in obedience to the people's will. (Xi Jinping, 2020)

"横眉" can be directly translated as "Fierce-browed", describing a proud and rebellious person who is not easily submissive; "俯首" can be directly translated as "head-bowed", describing a humble and respectful person. The original text uses a rhetorical technique---antithesis. The translator did not use a literal translation method, but translated "横眉" as "holding my headhigh", and "俯首" as "bowing my head low", retaining the form and meaning of antithesis in Chinese version. In addition, the sentence "holding my head high" forms a sharp contrast with "bowing my head low", which better reflects the author's tough and unyielding attitude when facing the enemy than using "Fierce-browed".

Example 3

The original: 新松恨不高千尺，恶竹应须斩万竿。(Xi Jinping, 2018)

Translation: One pines should grow a thousand feet high, while poisoning bamboos should be cut down one by one. (Xi Jinping,, 2018)

In Example 3, the rhetorical device of metonymy is used for "恶竹", referring to "various corrupt practices that damage the political ecology, the Communist Party of China and the people". If "万竿" is translated through literal translation, it may make the target language readers get a wrong impression of "there are so many evils within the Party", and it will not achieve the communicative purpose of promoting the

Communist Party's determination to fight against corruption. Although the personification of the word "恨" and the exaggeration of "万竿" are not literally translated, the translation maintains the consistency with the original text in terms of the parallel structure and poetic rhythm.

3.1.2 Formal Correspondence in General Form

Formal correspondence in general form refers to the existence of language structural differences between two languages, so in translation, it is necessary to abandon the formal meaning of the source language and only retain the conceptual meaning of the original text.

Example 4

The original：物之不齐，物之情也。 (Xi Jinping, 2019)

Translation：It is natural for things to be different. (Xi Jinping, 2019)

"Four-character structure" is a unique linguistic phenomenon in Chinese, especially in ancient Chinese where they were widely used. The balanced structure, harmonious syllables, short and smooth rhythm, and varied tones of four-character structure reflect the pursuit of structural symmetry and phonetic harmony in ancient Chinese language. As there is no strict equivalent sentence structure in English for "four-character structure", the translator can only use a free translation method to reduce the sense group and convey the intended meaning of the original text.

3.1.3 Formal Correspondence in Alternative Forms

Formal correspondence in alternative forms refers to, in the context of bilingual translation, replacing the original language form with a non-corresponding target language form structure in order to preserve the meaning of the original language form.

Example 5

The original；云帆高张，昼夜星驰 (Xi Jinping, 2018)

Translation：Sailed the ocean day and night. (Xi Jinping, 2018)

Both Example 5 and Example 4 belong to the "four-character structure" sentence pattern in Chinese. Although the translation loses the formal meaning (symmetry) of the source language, the translated sentence is concise and idiomatic, achieving the effect of the Chinese original's "four-character structure" sentence pattern that is easy to recite.

3.2   Cultural Dimension

Ecological translation theory believes that translation should maintain a balance of cultural exchange, so translators need to focus on conveying and interpreting the cultural connotations in both languages during the translation process. The Chinese poetry and prose quoted in Xi Jinping's political discourse are the essence of traditional Chinese culture, fully demonstrating the ideological concepts of various schools of thought in ancient China, as well as the moral, aesthetic, and value systems accumulated by the Chinese nation over thousands of years of practical experience. Due to significant differences between Chinese and English in language, culture, thinking, and poetics,

translators must be familiar with both cultural ecology of the source language and that of the target language, pay attention to communication barriers caused by cultural differences, and use cultural concepts and language strategies that are easily accepted by the target language readers to accurately convey the traditional Chinese cultural connotations and the political implications contained therein.

3.2.1 Cultural Manifestation

Cultural manifestation refers to adding relevant descriptions or subtext information in the translation to eliminate cross-cultural communication barriers. Appropriate cultural manifestation helps to convey the artistic conception of the original ancient poetry and improve the aesthetic value and acceptability of the translation itself. When translating the ancient poetry quoted by Xi Jinping, translators mainly use two methods of cultural allusion manifestation and cultural imagery manifestation to carry out cultural dimension conversion.

3.2.1.1 Cultural Allusion Manifestation

Allusions used in ancient Chinese poetry can be divided into two categories: historical events and figures, and famous lines from other well-known poems and writings. Both types of allusions are difficult to convey in translation and may not easily evoke intertextual associations for readers of the translated text. Therefore, adding relevant background information about the allusion in the translated text or providing cultural information in the paratext can be effective means of cultural manifestation for translators.

Example 6

The original: 橘生淮南则为橘，生于淮北则为枳。 (Xi Jinping,, 2021)

Translation: As an old China saying goes, to the south of the Huaihe river grows oranges, while to the north grow bitter oranges. The purpose of the saying is to highlight the influence of environment. (Xi Jinping, 2021)

This ancient Chinese saying comes from the historical book *Yanzi' s Spring and Autumn Annals*, using the example of different flavored fruits produced by orange trees on the south and north sides of the Huai River in China to explain the principle that the nature of things will also change with environmental changes. Xi Jinping quoted this ancient saying to illustrate that the world's development has diversity, and different historical, cultural backgrounds, and political and economic conditions determine that the political systems of any country or region will differ due to different national conditions. Due to the limited knowledge of Chinese history and culture among foreign readers, if the translator does not provide some supplementary explanations for this ancient saying, foreign readers will find it difficult to understand the metaphorical meaning of this sentence, which will cause confusion for the following text. Firstly, the translator added a non-restrictive relative clause "As an old China saying goes" at the beginning of the sentence, clearly informing readers that this is an ancient Chinese saying, increasing readers' understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture. Secondly, the translator added "The purpose of the saying is to highlight the influence of environment" after the translation, explaining the allusion, making the ancient saying more smoothly connected to the following text in the translation, removing obstacles to

understanding for readers, and enabling them to establish an association between "environment" and "different national conditions" and understand the main point of the speech.

3.2.1.2 Cultural Imagery Manifestation

Imagery is the core component of classical Chinese poetry and an important mechanism for poetic creation. The manifestation of imagery mainly refers to adding related words to highlight the symbolic meaning of the imagery in the original poem and strengthen the emotional appeal of the imagery.

Example 7

The original：栽下梧桐树，引来金凤凰。 (Xi Jinping, 2021)

Translation: A tall and luxuriant Chinese parasol tree attracts golden phoenixes. (Xi Jinping, 2021)

The Chinese "梧桐树 (parasol tree)" grows on high hills, facing the sun, with lush branches and a tall and straight stature. In ancient times, it was believed that only phoenixes would perch on parasol trees, making it a symbol of auspiciousness in classical Chinese poetry. Xi Jinping quoted this ancient proverb to emphasize the need to accelerate the construction of scientific and technological innovation bases and attract outstanding scientific and technological talents. As the symbol of "梧桐(parasol)" does not have a similar symbolic meaning in English as it does in Chinese, the translator did not use a literal translation method to translate the original sentence as "Planting parasol to attract golden phoenix". Instead, the translator rigorously used the word "Chinense" to specify the geographical area where the parasol tree grows, indicating that the parasol tree is a unique literary symbol in the Chinese cultural context. By adding the adjectives "tall" and "luxuriant" to highlight the characteristics of the parasol tree, foreign readers can understand why the parasol tree attracts phoenixes and thus understand the main point of Xi Jinping's speech.

3.2.2 Cultural Substitution

Cultural substitution refers to the translation method of selecting a similar expression in English for parallel correspondence when literal translation cannot make the target language reader understand or may cause misunderstanding due to the differences between English and Chinese language. This method is similar to the translation method of "functional equivalence" proposed by American translator Eugene Nida.[5]

Example 8

The original：自古雄才多磨难，从来纨绔少伟男。 (Xi Jinping, 2019)

Translation：A hard life breeds great talents, whereas an easy life is not the way to cultivate great men. (Xi Jinping, 2019）

Example 9

The original：单则易折，众则难摧。 (Xi Jinping, 2019)

Translation: United we stand, divided we fall. (Xi Jinping, 2019)

In Example 8, the cultural substitution method was used to translate "磨难" and "纨绔", using the English proverb "A hard life breeds greater men than an easy one". This conversion not only preserves the original meaning well, but also conforms to

English expression habits. In Example 9, the translator did not use a literal translation to translate the original text into"One people is easy to break, a group of people are hard to destroy", but instead used the familiar Western proverb "United we stand, divided we fall" to translate it. This proverb has been used by many famous people in Western history. For example, John Dickinson, a founding father of the United States, used this proverb to boost morale before the Revolutionary War; Winston Churchill used this phrase during World War II to demonstrate the Allies' determination to resist fascism. This translation method is more likely to evoke emotional resonance among Western readers.

3.3   Communicative Dimension

The communicative dimension focuses on whether the overall communicative intention of the author in the source language system can be reflected in the target language system.[6] After being placed in the context of political discourse, ancient poetry is endowed with certain political connotations. Therefore, the translation of ancient poetry in political documents requires translators to help readers deepen their understanding and knowledge of the source country's politics, policies, guidelines, society, and other aspects as much as possible through ancient poetry.

Example 10

The original： 天下之势不盛则衰，天下之治不进则退。 (Xi Jinping, 2019) (Xi Jinping, 2022)

Translation①：If a dynasty cannot continue to rise, it will fall; if a country cannot improve its governance, the state of order will deteriorate. (Xi Jinping, 2019)

Translation②：the momentum of the world either flourishes or declines; the governance the world either progresses or regresses. (Xi Jinping, 2022)

The translator, based on the macro historical background and micro realistic context, has adopted different translations for the same ancient poetry quoted by Xi Jinping on different occasions, making the English translations of ancient poetry a powerful supplement to the interpretation of Chinese political ideas.

In 2019, Xi Jinping quoted this ancient poem at a domestic meeting, emphasizing the complex and changing international situation and the need to promote the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity to respond to risks and challenges from domestic, international, economic, social, and natural fields. The translator translated "天下" as "dynasty" and "country", strictly limiting the translation to the domestic context, reflecting that it is a domestic meeting where Xi Jinping quoted this ancient poem, and the audience of the speech was the party leaders of the Communist Party of China. In addition, the translator translated "治" as "the state of order", echoing the main theme of Xi Jinping's speech, which is to adhere to and improve the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and prevent and resolve multiple risks.

Xi Jinping quoted this ancient poem for the second time during his speech at the 2022 World Economic Forum video conference, which was an international conference with leaders from various countries as the audience. Xi Jinping quoted this ancient poem to emphasize the development of the world in the movement of contradictions, and to call on governments of all countries to seek common ground while reserving

differences, cooperate for win-win results, and actively pursue progress in the new turbulent and changing era after the pandemic. The translator used a literal translation method, translating "天下" as "the world", expressing China's call for the international community to jointly tackle challenges and promote peaceful development.

4   Conclusion

From the perspective of ecological translation theory, the English translation of ancient poetry cited in *The Governance of China* is a model for the translation of Chinese political documents. The translators of *The Governance of China* have a profound language and cultural foundation and a high level of political literacy. Based on fully adapting to the translation ecological environment, they have made the correct choice of translation strategies.

It is of great significance to study the translation of political documents for external propaganda under the perspective of ecological translation theory. For external propaganda translators, the most important thing is to understand the ecological environment of the target language, especially the cognitive context of the target language, and to be good at discovering the characteristics of ecological environments of two languages, and to keenly capture the differences between them in specific translation practices when it comes to external propaganda. Based on this, through the use of appropriate translation strategies and flexible handling, the balance between the source language ecology and the target language ecology can be fulfilled to achieve the best translation effect.

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