



# The Selection and Transformation of Communicative Dimension in the English Translation of *Legends of the Creation of the Bai Kingdom*

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**Abstract.** This paper delves into the communicative dimension within the English translations of "Legends of the Creation of the Bai Kingdom," a historical document teeming with the Bai ethnicity's rich history, religion, and culture. Employing Professor Hu Gengshen's Eco-translatology theory, it addresses the challenges of translating culturally-laden terms and underscores the significance of maintaining ecological balance in translation. The study elucidates the impact of the communicative dimension on term selection and transformation, ensuring the fidelity and cultural authenticity of translations. By dissecting specific translation cases, the paper accentuates the importance of cultural factors, register styles, and communicative intentions for effective target audience communication. It concludes that eco-translatology's communicative dimension is indispensable for culturally sensitive and effective translation, facilitating the preservation of the source text's essence and its resonance with the target reader.

**Keywords:** Eco-translatology, Communicative Dimension, Cultural Translation

## 1 Introduction

Translation activities have always been inseparable from the mastery of language, culture, and communication. As languages evolve and cultural boundaries blur, our ability to understand translated textual materials with nuance becomes increasingly important. Correspondingly, the production of historical knowledge is a process that involves interactions among multiple parties, including local populations.<sup>[1]</sup> The early folk culture of the Dali region was predominantly circulated in the form of oral literature. However, once scholars began to transcribe and officials funded the publication, the history and texts of the Dali Kingdom, regardless of their intentions, were mediated by people from various regions and identities, entering a broader readership and achieving the effect of communication and propaganda.

Although translation, language, and culture are closely intertwined, it is inevitable that during the translation process, the source text will be influenced by the culture of the target language, leading to an imbalance in the role of translation as an intermedi-

ary. Against this backdrop, while aiming to achieve the goal of cultural dissemination, it is especially important to focus on the communicative dimension in translation to ensure the accurate conveyance of information and the appropriate expression of culture. Under the guidance of Professor Hu Gengshen's "Eco-translatology" theory, and particularly within the framework of his concept of "translation as textual transplant," this paper will focus on how to handle the communicative dimension when translating culturally loaded terms from Chinese to English. By analyzing this dimension, we can gain a deeper understanding of how to achieve ecological balance in translation practice—that is, preserving the cultural characteristics of the source text while ensuring that readers of the target text can accurately understand and accept them.

## 2 Eco-translatology Theory

In recent two decades, ecology has emerged as a highly productive framework for reimagining translation processes and translator's actions.<sup>[2]</sup> This shift is particularly evident in the pioneering work of Professor Hu, who introduced the concept of "Eco-translatology." His theory underscores the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of modern translation and literature.

### 2.1 Definition of Eco-translatology Theory

Eco-translatology focuses on the harmonious coexistence among the "translator's survival" (representing life), "textual life," and "translation-environment ecology" (representing the eco-system). This focus introduces a fresh research direction and development trend in the field of translation. Professor Hu's approach to constructing eco-translatology revolves around four central questions: what is translation, how to translate, who is translating, and why to translate.<sup>[3]</sup> By addressing these questions, he has formulated a relatively systematic theoretical discourse that examines textual life, translator's survival, and translation-environment ecology from an ecological perspective.

The interactive integration of eco-life constitutes a life-centered mindset that permeates the entire eco-translatology framework and shapes its research evolution. This mindset embodies the eco-paradigm, where Professor Hu identifies three interconnected core translation concepts: "translation as adaptation and selection," "translation as textual transplant," and "translation as eco-balance." These concepts collectively form a discourse recognizable and understandable within the broader academic community.<sup>[4]</sup>

This eco-translatology theory not only offers a fresh lens for examining translation but also encourages a holistic understanding of the translation process and its interaction with the surrounding environment. By emphasizing ecological balance and harmony, eco-translatology challenges traditional translation theories and promotes a more inclusive and sustainable approach to translation studies.<sup>[5]</sup>

## 2.2 The Concept of the Communicative Dimension

Language, culture, and communication have always been the focal points in translation theory and practice. Translation involves the conversion of languages, and language serves as the carrier of culture, while culture is the precipitate of communication. Eco-translatology fully absorbs the process model of Chinese philosophical vitalism, focusing on the core factors of semantic transformation in translation as well as the variables in the communication process.<sup>[6]</sup> Professor Hu Gengshen's term "translation as textual transplant" in translation denotes that the focus of text transplantation lies in the transfer of texts within the "three-dimensional" ecological environment of language, culture, and communication in both the source and target language systems. When it comes to the selection and transformation of communicative intentions in the translation process, attention is paid to whether the author's overall communicative intention in the source language system is reflected and conveyed to the target language readers. Furthermore, it is concerned with whether the communicative intention of the original language or cultural form, as well as the language or cultural connotation, in the source language system is transmitted to the readers. Therefore, from the perspective of the communicative dimension, greater emphasis is placed on maintaining and preserving the communicative ecology of both the original and translated texts optimally.

## 3 Introduction to the Origins of *Legends of the Creation of the Bai Kingdom*

*Legends of the Creation of the Bai Kingdom*, authored by the abbot of Shengyuan Temple in Dali, Yunnan, in 1706, is a significant historical document of the Bai ethnic group that blends history, religion, mythology, and cultural identity. This document records important events and legends in Bai history, particularly those related to the Nanzhao Kingdom and the Dali Kingdom. According to the document, in 615, Avalokiteśvara, who manifested as Guanyin, arrived in Dali as an Indian monk, defeated demons causing trouble in the area, and assisted Xi Nu Luo in establishing the Nanzhao Kingdom, converting the local residents to Buddhism. After the fall of the Nanzhao Kingdom, Avalokiteśvara once again intervened, helping Duan Siping become the first king of the Dali Kingdom.<sup>[7]</sup>

From a cultural perspective, *Legends of the Creation of the Bai Kingdom* is not only the authoritative record of the Bai people's legends about Avalokiteśvara but also symbolizes the unity of the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms. This document was of great significance to the Bai people during the Ming and Qing dynasties, as it preserved the belief in regional unity and integrated it into a general historical image of the Bai Kingdom that is easy for us to understand. Through the records in this historical document, we can also sense the Bai people's cultural identity and historical conceptions. The legends about Avalokiteśvara in the document spread among the Bai people and became part of their culture, demonstrating the combination of history and

mythology. This combination gives the document a unique narrative style, blending the seriousness of history with the imagination of mythology.

In terms of writing style, as a historical document, it mainly adopts the classical Chinese expression common in ancient Chinese literature. This style reflects the writing habits of the ancients and possesses the charm of classical literature. When reading this work, we must have a grasp of classical Chinese expression to better analyze the information conveyed by its English translation.

Regarding its documentary value, the significance of *Legends of the Creation of the Bai Kingdom* does not lie in its accurate description of the spread of Buddhism in Yunnan or other historical facts but rather in its role as the center of belief in the legitimization of unity in the Dali area since the Nanzhao period. This belief was preserved among the people throughout the Ming dynasty and was consolidated into a general understanding of the historical image of the Bai Kingdom during the Qing dynasty.

## 4 The English translation of classical Chinese

The process of converting classical Chinese to vernacular Chinese essentially constitutes a form of translation, where the resulting Modern Chinese serves as the surface structure in the context of Chinese-to-English translation. By analyzing the context, translators can roughly grasp the meaning intended by the author, further inferring the author's writing intention by incorporating cultural factors, and re-analyzing this intention to accurately capture the deep structure of the source language. Subsequently, through comprehension, they transform the deep structure of the source language into the deep structure of the target language, and then from deep to shallow, convert the deep structure of the target language into its surface structure. Selection of words in the target language is then based on cultural factors within the target language and their correlation with cultural factors considered during the source-to-target language conversion. Finally, the ultimate expression in the translated language is determined by sentence structure, text type, and linguistic style.<sup>[8]</sup>

When dealing with the English translation of classical Chinese, translators need to consider cultural factors, register styles, and communicative intentions from the communicative dimension. In terms of cultural factors, classical Chinese employs specific expressions or allusions that may lack direct equivalents in modern English, necessitating conversions and adjustments tailored to the target language culture to facilitate understanding by target readers. Classical Chinese and modern English also differ in register styles; during translation, it is necessary to convert and adjust these styles into formal, casual, or negotiation-oriented ones as appropriate, ensuring the appropriateness and applicability of the translation results. In terms of communicative intentions, besides adhering to the "multi-dimensional integration" principle of eco-translatology, comprehensive consideration must also be given to the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions, thereby achieving a harmonious balance among linguistic expression, contextual effects, and communicative intentions. For

the historical literary works analyzed in this paper, the focus is on assessing the English translation of classical Chinese from the communicative dimension.

## 5 Translation Cases and Analysis

### Example 1:

Original Translation: They listened to his teachings every day and could not bear to be separated from him.

Revised Translation: They reverently attended his teachings day and night, loath to part from his wisdom.

This translation basically meets the requirements of the communicative dimension, conveying the respect and dependence on the teachings as well as the strong emotion of not wanting to separate. However, there is room for improvement to more accurately reflect the context and cultural connotations of the original text. The term "day and night" emphasizes the continuous nature of their engagement with the teachings, reflecting a deeper level of commitment and respect. The phrase "loath to part from his wisdom" conveys a stronger emotional attachment to the teachings, aligning more closely with the original text's intent to express the depth of their reverence and dependence on the guidance provided. This revised translation better captures the continuous and intimate nature of the relationship between Rakshasa and an Indian monk which aligns with the cultural factor of respecting the teachings and the communicative intention of expressing deep attachment, making the translation closer to the original's intent and emotional depth, thereby facilitating effective communication with the target audience.

### Example 2:

Original Translation: Ten days later, he reported to Rakshasa.

Revised Translation: Ten days later, he offered his counsel to the mighty Rakshasa, saying...

In this sentence, "Jin Yan" not only refers to reporting or conveying information but also carries a tone of respectfully offering suggestions or counsel. Therefore, translating it simply as "reported to" in English would be relatively neutral and fail to convey this respectful tone, making it difficult to fully achieve the communicative intention.

To better meet the requirements of communicative translation, we can translate it as "presented his advice to" or "offered his counsel to" to convey the respectful tone of the interaction and maintain the cultural connotation of "Rakshasa" as a powerful entity, fulfilling the communicative intention and cultural factor.

Therefore, this revised translation not only accurately conveys the literal meaning of the original text but also better conveys the emotions and intentions, aligning with the requirements of communicative translation. Additionally, by adding "saying..." to introduce the subsequent speech, the translation becomes more fluent and natural.

**Example 3:**

Original Translation: Therefore, on second thought, I think it is important that we make a deed as evidence, so that when I spread out my kasaya and let my dog make the jumps to measure the land, you will not change your mind.

Revised Translation: On reflection, I believe it is crucial that we establish a written agreement. Only then, when I spread out my kasaya and let my white dog take its four measured steps, can we be assured of your adherence to our agreement.

Note: The "white dog" is a symbolic reference to the purity and sanctity associated with Buddhist culture, signifying the sacredness of the land measurement.

The color white in Buddhist culture carries specific connotations, symbolizing purity and holiness, auspiciousness and blessings, protection and warding off evil, as well as bravery and loyalty. Simply translating it as "dog" would fail to associate it with this particular sacred beast for foreign readers, who would perceive it as merely ordinary. To better achieve the communicative dimension, it can be supplemented as "white dog."

Such a handling approach not only retains the directness of the original text but also provides necessary cultural background information through annotations, helping the target readers better understand the specific intention of the "white dog" in Buddhism. Meanwhile, the form of annotation avoids inserting too much explanatory text into the direct translation, making the translation smoother and more natural. Otherwise, the target readers may not fully understand the intention or emotional color of the original text due to the lack of cultural background information.

Therefore, in the process of translation, the communicative dimension requires that translation should not only convey the literal meaning of the original text but also accurately convey the implied information such as context, emotion, and culture as much as possible. If a certain word or phrase in the original text lacks corresponding cultural connotations or symbolic meanings in the target language, then it is necessary to consider how to bridge this cultural gap during translation to ensure that the translation can accurately convey the communicative intention of the original text.

**Example 4:**

Original Translation: Today, the stone plate at the west of Jiaochang is the very place Rakshasa swore his oath. People often come here to untie their Gordian Knots.

The translator skillfully translated "knots" as "Gordian Knots," cleverly invoking the story from Greek mythology where Alexander the Great cut the Gordian Knot. From the perspective of communicative intention, this translation effectively allows target language readers to understand the concept of difficult or complex problems as expressed in the source language culture through the lens of their own culture.

From the communicative dimension of eco-translatology, it is easy to understand that when translating, we must not only be faithful to the content of the original text but also consider the cultural background and communicative intention of the target language readers. According to the original text, Avalokiteśvara appeared in the world and compelled the Rakshasa to make a solemn promise to give the land to her, allowing to use her wisdom to preserve the land and people of Dali and punish the Rakshasa. Therefore, later generations believed that they could also receive the pro-

tection of Avalokiteśvara here and resolve difficult or complex problems. Using "Gordian Knots" as the translation is appropriate because it conveys the symbolic meaning of the original "knots" and aligns with the cultural and communicative habits of the target language. Although the former is a religious story and the latter is a cultural story embodying heroism, they share common characteristics of helping the weak and solving problems with wisdom and decisiveness. Therefore, this natural transition helps target language readers grasp the balance of intentions between cultures and achieve communicative goals.

### **Example 5:**

Original Translation: The Rakshasas thought it was just a small piece of land, thus didn't care a bit about it. They just talked with the Indian monk so congenially and freely that they didn't bother about gain or loss.

Revised Translation: They just talked with the Indian monk so congenially and freely that they transcended the concerns of self and others, not even minding the boundaries of territory or the matters of gain and loss.

Based on the context, the phrase "Xiang Wang Yu Er Wo" in the original text expresses the joyous and deep conversation between the Rakshasa father and son and the Indian monk, to the extent that they forgot their respective identities and specific territorial issues. The previous translation "they didn't bother about gain or loss" has already conveyed the atmosphere of the Rakshasa father and son not being concerned about gains and losses, aligning with the communicative dimension of eco-translatology and reflecting the communicative intention and cultural connotation of the original text.

However, considering that the latter part of this phrase also implies a deeper meaning of intimate bond and transcending the boundaries between self and others in Chinese; this refined translation not only retains the communicative intention of the original text, namely the harmonious exchange between the Rakshasa father and son and the Indian monk, but also more accurately conveys the deeper meaning of transcending the boundaries between self and others in this phrase through "transcended the concerns of self and other." Such a translation more comprehensively and richly embodies the communicative intention and cultural connotation of the original text, meeting the requirements of the communicative dimension in eco-translatology.

### **Example 6:**

Original Translation: Nu Luo said, 'How could I be so blessed as to take on such an important task?'

Revised Translation: Nu Luo said, 'With my humble blessings, how dare I presume to undertake such a significant task?'

The original translation, to a certain extent, aligns with the communicative dimension by conveying Nu Luo's humility in expressing his reluctance to take on an important task. However, to more accurately reflect the contextual and cultural connotations of the original text, there is room for improvement in this translation.

From the perspective of cultural adaptability, "Fu Bo" in Chinese carries a sense of humility and self-deprecation, while "blessed" in English usually refers to being fortunate or favored by good luck or divine grace. Although "blessed" can convey Nu Luo's humility, it may not fully capture the deeper meaning of "Fu Bo" as self-deprecation. In terms of communicative intention, the phrase "Zen Gan Ru Ci" in the original text expresses Nu Luo's hesitation and reluctance to take on the task, while "How could I be so blessed" emphasizes more on his surprise and honor at being assigned the task. To more accurately convey the communicative intention of the original text, vocabulary that more directly expresses humility and reluctance should be considered.

The refined translation directly conveys Nu Luo's humility and hesitation in taking on the task. At the same time, "humble blessings" is closer to the cultural connotation of "Fu Bo" making it easier for target language readers to understand the degree of emphasis in the original text and to immerse themselves in the speaker's identity and tone. By selecting more precise vocabulary and expressions, readers can better understand Nu Luo's status and reverence in front of Avalokiteśvara, thereby highlighting the respect of ordinary people.

### **Example 7:**

Original Translation: When he saw that Zhang Jing begged him to stay over and over again, he said.

Revised Translation: Zhang Jing, seeing that he was implored to stay over and over again, said...

In translation, maintaining the unity of the sentence subject is an important consideration, as it helps to preserve the coherence and clarity of the sentence. In the translation example provided, if "Zhang Jing" is used as the subject of the sentence, the translation would be revised.

This translation keeps "Zhang Jing" as the subject, consistent with the original Chinese text. However, this translation may not align well with English conventions, as in English, if "Avalokiteśvara" is responding to "Zhang Jing's" request, it is often more natural to use "Avalokiteśvara" as the subject to emphasize who is responding. Additionally, English sentence structure tends to place the agent of the action at the beginning of the sentence, conforming to English word order.

When translating into English, translators may adjust the sentence structure based on English language habits and communicative effectiveness, even if it means changing the subject from the original text. This adjustment aims to make the translation more natural, fluent, and consistent with the expression habits of the target language. Therefore, while maintaining the unity of the original text's subject is a translation principle, translators sometimes need to balance fidelity to the original text and adaptation to the target language.

## 6 Conclusion

The exploration of the communicative dimension for eco-translatology within the context of translating classical Chinese texts into English reveals the complexity and richness of this ecological paradigm. It has become evident that the communicative dimension provides a holistic understanding of the translation process and its interaction with the surrounding environment. By emphasizing ecological balance and harmony, it encourages a more nuanced and culturally sensitive translation practice. The analysis of the translation cases from *Legends of the Creation of the Bai Kingdom* has demonstrated the importance of considering social cultural factors, register styles, and communicative intentions in achieving effective communication with the target audience. These revisions ensure that the translations are culturally sensitive, stylistically appropriate, and aligned with the communicative intentions of the original text, fulfilling the requirements of eco-translatology's communicative dimension. Through this ecological lens, translators can bridge cultural gaps, preserve the essence of the source text, and ensure that the translation resonates with the intended readership.

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