



# The Effect of Chinese-English Translation of Dai Poetry from the Perspective of the Translation Ecosystem and the Principle of Survival of the Fittest

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**Abstract.** Eco-translatology has emerged as a significant theoretical framework in the field of translation studies, offering new perspectives for translation practice. This paper explores the application of the “translation ecosystem” and the principle of “survival of the fittest” proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen in the translation of Dai literature. Through an analysis of the translation of the Dai narrative poem *Sad Song about Love*, this study reveals the value of eco-translatology in translation practice. The findings show that translators, through strategies such as domestication, cultural annotation, and adaptive selection, have achieved a dynamic balance and ecological aesthetics between the source text and the target text. This paper not only validates the scientific nature and practicality of translation ecosystem but also provides new perspectives and methods for translation research, promoting the application of translation ecosystem and the principle of “survival of the fittest” in the translation of ethnic minority literature.

**Keywords:** Eco-translatology, Translation Ecosystem, Survival of the Fittest, Dai Literature, Dai Poetry

## 1 Introduction

Traditional translation theories are increasingly limited by multidisciplinary research approaches. Professor Hu Gengshen's eco-translatology, proposed in the early 21st century, offers new ideas and methods. Centered on the "translation ecosystem," it emphasizes the integrity, dynamism, and diversity of translation activities, guided by the principle of "survival of the fittest." This framework highlights the complex interactions among language, culture, society, and communication, providing new insights for translation research. Key characteristics of the translation ecosystem include holistic interconnection; dynamic equilibrium; ecological aesthetics; translation communities; translation ethics; and diversity and unity. These traits guide translation practice by clarifying translators' adaptive choices and dominant roles.

This paper examines the translation of Dai poetry, a significant part of Chinese ethnic minority literature, from Chinese to English. It explores how eco-translatology's principles can be applied in practice, using the translation of the Dai narrative poem "Sad Song about Love" as a case study. The analysis investigates achieving dynamic balance between source and target texts, adaptive selection guided by "survival of the fittest," and the integration of holistic and ecological aesthetics. The study aims to reveal eco-translatology's value in practice and provide new insights for translation research.

## 2 Eco-translatology Theory

Eco-translatology is a novel ecological paradigm that integrates ecological holism, oriental ecological wisdom, and translation adaptation and selection theory. It represents an innovative approach to integral research in translation studies and a scientific exploration of ecological paradigms.

Eco-translatology focuses on the harmonious symbiosis of "translator's survival," "textual life," and "translation-environment ecology." It offers a new research direction and development trend for the translation field. Professor Hu's construction of eco-translatology begins with four fundamental questions: what is translation, how to translate, who translates, and why translate<sup>[1]</sup>. In addressing these questions, he develops a systematic theoretical framework by examining translation activities from an ecological perspective, with a focus on textual life, translator's survival, and translation-environment ecology.<sup>[2]</sup>

This framework is characterized by an interactive eco-life integration, which permeates the entire concept of eco-translation and guides its research development. Professor Hu identifies three interrelated core concepts: "translation as adaptation and selection," "translation as textual transplant," and "translation as eco-balance." These concepts form a cohesive discourse that is widely recognized and understood within the community.<sup>[3]</sup>

The translation ecosystem is a complex system encompassing language, culture, society, and communication. Like a natural ecosystem, it possesses spatial and temporal dimensions, self-regulation capabilities, and openness. It can be defined as a functional unit in translation studies where languages interact with each other and with non-translation elements (such as society, communication, and culture) through continuous cycles of matter and energy. Narrowly defined, it represents the coordinated development of internal and external linguistic controls within the translation environment. Broadly speaking, all translation-related activities can be examined within this system.

### 2.1 Translation Ecosystem

Historical studies of translation have shown that various aspects of translation—such as the formation of translation standards for individual translators or ethnic groups, the selection of translation materials and strategies, the development of translation

ideologies, the characteristics of translation in specific historical periods, the formulation of translation policies, and the historical impact of translation—are not isolated phenomena. They all require a comprehensive and holistic examination from the perspective of the translation ecosystem.

Professor Hu has summarized the rational characteristics of the translation ecosystem as follows: (1) holistic interconnection; (2) dynamic equilibrium; (3) ecological aesthetics; (4) translation communities; (5) translation ethics; and (6) diversity and unity.<sup>[4]</sup> Based on an ecological perspective, translation research emphasizes the holistic integration of the translation ecosystem and its internal structure. This holistic approach not only facilitates the formation of mutually beneficial relationships among the elements within the translation ecosystem, creating a harmonious ecological beauty, but also influences translation theory research. It promotes the mutual borrowing, grafting, adaptation, penetration, confrontation, replacement, and evolution of different translation theories, ultimately leading to “diversity, unity and “integration” in translation studies.

## 2.2 Survival of the Fittest

In eco-translatology, Professor Hu addresses fundamental questions of translation ontology: “What is translation?” “Who translates?” “How to translate?” and “Why translate?” He answers “What is translation?” through the core concept of “translation as adaptation and selection.” For “Who translates?” he emphasizes “translator dominance” and “translator-centeredness.” He explains “How to translate?” with the dominant method of “survival of the fittest.” Lastly, he addresses “Why translate?” by highlighting the original purpose of translation—“survival of the fittest” and “translation for a purpose.” Ultimately, translators must adapt to the translation ecosystem, where harmony among participants—authors, translators, readers, etc.—is essential. This harmony also requires alignment between the translated work and the original text. Throughout the translation process, translators must employ “survival of the fittest” and “adaptive selection” to achieve a holistically harmonious translation ecosystem.<sup>[5]</sup>

## 3 Dai Literature

Literature of the Dai People consists of three main parts: oral literature, be leaf literature, and written literature. Its history can be divided into five developmental stages: the Sangmudi era (from ancient times to the 2nd century AD), the Mingle King era (3rd to 11th centuries), the Payazhen era (11th to 14th centuries), the Simafa era (14th to 18th centuries), and the Dao Anren era (late 18th century to the 1940s). The ancient ballads of the Dai people originated in the Sangmudi era.<sup>[6]</sup>

### 3.1 Literature in Sangmudi era and Mengele King era

Sangmudi is a legendary ancestral hero from the ancient history of the Dai people, representing the initial stage of Dai literature during the primitive society. The main literary phenomena of this period include ancient ballads, sacrificial songs, customary songs, production songs, myths, and ancestral legends. The Dai people call these ancient ballads “Ganhamoguan,” where “Ganha” means song, and “Moguan” refers to ancient times. “Ganhamoguan” thus means songs of ancient times. These ballads include various customary songs, such as sacrificial songs, house-building songs, funeral songs, wedding songs, and festival songs, reflecting the early Dai society's natural worship, spiritual beliefs, house-building experiences, and the entire process of courtship and marriage.

During the Mengele King era, Dai society transitioned from a slave system to a feudal lordship, and Dai literature entered a period of prosperity with the emergence of professional singers known as “Zhangha.” The literature of this period mainly celebrated national unification and heroic figures in wars, marking it as an era of heroic epics. Additionally, with the gradual establishment of monogamous marriage in the Dai people, love poems also developed smoothly and matured. These love poems are generally divided into two major types: courtship songs and love-lorn songs, comprehensively depicting the processes of young men and women's courtship, marriage, and heartbreak.<sup>[7]</sup>

### 3.2 Dai Poetry

Dai poetry covers a wide range of themes, including life, love, and nature. It includes poems that express deep emotions and celebrate love, as well as those that depict natural landscapes and praise the beauty of nature. There are also poems that reflect the hardworking and simple lifestyle of the Dai people. These poems, with their concise and lively language, convey profound emotions and ideas, showcasing the Dai people's love for life and reverence for nature.

Among them, love poems are mostly sung to music or recited orally, reflecting the traditional integration of poetry and song in Dai literature. Ancient Dai poetry evolved from “scattered ballads” (ancient ballads). Early love poems were mainly spread orally among the people, giving Dai poetry a strong sense of life and traditional characteristics. With the introduction of Buddhist culture and the widespread use of the Dai script, these poems gradually began to be recorded in written form.

These national narrative poems, with their profound romantic spirit and rich romantic colors, are unique in their themes, character images, poetic endings, and lyrical parts. Dai poetry is adept at using exaggeration and imagination to shape character images and present storylines with simple yet novel techniques. At the same time, Dai poetry also focuses on rhythm and melody, making it easy to read aloud and sing.

## 4 Translation Case Analysis

The following cases are selected from the Dai narrative poem *Sad Song about Love*<sup>[8]</sup>, which revolves around a love story forcibly separated by external factors. The poem's emotional expression is rich and natural, with vivid and imaginative metaphors that reveal the protagonist's deep sorrow over lost love, unwavering pursuit of love, helplessness in the face of fate, and longing for the future. Through these cases, we can delve into how translators apply the “translation ecosystem” and the principle of “survival of the fittest” to achieve dynamic balance and ecological aesthetics between the source text and the target text during the translation process.

### Example 1.

How sorrowful I am right now! Sister dear!/ My heart aches, sister dear,/ How much I loved, Sister dear,/ I dare you, sister dear, to abandon the whole world!/ Why not leave him behind instead, sister dear?/ If you, sister dear, left the world before me,/ If you, my girl, love me back,/ Please, my dear, keep my body in a coffin...

### Analysis 1.

From the perspective of eco-translatology, the translation of ethnic minorities' classics is the transplanting of cultural texts under the condition of ecological balance<sup>[9]</sup>. This example illustrates the application of holistic interconnection and cultural adaptation within the translation ecosystem to align the source text's cultural context with that of the target language, ensuring the translation is both faithful and accessible. In translating this poem, the translator chose the ballad form common in English literature. This choice not only preserved the oral style of the original poem but also aligned it with the cultural context of the target language. Ballads, characterized by their oral expression, repetitive structure, and strong emotional appeal, are well-suited for love stories. By adding extra affectionate addresses and expressions of longing, the translator enhanced the rhythm and emotional intensity of the translation.

### Example 2.

I would rather become a boat then, Carrying you ashore safely;/ I would become an ant if I died one day, Waiting for you on the tree./ A little snake I would turn into, Hiding under the straw mattress./ And sweeping you along in the river!/ And I will do what it takes to fight with the waves, Only to hold you tightly in my arms!

### Analysis 2.

This example demonstrates the use of ecological aesthetics and symbolic retention. The translator employs adaptive selection to retain the symbolic elements from the original text while enhancing their significance through culturally appropriate expressions in the target language. Ballad-style poetry often employs rich metaphors and symbols to enhance imagery and emotional depth. In this translation, the translator skillfully retained the symbolic elements from the original text, such as the ant and the little snake, and reinforced their significance using vocabulary consistent with English expression. The ant symbolizes perseverance and patient waiting, while the little snake represents reluctance to part with one's beloved. By balancing fidelity to the original with adaptation to the target language, the translator achieved a dynamic balance and vividly conveyed the emotional depth of the poem.

**Example 3.**

Sometimes I lost myself like a drunken lunatic./ Bananas ripe and tempting on the tree  
Were reduced to being destroyed by the crow;/ A brilliant pearl once you must  
have been, Yet thrown away in the river and entangled by moss;

**Analysis 3.**

This example highlights the importance of cultural connotation and survival of the fittest in translation. The translator employs cultural annotation and adaptive selection to convey the original text's symbolic meaning while ensuring it is relatable to target language readers.

The translator did not merely convert the words but delved into the cultural connotations and emotional expressions of the original text. By adding the adjective "tempting" and using phrases like "reduced to" and "destroyed," the translator emphasized the beauty and destruction of love, making it more accessible to target language readers. This strategy reflects the principle of "survival of the fittest" by choosing the most appropriate expressions to achieve an optimal match between the original and the translation, while preserving the ecological aesthetics of the translation ecosystem.

**Example 4.**

A Jiaolong I would turn into; (note: A legendary river dragon in Chinese mythology.)

**Analysis 4.**

This example illustrates the application of cultural authenticity and explanatory notes. The translator employs cultural annotation to retain culturally specific terms while providing necessary context for target language readers.

The translator retained the term "Jiaolong" (a legendary river dragon in Chinese mythology) and provided an explanatory note to convey its cultural significance. This approach preserved the cultural essence of the original while offering context for readers. By choosing a culturally authentic approach instead of replacing it with a Western equivalent, the translator demonstrated respect for cultural diversity and achieved a harmonious balance between fidelity and adaptation, in line with the translation ecosystem's characteristics.

**Example 5.**

Separated from you, my beloved,/ I end up having nothing but loneliness;/ I could  
not get you free either, since/ Someone has kept a close eye on you.

**Analysis 5.**

This example demonstrates the use of contextual adaptation and dynamic balance. The translator employs adaptive selection to convey the emotional context of the original text while ensuring it resonates with target language readers.

The translator focused on conveying the overall context and emotional intensity of the original text. By using the metaphor "a close eye" to replace the culturally specific term "tengquan," the translator achieved a dynamic balance between fidelity and adaptation. This approach not only conveyed the protagonist's helplessness and sorrow but also enhanced the translation's readability and emotional impact, demonstrating the translator's ability to adapt to the target language's cultural expectations.

**Example 6.**

How much I loved, sister dear,/ Your nice fair hair before.

### **Analysis 6.**

This example highlights the application of emotional intensity and adaptive selection to enhance the emotional expression while ensuring it aligns with the target language's cultural norms.

The translator used the intensifier "how much I loved" to strengthen the emotional expression of admiration for the beloved's appearance. This approach preserved the intensity of the original emotions while adapting to the target language's cultural and linguistic norms. By considering the overall context and balancing cultural and linguistic aspects, the translator achieved dynamic balance and ecological aesthetics, making the translation natural and fluent.

## **5 Conclusion**

This paper explores the application of eco-translatology in translation practice through the analysis of Dai literature. By examining the translation ecosystem and the principle of "survival of the fittest," the study demonstrates how translators can achieve dynamic balance and optimal outcomes. Strategies such as domestication and cultural annotation are shown to be effective in balancing the cultural connotations of the source text with the readability of the target text. The holistic integration and ecological aesthetics within the translation ecosystem further reveal the integrity and diversity of translation activities, validating the scientific nature and practicality of eco-translatology.

In summary, eco-translatology provides a robust theoretical framework for translation research and practice. Its emphasis on integrity, dynamism, and diversity offers valuable insights for translators and researchers. Future studies can further explore the application of eco-translatology in other literary genres and translation domains to advance the development of translation studies.

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