

A Study on the Chinese Translation of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* from the Perspective of “Three-Dimension” Transformation of Eco-Translatology

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Abstract

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a full-length novel that was first published by Hosseini (2007), an acclaimed Afghan-American writer. The translation by Mr. Li Jihong, a famous Chinese translator, is one of the most famous Chinese translations of the novel in China. This paper analyzes this translation based on the perspective of “three-dimension” transformation of Eco-translatology, and explores the translation method of adaptive transformation in the three dimensions, including linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension, so as to help readers deepen their understanding of the Chinese translation of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and to promote cultural interaction and exchanges.

Keywords

Eco-Translatology, “Three-Dimension” Transformation, Chinese Translation, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

1. Introduction

As globalization continues to deepen, cultural exchanges have become more frequent, but the cultural voice power is still mainly occupied by developed countries. This has resulted in people around the world knowing very little about the cultures of slightly backward and weak countries. The work *A Thousand Splendid Suns* conforms to the general trend of cultural globalization, depicts the scene of war-torn Afghanistan, and at the same time depicts how two ordinary and resilient women survived during the war. This work not only speaks for the weak countries in the war, but also speaks for women’s rights. Translating *A Thou-*

sand Splendid Suns is of great value to the Chinese people's understanding of Afghanistan, Islamic culture and feminism.

Eco-translatology, as a new creative theory with high practical significance, provides a brand-new perspective for solving the Chinese translation of English works with its translation method of "three-dimension" transformation. In order to achieve an ecological balance between the source language and the target language, Eco-translatology regards language as an organic ecosystem, and utilizes the three major translation methods of adaptive transformation from the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions for translation. In this paper, the Chinese translation method of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* will be discussed by using "three-dimension" transformation of Eco-translatology.

2. Overview of Eco-Translatology

Eco-translatology, proposed by Chinese scholar Hu Gengshen, combines ecology and translation, based on the theory of adaptation and selection, to explore how the environment in which the translator translates affects the translator's translation behavior (Jiao & Li, 2023: p. 21). Eco-translatology compares the objective environment in which the translator translates to the ecological environment in which species live in the natural ecology (Hu, 2008a: p. 11).

And one of the indispensable elements is the translational eco-environment, which refers to the world presented by the original text, the source language and the target language, i.e. the combination of language, communication, culture, society and the interconnected interactions of author, reader and delegator (Hu, 2008b: p. 1). The translational eco-environment is a collection of factors that constrain the translator's best adaptation and optimal selection. For specific translations, from the style of content to the selection of words and phrases, there will always be a connection with the translational eco-environment. However, this connection may be manifested in different forms (e.g., directly or indirectly, materially or spiritually) or to different degrees (e.g., more closely or a little further), and so on. On the basis of the translational eco-environment, the translator has to implement different dimensions of adaptive selection of the translated text, and make appropriate choices, so that the translation can achieve the effect that best meets his or her own translation purpose (Tao & Chen, 2020: p. 3). As for the recent research of the translational eco-environment, all external environment that are related to the translator or the translation can be seen as translational eco-environment (Hu, 2011: p. 7).

In Eco-translatology studies, professor Hu Gengshen proposed a translation methodology, that is, the "three-dimension" transformation. Based on the basic principle of "multi-dimension adaptation and adaptive selection", the main perspective focuses on the linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension (Hu, 2011: p. 8).

The so-called "adaptive transformation from the linguistic dimension", means adaptive selection of linguistic forms in the translation process. The so-called "adaptive transformation from the cultural dimension", means focusing on the

transmission and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotation in the translation process. The so-called “adaptive transformation from the communicative dimension”, means focusing on the adaptive selection of bilingual communicative intention in the translation process. Research on the “three-dimension” transformation has mainly taken place at the operational level of translation, and at the same time, “three-dimension” transformation is also a focus of current research on applied translation (Hu, 2011: p. 8).

3. The Translational Eco-Environment of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

The economic environment is one of the elements that trigger translation activities. With the economic development in China, the need to contact foreign works is constantly increasing. In this regard, the influence of publishers on translation activities is crucial. This work is published by Shanghai People’s Publishing House. Shanghai People’s Publishing House (collectively referred to as SPPH) was founded in 1951. In the 1970s, it led the trend of study Chinese culture. Now it has been one of the most famous comprehensive publishing houses of China, covers a great deal of fields, especially in philosophy, politics, law, economics, history and social science. It is also an authority on the history of the Communist Party of China. The works of Khaled Hosseini are all published by SPPH in China, including *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *And the Mountains Echoed*, and *Sea Prayer*. So, SPPH is an authority for the translated works of Khaled Hosseini.

Also, social factor and environment factor are also very important. With the development of globalization, cultures of different countries and nations are becoming closer and closer. Under this circumstance, people now have a chance to contact with more different cultures of the world. Khaled Hosseini is a famous Afghan-American writer. Although now he is an American, he was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, and lived in there for almost 10 years during his childhood. Because of the turmoil of Afghanistan, his family decided to emigrate from Afghanistan to America. So, he cares about and knows about the situation of Afghanistan and wants to let people of the world to know more about Afghanistan. In this work, Hosseini focuses on Afghan women, and the novel tells the unfortunate story of two Afghan women, Mariam and Laila. Individuals of Afghanistan have to endure the constraints of hunger, sickness and disease, and families have to endure the trauma of war. Also, the work depicts the displacement of refugees as well as the war between the Soviet Union, the Taliban and the United States. In addition to the usual criticism of war, there is also a cry for women’s rights.

While in China, people do not know much about Afghanistan. However, with the Chinese translation of “《灿烂千阳》” by Li Jihong was published by SPPH, it became one of China’s bestsellers. So, after more and more Chinese people reading this work, they would like to take the initiative to know more about Afghanistan, and learn more situations and cultures of Afghanistan and Islam. This will help the culture interaction and exchange between China and Afghanistan.

4. The “Three-Dimension” Transformation under Adaptation and Selection

The basic theory of Eco-translatology summarizes the translation method as “three-dimension” transformation, that is to say, under the principle of “multi-dimension adaptation and adaptive selection”. It focuses more on the adaptive selection of transformation in the three dimensions of linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension (Hu, 2006: p. 50).

4.1. Adaptive Transformation from the Linguistic Dimension

The so-called “adaptive transformation from the linguistic dimension”, means adaptive selection of linguistic forms in the translation process. The two languages have various differences, such as dynamic expression and static expression, passive voice and active voice, personal subject and impersonal subject, hypotaxis and parataxis and so on (Lian, 1993). In the process of translation, we need to take into account their unique linguistic characteristics and expression habits, avoid word-for-word translation, but also take into account the ecological balance between English and Chinese, consider the different cultural backgrounds and rhetorical modes of discourse of the two languages. These are all for achieving the optimal adaptive transformation from the linguistic dimension.

Example 1:

ST: It must have, because Mariam remembered that she had been restless and preoccupied that day, the way she was only on Thursdays, the day when Jalil visited her at the kolba.

TT: 肯定是的，因为玛丽雅姆记得那天她坐立不安、心不在焉；她只有在星期四才会这样，星期四是扎里勒到泥屋来看望她的日子。

Analysis: English has a tendency to use static expression, such as adjective, preposition, and non-verb structure, while Chinese tends to use more dynamic expression, that is, using verbs or verb phrases to express its meanings. In the English source text, the words “restless” and “preoccupied” have been translated into “坐立不安” (zuo li bu an, a four-character idiom in Chinese) and “心不在焉” (xin bu zai yan, a four-character idiom in Chinese). These two words in English are static, and have been transformed to two dynamic four-character idioms to express the meaning of the two words. “坐立不安”, a Chinese idiom, means neither sitting nor standing, and describes a tense, emotionally disturbed mood. “心不在焉”, also a Chinese idiom, means that the mind is not in the right place and the thoughts are not focused. If we just use literal translation strategy to translate the two words “restless” and “preoccupied” into “不安的” (bu an de) and “心事重重的” (xin shi chong chong de), and do not change the part of speech of them, then there is a serious translationese in Chinese and it is not as strongly expressed in tone as the dynamic four-character idioms. At the same time, generally speaking, unless there is an intention to emphasize or for the rhetorical purpose, the general tendency in English is to avoid repetition as much as

possible. However, in Chinese, pronouns are often used less, and real words are often used more, and thus are often repeated more. In the source text, “the day” represents “Thursdays”. However, in Chinese, it has been translated into “星期四” (xing qi si, equals “Thursday”) to express the time more specific and accurate, and provide accurate information for Chinese readers. Finally, English focuses on hypotaxis, while Chinese focuses on parataxis. In this sentence, the conjunction “when” is translated into Chinese as “是” (shi, means “is”), which expresses the logic of the source text completely and avoids the translationese.

Example 2:

ST: She imagined her on horseback, smiling shyly behind a veiled green gown, her palms painted red with henna, her hair parted with silver dust, the braids held together by tree sap.

TT: 她想象她骑着马，穿着绿色的长裙，在面纱之后羞涩地微笑，手掌用指甲花涂得红红的，扑了银粉的头发被分开，扎成的几条辫子用树液粘在一起。

Analysis: This sentence reflects the rigidity of English grammar and the flexibility of Chinese grammar. In English, an independent and complete sentence can only have a subject and a predicate verb. But in Chinese, verbs can be conjugated and are not constrained by grammatical morphology. In this sentence, “she” is the subject, “imagined” is the predicate verb, and the rest are all modifiers. For example, “smiling” modifies “her” as an adverbial to indicate a state of “her”. And the rest of the verbs are non-predicative forms. In Chinese, on the other hand, verbs can be used repeatedly and are not subject to grammatical constraints. For example, the verbs “微笑” (wei xiao, equals “smile”), “涂” (tu, equals “paint”), “被分开” (bei fen kai, equals “be parted”), and “粘” (zhan, equals “hold”) in the target text. When we are translating English non-predicative verbs, we can directly adopt a dynamic expression by employing verbs in Chinese, thus conveying the real meaning of the English words. In addition, the English has a tendency to use the passive voice to express objective state of affairs, whereas the Chinese likes to use the active voice. In general, the passive voice in Chinese is used only when an unfortunate situation occurs. So, in order to make it readable to the reader and to avoid translationese, here the passive voice is converted to active voice. In this example, “painted”, and “held” are all non-predicative verbs expressing passive voice. While in Chinese, they have been translated into “涂” and “粘” which express the active voice, and the passive verb “被” (bei, means “be done”) in Chinese has been omitted.

4.2. Adaptive Transformation from the Cultural Dimension

The so-called “adaptive transformation from the cultural dimension”, means focusing on the transmission and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotation in the translation process. Language is the carrier of culture and the most direct external expression of culture, and the two are inseparable. The problem

of incoherent language expression caused by the differences between Chinese and Western cultures can be solved by adaptive transformation from the cultural dimension. The adaptive transformation from the cultural dimension is to pay attention to the differences in the nature and content of the source language culture and the target language culture, and to avoid misinterpreting the source text from the view of the target language culture. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* depicts a story that takes place in Afghanistan, and the culture of Islam exists in the whole work. When translating these words and phrases with religious and cultural colors, the translator should be objective and free of personal feelings to protect the ecological balance between the two cultures and ensure the smooth and accurate dissemination of information.

Example 3:

ST: But Mariam's favorite, other than Jalil of course, was Mullah Faizullah, the elderly village Koran tutor, its Akhond.

TT: 但玛丽雅姆最喜欢的人——当然，除了扎里勒之外——是法苏拉赫毛拉。他是一个老人，村里的阿訇，也就是讲解《古兰经》的老师。

Analysis: This sentence is not difficult to translate from the view of grammar or syntax, but it is difficult to convey the cultural content. The words "Koran" and "Akhond" are two religious words of Islam. The "Koran" is the only fundamental work of Islam, and "Akhond" means the tutor of teaching "Koran". When translating these words into Chinese, this type of religious words has official translation historically. Therefore, it is directly translated here as "《古兰经》" (gu lan jing, equals "Koran") and "阿訇" (a hong, equals "Akhond") by using literal translation. For readers who understand Islamic culture, such direct adoption of the existing translation can make them understand the cultural connotations at a glance. For readers who do not understand Islamic culture, such translation can let them learn more about Islamic culture, and at the same time achieve the effect of cultural dissemination and boost culture interaction and exchange.

Example 4:

ST: "You go on and cry, Mariam. Go on. There is no shame in it. But remember, my girl, what the Koran says, 'Blessed is He in Whose hand is the kingdom, and He Who has power over all things, Who created death and life that He may try you.' The Koran speaks the truth, my girl. Behind every trial and every sorrow that He makes us shoulder, God has a reason."

TT: "你哭吧，亲爱的玛丽雅姆。哭吧。但是，小姑娘，你要记住《古兰经》上说的：'他掌管人间，他主宰万物，他创造了生与死，得到他的考验是你的光荣。'《古兰经》说的都是真理，小姑娘。真主不管让我们承受什么考验和悲哀，他总有他的理由。"

注：《古兰经》第 67 章。本书所引《古兰经》均由译者自英译本转译，下

面不再注明。

Analysis: In this example, the words of the Koran were quoted. However, China has been guided by Marxism since the founding of the country, and most Chinese people believe in atheism rather than any religion. Except for some ethnic minorities who believe in Islam, most Chinese people only know about Islam from some news or textbooks. So, most Chinese people do not know the origin of the quote. In addition to translating the source text, the translator has taken the approach of adding note to supplement the quote, which can provide more information about the sentence for the target readers. Those readers who are interested in the Islamic culture will be able to read the source text where the sentence comes from on their own according to the note and learn more about the culture of Islam, thus fulfilling the function of cultural transmission. Meanwhile, in this work, all the word “God” is translated into “真主” (zhen zhu, means “Allah”) in Chinese, which is also due to the influence of Islamic culture. Although the word “God” in English refers to all gods, the translations of different gods in Chinese vary greatly. For example, in Protestant Christian culture, the word “God” is translated into “上帝” (shang di); while in Catholic culture, the word “God” is translated into “天主” (tian zhu). And for Islamic culture, the word “God” should be translated into “真主”. These are due to historical and religious reasons, but have been agreed upon in Chinese for centuries and therefore require extra care during translation. When one is translating, it is important to pay attention not only to the culture of the source language, but also to the culture of the target language, so as to avoid mistranslations that may lead to misunderstandings during the transmission of different cultures.

4.3. Adaptive Transformation from the Communicative Dimension

In the process of translation, translators need to consider the communicative intention in addition to the above two dimensions. The so-called “adaptive transformation from the communicative dimension”, means focusing on the adaptive selection of bilingual communicative intention in the translation process. The transformation from the communicative dimension of the translated text requires the translator to be able to find out the real communicative intention of the original author hidden behind the text, and to adaptively select the translated text for transformation with the communicative intention as the core. The vast majority of the novel consists of dialogues between different characters, so the translation of these dialogues should be as colloquial as possible, and not be stiffly connected with the preceding and following sentence. In this regard, the translator should always pay attention to whether the communicative intention of the source language is reflected in the translation, and make the translation easy to understand rather than obscure, in order to avoid causing unnecessary misunderstandings.

Example 5:

ST: “But I boiled it five minutes more than usual.” “That’s a bold lie.” “I

swear-”

TT: “可是我已经比平常多煮了五分钟。”“说谎倒是不脸红啊你。”“我对天发誓……”

Analysis: The dialogue is from Part I, Chapter 15 of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, in which Mariam cooks for Rasheed, and Rasheed rebukes her for not cooking well enough and at the same time Mariam defended it. The context here is a heated argument between Mariam and Rasheed. If the translator simply translates the source text of “That’s a bold lie.” and “I swear-” directly into “这是一个大胆的谎言。”(zhe shi yi ge da dan de huang yan) and “我发誓……”(wo fa shi), the communicative dimension can not be transformed well enough. Although it is faithful to the source text and takes into account the English sentence structure, it lacks the flexibility of Chinese expression, leads to translationalism, and fails to convey the intention of communication. Thus, the translator changed the original English sentence structure in translation and adopted the translation strategy of free translation as well as the translation method of amplification to reshape the sentence structure. Finally, translate them into “说谎倒是不脸红啊你。”(shuo huang dao shi bu lian hong a ni, means “you’re not ashamed of lying, are you?”) and “我对天发誓……”(wo dui tian fa shi, means “I swear to God”). Such expressions are more in line with Chinese expression habits, stronger in tone and more understandable to Chinese readers, which can better convey the communicative intention.

Example 6:

ST: An insult Laila had heard on the street rose to her lips. She didn’t really understand it—couldn’t quite picture the logistics of it—but the words packed a fierce potency, and she unleashed them now. “Your mother eats cock!”

TT: 一句从街上听来的粗口涌到了莱拉嘴边。她并不知道它究竟是什么意思——不是十分清楚它怎么就成骂人的话了——但她急怒攻心，那几个字脱口而出。“你妈吃鸡巴！”

Analysis: This text is from Part 2, Chapter 17 of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Here Laila is getting ready to go back home, but she is blocked and teased by Khadim, and in the heat of the moment Laila cursed him. This text is characterized by apparent colloquialism, and the translation of bad words is also a major challenge. Here the translator translates the bad words “Your mother eats cock!” directly into “你妈吃鸡巴！”(ni ma chi ji ba) instead of using euphemism just for the purpose of making the reader understand the message and context better. Meanwhile, the word “insult” as well as the sentence “but the words packed a fierce potency, and she unleashed them now” in the source text are translated into “粗口”(cu kou, means “swear words”) and “但她急怒攻心，那几个字脱口而出”(dan ta ji nu gong xin, na ji ge zi tuo kou er chu, means “but she was so furious that she blurted out those words”). According to the context, the translator adopts a flexible translation method, free translation, instead of adopting

literal translation to translate them into “侮辱” (wu ru, equals “insult”) and “但这些话蕴含着巨大的力量，她现在释放了出来” (dan zhe xie hua yun han zhe ju da de li liang, ta xian zai shi fang le chu lai). Such translation by the translator obviously better reflects the communicative intention of the source text. The so-called “adaptive transformation from the communicative dimension” requires translator to convey the real intention of the author according to the context. No matter the sentence meaning conveys praise or blame, or there is omission of the sentence meaning, the translator should pay attention to them and convey the real communicative intention.

5. Conclusion

This paper introduces the translational eco-environment of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and elaborates on the translator’s adaptation and selection of translation of this text from the perspective of “three-dimension” transformation in the theory of Eco-translatology. The translation of literary works requires the translator not only to convert English into Chinese, or Chinese into English, but also to appreciate the original exotic flavor of the work on the basis of understanding, and at the same time to convey the cultural connotation and communicative intention of the original work to readers. No translation can be perfect, but the appropriate translation strategy as well as the appropriate translation methods can play a vital role in successful translation. The theory of Eco-translatology provides a good perspective to balance the differences between linguistic dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension, which not only regulates the translation, but also promotes the mutual appreciation of Chinese and Western cultural exchanges. Meanwhile, the theory of Eco-translatology can not only be used to analyze the translator’s translation behavior, but also can be used to guide one’s own translation practice. For future application of the Eco-translatology theory in translation, translators can try to use the theory to translate various kinds of texts, including not only literary works, but also business text, scientific text, political text or law text and so on. Translators can skillfully use the translation method of “three-dimension” transformation during translation, so as to better convey the information of the source language and balance the differences between two different languages.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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