

A Comparative Study of *The Dream of Red Mansion* From the Perspective of Eco-translatology

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The Dream of Red Mansion is a masterpiece with tremendous influence at home and abroad. The success of it depends largely on the promotion of its English versions. The most renown versions are the translation of *The Story of the Stone* by David Hawkes and the translation of *The Dream of Red Mansion* by Yang Xianyi. This thesis strives to make an analysis of the English versions of *The Dream of Red Mansion* under the guidance of eco-translatology, and to verify that eco-translatology has a strong explanatory power and guidance for relevant studies. This thesis makes a comparative analysis on the English versions of *The Dream of Red Mansion* from the perspective of the “Adaption and Selections” and the “Three Dimensional Transformation” and sums up how the translators make selective adaptations.

Keywords: eco-translatology, *The Dream of Red Mansion*, “Three Dimensional Transformation”, comparative analysis

Introduction

With the improvement of Chinese international status and increasingly deepening culture exchange with foreign countries in recent years, translation of classics has received more and more attention than ever before. *The Dream of Red Mansion*, as one of the highest literature achievements of the Chinese classical literature, is a masterpiece with tremendous significance both at home and abroad. Among the Chinese classical works, *The Dream of Red Mansion* enjoys the highest status in the aspect of language and culture. It has been translated into more than 60 versions until now, two of which have drawn widespread attention throughout the world. One is *The Story of the Stone* translated by David Hawkes and John Minford, and the other one is *The Dream of Red Mansion* translated by Yang Xianyi and his wife Ladys Yang.

Eco-translatology put forward by Professor Hu Gengshen provides a new a way to explore the translation at multi-dimensional level. Traditional Chinese culture and eco-translatology have features of advocating harmony and pursuing balance in common. Thus, the thesis will compare the two versions of *The Dream of Red Mansion* based on eco-translatology to figure out how eco-environment influences the process of translation and how the translators make their versions adapt to translation eco-environment.

In this thesis, the author will provide a detailed analysis on the two versions of *The Dream of Red Mansion* from three dimensions, which are language, culture, and communication. Eco-translatology provides a new way

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to study the translation of Chinese classical literature in multiple dimensions. Therefore, eco-translatology is both theoretically and practically feasible.

The Comparative Analysis of Two English Versions of *The Dream of Red Mansion* From the Perspective of Eco-translatology

The Dream of Red Mansion, as the peak of ancient Chinese literature, exerts a huge influence on the later generations deeply. It plays a vitally significant role in the promotion of Chinese classics and culture. This part makes a comparative analysis of the two most popular English versions of *The Dream of Red Mansion* under the guidance of the eco-translatology.

Adaptive Selections in Linguistic Dimension

From the perspective of eco-translatology, adaptations and selections in the linguistic dimension should be adaptations at various levels. Therefore, this part will make a comparative analysis of Hawkes' and Yang's versions from the aspect of the lexis.

During the translation of *The Dream of Red Mansion*, it is inevitably that Hawkes and Yang have tried every means to make proper transformations of the two languages, for the Chinese classics involve so many words that are not used in modern times. The great differences between source language and target language require them to try to make adaptations and selections and achieve the balance between the source and target texts at lexical level in the linguistic dimension. There are some examples to be analyzed in detail at the level of lexis:

Example 1. 薄命女偏逢薄命郎，葫芦僧乱判葫芦案。

Hawkes' version: The Bottle-gourd girl meets an unfortunate young man.

And the Bottle-gourd monk settles a protracted lawsuit.

Yang's version: An ill-fated girl meets an ill-fated man.

A confounded monk ends a confounded case.

In Hawkes' version, “薄命女” is translated into “Bottle-gourd girl”, which is not relevant to the original text. “葫芦僧” is translated into “Bottle-gourd monk”. It seems to be faithful to the original text, but in fact, it may twist the author's original intention. In the latter part, Hawkes translates “葫芦案” into “a confused lawsuit”, so in fact he slightly misinterprets the meaning of “Hulu” in the original text: “Protracted” means “relatively long in duration”, which is different from the meaning of “confused”. In addition, the two repetitions in the original text are not reflected in the translation.

And in Yang's version, his version is remarkably perfect in language form and content. In the translation, the “ill fated” and “confused” are used repeatedly to reproduce the “薄命” and “葫芦” in the original text, achieving the same audio-visual effect as the original text, faithfully reproducing the ideological content, style, and form expressed in the original text. Therefore, after the analysis of this example, it can be concluded that Yang's translation is better than Hawkes' considering adaptations and selections at lexical level in the linguistic dimension.

Adaptive Selections in Cultural Dimension

In the process of translation, the translators should make an adaptive choice not only at the language level, but also at the cultural level with the purpose of providing the target readers with a real reading experience which is the same as the readers of original text do. This requires the translators to understand the exact cultural

information of the original language, to try to make up for the cultural differences between the source and target languages.

Example 2. 谋事在人，成事在天。

Hawkes' version: Man proposes, God disposes.

Yang's version: Man proposes, Heaven disposes.

Both Hawkes and Yang choose to keep the antithesis form of the original text, but due to cultural differences, the two translators deal with “天” differently. The choice of “heaven” in Yang's translation not only reflects the Chinese Confucian and Taoist thought of believing in the unity of heaven and man, but also meets the needs of the specific context of *The Dream of Red Mansion*. Hawkes' choice of God is based on his consideration of the target readers' Christian belief in God. The selective transformation of “heaven” by translators from different cultural backgrounds not only reflects their personal subjective choice, but also conveys different cultural implication, which adapts well to the translation ecological environment of the target language.

Adaptive Selections in Communicative Dimension

In communicative dimension, the most essential factor is the information the author aims to convey to the readers. This kind of information can be extracted from the original text and reproduced faithfully and accurately by the translators. The character, plot, poem, couplet, riddle, even the names in the novel, have implied certain moral meaning, hinted the beginning and development, reflected the encounter and fate of the character, and reflected the author's communicative intention to the readers.

Example 3. 娇杏

Hawkes' version: Lucky

Yang's version: Jiao Xing

According to the original text, “娇杏” is a poor servant girl, and the author names this servant girl “Jiao Xing”, whose communicative purpose is to suggest to the readers that the change of her fate is fluke. In dealing with this person's name, Hawkes translates it into “Lucky” by means of free translation, so that when the target language readers read this person's name, they can easily think of the final fate of the character. However, Yang directly translates the name as “Jiao Xing”. This translation fails to reflect the fate of the characters and lacks the original communicative purpose of the author. So in this example, Hawkes' version of “娇杏” is better to achieve communicative purpose.

Summary

By analyzing the examples mentioned above, it can be easily concluded that both Hawkes and Yang Xianyi have made strenuous efforts in order to pursue adaptations and selections in linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimension.

In linguistic dimension, the translators try to make a balance of ecology between the original and target language by making selective adaptations from the aspect of the lexis. And in cultural dimension, the translators try to understand the exact cultural implications of the original language, to try to make up for the cultural differences between the source and target languages, and to present the best translation versions to the target readers. Finally, in communicative dimension, the translators should achieve the authors' communicative purposes with their adaptations and selections in the process of translating.

Conclusion

This thesis mainly takes the two versions of *The Dream of Red Mansion* as a sample study to analyze and compare the translation strategies adopted in Hawkes' and Yang's versions under the guidance of eco-translatology. After a detailed analysis, it can be found that eco-translatology can work as an effective theoretical framework and provide a new angle to guide the translations of Chinese classical literature.

Firstly, eco-translatology provides a new perspective for scholars to study the English translation of *The Dream of Red Mansion*. Translation is by no means an isolated activity. The translation process is closely related to culture and society. Under the guidance of eco-translatology, translators are supposed to try to pursue proper adaptations and selections at their full capacity in order to satisfy the needs of the target readers. Secondly, after the analysis on the two versions of *The Dream of Red Mansion*, it is too difficult to choose the superior one. And what counts is whether translators adapt to the translation environment. Hawkes and Yang have achieved their successful English versions of *The Dream of Red Mansion* under the guidance of eco-translatology. With totally distinctive cultural backgrounds, both Hawkes and Yang tend to translate the literary works differently on the basis of their own culture. And both of their versions should be accepted. From this paper, it can be concluded that eco-translatology can serve a new perspective and a new way to analyse and study the classic works, especially with its core concept "three dimensional transformation", from linguistic dimension, cultural dimension, and communication dimension.

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