

# Mark Bender's Translation and Introduction of Plants and Animals in *The Nuosu Book of Origins*

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Mark Bender and Aku Wuwu translate *Hnewo Teyy*, a crucial epic for Nuosu people from Yi to English directly and entirely for the first time. Their translation and introduction of the epic are involved in *The Nuosu Book of Origins*, in which Bender concerns plants and animals. This paper mainly analyses Bender's adaptation and selection concerning his investigation and translation of plants and animals under the guidance of Eco-translatology. Significantly, Eco-translatology and Bender's translation and introduction provide enlightenment to the transmission of Chinese culture.

*Keywords:* *The Nuosu Book of Origins*, Eco-translatology, adaptation and selection, Chinese culture

## Introduction

The creation epic *Hnewo Teyy* is crucial to Nuosu, a subgroup of Chinese Yi nationality in southwest China, mainly depicting the genealogies and origins of human and non-human inhabitants and migrations of clans. Bender and Yi poet Aku Wuwu translated it from Yi to English according to a relatively original version still in circulation collected by Jjivot Zopqu entirely. Their translation is included in *The Nuosu Book of Origins: A Creation Epic From Southwest China* followed by a forward, preface, pronunciation guide, detailed introduction, and other parts.

As seen from his introduction and translation of the Nuosu epic, Bender pays extra attention to the plants and animals in it, which will be discussed in this paper for two primary reasons. Firstly, limited research and its significance in comprehending and transmitting Nuosu Yi people's splendid culture, especially its harmonious co-existence wisdom worldwide, by the complement of an objective western perspective that can improve the limitations of self-view. After all, studying the non-human inhabitants can help research the culture of humans living in the environment as it involves people's way of understanding the world. And in the Anthropocene epoch, the environment suffers from people's damage. Secondly, the precious experience and method provided by his translation and introduction.

Eco-translatology combines translatology and ecology, researching translation from an ecological perspective. In a degree, Chinese translation theory Eco-translatology and Bender's translation and introduction of plants and animals in *The Nuosu Book of Origins* are similar in thinking mode, which will be employed in the analysis. In a sense, Bender's selection of translation mode is based on his adaptation to translational

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eco-environment, “a complex of all exterior factors acting on the existence and development of translation subjects” (Hu, 2020, p. 56).

### **Eco-translatology and the Translation of Plants and Animals in *The Nuosu Book of Origins***

Eco-translatology is “a synthesis of translation studies and the ecological perspective” (Hu, 2020, p. 4). Like nature ecology, Eco-translatology emphasizes the construction of a holistic, balanced, and harmonious translational environment, possessing philosophical wisdom.

The wisdom of interrelation and balance can also find its way in Bender's translation and introduction of plants and animals in *The Nuosu Book of Origins*. Firstly, Bender's study and translation process involve harmonious and united employment of multidisciplinary knowledge such as that of biology, folkloristics, and ecocriticism of literature. Secondly, human and non-human inhabitants are both concerned without anthropocentrism. Thirdly, the translation itself and Bender's relevant introduction and theses constitute the entire ecology of the translation and introduction of plants and animals as there are abundant introductions and annotations explaining the designation and significance of plants and animals in Nuosu Yi culture. Fourthly, the translation tries to observe and balance both the source and target language features which is accepted by translation community composed of humans such as editor, readers, tradition bearer.

In *Eco-translatology*, Hu Gengshen (2020, p. 55) defines translation as “a selection activity of the translator's adaptation to fit the translational eco-environment via textual transplants”. And the translational eco-environment integrates various natural or human factors relevant to the occurrence, existence, and development of translation activities which contains natural economic environment, linguistic and cultural environment, social and political environment, and various environments (Hu, 2020). Bender adapts to the characteristics of the source and target language environment and selects his translation in accordance with the expectations of the translation community.

The next chapter will discuss Bender's adaptation and selection in detail.

### **Bender's Adaptation and Selection**

#### **Bender's Adaptation and Selection Concerning His Research on Plants and Animals**

Bender's study of plants and animals in the *The Nuosu Book of Origins* is owing to his adaptation of various translational eco-environments.

Firstly, Bender adapts to the cultural environment of Nuosu people and *Hnewo Teyy*. Plants and animals are indispensable in Yi culture and Nuosu people's unique views about the relationship between humans and animals and plants are worth studying. Bender had emailed the writer, denoting that plants, animals, and features of the environment like rivers, caves, and mountains tell what the people who created and transmitted the epic know about their environment—this is why scholars of the 1950s described epics from southwest China as “encyclopedias” of local knowledge and it's also the reason why Bender focuses on plants and animals in his study.

Influenced by the primitive culture of totems, Yi worships animals such as dragons and tigers. The ancient name of the Yi people is “Luolo” (“罗倮”), in which “Luo” means “tiger” in Yi, while “lo” means dragon. Zhyge Alu, the most crucial hero in Yi, is the son of the dragon eagle in the legend. In addition, plants and animals are widely used in Yi medicine.

The Nuosu people of Yi nationality mainly inhabit the large and small Liangshan Mountains in Sichuan Province, the southwest China with few scattered in the northeast of Yunnan Province and the southeast of Tibet Autonomous Region. Liangshan Mountains are in the north of Jinsha River and the south of Dadu River, where are natural habitats for plants and animals. In the unique environment, Nuosu people form a distinctive ecological outlook.

*Hnewo Teyy* is like an encyclopedia recording copious native plants and animals involving abundant folk knowledge. Bender holds that the epic presents an all-encompassing genealogy, successively describing stories of the origins and connections among the sky, earth, water, and the plants and animals that inhabit the diverse ecological habitats of water, land, and air from generation to generation (Bender, Aku, & Jjivot, 2019). *Hnewo Teyy* records a large number of flora and fauna in which it reveals original folk taxonomy about tribes of snow: six with blood and six without. "The Twelve Branches of Snow" in *Hnewo Teyy* mentions that red snow falls from the sky and melts into their ancestors after nine days and nine nights. Of the 12 snow tribes, those without blood include trees, vines, and various grasses, while those without blood include frogs, snakes, vultures, bears, monkeys, and humans (Bender et al., 2019). That is, people are of the same origin as plants and animals coming from sky equally.

The application of Yi medicine is involved in *Hnewo Teyy*. Plants such as anji fruits and sypy fruits in "Genealogy of Shyly Wote" and animals such as lark, crow, and pheasant in *Hnewo Teyy* are all Yi medicine. In the epic, Jiumu Vuvu saves some animals such as a floating leopard, rat, honeybee, poison snake when the flood comes, befriending them. Afterwards, animals play a trick on the Ngeti Gunzy, the sky spirit to help Jiumu marry Ngeti Gunzy's daughter. Then Ngeti Gunzy and his daughter are suffered from a bee sting and a snake bite, and the Yi medicines such as hlyvo grass and musk are applied to cure (Bender et al., 2019).

Ngeti Gunzy cuts the spider into three parts, which are separately thrown into the rock pile, the river, pine forest, and then his wife is suffered from cataracts. He can do nothing but invite Bimo to cure, which is the explication of "spiders are inedible" in Nuosu culture. From stories in *Hnewo Teyy* above, the Nuosu ancestors' awareness of the ecological harmony and equality among gods, human beings, and plants and animals is evident. People and animals are in harmony and mutual assistance, and even God cannot hurt animals, or he will incur misfortune.

In addition, content in many chapters such as "Twelve Branches of the Snow" in *Hnewo Teyy* reveals the killing and eating taboos of animals.

Secondly, Bender adapts to the trend of Yi study. The International Symposiums on Yi Studies, initiated by American anthropologist Steven Harrell, also the editor of *The Nuosu Book of Origins*, saw a consistent focus on Yi ecology and the environment. And ecology studies the coexistence of plants, animals, and other creatures. The Third Symposium focuses on economic development and education (including the development of tourism and protection of nature), the Fourth on the sustainability of the Yi ecosystem, and the Fifth on various topics, including Yi medicine research. Plants and animals are nonideological which can arouse readers' interests from overseas; nevertheless, relevant research is very limited and scanty from China and overseas.

Thirdly, the academic research environment. Bender is the Chair of the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at the Ohio State University. The issue of ecology, especially the relationship between humans and plants and animals, has been attracting worldwide attention in literature since the Industrial Revolution. Then ecocriticism emerges to work as theoretical support. Shi Pingping (2009) points out that overcoming the parochialism of the first wave of ecocriticism in the U.S., the second wave of ecocriticism

appears in the late 1990s with the burgeoning of ethnic ecocriticism. And in the 21st century, multispecies ethnography arrives on the anthropological stage, making creatures, the margins into the foreground in ethnographies and people's entanglement with other creatures is under research (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010). Following the trend, Bender performs his study.

Fourthly, bathing in natural environment and ancient Indian culture, Bender adapts to his own interests and academic research preference in nature and folk culture. Bender said he was used to going hunting and fishing in the forests of the Appalachian Mountains area when he was young, where he learned blacksmithing, made hunting rifles, and went camping in the mountains with his family (Wen, 2015). And he furthered to put that

It's the reason why the material culture of the Miao or Yi attracted me. When I went to these ethnic areas in China, even though the cultural context was different, understanding what they were doing was easy for me because I had done similar things before. (Wen, 2015, p. 40)

In the 1960s and 1970s, influenced by American ethnographic poetics, he devoted himself to the study of non-mainstream oral poetry of ethnic minorities. He mentions that his academic roots are basically in China, and had been interested in East Asian culture since he was a child. According to him, his study of ecological poetry in East Asia is a new phase, but the concerns for cultural traditions and the natural environment run through his academic life (Wen, 2015). And Bender's concern for ecology (mainly studying the relationship between humans and plants and animals) permeates his research on ethnic literature. He employs a combination of western theories from ecocriticism, folkloristics, ethnographic poetics, and biology to study the ecological concepts, folk knowledge related to flora and fauna of China's ethnic minorities, gradually expanding the scope from the study of a single ethnic minority literature to the Chinese minority epics research entirely.

In 2008, "Tribes of Snow': Animals and Plants in *The Nuosu Book of Origins*" was released in which he investigated flora and fauna appearing in the *Hnewo Teyy*. In "Slinking Between Realms: Musk Deer as Prey in Yi Oral Literature" issued in 2011, he performs a microscopic study of Yi people's perception of deer according to Yi's folk literature such as legends and epics in Sichuan (mainly Nusu) and Yunnan Provinces with the guidance of zoological and folkloristic knowledge. He points out the uniqueness and diversity of the Yi people's perception of deer and this study can help study Yi's ethnic identity. In "Landscapes and Life-Forms in Cosmographic Epics From Southwest China" published in 2016, he applies the ecocritical terms to the study of epics of Chinese minority, and even creates terms such as "eco-genealogy" himself for the exploration.

And he even compares the similarities between ethnographic poetry from southwest China and northeast India in "Ethnographic Poetry in North-East India and Southwest China" in 2012 with macro and micro case studies, pointing out the similarities in the understanding of the world and the creation of ethnographic poetry in different countries and regions with similar geographical environments. And the poetry contains many natural images including plants and animals. Then in "Constellations of Competency in Cosmographic Translation" issued in 2017, based on his own translation experience, he explicates the translation paradigms that can be adopted in the translation of folk literature rich in connotation (including those about plants and animals) such as that of Chinese minority groups.

In conclusion, Bender gradually extends its scope in the study of plants and animals, compares different countries' views about them, and puts forward cosmographic translation.

### **Bender's Adaptation and Selection in the Translation of Plants and Animals in *The Nuosu Book of Origins*: Cosmographic Translation**

"Cosmographic" is utilized by Bender to describe epics like *Hnewo Teyy*, similar to a cosmographic repository with ample cultural images. And this is the translational environment of source language text that Bender has to adapt to.

In "Constellations of Competency in Cosmographic Translation", Bender mentions the translation of folk literature in a multinational country like China. Bender (2017) mentions the collaboration of "active agents" is needed in translating the cosmographic translation, "active agents" including performers/tradition bearers, community go-betweens, collectors/recorders, translators/editors and audiences. And these "active agents" except translators are translation community in Eco-translatology which is a part of translational environment that translators should adapt to and they accept an objective translation. Bender has ever recorded objective and authentic performances such as Vazyrhli in which performers perform during a specific performance event; tradition bearer Jivot Zopqu supports the objective transmission of culture; the press publishes a series of books named *Studies on Ethnic Groups in China* with Harrell as editor. He had ever studied Yi's ecology and he persisted with objective introduction of Yi culture as an anthropologist. Moreover, Bender (2017) furthers that translation goal varies by audience, and his translation of *Hnewo Teyy* follows Goal Level 2. It requires sophisticated translation with detailed explanations for specialized "local" audiences and specialists. Thomas Heberer's book review about *The Nuosu Book of Origins* demonstrates the effective transmission of Yi's unique ecological concept.

In order to adapt to this translational environment and translate *Hnewo Teyy* objectively and accurately, Bender takes some measures to translate animals and plants in it.

**Collaborative translation based on field-work.** Bender (2017) notes the collaborative translation model in which many "active agents" play specific roles. While translating plants and animals in *The Nuosu Book of Origins*, Bender, Aku Wuwu, and their students form a translation team of small-scale and they employ "extended cohort" instead of "basic constellation" as Bender consults not only database but another translator Aku Wuwu and some experts (Bender, 2017). They had ever done field-works in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture and Bender collected plants specimen and took many pictures of plants and animals, asking Aku Wuwu whether they existed in *Hnewo Teyy* and the cultural knowledge of them.

**Peritext and epitext.** The concept of "Paratext" is raised by Gerard Genette, a French structuralist-literary theorist who divides paratext into peritext and epitext (Genette, 1997). Peritext includes the introduction and annotations in *The Nuosu Book of Origins*. In the book's introduction, "the epic as cosmographic repository" and "Eco-Genealogies of the pluriverse" expound the relations between lifeforms on earth, especially humans and animals and plants in Nuosu culture and combine with the trend of ecocriticism.

Epitext is relevant information outside *The Nuosu Book of Origins*, including the "'Tribes of Snow': Animals and Plants in *The Nuosu Book of Origins*", working as an intertextual text to the translation. This paper was written in the context of the Fourth International Symposium on Yi Studies, which mainly explored the sustainability of the Yi ecosystem. In this paper, classifying flora and fauna into domestic and wild, he employs ecocritical and folklore theories as well as personal field-study research to explore the unique ecological concepts of Nuosu people. He mentions they have the same origins and the boundaries between realms of gods, humans, and plants and animals are permeable (Bender, 2008).

The paratexts work as an intertextual reference to the translation and pose holistic and balanced translational environment together with the translation.

**Three-dimensional transformation.** Hu (2011) mentions that translators make adaptive choices based on the dimensions of linguistic, cultural, and communication.

Firstly, adaptive transformation from the linguistic dimension. Nuosu people's observing living creatures are vividly showcased in the sentence order of S + O + V as they put living creatures including plants and animals ahead of verbs. Nevertheless, the order of plants and animals in a sentence is adjusted to fit the structure of S + V + O to adapt to English translational environment.

And most of the classics of Chinese minority groups are translated from minority language to Chinese and then English. Nevertheless, Bender translates from Yi to English to avoid cultural loss. In translating plants and animals, he follows the original text by using Romanized standard Yi to replace those untranslatable names.

Example 1:

ST: ap mit hlop yu six (Romanized standard Yi) (Bender & Aku, 2019)

TT: led the heavenly steed Ami Hlo (Bender et al., 2019)

As t and p are just tone indicators and should not be pronounced, Bender deletes them with Ami Hlo left. Bender uses literal translation plus note explaining the cultural connotation of horse in Nuosu culture. For those having English equivalence, deer is common in Yi areas and Bender distinguishes their difference meticulously reflected in his translation. He studies deer and translates them as musk deer, fawn, water deer, and muntjac in diverse situation.

Secondly, adaptive transformation from the communicative dimension emphasizes the achieving of communicative effects. In Bender's translation, transliteration plus amplification makes the translation understandable for readers.

Example 2:

ST: hnap bbit syt syp ke (Bender & Aku, 2019)

TT: The susy birds that built the nests in their noses (Bender et al., 2019)

"Hnap bbit" means nostrils; "ke" means "nest". Bender adds "birds" to clarify that "syt syp" are actually birds with this name which not only observes the original language but adapts to the language environment in target language.

Thirdly, adaptive transformation from the cultural dimension cares about the transmission of cultural connotations. Bender's translation is followed with ample ethnographic notes explaining missing connotations. In *The Nuosu Book of Origins*, notes about plants or animals mainly include their names, the comparison and contrast between different nationalities' culture, relevant folk knowledge such as food taboos, their relationship with religion, belief, and society.

Sometimes, notes cover the scientific name, Chinese pinyin, or Nuosu name of these plants and animals which contribute to the understanding and study of the target readers. Bender (2017, p. 14) expresses that "While the text and the informants may have original language names, these names are typically part of a folk taxonomy of life forms which is often very different from scientific classification systems". Bender's valuing the scientific investigation, classification, and verification under the scientific guidance of zoology and botany can be sensed.

Example 3:

The notes of cypress

The cypress (N: shubo; Ch: baishu; Cupressaceae) (Bender et al., 2019)

In the notes, the Nuosu, Chinese pinyin and scientific name of the plant are given.

Concerning the note of “Ami Hlo” in Example 1, Bender compares and contrasts the recognition of the same target in China's different nationalities such as Miao based on his studies before. Bender's introduction of culture is closely related to his studying and translating epics of other ethnic groups. In addition, annotations embrace hunting taboos and food taboos about animals and the medicinal value of plants such as punuo grass.

Briefly, Bender's translation and introduction stress the objective and understandable transplantation based on multidisciplinary theory.

### Conclusions

Eco-translatology broadens the horizon for translation research and it studies translation based on the translational eco-environments that translator adapts to instead of the limited analysis of translation method. Bender's translation and introduction of plants and animals keep balance in source and target language translational eco-environments, and consensus is reached among translation community. That is, Bender performs studies on Nuosu's plants and animals under the guidance of western theory, making up the limitation of Yi study. Not only does he contribute to the objective translation and transmission of Yi culture, a part of Chinese culture, but makes the translation acceptable to the target readers overseas.

Eco-translatology and Bender's experience are enlightening about Chinese culture transmission. Firstly, translator should make three-dimensional transformation with the translation balancing source and target language translational environments. Secondly, stay close to international academic trends, draw on western theory, and build Chinese theory to the investigation and dissemination of Chinese culture. Thirdly, multispecies ethnography should be paid attention to. The research and dissemination of culture related to Yi's plants and animals should be furthered, for example, the promotion of Yi medicine, database construction for them, and multi-format dissemination based on Bender's translation. Fourthly, value marginalized Culture's significance in promoting Chinese culture transmission.

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