# Study of Science Fiction Traslation from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

# -- A Case Study of "Folding Beijing"

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## Abstract

In recent years, Chinese science fiction has won the Hugo Award one after another. The wave of world science fiction has set off. The global readership of Chinese science fiction continues to expand, and science fiction translation has naturally ushered in a new golden age. Science fiction translation not only focuses on language, but also pays attention to society, culture and literature, and spreads and creates the future through translation. This paper takes the 2016 Hugo Award-winning Chinese science fiction novel "Beijing Folding" as the research object. Chinese scholar Hu Gengshen links translation studies with ecology, and puts forward the ecological translation theory. This paper studies the similarities and differences in the language characteristics of the original text and the translation through case analysis. And this paper explores the translator's strategic choice and the translation effect that can be achieved from the three dimensions of language, culture and communication. This paper aims to provide translators with new ideas from the perspective of eco-translatology, so as to translate high-quality translations and further expand the spread of Chinese ideas and Chinese culture around the world. This paper concludes that applying the "three-dimensional transformation" theory of eco-translatology to the English translation of science fiction can effectively achieve the balance and harmony of the source language and the target language in terms of language, culture and communication.

## Keywords

Science Fiction; Eco-translatology; Translation Studies.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background

Folding Beijing expresses the connotation and beauty of science, and the language features and work style are very prominent. Science fiction has gone from the non-mainstream literature of the past to the hot new genre of today. Science fiction is not just a hall of imagination, but also guides the direction of human civilization and warns of the opportunities and challenges that exist in the current society. In the 40 years of reform and opening up, compared with traditional literature or mainstream classic literature, there has been less research on science fiction, and less research on translation of science fiction. However, science fiction has rapidly heated up in recent years. Especially after the works of Cixin Liu and Jingfang Hao won the Hugo Award, the whole domestic science fiction translation research also showed a clear upward trend. A large part of them are the dissertations of postgraduates in colleges and universities, including the translation practice report of translation masters.

## 1.2. Research Significance

Hu Gengshen, a Chinese scholar, linked translation studies with ecology, and put forward the ecological translation theory, who believes that translation is a process of continuous adaptation and selection of human beings. Completion of translated elements requires competition and elimination in a specific environment. The elements of translation are not formed spontaneously. Translator has to adapt to the competitive environment and make choices for the formation of the translation. On the basis of accurately conveying information in the translation of science fiction novels, it is important to convey the style of the original text. Eco-translatology theory has wider application space in realizing the equivalence of information, spiritual style and readers' reflection in science fiction translation.

## 2. Literature Review

## 2.1. Domestic Research

In general, there are still relatively few science fiction translation studies. Judging from the titles on CNKI, there are not many papers and only a few monographs. In addition, there is still a lot of room for research quality. At present, we can see that there are not many high-quality papers or papers published in high-level journals.

Domestic scholars mainly focus on the research objects and research methods in the translation of science fiction. The research objects mainly focus on three aspects: translation version, translator and translation history. Among them, the number of translation studies is the largest. These studies mainly focus on the specific textual analysis of the translations of science fiction. In terms of translators, Xun Lu appeared most frequently, followed by Qichao Liang , Jianzhong Guo from China, and  Yukun Liu who came later. Translation history, because science fiction translation has a history of more than 100 years, many of which can be excavated. At present, there have been researches in basically all ages. There are three types of research methods. The most common is the study of translation strategies, that is, to see how a text is translated and what translation strategies are adopted. The second is the interpretation of translation theory. Translation studies involve theoretical issues, and a common practice is to use a theory to explain the translation of a text or a translation phenomenon. The third one is theoretical construction, which proposes its own views on some phenomena of sci-fi translation, such as how to translate sci-fi literature for children, and the relationship between sci-fi and Chinese science and technology culture and cultural concepts.

## 2.2. Research Abroad

Angel Chau, an overseas Chinese scholar, comprehensively reviewed the development and translation status of contemporary Chinese science fiction, as well as the global influence of Chinese science fiction. The Chinese-American teacher taught Chinese science fiction at the school. This has a more impact on the spread of Chinese science fiction overseas. Some scholars have compared Liu Cixin's The Three-Body with Arthur Clarke's novels. Scholar Bruce Doar, conducts research from a dystopian perspective. Other overseas non-Chinese scholars mainly focus on The Three-Body. The perspectives of their study of The Three-Body are mainly from the aspects of political ideology, international relations and anti-Ukraine. Some Korean scholars have explored the imaginative and visual issues of science fiction from the perspective of culture and micro-vision.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

### 3.1. The Background of the Formation of Eco-Translatology

Eco-translatology is a kind of theoretical activity, which is developed on the basis of the theory of translation adaptation selection. Translation work needs to be carried out from the perspective of ecology and implement the principle of "translator as the core". Translators need to improve the systematic degree of interpretation of the ecological environment, so that the translator's translation ability can be effectively improved. Hu Gengshen, a professor at Tsinghua University, introduced ecological ideas into the field of translation activities, and based on a new perspective who explained and analyzed the basic process of language translation, the basic principles of language translation, the basic methods of language translation, and the evaluation criteria of translation quality.

Based on the perspective of ecological translation theory, the basic connotation of "language translation" lies in the selective activity process implemented by the participants in translation activities in the process of fully adapting to the ecological environment of language translation. The specific implementation process of language translation activities is essentially the translator's adaptation process to the ecological environment of language translation and the alternation of the translator's selection process of the target language text for translation. The core content of eco-translatology theory lies in the theory of adaptive choice.

#### 3.1.1. The Origin of Eco-translatology

In 1988, Peter Newmark began to apply ecology to the field of translation. Incorporating ecology into translation and emphasizing the importance of selection and adaptation is the so-called eco-translatology. In this area, the main emphasis is on the new description and interpretation of the content under the premise that the entire translation system can maintain the integrity. The most basic theory of eco-translatology is to explain the selectivity and adaptability in translation. In other words, I hope that the translation can restore the self to the greatest extent, so that the translator can better adapt to the current environment.

#### 3.1.2. The Development of Eco-translatology

Since the beginning of the 21st century, Professor Hu Gengshen's research on the ecological perspective of translation studies has achieved fruitful results. With the increasingly extensive and in-depth discussion of ecological translation studies, a school of translation with Chinese characteristics has become increasingly prominent. Eco-translatology has become not only a grand field of contemporary translation studies, but also a dynamic new growth point of contemporary translation studies. Eco-translatology like applied translation, cognitive translation, corpus translation, translation ecology, translation geography, translation aesthetics, social translation and other specific translation studies emerging in China, are all moving towards translation studies. Development in an interdisciplinary direction.

### 3.2. The Main Concepts of Eco-translatology

#### 3.2.1. The Translation Principle of Adaptive Selection

In 2001, Professor Hu Gengshen of Tsinghua University put forward the brand-new translation theory of "ecological translation studies" in his monograph "Theory of Translation Adaptation and Selection". Ecotranslatology is guided by the theories of "natural selection" and "survival of the fittest" in the theory of biological evolution. After, it was introduced into translation studies, concepts such as "translation ecological environment", "translator adaptation" and "translator choice" were formed. Therefore, it is also a cross-disciplinary study with an interdisciplinary nature. Under the theme concept of "translation is adaptation and selection", the theory clearly embodies the concept of "translator-centered" in the definition of translation,

that is, translation is "the translator's selection activity to adapt to the translation ecological environment" .

### 3.2.2. The Translation Method of Three-Dimensional Transformation

Adaptive selection theory provides an operational translation method for translation: "three-dimensional" transformation. This paper explores the Chinese characteristics of the original text and how the "three-dimensional" transformation conveys the style of the original text in the English translation. Adaptive selection transformation refers to the translator's adaptive selection transformation of language forms in different aspects and levels during the translation process. Because Chinese pays attention to the transmission of language meaning, English pays attention to the integrity of language structure. Therefore, in the process of translation, translators need to make different levels of adaptive selection and conversion of their language forms according to the characteristics of the text.

## 4. Folding Beijing from the Perspective of Ecotranslatology

### 4.1. Language Dimension

According to the theory of eco-translatology, the transformation of the language dimension refers to the adaptation and selection of the translator at the language level during the translation process.

Chinese and English belong to different systems. Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, and English belongs to the Indo-European language family. They have their own different characteristics. In terms of vocabulary, Chinese prefers repeated expressions, while English prefers brevity; in terms of syntactic structure, Chinese emphasizes connotation, relying on logic or meaning ties to connect the components of sentences to be invisible and coherent; English emphasizes form. In view of the characteristics outlined above, translators should make necessary adjustments when translating science fiction.

### 4.1.1. Lexical Level

Example 1:

Source text：这里完全没有摩天大楼,只是围绕着一座公园有零星分布的楼宇,楼跟楼之间的联系气若游丝,几乎看不出它们是一体,走到地下,才看到相连的通道.

Translation text: There were no skyscrapers at all, only a few low buildings scattered around a large park. The buildings seemed isolated from each other but were really parts of a single compound connected via underground passages.

Here is the description of the street scene of the first space by Lao Dao from the third space, in which "气若游丝" is a four-character idiom. The original meaning is that the breath is like a wisp of hairspring. The word "游丝" refers to very weak. The translation here enhances the perceptibility of the sentence. The translator uses the word "isolated" to interpret the truth behind the idiom from the linguistic dimension, that is, the first space has a low density of buildings, a large area of green space, and the privileged class can enjoy life here. The imagery makes the readers think, making the prosperity of the first space and the crampedness of the third space in sharp contrast. The translator's adaptation and selection at the Language level during the translation process.

### 4.1.2. Syntactic Level

Example 2:

Source text：一个区一个区改造旧城市，像白蚁漫过木屋一样啃噬昔日的屋檐门槛,再把土地翻起，建筑全新的楼宇.

Translation text:Like termites swarming over a wooden house, they had chewed up the wreckage of the past, overturned the earth, and constructed a brand new world.

When the modified attribute component is too long (such as a clause), the attribute is often placed in the sentence in Chinese. In English, attributives are placed at the beginning or end of a sentence. The translator put " Like termites swarming over a wooden .." at the beginning of the sentence and added the subject "they" to make the sentence structure clearer and easier for readers to read. Differences in sentence structure between English and Chinese. In the process of translation, translators need to take into account the ecological environment of Chinese-English translation, and also need to convert sentence patterns and adjust word order to integrate the ecological environment of the two languages.

Example 3:

Source text : 他在垃圾站上班,没必要穿得体面，偶尔参加谁家小孩的婚礼,才拿出来穿在身上.

Translation text:Working at the waste processing station meant there were few occasions that called for the outfit, save a friend's son or daughter.

This is a typical conversion sentence. The subject in the original text is a person, but the translator takes the gerund as the subject and connects it with an attributive clause guided by "that". This is in line with the rigorous and objective language characteristics of science fiction. Sentences in English often take things as the subject, while Chinese often take people as the subject. In science fiction, a large number of impersonal sentences and passive sentences are often used to demonstrate the objectivity of the content. When translating from Chinese to English, translators can change personal sentences in Chinese into non-personal sentences, and convert active sentences into passive sentences.

## 4.2. Cultural Dimension

Hu Gengshen believes that translators should pay attention to adapting to the cultural system in which the language is located when transforming word order. Translators need to fully understand the cultural connotation of the source language, and fully transform the form and connotation of the target language.

### 4.2.1. Translation of Slang Terms

Slang has a specific cultural background and carries the Chinese characteristic culture. Translators adapt to the entire social and cultural system they are in when converting the original language, and pay attention to the "cultural dimension" adaptive selection conversion. In order to interpret and accurately convey the connotation of bilingual culture.

Example 4:

Source text : 这不过是冒违规的大不韪，只要路径和方法对,被抓住的几率并不大.

Translation text:Sure, it was illegal, but no one would be harmed. and as long as he followed the right route and method, the probability of being caught wasn't great.

The idiom "大不韪" refers to doing bad things regardless of the condemnation of public opinion. Here is Lao Dao explaining to others the feasibility of going to the first space. But it's illegal to cross in the hierarchically folded city. The translator disassembles the idiom to move closer to the target language culture, and presents the invisible logic in the context with "no one would be harmed", that is, Lao Dao's only motive is to make money to send his daughter to school.

Example 5:

Source text : 机器人有时候还是不如人靠谱，它们认死理儿.

Translation text:I don't trust robots for things like this. Sometimes they don't know how to be flexible.

Here is Lao Ge complaining to Lao Dao about the disadvantages of artificial intelligence. Among them, "靠谱" and 认死理儿" are common expressions in northern China. The translator creatively translates "靠谱" into "trust" under the premise of ensuring the ecological balance of communication, which is concise and easy to understand. And "认死理儿" was translated into

"flexible", to get rid of the shackles of textual form. According to the theory of eco-translatology, the transformation of cultural dimension means that the translator must be culturally aware. In order to maintain the cultural ecological balance of the two languages, the translator's adaptation and selection at the cultural level of translation examples 4 and 5.

### 4.2.2. Translation of Idioms

Example 6:

Source text : "你真是作死," 彭蠡说.

The original meaning is to ask Lao Dao who is sending the letter so risky. The original "作死"is a term used on the Internet in recent years, derived from "no zuo no die". But as a network term, the playful meaning of this translation is self-evident. In the original text, it should be expressed that Laodao is taking risks for the tuition of the adopted daughter Tang Tang, which is a compliment, not a derogation. Therefore, Yukun Liu did not refer to this translation method. Instead, it is changed to "working so hard for", which is a more faithful conveyance of the original position and attitude. Some idioms and colloquialisms cannot be simply translated literally, but should be combined with cultural backgrounds.

## 4.3. Communication Dimension

The adaptive selection of the communicative dimension focuses on the purpose of interpersonal communication. The transformation of communicative dimension refers to the adaptations and choices made to achieve communicative intentions.

### 4.3.1. Technical Vocabulary

Example 7:

Source text : 动态图

Translation text:dynamic graph live maps

Example 8:

Source text : 软组织

Translation text:Soft tissue softtissue

Science fiction contains a lot of technical vocabulary. When the literal meaning of the word is consistent with the meaning it refers to, and there is no ambiguity, the method of literal translation can be adopted. When translating proper nouns, literal translation can be used to convey the meaning of the words.

### 4.3.2. Character Dialogue

Due to differences in cultural presuppositions and shared knowledge, Chinese people tend to attach importance to opinions in communication and show more euphemism in communication. The translator adopts the adaptive transformation of the "communication" dimension in eco-translatology when dealing with the English translation of the dialogues of the characters in "Beijing Folding". In addition to considering the adaptability of the "communicative dimension" of different aspects and levels of language forms, the translator should also take into account the differences in the cultural nature and content of the original language and the target language.

Example 9:

Source text : "你们这些科学精英都看不出来的事，居然被我这个专科毕业的大老粗看出来了?"

Translation text:So many of you scientific elites couldn't figure it out, and I, having gone only to vocational school, had the answer?

"大老粗" refers to those who are not literate. Generally give people the image of being informal and impolite. Therefore, it cannot be expressed in simple equivalent English. From the perspective of the communicative dimension, in order to fully reflect the meaning of "大老粗"

in English, it must be explained through redundant sentences. But such translation reduces the readability and fluency of the text. Therefore, in the translation activities of the translator, the translator adopts the translation method of provincial translation, and only translates the "college graduate". At the communicative level, adaptive selection and conversion are realized, so that the information exchange between bilinguals can be realized smoothly.

Example 10:

Source text："可就是这么回事......只是这么多年过来,人就木了,好多事儿没法改变,也只当那么回事了."

Translation text:"But it's the truth.... But after so many years, you get a bit numb. There are many things in life we can't change, and all we can do is to accept and endure."

In the original text, Lao Ge, who was in the first space, had a conversation with Lao Dao, who came from the third space. The word "事" appears three times. The "communicative adaptation transformation" in ecological translation requires translators to use strategies flexibly to fill in the vacancies and deviations of the original language. Therefore, the first "事" is translated as "truth", implying that Lao Ge revealed the truth of the city's folding; the second "事" is literally translated as "things"; the third is "事" is translated as "all we can do is to accept and endure". The translator interprets the original meaning and the extended meaning of "事" one by one through the context, and also shows the readers the connotation behind the "polysemy" in the selection. This kind of translation reflects the adaptive choice of the communicative dimension and balances the communicative ecological environment of the two languages.

## 5. Conclusion

Chinese science fiction started late and developed slowly. The theoretical and practical research aspects of science fiction translation still need further development. Science fiction translation is extremely important to the development of Chinese literature. However, from the perspective of ecological translation studies at home and abroad, less attention is paid to the analysis of Chinese science fiction. Eco-translatology theory can standardize translation, and at the same time provide a novel perspective for the exchange and mutual learning of Chinese and Western cultures, and can also expand space for science fiction translation research. Therefore, translators should make adaptive selection transformation from a "three-dimensional" perspective, combining linguistics, cultural studies and communication studies. In order to accurately convey the original information, reduce translation errors, and translate excellent translations that conform to the Chinese and English ecology and the aesthetic characteristics and habits of the public.

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