

Translation of Chinese Idioms in *The Governance of China III* from the Perspective of Ecotranslatology

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Abstract

By collecting and classifying the Chinese idioms in *The Governance of China III*, the study tries to investigate the linguistic characteristics of Chinese idioms in political texts and their translation methods from the perspective of the three dimensions of language, culture and communication in the ecotranslatology. The findings show that Chinese idioms are mainly treated under (1)Chinese idioms on spiritual culture, (2)Chinese idioms on social culture, (3)Chinese idioms on linguistic culture, (4)Chinese idioms on political culture, (5) Chinese idioms on ecology and (6)Chinese idioms on religious culture, and a variety of translating methods such as literal translation, free translation and adapted translation can be used to translate idioms in the political text.

Keywords

Ecotranslatology; Political texts; Chinese idioms; Chinese—English translation.

1. Introduction

As the international influence of China rises, the unique governance model of China has garnered intensifying attention. *The Governance of China III* provides a tangible representation of ideology of socialism imbued with Chinese characteristics in contemporary China. It has established itself as an authoritative lens through which the global audience may perceive China in this new epoch. In order to better showcase Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions, greater emphasis should be placed on the translation of national publicity documents.

The Governance of China III is not merely comprehensive in its content, encompassing a diverse array of spheres such as politics, economics, and culture, but its language also distinctly captures Chinese characteristics. It utilizes a wealth of classical allusions and vivid imagery while employing a wide range of rhetorical strategies. Its release ignited a fervor of scholarly interest within the academic community. Nevertheless, the endeavor to harmonize the study of political texts with idiomatic research, by leveraging pertinent translation theories, remains notably underrepresented.

Moreover, while a substantial number of scholars have delved into the field of ecotranslatology, the application of the three-dimensional transformation theory in this field to political texts remains relatively limited. This paper aims at studying the English translation of idioms in *The Governance of China III* from the perspective of the three dimensions of ecotranslatology by classifying the idioms, summarizing and analyzing the translation methods when translating Chinese idioms and their rationality, so as to provide a point of reference for English translations of idioms in political texts.

2. Overview of Ecotranslatology Theory

Ecotranslatology was born under the thrust of domestic and foreign influence as people's research on translatology continued to deepen and the ecological trend of global perspective

emerged^[1]. This concept was initially proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen from Tsinghua University in 2001. Subsequently, combining Western ecological principles with Eastern ecological wisdom, he formally presented Ecotranslatology as a novel interdisciplinary research theory in 2008. This innovative approach investigates the relationship between the "translation ecology" and the translator, striving to achieve a harmonious unity between the translator and the translation environment^[2].

Ecotranslatology centers around the principle of ecological rationality, conducting an encompassing analysis of translation through the lens of ecology. It constitutes a comprehensive investigation covering macro, meso, and micro levels, providing a holistic perspective in the field of research. Ecotranslatology views the translation ecosystem, namely, the environment where the source text and translated text exist, as a unified whole. By employing this ecological approach and its unique narrative style, ecotranslatology offers fresh interpretations and descriptions concerning the essence, process, standards, principles, methodologies, and various phenomena in the sphere of translation. Thus, it paves the way for innovative lines of thought for scholars engaged in translation studies^[3].

The three-dimensional transformation theory, an integral component of ecotranslatology, underscores the translator's management of three dimensions in the translation process, namely, language, culture, and communication. This theory advocates that translators should root their understanding and approach in the ecological context, thoroughly considering diverse factors within the environment of the source and target texts. It asserts the translator's leading role, endorsing the need for suitable cross-dimensional transformations within the framework of ecotranslatology to pursue the highest efficacy in the resultant translation. Consequently, this paradigm enables the realization of proficient and impactful translation.

3. English Translation of Idioms in Political Texts

Idioms represent a unique and invariant modality of expression that emerges through the linguistic practices of a specific language^[4]. Each nation or region, to varying degrees, possesses idioms that serve as linguistic vessels carrying their traditional customs or cultural connotations. The efficacious dissemination of these idiomatic expressions paves a pivotal route for fostering mutual comprehension between countries. The time-honored Chinese culture comprises a plethora of idioms, exhibiting humor, wit, obscurity, or vivid imagery. These idioms utilize the most succinct linguistic form to impart profound significance and incorporate a rich spectrum of historical, cultural, and humanistic references. They stand as one of the most salient features of linguistic culture within the realm of the Chinese language. Hence, how to translate the Chinese story and deliver Chinese voices well has also become the focus of China's presentation of itself to the world today.

As critical mediums of international communication, foreign publicity texts brim with culturally-loaded words, among which idioms hold a prominent place. In the context of Sino-foreign interaction, *The Governance of China III* takes on a vital role in the promotion of governance ideologies and the spread of Chinese culture. Quoting classics is a notable feature of Chinese leaders' speeches, with their refined and broad use of allusions conveying profound implications, from which we can see that *The Governance of China III* not only encapsulates the thoughts of state governance in the new era but also embodies deep cultural connotations. Therefore, integrating political text studies with the English translation of idioms provides a novel approach to disseminating China's excellent traditional culture. During translation, it is incumbent on translators to leverage suitable strategies and methods to effectively transmit Chinese wisdom and culture. With the three-dimensional transformation theory of ecotranslatology serving as its springboard, this paper delves into the English translation of idioms present within the "Governance of China".

4. Establishment and Analysis of Idioms Database

The Governance of China III Bilingual Parallel database is designed to explore the usage and classification of Chinese idioms within the book. The database is based on *The Governance of China III* and its translated version, published by the Foreign Languages Press in 2020. Taking the definition of idioms from The Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th edition) into account, a total of 676 instances (including 306 repeated phrases) were identified. Among them, 370 unique phrases, each distinctive and of significant research value, were further refined and categorized. Eugene Nida published an article *Linguistics and Ethnology in Translation-Problems in WORD* in 1945, in which he classified culture into five major categories: ecological culture, linguistic culture, religious culture, material culture, and social culture. Ecological culture constitutes the cultural diversity born out of disparities in natural habitats, biodiversity, and geographical topographies. Linguistic culture signifies the cultural distinctions mirrored in the unique attributes of language families, phonetics, and grammatical structures. Religious culture is shaped by the evolution of indigenous religions or foreign religious sects, imbuing it with specific religious characteristics. Material culture involves all the tangible facets of human life, such as clothing, food, housing, transportation, work, and entertainment. Social culture extends to an even broader realm, permeating every aspect of daily life, including but not limited to cultural background, societal norms, local customs, history, traditions, ethical codes and so on [5].

At the dawn of the 21st century, Professor Chen Hongwei re-categorizes culture into material, institutional, and spiritual spheres. The concept of spiritual culture represents an enriching extension and complement to Nida's five categories. It encompasses the realm of human mental activities, behaviors, beliefs, philosophies, value systems, and cognitive schemas[5].

Considering the nature of the political text, this paper integrates the classification of culture by Nida and Chen Hongwei and selects five categories of idioms that conform to the characteristics of idioms in *The Governance of China III*, namely, ecological idioms, language idioms, religious idioms, social idioms, and spiritual idioms. In addition, in light of the comprehensive representation of China's political system and environment in this book, this paper also includes a category for political idioms. The usage of various types of idioms in *The Governance of China III* can be seen in the figure below.

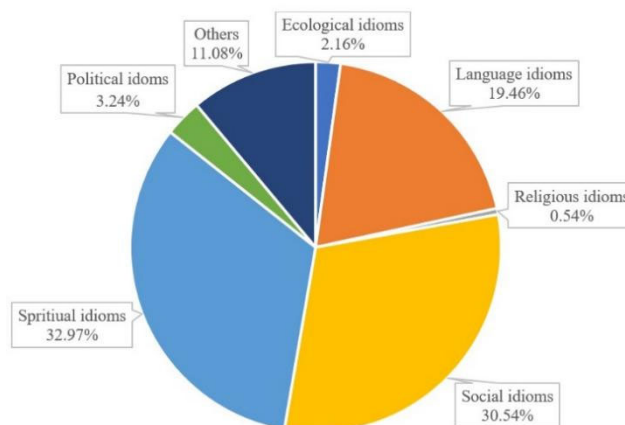


Figure 1. Types of Idioms in *The Governance of China III*

Analyzing the above figure, it is concluded that the idioms in *The Governance of China III* shows the following characteristics: less use of religious idioms, appropriate use of political idioms, timely use of linguistic idioms, and extensive use of spiritual and social idioms. These idioms align closely with the economic, political, cultural and livelihood fields covered in *The*

Governance of China III, which shows that language is a carrier of culture, and idioms, as a highly condensed form of language, manifest profound cultural accumulation and historical heritage. The translation of idiomatic expressions from Chinese to English not only constitutes a crucial component in the translation process between the two languages but also represents an essential step in the process of cultural communication. Therefore, English translation of idioms plays a key role in telling an excellent Chinese story and delivering the Chinese voice.

5. Translation of Chinese Idioms from the Perspective of Ecotranslatology

Ecotranslatology is a research paradigm from an ecological perspective, in which the translation method can be described as a "multidimensional" transformation, in which the translator selectively adapts the translation to the "ecological environment" through transformation, and at the same time transposes the "ecology" of the original text to the larger environment of the target language, thus achieving ecological balance. The basic theory of ecotranslatology briefly summarizes the translation method as a "three-dimensional" transformation, that is, under the principle of "multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection", relatively focusing on the adaptive selection transformation of language, cultural and communicative dimensions[6].

5.1. Adaptive Selection and Transformation in the Language-dimension

Language is the carrier of textual information and the element that translators should consider first and foremost in the translation process. From the syntactic structure and rhetorical style to characteristic vocabulary, there are obvious differences between Chinese and English expressions. As an authoritative window for the world to understand China, the speeches in *The Governance of China* contain many linguistic terms and humanistic texts with Chinese characteristics, which fully reflect the excellent Chinese traditional culture and socialist culture with Chinese characteristics in the new era while focusing on Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions to the international community. The English translation of *Governance* is published by the Foreign Language Press, by which the textual information and cultural connotation are balanced. In translating Chinese, featuring rhetoric and repetition, the translator uses a series of translation methods to make the translation clear and to keep the original taste to the greatest extent.

Rhetoric is an indispensable ideographic technique in both spoken and written language. As a typical rhetorical technique, parallelism can make the text logically clear, systematic, coherent and concise. At the same time, it can produce an overwhelming and powerful momentum, which creates a great appeal and irresistible attraction to the audience^[7]. To adhere to China's modern philosophy of governance, publicity materials have been updated to utilize direct and concise language, thus generating additional momentum which coincides with the effect produced by the rhetorical pattern of parallelism. Hence, this rhetorical technique is frequently employed in *The Governance of China*.

1. ST: 唯有坚定不移、坚韧不拔、坚持不懈，才能无愧于时代、不负人民。

TT: Only with determination and perseverance can we carry on to fulfill our mission, do justice to these great times, and live up to the people's expectations.

In the original text, the three Chinese idioms "坚定不移", "坚韧不拔", and "坚持不懈" share similar structures and akin meanings, all of which embody steadfast belief, unyielding will, and firmness. In Chinese, the compounded use of idioms often conveys brevity and potency, yet in English, this kind of lexical stacking can potentially lead to redundancy. Therefore, while translating such a series of idioms, as in Example 1, a cogent approach would be to convert them into two semantically close English equivalents. Although this approach may forgo some

aesthetic form, it more closely aligns with the natural expression of the target language, thereby actualizing an adaptive linguistic transformation.

Adaptive transformation of linguistic forms can be reflected in various aspects. As Professor Hu Gengshen points out, when translators grapple with maintaining harmony between form, meaning, and sound, or when it's tough to strike a balance between faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance, they can make appropriate adaptive choices based on their own judgment^[8]. The prior translation instance focused on preserving the meaning over the form, adhering to English's penchant for conciseness. Nonetheless, within the translations of idioms in "The Governance of China," numerous examples effectively balance both the form and the meaning.

2. ST: 我们要加强生态文明建设, 牢固树立绿水青山就是金山银山的理念。

TT: We should strengthen our commitment to eco-civilization. Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets.

The term "绿水青山" traces its origin back to the Song Dynasty, representing emerald rivers and mountains and describing beautiful landscapes. With the growing prevalence of the scientific proposition that "绿水青山就是金山银山"(lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets), there has been a plethora of English translations for the term "绿水青山." Among these, the two most common renditions are "clear waters and green mountains" and the translation example "lucid waters and lush mountains." Viewing from the lens of semantic equivalency, both translations utilize the literal translation technique, accurately conveying the original language's meaning. However, the latter employs one of the English phonetic rhetorical techniques— alliteration, which is more popular in the target language, hence conforming more to the target language's linguistic environment.

5.2. Adaptive Selection and Transformation in the Culture-dimension

Adaptive transformation in the cultural dimension necessitates overcoming the cultural differences between the source and target languages, integrating the cultural connotations of the source language into the cultural ecology of the target language, thereby reducing cultural barriers for the target readers. Chinese is an evolving and highly inclusive language. Over the span of its more than 5000-year history, it has accumulated a wealth of colloquialisms, two-part allegorical sayings, maxims, proverbs, slang, jargon, and so on, which we broadly categorize as Chinese idioms.

While most of these idioms carry their own metaphoric meanings, native Chinese speakers can comprehend their implications without the need for explicit demystification thanks to the linguistic environment. However, these idioms are rarely directly comprehensible to the audience of the target language. Unadorned translation, without any tactful finesse, may cause cultural differences and even cultural conflicts without skillful handling.

Idiomatic expressions in "The Governance of China" primarily appear in two categories: folk mythology and idiomatic allusions. Both types brim with rich narratives and profound wisdom. The challenge for translators lies in using concise language to lucidly articulate the inherent meanings of these idioms in the target language. To accomplish an adaptive cultural transformation of idioms, translators should harmonize various factors including the style of the original text, the author's intent, and their personal understanding, to choose the most fitting translation strategy and approach.

3. ST: 盘古开天、女娲补天、伏羲画卦、神农尝草、夸父追日、精卫填海、愚公移山等我国古代神话深刻反映了中国人民勇于追求和实现梦想的执著精神。

TT: Ancient Chinese mythologies, such as Pangu creating the world, Nüwa patching up the sky, Fuxi drawing the eight diagrams, Shennong testing herbs, Kuafu chasing the sun, Jingwei filling up the sea, and Yugong removing mountains, reflect our determination in dauntlessly pursuing and realizing dreams.

Chinese mythologies represent a literary genre, crafted by the ancient Chinese populace through long-term social practices and laborious lives. These narratives, with their distinct national characteristics, are sparkling gems in the grand treasure chest of Chinese culture^[9]. The translation of these mythological stories, particularly into English, carries significant weight in articulating Chinese narratives and spreading China's voice effectively. Considering the international outreach and political attributes of "The Governance of China," the English rendition of its mythologies should not only maintain clarity of meaning but also encapsulate brevity and potency. Consequently, in translating mythological narratives within the text, the translators utilized the translation technique of combination, transliterating names and literally translating events. This approach not only showcases the diverse and vibrant Chinese mythologies to foreign readers but also manifests the spirit of the Chinese people's unyielding pursuit of dreams since ancient times.

4. ST: 要始终把人民群众的健康放在第一位, 以猛药去疴、刮骨疗毒的决心, 完善我国疫苗管理体制, 坚决守住安全底线。

TT: We must always prioritize people's health, improve vaccine management, and hold firm to the red line of medication safety, just as we would take a heavy dose of medicine to treat a serious disease.

The term “猛药去疴”, meaning using strong medicine to cure serious disease, originates from the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, where “疴” signifies critical illnesses. “刮骨疗毒” meaning scraping the bone to eliminate the poison, comes from Records of the Three Kingdoms, narrating the incident where Guan Yu, to cure a chronic ailment in his left arm, asked a doctor to incise his arm and scrape off the poison ingrained in the bone. This saying is now used to denote thorough treatment and addressing issues from their root cause. The usage of these two comparable idioms in this context underscores our country's unwavering commitment and disregard for costs to ensure drug safety. In translating these idioms, the translator utilizes a blend of combination and literal translation. This approach sidesteps the redundancy issue linked with synonymous translations and also prevents inappropriate contextualization arising from the explicit narrative of the allusions, thus accomplishing the cultural transformation.

5.3. Adaptive selection and transformation in the Communication-dimension

During the process of translation, adaptive selection of communicative intentions refers to the translator's emphasis on the communicative aspect, apart from converting linguistic information and conveying cultural connotations. It focuses on whether the communicative intentions in the source text are reflected in the translation^[10]. Chinese contains many idioms with numerals, where the meaning of the idiom is determined by the magnitude of the numeral. The use of numerals in most cases does not represent the actual quantity but rather indicates the degree or level. For instance, in Chinese, idioms like “一心一意”(containing the numeral one) describe single-mindedness and exclusive focus, while “三心二意”(encompassing numerals three and two) portrays indecisiveness or lack of determination. It is evident that the variation of numerals directly affects the meaning of idioms. Therefore, how to handle such idioms to fulfill communicative intentions in the process of English translation is a question that translators should carefully consider.

5. ST: 如果党的理论和路线方针政策在这里失之毫厘, 到了基层就可能谬以千里。

TT: The slightest deviation from the theories, guidelines, principles and policies of our Party will lead to huge mistakes at the grassroots level.

"The slightest deviation leads to huge mistakes" is a translation of the Chinese phrase “失之毫厘, 谬以千里” from the book “Li Ji · Jing Jie” (The Book of Rites · Classic Explanations). In Chinese, “毫”(milli) and “厘”(centi) represent tiny units of length, while “千”(thousand) and “里”(li) represent vast distances. The literal translation of this phrase would cause confusion

and hinder the target readers' understanding. Therefore, in this translation example, the translator uses the method of free translation, making the meaning clear and achieving the communicative purpose for the target readers.

6. ST: 六合同风, 四海一家的大一统传统

TT: The same tradition across the country so that all areas follow similar customs and all people are of the same family

The term "六合同风" originates from 'The Book of Han: Biography of Wang Ji'. "六合" refers to the four cardinal directions - east, west, south, north - as well as the vertical axis of up and down, broadly symbolizing the entire world. In antiquity, this phrase was used to imply that customs and education were consistent across all regions. In the translation, both "六"(six) and "四"(four) have been interpreted as "all", instead of their literal numerical values, to better align with communicative contexts. Although they carry specific referential meanings here, the prevalent Chinese interpretation habit, which generally understands 'six' and 'four' in this context as implying 'everywhere in the world', as well as English readers' preferences leaning towards simplicity and brevity, contribute the usage of free translation, which effectively conveys the essence of the original text, thus achieving effective communication.

Besides idioms encompassing numerals, the Chinese language also has a category of idioms that incorporate antonyms, particularly in four-character idioms, such as "南辕北辙" (going south while the chariot is pointed north, suggesting going in the opposite direction of one's intended goal), "进退两难" (meaning a dilemma where a person is forced to choose between two equally undesirable options), and "前倨后恭" (describing a person who first displays arrogance or dismissive attitude, but subsequently shows respect or humility), and so on. Considering the semantic structure of these idioms, it becomes challenging for foreign readers to comprehend the complete implication of such idioms where two diametrically opposed words coexist to express a holistic meaning^[11]. Thus, while translating such idioms, we ought to consider how to convert them into expressions that are not only faithful to the communicative intent but also more palatable for the target language readers. The book *The Governance of China* frequently uses such idioms. The following is an example for illustration.

7. ST: 我们党来自于人民, 为人民而生, 因人民而兴, 必须始终与人民心心相印、与人民同甘共苦、与人民团结奋斗。

TT: Our Party is from the people, for the people, and successful because of the people. It must always be close to the people, and work vigorously by their side through thick and thin.

In Example 7, the phrase "同甘共苦" originates from "Strategies of the Warring States - Yan Strategy I," signifying the shared experience of joy and happiness, as well as jointly shouldering misfortune and suffering. Within this idiom, "甘" (sweet) and "苦" (bitter) act as antonyms, while "同" (together) and "共" (share) bear similar meanings. When translating these antonyms, the method of idiomatic translation is utilized, employing a familiar expression in the target language to replace the original text^[12]. That is, the English idiom "through thick and thin" is used to represent "甘" and "苦". This not only achieves semantic equivalence but also maintains structural consistency, thus embodying Professor Hu Gengshen's proposition that "translation is a process of adaptive selection". From this perspective, when translating idioms containing antonyms, the use of idiomatic translation can be a beneficial strategy. Based on understanding the ecological contexts of both the source and target languages, translators can make adaptive choices autonomously.

6. Conclusion

This study focuses on the third volume of *The Governance of China* and its English rendition, utilizing a bilingual parallel database to summarize the classification of Chinese idioms in the book and their corresponding translation methods. The translation of these idioms is analyzed from three fundamental dimensions of ecotranslatology theory: linguistic, cultural, and communicative. It is suggested that when translating Chinese idioms in political texts, translators need to apprehend the fundamental semantics and cultural connotations embedded within them. Concurrently, it is essential that they tailor their approach to resonate with the expectations of the readership of the target language. This necessitates the judicious application of a spectrum of translation strategies - inclusive but not limited to literal, free, and combined translation - to accommodate the linguistic, cultural, and communicative ecological environments of the target language. By adopting this methodology, the translation aims to present, to the greatest extent, the grandeur of a great nation nurtured by excellent traditional Chinese culture to the international community.

Acknowledgments

This research is supported by the National Undergraduate Training Program for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (Grant No. 202210555116), the Hunan Provincial Department of Education Project (Grant No. 19C1617), and the Social Science Project of Hunan Province (Grant No. 19YBA295).

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my mentor Yuan Yanling, whose invaluable instruction and inspiration benefit me a lot. Your encouragement and suggestions have given me much insight into translation studies and brought my work to a higher level.

In addition, I would particularly like to acknowledge my teammates, for their wonderful collaboration and ongoing support. I would also like to thank my parents for their companionship and patience. You are always there for me.

Finally, I appreciate all those who devote time to reading this thesis and giving me advice, which will contribute to my later study.

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