

# Research on Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology's Three-Dimensional Transformation Theory:

-- A case study of the movie the wandering earth

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**Abstract:** As a comprehensive medium that integrates visual, auditory, and narrative arts, film serves as a carrier for cultural transmission. In the context of rapid economic development and accelerated globalization, movies have become important vehicles for showcasing the cultural and historical richness of different countries. In recent years, Chinese films have emerged prolifically, gaining attention worldwide and not only providing entertainment for foreign audiences but also actively promoting the dissemination of Chinese culture and values globally (Fan Xiaodi, 2020). To help foreign viewers better understand Chinese films and foster cultural exchange and development among nations, this paper analyzes the subtitle translation of the film "The Wandering Earth" through the lens of ecological translation studies, applying the three-dimensional transformation theory. Additionally, the study explores potential issues in subtitle translation, such as free translation and cultural conflicts. By analyzing the subtitle translation of "The Wandering Earth," this paper underscores the importance of ecological translation perspectives in subtitle studies, which can enhance the international competitiveness and cultural recognition of Chinese films, while also providing insights into future directions for subtitle translation research.

**Keywords:** Ecological Translation Theory; Three-dimensional Transformation; Subtitle Translation.

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## 1. Introduction

In modern society, the competition among countries extends beyond just economic and political realms; a cultural soft power competition is actively underway. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized: "We must enhance our international communication capabilities, tell China's story well, present a true, multi-dimensional, and comprehensive image of China, and improve our national cultural soft power" (People's Daily, 2018). The importance of subtitle translation for Chinese films aiming for global reach is evident. "The Wandering Earth," as one of the outstanding representatives of China's cultural "going out" strategy, became an instant hit upon its release and marked the beginning of a new era for Chinese science fiction cinema. As a milestone in the history of Chinese sci-fi films, "The Wandering Earth" tells the story of humanity's plan to escape a rapidly aging sun and the impending destruction of Earth by embarking on a journey lasting thousands of years to find a new place to live. The film emphasizes the spirit of international cooperation from the perspective of a shared human destiny and has made a significant impact globally, signifying a true transformation and upgrade for Chinese cinema. This paper aims to study the subtitle translation of "The Wandering Earth" from an ecological translation perspective, utilizing the three-dimensional transformation theory, hoping to provide insights for future Chinese film subtitle translations and lay a solid foundation for helping Chinese films reach international audiences.

## 2. Ecological Translation Theory

### 2.1. Overview of the Content of Ecological Translation Theory

Renowned Professor Hu Gengshen from Tsinghua University proposed the brand-new theory of Ecological Translation Studies in 2001. This theory has evolved from the "Translation Adaptation-Selection Theory" and represents a holistic and integrative study of translation from an ecological perspective. Ecological Translation Studies is not a standalone academic discipline but rather a translation study that adopts an ecological viewpoint. The core tenet of Ecological Translation Studies is "translator-centered," positing that "translation is adaptation and selection," emphasizing that translators should rely on the text, utilize cross-cultural information, and focus on the ecological balance and adaptive selection between the source text and the target text during the translation process. (Hu Gengshen, 2006) Ecological Translation Theory fills a gap in the theoretical landscape of Chinese translation studies, providing new perspectives and methods for the study of translation activities. Prior to proposing Ecological Translation Studies, Professor Hu Gengshen published "Translation Adaptation-Selection Theory," which explored the theoretical framework of "adaptation/selection." The book indicates that based on the central concept of natural selection from Darwin's theory of evolution, the "adaptation/selection" doctrine can be interpreted as "natural selection" and "survival of the fittest." In his paper "Translation As Adaptation And Selection," published in Perspectives: Studies in Translatology, Hu Gengshen illustrated the two stages of adaptation and selection in the translation process.

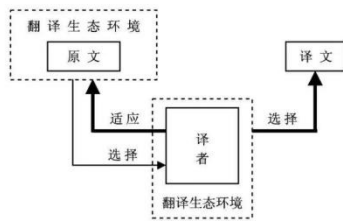


Fig 1. The Ecological Translation Theory

These two stages are the stage where the translational ecological environment selects the translator and the stage where the translator, as an entity within the translational ecological environment, chooses or determines the final form of the target language text. It emphasizes the translator-centered doctrine of adaptation or selection. The purpose of adaptation is survival, and the means of adaptation is to optimize selection; the method of selection is "weeding out the weak and retaining the strong." (Hu Gengshen, 2011)

Currently, Ecological Translation Theory encompasses nine major research foci and theoretical perspectives, namely ecological paradigm, correlation sequence chain, ecological rationality, the act of translating, translational ecological environment, translator center, adaptation-selection, three-dimensional transformation, and post hoc punishment. The foundational theory of Ecological Translation Studies summarizes translation methods as three-dimensional transformations, where, under the influence of different languages and environments, translators focus relatively on adaptive selection transformations along the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions during the translation process, according to the principles of adaptation and selection. They adopt appropriate translation strategies to adapt to the translational ecological environment and maintain ecological balance and harmony between the source and target languages. It is important to note that when we emphasize a certain dimension or element for descriptive purposes, it does not mean that other dimensions or elements do not play a role in the translation process. In fact, in specific translation processes, linguistic, cultural, and communicative factors are often interwoven, interconnected, and interact with each other. (Zhang Tingting, Chen Shaochen, Hu Jiahui, 2024)

## 2.2. The Development and Trends of Ecological Translation Theory

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, translation theories in China have been continuously enriched and perfected. Reform and opening up have provided significant opportunities for the development of translation theories and the derivation of domestic translation theories, such as Professor Hu Gengshen's Ecological Translation Theory and Professor Huang Zhonglian's Translation Variation Theory, which have provided new ideas for Chinese translation theories. The concept of Ecological Translation Studies aligns with traditional Chinese ecological culture, containing the great ecological wisdom of the Chinese nation. (Sun Yue, 2023) The emergence and development of Ecological Translation Studies are in line with the direction of societal and academic development. Ecological Translation Studies reflect the transformation of economic and social structures in translation studies, and the ecological trend is an inevitable result of the transformation of modern thought and philosophy. British translation scholar Munday (2000) was the first to explore Ecological Translation Studies, proposing

"cognitive ecological translation," which posits that translation is not a singular language-culture system but a complex cognitive system. British translation scholar Hermans (2002) introduced "ecological translation theory," arguing that translation is a complex interactive system between society and culture and should not be seen merely as a linguistic tool but as a pattern and system determined by social context dynamics.

Domestically, research in Ecological Translation Studies has achieved certain results. Scholars, starting from the perspective of Ecological Translation Studies, have conducted in-depth discussions on translation theory, translation practice, and translation teaching, proposing many innovative and practical viewpoints and methods. However, there are still some issues and deficiencies in the current domestic research on Ecological Translation Studies. There is a certain disconnect between theoretical research and practical application, with theoretical research results not being well applied to actual translation practices; theoretical research methods are relatively singular, lacking diversity and innovation. The development and evolution of Ecological Translation Studies in terms of philosophical basis, research horizons, and research paradigms may become a trend. The philosophical foundation of Ecological Translation Studies theory is transitioning from partial applicability to universal applicability; from the perspective of research horizons, it is evolving from a single discipline to an integrated interdisciplinary approach. From the perspective of research paradigm transformation, translation studies, after experiencing "intuitionism" and "structuralism," are currently in the development stage of "pluralism," and through the dissemination and practice of "holism," they are ultimately evolving towards "multiplicity in unity."

## 3. Application of Ecological Translation Theory in Subtitle Translation of the Wandering Earth

### 3.1. Adaptive Selection Conversion of Language Dimensions

In Ecological Translation Theory, linguistic dimension refers to the translator's adaptive conversion of different language forms according to different translation ecological environments in the translation process, so as to ensure that the target text is both faithful to the original text and acceptable to readers, so as to achieve a balance between the source text and the target text. The linguistic dimension is concerned with how to convert between different language systems to ensure the accurate transmission of information and the consistency of language expression. This includes the vocabulary, grammar, rhetoric, syntactic structure of the source language and the target language. The translation of language dimensions requires the translator to pay attention to the language expression of the target text, and to use accurate words and proper syntax in the translation process. (Zhang Xinyu, Yu Shaohua, 2023)

Original

Text: 还一天我就回家了，别晚节不保，这酒你自己留着喝吧。

Translation: One more day until I go home. Don't mess up my last dignity. Save this moonshine for yourself.

In the line, "还一天我就回家了" expresses the protagonist's desire and expectation for going home, and does

not want to have an unexpected situation at this time. "晚节不保" means to be unable to maintain one's moral integrity in one's old age. This idiom can be used to describe people who fail to maintain their moral integrity in their later years, or to describe situations where things fail just when they are about to succeed. The term "节操" may be translated as "high moral principle", but the translator translated the term "节操" into "dignity", which is often used in the context of "human dignity" to denote a fundamental value or status allegedly belonging equally to all people and the basis of fundamental moral or political duties or rights. From the perspective of language dimension, the translation is concise and easy to understand, and more in line with the context of the original text. The protagonist refused his colleague's request to drink because of the requirements of his work, indicating the protagonist's resolute attitude to avoid the trouble of burning his efforts because of drinking. At this time, wine is not only a kind of liquid, but also a kind of "demon". The translator translates "酒" as "恶魔", which means "moonshine", that is, illegally brewed wine. This behavior itself is not recognized by the society and has derogatory connotation. It has the rhetorical effect of a pun. This line reflects to the audience the persistence and pursuit of family, affection and responsibility in the face of disasters and difficulties.

### 3.2. Adaptive Selection Conversion of Communicative Dimension

In Ecological Translation Theory, the communicative dimension refers to the communicative context and effects of translation activities. This includes the identity, role, relationship and other factors of the participants, as well as the impact of translation results on the relationship between communication participants. Considering how to promote linguistic communication and cross-cultural understanding, communicative translation requires translators to be faithful to the target language and culture in the translation process, so that readers can clearly understand the meaning conveyed by the source language. It is necessary to pay attention to the expression habits, mode of thinking and cultural background of the source language and target language, and to pay attention to the adaptive transformation of communicative dimension, that is, whether the translation carries the true information and characteristics of the original text. Make the reader really feel the charm of it. (Liu Hongli, Wang Aiping 2021)

Original Text: 这些衣服不干净他们报案等于投案自首。

Translation: These were illegally made. They'll expose themselves if they report.

The clothes mentioned in the original article are clothes obtained by the protagonist Liu Qi in the black market, and it is not difficult to determine whether these clothes are illegally manufactured or obtained through illegal means. The word "不干净" here does not mean "dirty" literally, but obtained by illegal means. "illegally made" refers to the illegally manufactured goods, emphasizing the illegality of the manufacturing process or source of the goods, which may involve legal issues, violate laws and regulations and infringe on the legitimate rights and interests of others. To literally translate "不干净" into "dirty" violates the communicative intention of the source language. In a legal and ethical context, the word "报案" in the original text refers to reporting the origin of the clothing to the police. The speaker's intention is

to warn others that if they report the origin of these clothes to the police, they will be implicated or prosecuted for the illegal origin of these clothes. In the communicative dimension, the translation not only explains the illegality of the clothes to the audience but also conveys the intention of warning, which accords with the meaning of the source language.

### 3.3. Adaptive Selection Conversion of Cultural Dimension

In Ecological Translation Theory, cultural dimension refers to the cultural awareness and cultural adaptability involved in the process of translation. In the process of translation, translators should pay close attention to the connotation of the source language culture and realize the equivalent communication of culture. This includes the cultural features, social customs, historical background and values in the source language, as well as how the translation conveys these cultural elements and maintains their meaning and effect in the target language environment to avoid conflicts caused by cultural differences. The cultural dimension considers how the target language correctly conveys the cultural elements in the source language, and emphasizes the preservation of the cultural connotation of the source language in the translation process and the complete and accurate transmission of the cultural information to the reader. The adaptive transformation of cultural dimension requires translators to pay attention to the expression of contextual effects, have cultural awareness in the translation process, and fully consider the negative effects brought by cultural differences.

Original Text: 老东西

Translation: The old man

In the film, the hero Liu Qi calls his grandfather an "老东西". In the traditional cultural background of China, which respects the old and cherishes the young, this kind of name is offensive and playful, and has a certain derogatory connotation. However, in the language environment of the film, such a title on the one hand reflects the intimate feelings between grandpa and grandson, vividly portrays the natural process of getting along with the hero's grandfather, and on the other hand, it also expresses the hero's complex feelings towards his grandfather, including not only closeness, but also resistance and dissatisfaction. It embodies the hero's challenge and question to the traditional Chinese family structure. In the West, the younger generation can call the elder by his name, but in China pay attention to "respect the old and love the young", the younger generation cannot call the elder by his name. At all times, the younger generation must address the elder by his honorific title. In the film, the master calls grandpa "老东西", which can be translated as "old-timer", and the word "old-timer" retains the intimacy and respect of the original title, while avoiding the misunderstanding of derogatory meaning. If the translator directly deals with "old man", it will not only lose its emotional color, but also make the audience ignore this cultural difference, which will cause misunderstanding to the uninformed foreign audience.

## 4. Discussion and Reflection

### 4.1. Cross the Boundary of the Seawords

Subtitle refers to the non-video content such as dialogues in TV, film and stage works displayed in text form, and also refers to the post-processing text of film and television works. Film subtitle translation mainly involves subtitle translation,

listening translation services, multilingual script translation, subtitle script translation, film narration translation and song translation. Film subtitle translation involves special terms, concepts and cultural connotations in different fields, which requires the translator to have certain professional knowledge such as social background, academic experience and philosophical vision. Adaptive transformation of language dimensions refers to the process of mutual transformation between source language and target language. In subtitle translation, translators need to take into account the audience's understanding of different social systems, cultural customs and social problems, not only pay attention to the information transmission of the source language, but also accurately express the vocabulary, grammar, rhetoric, syntactic structure and other aspects of different language systems, so as to make appropriate adjustments to achieve the balance between the source language and the target language. If the subtitle translation fails to correctly convey the information of the source language, the audience may become confused about the plot of the film, thus affecting the overall viewing experience. The relevant scientific and technological terms and cultural elements involved in the film *The Wandering Earth* need to be transformed into the translation content that is both faithful to the original text and acceptable to the audience.

#### **4.2. Build the Bond of Communication**

Translation is not only the conversion between languages, but also the expression of different values and cultural connotations. The communicative dimension of ecological translatology emphasizes the need for translation to achieve the purpose of effective communication and communication. This means that translators need to pay attention to the needs, background and emotions of the target audience so that the information conveyed can produce the desired effect (Hu Gengshen, 2008). In terms of the communicative dimension, translators may need to appropriately adjust their expressions to meet the communicative needs of the target audience. This may involve word choice and adjustment of sentence structure to ensure that the message is clearly conveyed on a communicative level. (Zhang Xiaojie, 2024) As a Chinese science fiction film, *The Wandering Earth* contains unique elements of Chinese culture. If the subtitle translation fails to properly convey these elements, the audience may not fully understand the connotation of the film. Through subtitle translation, Chinese cultural works can enter more countries and regions and reach more audience groups, thus promoting the international influence and economic value of China's cultural industry, and providing new impetus for China's economic development and foreign cooperation. Foreign audiences can also understand Chinese characters, stories and history through subtitle translation, increase their interest in Chinese culture, and constantly deepen cultural exchanges between different ethnic groups.

#### **4.3. Convey the Value of Translation**

The purpose of subtitle translation is to let the audience better understand the content of the film and convey the cultural value of the work. If the translation is not accurate enough or does not fit the original meaning, it may lead to misunderstandings of the audience's understanding of the film, affecting the viewing effect. With the development of multi-culture, cultural transformation has become an inevitable trend. Under the background of opportunities and challenges,

any society cannot achieve development without the mutual penetration of various cultures. Ecological translation is essentially the mutual expression between two languages, which can also be said to be the exchange and integration of two cultures. With the help of the subtitle translation of *The Wandering Earth*, this paper studies ecological transliteration from the micro level, and combines some translation strategies and translation methods to concretely analyze and interpret translated texts and translation phenomena, so that readers can have a clear understanding and understanding of the theoretical functions of ecological transliteration, and Chinese culture can be understood and accepted by foreign audiences in written form. This helps spread information about Chinese values, ways of thinking, art forms and social development. This kind of cultural communication can deepen people's understanding of China around the world and promote exchanges and dialogue between different cultures. Moreover, subtitle translation allows Chinese culture to be understood and accepted by the outside world in its own voice and way. This will help to enhance China's cultural confidence and make the Chinese people more proud and confident in showing their cultural characteristics and charm.

### **5. Conclusion**

With the accelerated pace of information exchange in globalization, translation has become the core tool of communication in different fields such as economy, politics and culture. Moreover, due to the cross-development and mutual influence of multiple disciplines in society, the interdisciplinary nature of translation studies has gradually emerged. The importance of ecological translatology is also being paid more and more attention by more and more scholars. This paper discusses the role and influence of subtitle translation in the process of ecological translation from the perspective of ecologies, taking the film *The Wandering Earth* as an example. By applying the three-dimensional transformation theory, this paper analyzes the transformation process of subtitle translation in three aspects: linguistic dimension, communicative dimension and cultural dimension, and puts forward corresponding translation strategies and countermeasures. The results show that in ecological translation, subtitle translation can play a good role in presentation and dissemination, and at the same time, attention should be paid to the requirements of cultural adaptation and environmental protection.

Through the research on subtitle translation of *The Wandering Earth*, we realize that ecological translation theory provides a new research perspective for subtitle translation. Excellent subtitle translation plays an important role in promoting cross-cultural communication and can better convey the information conveyed by the film and Chinese culture, that is, convey the movie information to foreign audiences and stimulate their interest in watching movies. And make them get a good viewing experience, so as to promote cross-cultural communication. Secondly, in translation work, when translators face contradictions and conflicts between different dimensions, they first weigh pros and cons and then make compromises to ensure the integrity of subtitles (Wang Qiurong, 2023). They should flexibly use translation strategies in different situations. Various translation theories and methods are comprehensively applied to solve the problems in subtitle translation so as to make the translation more concise, smooth and easy to understand, so that Chinese culture can truly "go out". It is hoped that more

scholars and translators will join in the research of subtitle translation in the future, so as to jointly open up new research fields and promote the development of subtitle translation practice.

## Acknowledgments

This work was financially supported by innovation and entrepreneurship program.

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