

# Multidimensional Adaptation Study of the English Translation of *Petition on Taking the Field* from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

-- Taking Moss's translation as an example

Zhanglong Liu

School of Foreign Languages & Literature, Yunnan Normal University, Kunming, Yunnan, China

**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the English translation of *Petition on Taking the Field* translated by Moss, conducting an in-depth analysis based on Eco-translatology from three dimensions: language, culture, and communication. In the linguistic dimension, it examines the strategies for the conversion of vocabulary, sentence structures, and discourse; in the cultural dimension, it delves into the transmission and adjustment of cultural imagery and values; from the communicative perspective, it fully considers the paths to achieving translation intentions, audience expectations, and communicative effectiveness. The research found that the translator skillfully adopted various strategies during the translation process to achieve a dynamic balance between fidelity to the original text and adaptation to the target language culture. This study provides valuable insights for the practice of translating classical Chinese texts into English, and also expands new ideas for translation theory research, highlighting the unique value of Eco-translatology in analyzing the cross-cultural interpretation and dissemination of classical literature, promoting the development of the translation discipline and facilitating cross-cultural exchange and mutual learning.

**Keywords:** Eco-translatology, *Petition on Taking the Field*, Analysis of English Translation, Translation Strategies.

## 1. Introduction

*Petition on Taking the Field*, authored by Zhuge Liang, the Prime Minister of the Shuhan State during the Three Kingdoms period of ancient China, is a remarkable work that holds considerable cultural significance in promoting ancient Chinese civilization. Eco-translatology provides a novel perspective on translation research, and this article aims to establish a framework for a comprehensive analysis of the English translation of this article. It will examine Moss Robert's translation strategies and choices across various dimensions, unveiling the principles and diverse contexts he adhered to during the translation process. The selected translation by Moss is from Chapter Ninety-One of his book, *Three Kingdoms*. For the sake of clarity, the dimensions of language, culture, and communication will be discussed separately; however, it should not be misconstrued that each dimension operates independently within this translation process. In reality, the various factors of language, culture, and communication are intricately intertwined, interactively influencing one another and cannot be easily disentangled.[2]

## 2. An Overview of Eco-translatology

Ecological Translation Theory, proposed by Professor Hu Gengsheng of Tsinghua University, is a Chinese original translation theory that describes translation phenomena. Built upon the principle of ecological holism and Darwin's theory of "adaptation and selection," this theory provides an ecological perspective for comprehensively describing translations.[1] The central feature of ecological translation method is a three-dimensional transformation-language dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension. Under this three-dimensional transformation, the standard for an excellent translation transcends mere fidelity

to the source text and no longer merely caters to readers; instead, it aims to achieve the goal of enabling the translated text to survive and thrive in a new linguistic, cultural, and communicational ecology.[1] In the process of translation, translators achieve the optimal adaptation through a three-dimensional transformation of language, culture, and communication, ultimately realizing the best possible fit between the source text and the target text. [5]

## 3. The Background of *Petition on Taking the Field* and Its English Translation

*Petition on Taking the Field* is a letter written by Zhuge Liang before his northern expedition into Central China. It possesses immense literary value and historical significance. An accurate translation requires translators with profound bilingual prowess and impeccable translation skills, as well as an in-depth understanding of ancient Chinese history and culture. By examining the translated work, one can discern the translator's strategies and methods in handling classic texts as well as their presentation in a multicultural context.

## 4. An Appreciation of the Translation of *Petition on Taking the Field* from the Eco-translatology Perspective

### 4.1. The Appreciation of Language Dimensions

#### 4.1.1. Word-level Appreciation

Example 1:

ST: 先帝创业未半而中道崩殒,今天下三分,益州疲弊,此诚危急存亡之秋也。

TT: The late sovereign was taken from us when his life's work, the restoration of the Han, remained unfinished. Today,

in a divided empire, our third, the province of Yizhou, war-worn and under duress, faces a season of crisis that threatens our very survival.

Moss rendered it as "season," effectively conveying the precise meaning while establishing a linguistic ecology that remains closely aligned with the source language. He skillfully executed a dimensional shift in language while preserving an ecological balance between the source and target languages, thereby maintaining the distinctive flavor of classical prose.

Example 2:

ST: 亲贤臣，远小人，此先汉所以兴隆也；亲小人，远贤臣，此后汉所以倾颓也。

TT: The Former Han thrived because its emperors stayed close to worthy vassals and far from conniving courtiers. The opposite policy led the Later Han to ruin.

In Chinese, the term "小人" carries a multitude of connotations. It can denote a despicable individual, serve as an allusion for common folk, or function as a self-deprecating term. In this context, however, "小人" is used specifically to refer to those in power who manipulate politics and undermine the foundation of the state.

In this context, Moss renders "贤臣" as "worthy vassals" and "小人" as "conniving courtiers"; the term "courtier," in particular, refers to the ancient feudal society's servants of the imperial court, clearly conveying the contrast between the two and their inherent moral evaluations. This enables English readers to comprehend the profound impact of choosing worthy individuals over those who ally with wickedness on China's rise or decline, reflecting the ancient Chinese political wisdom and cultural values. The translator has successfully achieved the purpose of language conversion while imparting vitality in the target language that makes the translation truly alive.

#### 4.1.2. Syntactic Analysis

Example 1:

ST: 不宜妄自菲薄，引喻失义，以塞忠谏之路也。

TT: It would be unworthy of Your Majesty to demean yourself by resorting to ill-chosen justifications that would block the avenues of loyal remonstrance.

In Moss's translation, the phrase "it is inappropriate to belittle oneself and draw unreasonable inferences" has been split, making the sentence structure more aligned with English logical thinking and expression habits. At the same time, it accurately conveys the original meaning of not underestimating oneself, while also portraying the image of Mr. Kongming as a wise minister who dedicates himself to offering sincere advice.

Example 2:

ST: 亲贤臣，远小人，此先汉所以兴隆也；亲小人，远贤臣，此后汉所以倾颓也。

TT: The Former Han thrived because its emperors stayed close to worthy vassals and far from conniving courtiers. The opposite policy led the Later Han to ruin.

Moss translated the two parallel clauses into independent sentences. Due to the balanced structure and contrasting meanings of the original text, Moss omitted the subject part of the latter clause, using "the opposite policy" as a substitute. His expression is relatively concise while ensuring the accurate conveyance of meaning, maintaining correspondence between the sentences, and highlighting the different impacts of favoring virtuous ministers and distancing from petty individuals on the rise and fall of the

state. This aligns with English rhetorical conventions and enhances the expressiveness of the language.

#### 4.1.3. Discourse-level Analysis

Throughout the entire translation, Moss uses conjunctions such as "Despite," "Yet," "As well as," "Now that," and "As for" to clarify the logical relationships between paragraphs. For instance, after explaining the principles for handling matters in the palace, Moss introduces the introduction and recommendation of Guo Youzhi and others with "In my humble opinion," which allows the argument of the article to progress step by step and maintain logical coherence. At the same time, within sentences, he maintains the coherence and consistency of the discourse through means such as pronoun reference and lexical co-occurrence, resulting in an overall organic discourse. "In my humble opinion" is a humble expression, and Moss's handling method conveys the specific imagery while ensuring the complete preservation of the cultural ecology.

## 4.2. The Appreciation of Cultural Dimensions

The source language and the target language are two different languages, and besides linguistic differences, there are naturally vast cultural differences as well. To avoid misinterpreting the original text, translators must not only achieve a conversion at the linguistic level but also at the cultural level. Translators need to have cultural awareness during the translation process to convey the cultural connotations from the source language to the target language readers. In *Petition on Taking the Field*, there are many culturally loaded words, with official titles, self-deprecation, honorifics, and taboo words being the four main categories.[6]

In reviewing the translation methods of culturally loaded words across various translations, there are mainly five types: transliteration with annotation (annotation as a translation technique for transliteration), literal translation, explanation, free translation, and imitation.[4]

Transliteration refers to translating the original language using characters that are the same or similar in the target language; literal translation means not using figurative methods in handling vocabulary meaning and rhetoric, while allowing appropriate changes or transformations in the handling of language form to make the translation conform to the norms of the target language; interpretation and free translation both belong to free translation and are subdivisions of it. The interpretative method refers to explanatory translation, which does not replace the original text with idiomatic expressions of the target language; free translation is also a form of interpretation, but it is achieved by using idiomatic expressions of the target language; imitation translation does not stick to the original text and may condense and omit certain information or may add and expand to convey more information than the original.[4]

Comparing these five mainstream translation methods, it can be seen that the damage to culture decreases in the order of transliteration with annotation, literal translation, explanation, free translation, and imitation. The translation methods for culturally loaded words can reflect the efforts made by the translator in the aspect of cultural transformation.

#### 4.2.1. Cultural Imagery Transmission

Example 1:

ST: 先帝创业未半而中道崩殒，今天下三分，益州疲弊，此诚危急存亡之秋也。

TT: The late sovereign was taken from us when his life's

work, the restoration of the Han, remained unfinished. Today, in a divided empire, our third, the province of Yizhou, war-worn and under duress, faces a season of crisis that threatens our very survival.

The word "death" is also a culturally loaded term with profound cultural significance. In ancient Chinese feudal dynasties, under a strict hierarchical system, descriptions of death were quite particular. Whether in ancient feudal dynasties or modern society, whether in the East or the West, "death" is considered an inauspicious matter, and people always choose to avoid it actively. If avoidance is not possible, they will use other euphemisms to replace it. In summary, ordinary people's deaths are generally avoided in direct speech, while emperors, who stand at the top of the feudal monarchy, must be even more cautious in expressing their own death.

In Moss's translation, he takes into account the inherent need for euphemism, opting not to use "die" and its derivatives in a blunt and straightforward manner, but instead choosing to replace it with "be taken from." This is indeed an appropriate euphemistic expression that conveys the cultural imagery just right.

Example 2:

ST: 当奖率三军，北定中原

TT: it behooves me to marshal our soldiers to conquer the northern heartland

Moss translates the geographical concept of "中原" (Central Plain) with specific cultural connotations as "northern heartland." The term "northern" reflects the specific direction of the land to be conquered, while "heartland" retains its meaning as a political, economic, and cultural center in ancient China, allowing English readers to understand its important strategic position during the Three Kingdoms period. This demonstrates the translator's skillful handling and adaptation of cultural imagery.

#### 4.2.2. Handling Cultural Value Differences

Example 1:

ST: 盖追先帝之殊遇，欲报之于陛下也

TT: because one and all they cherish the memory of the exceptional treatment they enjoyed from the late sovereign and wish to repay it in service to Your Majesty.

In the above translation, "exceptional treatment" and "repay" vividly reflect the cultural values of loyalty and gratitude. Romushi did not directly and rigidly explain the concept of loyalty and righteousness between rulers and subjects in Chinese culture during the translation, but instead used common vocabulary and expressions in English, allowing English readers to feel this emotional power, transcending cultural barriers and achieving effective communication and transmission of cultural values.

Example 2:

ST: 此臣所以报先帝而忠陛下之职分也

TT: This is the way I mean to honor my debt to the late Emperor and fulfill my duty to Your Majesty.

Moss translated "职分" as "debt" and "duty," accurately reflecting the cultural values in ancient Chinese culture regarding the responsibilities and obligations that ministers owe to their monarchs. This allows English readers to understand Zhuge Liang's loyalty to the late emperor Liu Bei and the later emperor Liu Shan, as well as his sense of mission as a minister, further conveying the ancient Chinese concepts of the relationship between rulers and officials and the cultural connotation of loyalty.

### 4.3. Appreciation of Communicative Dimensions

The communicative dimension focuses on the communicative level, primarily concerned with whether the translation reflects the communicative intention conveyed by the original text.[3]

In the translation process, the integrity and accuracy of the translated text must be ensured. Errors and omissions do not achieve the adaptive selection and conversion required for effective communication. A translation can only be widely accepted and endure in the translation ecology of 'eliminating the weak and retaining the strong' if it faithfully and completely conveys the content of the original text, accurately reproduces the original expression, and presents the old forms and content of the original in a new linguistic guise. The translator's fundamental responsibility is to convey the original text completely to the target language readers; any omissions or errors undermine the communicative intent of the original.[6]

#### 4.3.1. Translation Purpose and Audience Targeting

The translator has fully considered the communicative purpose and audience positioning of the translation. Overall, the translator strives for clarity and simplicity, avoiding obscure vocabulary and expressions.

Example 1:

Throughout the text, titles such as 'the late sovereign' and 'Your Majesty' are used to translate '先帝' and '陛下' respectively. This not only preserves the respectful connotation towards the monarch but also allows English readers to quickly understand the identity and hierarchical relationship of the figures represented, thus avoiding misunderstandings caused by cultural differences and achieving a certain degree of cross-cultural transmission of cultural imagery.

Example 2:

ST: 臣不胜受恩感激

TT: Overwhelmed with gratitude for the favor I have received from you

When translating "臣不胜受恩感激", Moss chose the word "Overwhelmed"; this word vividly conveys Zhuge Liang's deep feelings of gratitude and emotional overwhelm, allowing English readers to sense Zhuge Liang's appreciation for the late emperor and the current ruler. This enhances the emotional impact and communicative effect of the translation, aligning with the communicative purpose of helping English readers understand Zhuge Liang's emotions and the intended audience.

#### 4.3.2. Choice of Communication Strategies

Example 1:

ST: 愿陛下托臣以讨贼兴复之效，不效，则治臣之罪，以告先帝之灵。

TT: My only desire is to obtain and execute your commission to chasten the traitors and restore the Han. Should I prove unfit, punish my offense and report it to the spirit of the late Emperor.

When Moss handled this text, he added "my only desire is," a treatment that conveys to the reader the urgent scene of Zhuge Liang striving for the revival of the Han Dynasty and planning for the future of the new regime, while also vividly shaping the image of a devoted and selfless minister who exhausts himself until death.

In translating "托臣以讨贼兴复之效", Moss succinctly

and clearly expressed the task content, aligning with English expression habits. At the same time, the words "punish" and "offense" added a more serious tone, conveying Zhuge Liang's firm determination to complete the task and his serious attitude towards the consequences of failure. This translation fully considered the understanding and acceptance of English readers in its communicative strategy, allowing the translated text to effectively convey the original meaning and emotions, achieving the goal of cross-cultural communication.

## 5. The Ecological Value and Impact of the English Translation of *Petition on Taking the Field*

From the perspective of Eco-translatology, the English translation of *Petition on Taking the Field* enriches the English-speaking world's understanding of ancient Chinese literary classics and provides cultural resources for cross-cultural communication. It serves as a model for translation practice and research, with the language techniques, cultural transmission strategies, and communicative balance methods employed by the translator offering references for the English translation of classical Chinese texts. At the same time, the English translation promotes mutual influence and integration between Chinese and English cultures, as elements of Chinese culture are introduced into the English context, leading to interactions and exchanges with English culture, sparking interest and reflection among English readers regarding Chinese culture, and fostering mutual understanding between different cultures.

## 6. Conclusion

By combining Eco-translatology with an appreciation of the English translation of *Petition on Taking the Field*, we find that this theory provides an analytical framework for the study of English translations of classical Chinese texts. The translation makes reasonable choices and adaptations in the linguistic dimension, conveys cultural imagery and values in the cultural dimension, and balances purpose, audience, and strategy in the communicative dimension, achieving an overall good translation effect.

## References

- [1] Hu Gengshen. Eco-translatology Construction & Interpretation. [M]. Beijing. The Commercial Press, 2013.
- [2] Hu Gengshen. Illustrate the translation principles and methods of "adaptive selection theory". [J]. Foreign Languages and Their Teaching, 2006,(03):49-52+65.
- [3] Moss Roberts. Three Kingdoms [M]. Oakland: University of California Press, 2014.
- [4] Xiong Bin. Conceptual Confusion in Translation Studies -- Taking "Translation Strategies", "Translation Methods", and "Translation Techniques" as Examples. [J]. Chinese Translators Journal, 2014,35(03):82-88.
- [5] Xiu Wenqiao, Jiang Tianyang. A Study on Science Fiction Translation: With Special Reference to Ken Liu's Translation of *Folding Beijing*. [J]. Chinese Science & Technology Translators Journal, 2018,31(01):46-48+64.
- [6] Zhang Yun. Comparison of Four English Versions of *Petition on Taking the Field*. [J]. Journal of North China University of Science and Technology(Social Science Edition), 2021,21(02):138-142+147.