# Study on the Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology—A Case Study of Chinese-English Translation of Yao-Chinese Folktales

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#### **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, under the strategic background of national cultural soft power construction, the domestic animation industry has shown a rapid development trend. The output of China's image in domestic animation is not only an important channel to tell the story of China, but also a showcase of Chinese culture going abroad. Guided by Ecotranslatology, this study uses the principle of three-dimensional transformation to explore how to show cultural self-confidence and achieve communicative purposes in the translation of animated subtitles, taking Yao-Chinese Folktales, a popular domestic animated series in 2023, as an example. It is found that translators often choose appropriate translation strategies, methods and techniques to achieve translation effects in linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions, promoting full communication between the source culture and the target culture. The purpose of this study is to provide reference for the subtitle translation of domestic animation and make contribution to the enhancement of international influence of Chinese animation and Chinese traditional culture.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The development of animation is closely related to the accumulation of culture and social changes. Since 1922, Chinese animation has gone through a hundred years of historical journey, leaving countless classic works. However, by the end of the 20th century, with the increasing competition caused by the influx of foreign animation, the national culture has suffered a certain impact, and Chinese animation industry has stepped into a trough (Wu, 2015). In recent years, under the strategic background of national cultural soft power construction, the domestic animation industry has made great progress and developed tremendously. In terms of the content of animation, a large number of Chinese animation works are adapted from fairy tales and classic works, which shows that Chinese excellent traditional culture and the core values involved have increasingly become the favorite content of domestic animation creation teams.

Tianjing Zhong School Of Foreign Languages, Soochow University, Suzhou, China With more excellent domestic animation works going abroad, the quality of their subtitle translation is undoubtedly a key step for us to introduce the Chinese excellent culture to the world and show our cultural confidence. Eco-translatology aims to guide translation activities, explaining the essence of translation process and inputting new vitality in translation research. Therefore, applying Eco-translatology to guide subtitle translation is conducive to realizing the balance of the eco-environment between the source language and the target language, promoting the overseas publicity of the works.

Yao-Chinese Folktales is an original domestic animation series jointly produced by Shanghai Animation Film Studio and streaming site bilibili, which went viral when it was released on January 1st, 2023. This series is rooted in Chinese traditional culture and shows a collection of stories full of Chinese imagination and aesthetic charm. In light of the significance of subtitle translation in promoting Chinese traditional culture, this study adopts the principle of three-dimensional transformation as the theoretical framework to explore the Chinese-English translation effect of the subtitles in Yao-Chinese Folktales from linguistic, cultural and communicative dimension. The present study aims to add reference to the subtitle translation of such works and boost Chinese traditional culture going global.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1950s, with the continuous development and perfection of the theoretical system of ecology, its research scope has been gradually introduced from the field of biology to the fields of humanities and social sciences such as sociology and psychology. The interdisciplinary study between translatology and ecology also follows the trend. The theory of Eco-translatology, which was put forward by Professor Hu Gengshen, was started in 2001. The birth of this theory was influenced not only by the global ecological trend of thought, but also the ecological wisdom of Chinese classics philosophy (Hu, 2010). Eco-translatology focuses on the integrity of the translational eco-environment and uses the narrative method of Eco-translatology to describe and explain the essence, process, standards, principles and methods of translation and translation phenomena in a new way (Hu, 2008).

Based on Darwin's theory of "survival of the fittest", Hu (2008: 13) innovatively used "adaptation and selection" theory to guide translation practice. In fact, translation is a process of adaptation and selection. Adaptation is translator's adaptation to the ecoenvironment, and selection is the translator's selection to the target language. In Ecotranslatology, the translator plays the leading role in the whole translational ecoenvironment. Any translation behavior is inseparable from the translator; thus, the quality of the translation works depends largely on the translator's translation literacy and ability, adaptability to the eco-environment of the source language and the target language, and the ability to choose translation strategies.

Based on the translation principle of "multi-dimensional selective adaptation and adaptive selection", Eco-translatology advocates the translation method of "three-dimensional transformation". Three dimensions are linguistic dimension, cultural

dimension and communicative dimension, respectively. First of all, the translator should start from the linguistic dimension when translating. Combined with the ecoenvironment of the text, the readability of the translation should be fully considered from the aspects of vocabulary, grammar and syntax to restore the original form as much as possible. Secondly, the translator should also consider the adaptive transformation of the cultural dimension. They should make a correct analysis based on the context and minimize the translation differences caused by different cultural differences, conveying the cultural intention of the source language to the target language readers. Finally, the translator ought to fully consider the communicative intention between the source language and the target language to achieve the adaptive transformation of the communicative dimension.

Eco-translatology is an interdisciplinary product, which adapts to the development of today's society and provides a new perspective for translation research. After more than 20 years of development, the theoretical system of Eco-translatology has been gradually improved, with increasingly rich research results and increasing influence. At present, much scholarly attention has been applied to the use of theory of Eco-translatology to different types of texts in order to evaluate translation quality or summarize translation methods. For example, guided by the principle of three-dimensional transformation, Li, Liao & Zhao (2022) compared two English versions of the poem Spring Garden Tea Picking (one is translated by W. T. Mercer and the other is John Francis Davis) and found that Davis's version was more adaptable and readable. According to this study, under the guidance of Eco-translatology, the English translation of Chinese ancient poems can be closer to the contents and ideas expressed in the original text and the language habits of the target readers. Wang and Qin (2022) viewed the subtitle translation in the movie Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child from three dimensions: language, culture and communication. This study combines Eco-translatology with subtitle translation, which provides important reference for improving the English translation quality of Mandarin films.

Based on the above analysis, it is not difficult to find that Eco-translatology is a new theory that integrates translation and natural science. It requires that translators choose appropriate translation strategies, methods and techniques to adaptively transform the original text based on adapting to the translational eco-environment. In recent years, the application fields of Eco-translatology have become more extensive, such as the translation of political texts, ancient poems, the film subtitles and public signs. In order to help Chinese traditional culture, go abroad and strengthen our cultural self-confidence, this study, takes the Chinese-English subtitle translation of the domestic animated series Yao-Chinese Folktales as an example, evaluates its translation quality and summarizes some translation methods from the perspective of Eco-translatology.

#### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SUBTITLES IN YAO-CHINESE FOLKTALES

Domestic animation works are based on two dimensions to a great extent: one is to tell Chinese traditional culture well, and the other is to carry out cross-cultural communication (Wang & Qin, 2022). Yao-Chinese Folktales consists of eight stories full of Chinese traditional culture. In terms of content, it is inspired by various classics such as The Journey to the West and Yangxian Scholar, and the concern for social reality and the thinking of philosophical propositions are also integrated into the animation. In the form of presentation, this series showcases a wide range of artistic styles such as paper cutting, ink painting, shadow play and Peking Opera. In addition, the background of the story, the interlude and the name of the protagonist also contain the Chinese traditional culture. From the perspective of cultural propaganda, the biggest intention of this work is to highlight the ideological essence and national spirit contained in Chinese excellent traditional culture from multiple perspectives, enhancing the cultural self-confidence of Chinese people.

Subtitle is one of the most direct forms to convey information. Subtitle translation of Yao-Chinese Folktales is of great significance for it to go abroad and convey China's story and Chinese culture. In view of the unique linguistic, cultural and communicative characteristics of this work, the translator should have a rich knowledge reserve, keep the cultural characteristics of the source language as much as possible on the basis of conforming to the language norms of the target language, so that the audience can feel the essence of Chinese culture. For another, the translator should also choose appropriate translation strategies according to the needs of the plot and diverse characters, trying to let the target audience get the clearest information with the least effort (Li, 2001).

# THE SUBTITLE TRANSLATION OF YAO-CHINESE FOLKTALES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THREE-DIMENSIONAL TRANSFORMATION

As the subject of translation, the translator should fully consider language, culture, communication and other factors in order to achieve the best translation effect. The following will illustrate the three dimensions.

#### **Adaptive Selection and Transformation from Linguistic Dimension**

Adaptive selection and transformation of linguistic dimension means that the translator should fully consider the readability of the translation in the process of subtitle translation and transform it from different levels of linguistics, such as pronunciation, vocabulary and syntax, so as to adapt to the language habits of the target audience.

### PHONETIC LEVEL

The adaptive transformation of the phonetic level of this work is mainly reflected in the translation of names and places. Most names and places are transliterated, such as "大王洞 (da wang dong)" is translated into "Da Wang cave", and "小满 (xiao man)" is translated into "Xiao Man". Transliteration is a common translation method, which can preserve the charm of the source language and avoid cultural loss or semantic incompleteness caused by improper liberal translation or literal translation. However,

some words have not been transliterated in order to better convey the meaning in the context. For example, in the first episode Nobody, "浪浪山 (lang lang shan)", the hometown of the little piggy monster, is translated as "Wave Mountain" instead of "Lang Lang Mountain". In the animation, the little piggy monster doesn't go home for a year. In the conversation with his mother, he lamented that he wanted to leave Wave Mountain, showing his sadness and helplessness. "wave" refers to a raised line of water that moves across the surface of the sea, and it also indicates twists and turns, which is in line with the context.

#### LEXICAL LEVEL

In translation, the translator's choice of words is also very subtle. Especially for the repeated words, the translator has made adaptive transformation according to the translational eco-environment. The following is an analysis of the translation of "£ (mao)" (Table 1).

TABLE 1. THE TRANSLATION OF "毛 (MAO)" IN YAO-CHINESE FOLKTALES.

	Source Traslation	Target Translation	
Example (1)	你毛呢	What's your feather?	
Example (2)	取此名然仪 七坪特川吉	Recently I always stay up late, so that I lost a lot of my <b>bristles</b> .	
Example (3)	这三根是保命 <b>毫毛</b> 你把它收好 以后用得着	Take this! It is my fur which can save your life in the future.	

The context in Example (1) is the first episode Nobody, where Bear Coach has a conversation with a crow monster and the question is directed at the crow monster. The Oxford Dictionary explains "feather" as "one of the many soft light parts covering a bird's body". Crows are birds, thus the choice of "feather" in the English subtitle is suitable. Example (2) is a conversation between a little piggy monster and his mother, and the answerer is the little piggy monster. "毛 (mao)" here refers to something short and stiff, which is aptly translated as "bristle". In Example (3), the speaker is Sun Wukong, and "毫毛 (hao mao)" refers to his own hair, while "fur" refers specifically to the soft hair of animals, which fits the context. Chinese language attaches more importance to parataxis instead of pursuing formal changes. The same Chinese word can have several different meanings, and the reader must use his or her own sense of language and certain non-contextual factors to understand the sentence, which is often difficult for foreign readers (Fan, 1996). In this series, the translator has done a good job of finding words that are more similar in meaning and style to those in the source language, preserving the linguistic characteristics without affecting the audience's understanding, in line with the linguistic dimension of Eco-translatology.

There are many dialogues between characters in the series too. How to translate the colloquial expressions in the dialogues appropriately and make them understood by the

target audience is also a major difficulty in subtitle translation of this work. The following two examples illustrate the conversations.

Example (4) ST: 没用的玩意儿

TT: You're pathetic! Example (5) ST: 别瞎想

TT: Come on! Don't be silly!

For colloquial expressions, the translator mainly adopts liberal translation to convey the meaning of the source language to the audience. In Example (4), "没用的玩意儿" is the reproach of Bear Coach to the crow monster in the first episode Nobody, which is a slightly insulting. The word "pathetic" is explained in the Cambridge Dictionary as "unsuccessful or showing no ability, effort or bravery". The translator's choice of the word for adaptive transformation is appropriate as it conveys the meaning of the source language better. In addition, the exclamation mark is used to emphasize the tone. In Example (5), although "别瞎想" is only three words, the translator has translated it very cleverly by first choosing the authentic phrase "Don't be silly!" and then adds "Come on!" in front of it to show the impatience of the speaker, making the tone even stronger.

#### SYNTACTIC LEVEL

Due to the temporal and spatial limitations of subtitles, translators need to balance the translational eco-environment between the source language and the target language in the process of subtitle translation, which should be as concise and condensed as possible on the basis of accurately expressing the meaning of the source language (He, 2022). Therefore, translators often adopt omission, and appropriately delete some long sentences according to the specific translational eco-environment, so as to ensure that the subtitles are presented more concisely on the screen. The following are some examples.

Example (6) ST: 她说她也有个心上人,想请出相会,求你勿言。

TT: She said she also had a beau, please, don't tell.

Example (7) ST: 你和她说了很多话,她给你讲山里,你给她讲山外。

TT: You talked a lot, your stories, her stories.

The above examples are all from the second episode of Yao-Chinese Folktales, Goose Mountain, which tells a story of a peddler who, on his way to make a delivery, happened to meet a fox child and then experienced a gloriously strange day in Goose Mountain. This episode is in the form of a silent film without a single line, relying only on subtitles to put the viewer in the main character's shoes, so the quality of the translation of the subtitles is extremely important in conveying the content and main idea of the work. In Example (6), the meaning of "想请出相会" is deleted from the translation, which can make the structure more compact and the subtitles more concise. In Example (7), "山里(shan li)" and "山外(shan wai)" do not mean literally, but refer to the story of two people. The translator understands the true meaning and translate them into "your stories" and "her stories" respectively, which also have a poetic rhythm. At the same time, the translator has also cut out "她给你讲" and "你给她讲" in the source

language, using only the word "talk" in the target language to express the meaning clearly.

# **Adaptive Selection and Transformation from Cultural Dimension**

Adaptive selection and transformation of cultural dimension means that the translator should pay attention to the cultural differences between the source language and the target language and transform the expressions with cultural characteristics in the works according to the specific translational eco-environment to avoid misinterpretation of the source language by the target language audience. The following is an analysis of the translation of "妖怪 (yao guai)" in Yao-Chinese Folktales (Table 2).

TABLE 2. THE TRANSLATION OF "妖怪 (YAO GUAI)" IN YAO-CHINESE FOLKTALES.

	Source Traslation	Target Translation	
Example (8)	11 1切好「哟 食水老是同 <b>欢怪</b>	Did you lock the door? Recently there are always monsters appearing.	
Example (9)	田螺姑娘是个 <b>妖怪</b>	The Snail Girl is a fairy.	

"妖怪 (yao guai)" is a concept in Chinese traditional culture, and there is no direct corresponding and appropriate translation in English. In subtitles, there are many translations of this word. For example, in several films such as The Fox Lover and Mural, the translator translates "妖怪 (yao guai)" into "demon" (Zheng & Zhang, 2017), and the movie title "捉妖记 (zhuo yao ji)" is translated into "Monster Hunt". According to statistics, "妖怪 (yao guai)" appears 24 times in Yao-Chinese Folktales, and is translated into "monster" 15 times, as the translator does in Example (8). The English definition of "demon" is "an evil spirit; an evil supernatural being", and the English definition of "monster" is "any imaginative strangeness creation, especially one that is large and strange". In most cases, "monster" is only aimed at strange appearance, and it does not involve whether monsters are evil or not. In the first episode Nobody, the little piggy monster finally woke up and revealed the information of ambush to the Tang Monk and his disciples. From this, it seems that his nature is not bad, so it is more appropriate to use "monster" to express the meaning of "妖怪 (yao guai)" in this context. However, the translator does not blindly translate all the "妖怪 (yao guai)" in subtitles into "monster". In some special contexts, the translator will choose the appropriate translation methods and transform the word "妖怪 (yao guai)" adaptively. The sentence in Example (9) is uttered by the alien girl in the sixth episode Null Land, who doesn't know the story of The Snail Girl. In fact, the snail girl is not a real monster as suggested in the subtitles, she is a goddess, a fairy, so the translator's choice of the word "fairy" is appropriate.

Through the above analysis, the translator has achieved adaptive transformation of the cultural words that appear repeatedly in this animated series. Of course, there are many expressions rich in Chinese cultural characteristics in the works, and their translation is also worthy of our investigation.

Example (10) ST: 不要节外生枝

TT: Remember! Don't make new troubles!

In Example (10), "节外生枝" is a Chinese idiom which means that new problems have arisen on top of the original ones. The translator adopts literal translation and amplification, using the phrase "don't make new troubles" to explain the true meaning the source language conveys, which is easy for the target audience to understand. "Remember!" is also prefaced by an additional translation, which not only fits the context of the warning from Bear Coach to the little piggy monster, but also matches the voice and images in the animation.

Interludes in animated works often plays a role in promoting the plot, character, and even the main idea. The lyrics of White Mountain and Black Water, an interlude from the third episode She Wolf, have a strong traditional Chinese cultural flavor, which tests the translator's cultural literacy and translation level.

Example (11) ST: 不见来路,胡不归去

TT: The way cannot be seen, why won't I go back?

She Wolf is the story of a young wolf named Linlin who becomes a human and tries to make friends with humans, but accidentally leads a hunter into the forest and eventually Linlin's mother dies to protect her. The interlude White Mountains and Black Water appears when Linlin first rejoins his mother as a wolf, and the lyrics are four-letter structured and meaningful. In Example 11, "不见来路,胡不归去" is taken from the poem It's Dark—"It's dark, oh nearly black, why not go back? If it's not for you, why do we get wet with dew? It's dark, oh nearly black, why not go back? If it's not for you, esquire, why do we toil in the mire?" This sentence means if you can't see where you're coming from, why don't you go home? Linlin wishes to live in harmony with humans, but humans are driving them to their death, and the only way for Linlin to be safe is to return to her own world. The rhetorical questions in the translation fit the tone of the original text and better convey the meaning of the original text. What's more, the translation is concise and condensed, in line with the characteristics of subtitle translations.

#### Adaptive Selection and Transformation from Communicative Dimension

The adaptive transformation of communicative dimension refers to the selection of a text by the translator in order to facilitate cross-cultural communication and achieve communicative purposes. According to Newmark, a communicative translation should be faithful and easy for readers to accept (Newmark, 1981). The translator ought to play a central role in the translation of subtitles, constantly adapting to the translational ecoenvironment and making appropriate trade-offs in order to achieve the communicative purpose.

The translation of the episode title in Yao-Chinese Folktales is a typical example of the adaptive transformation of its subtitle translation in the communicative dimension. The following is a detailed analysis of the title translation in the first episode Nobody.

Example (12) ST: 《小妖怪的夏天》

TT: Nobody

In Example (12), the title of the first episode also contains the imagery of "妖怪 (yao guai)", which the translator has created as "Nobody". The most creative act in translation is recreation, which perfectly unites translation and creation (Wang, 2015). The English definition of "nobody" is "a person who has no importance or influence". Compared with the literal translation of "a little monster's summer", this translation has the effect of simplifying. For one thing, the piggy monster in the story is just a small monster, who is struggling for survival every day and has endless grievances and sorrows. As a result, the word "nobody" fits perfectly with the image of the piggy monster. For another, this translation resonates with many audiences, reminding them of their own dilemmas and hardships in the workplace.

In addition to the translation of titles, the translator also uses liberal translation and amplification to make adaptative selection and transformation in the dialogues of the characters according to the context, in order to achieve the communicative purpose.

Example (13) ST: 你在教我做事

TT: You're telling me?

The context of Example (13) is that the piggy monster has added feathers to the arrow to win the appreciation of Bear Coach, only to be reprimanded with the words "你在教我做事". The translator translates is as "You're telling me?", and it is worth noting the use of the question mark. If "You're telling me" is followed by an exclamation mark, then it indicates full approval and a positive tone. Whereas, if a question mark is used, there is a sense of impatience. The translation of this sentence is more concise than "Are you telling me what to do?", which is more in line with the English language.

#### DEFECTS IN SUBTITLE TRANSLATION OF YAO-CHINESE FOLKTALES

According to the above analysis, in the subtitle translation of the domestic animated series Yao-Chinese Folktales, the translator has made adaptive selection and transformation of the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions, and it is overall a process of constant adaptation and selection. However, there are a small number of flaws in such wonderful subtitle translation, mainly in three aspects: form, spelling and grammar, as illustrated by the following examples.

In terms of form, some of the subtitle translation in Yao-Chinese Folktales have improper use of capitalization and punctuation. For example, "白山黑水" should be translated as "white water and black water", and the "W" should be lowercase instead of "black Water". The sentence"林林…你慢点……"is misused as an apostrophe in both the original and the translation. The Chinese apostrophe should be "……" and the English apostrophe should be "…"."

There are also a number of spelling errors in it, such as "stuff" being misspelled as "stuf", "Xiao Man" being misspelled as "Xiao Wan" and "catfish" being misspelled as "cartfish". These spelling mistakes should be avoided in order to improve the quality of subtitle translation.

In terms of grammar, the subtitle translation of Yao-Chinese Folktales, an excellent Chinese animation, should be paid more attention to inconsistencies in subject and predicate, collocation errors and lexical errors. "My bristles is...", "This common firewood spoil..." and "Lin often play..." are subject-predicate inconsistencies. "She is not the same with us." is missing the preposition "the", which is incorrectly collocated. In addition, the translator also confuses the lexical nature of some words, such as misusing the adjective "merciful" for the noun "mercy", the adjective "sharp" for the verb "sharpen", and the noun "molecule" is misused as the adjective "molecular".

TABLE 3. SOME DEFECTS OF SUBTITLE TRANSLATION IN YAO-CHINESE FOLKTALES.

Classification		Source Traslation	Target Translation	Correct Translation
Form	Example(14)	白山黑水,濯我红心	White mountain and black <b>Water</b> , washing my innocent heart.	White mountain and black water, washing my innocent heart.
	Example(15)	林林…你慢点	Linrelax	Linrelax
Spelling	Example(16)	这可暖和了	This stuf is very warm.	This stuff is very warm.
	Example(17)	小满 我们带你去一 个好地方	Xiao Wan, we will show you a nice place!	Xiao Man, we will show you a nice place!
	Example(18)	黑鱼 白鳝 黄辣丁	Snakeheads, White eels, Yellow cartfish!	Snakeheads, White eels, Yellow catfish!
Grammar	Example(19)	这些普通柴火糟蹋味 道	This common firewood spoil the flavor of the flesh of Tang!	This common firewood spoils the flavor of the flesh of Tang!
	Example(20)	大哥 毛都没了	Oh! Ow! Brother! My bristles is going to fall off!	Oh! Ow! Brother! My bristles are going to fall off!
		是真的,林林老来找 我们玩	Lin often comes over and play with us.	Lin often comes over and plays with us.
	Example(22)	快回去,她跟我们不 一样	Go back inside. She is not same with us.	Go back inside. She is not the same with us.
		所以唐僧真是慈悲为 怀 普度众生啊	Tang Monk helps countless beings, and he is very mercy.	Tang Monk helps countless beings, and he is very merciful.
	Example(24)	这个好像有点尖尖的	This one looks sharpen.	This one looks a little bit sharp.
	Example(25)	从理论上讲,只要你 捧起大海里任何一捧 水,里面就有81199 个我的分子。		Theoretically, if you pick up a handful of water in the sea, there will be 81199 molecules of mine.

A quality subtitled translation of a film or television work not only helps the audience to understand the original work, but also promotes cultural exchange (Wang & Li, 2020). The subtitle translation of domestic animation is of great importance to Chinese culture going abroad, but there is still a long way to go to improve its quality. For one thing, the state needs to strengthen the training of senior translation talents; for another, translators need to constantly learn the latest translation techniques, constantly supplement their knowledge of politics, economics and culture, and master the international discourse system, in order to better inherit and promote Chinese excellent traditional culture.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Guided by Eco-translatology, this study analyzes the Chinese-English subtitle translation of Yao-Chinese Folktales with the principle of three-dimensional transformation, and finds that the translator often chooses liberal translation, literal

translation, omission and amplification to realize the adaptive selection transformation of linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions, which basically adapts to the needs of the target audience and achieves the communication purpose. However, some of the subtitle translation is flawed and needs further improvement. High-quality subtitle translation can reflect and restore the connotation of the work to the greatest extent, but due to the uniqueness of subtitle translation, there may be many difficulties in the translation process. Eco-translatology provides a new perspective for the study of subtitle translation. Translators should pay more attention to the translational eco-environment and make adaptive selection and transformation from different dimensions, so as to make subtitle translation closer to the target language and resonate with the audience. Future research can focus on Eco-translatology from more angles and apply it to the subtitle translation practice of domestic animation, for example, a comparative analysis can be made in multilingual subtitle translation, so as to let more people in the world know about Chinese culture and help "Culture Exporting".

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