

## On Translation Strategy of Culture-Loaded Words from the Perspective of the Eco-Translatology

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**Abstract:** The Culture-loaded words demonstrate distinctive characteristics of Chinese culture and play a crucial role in the exchange and dissemination of Chinese culture. Due to the differences between Chinese and English and their culture, the translation of culture-loaded words remains a significant challenge in English translation. Therefore, the study of the English translation of culture-loaded words has both theoretical and practical significance. The emergence and development of the Eco-translatology provide new ideas for the research on the English translation of culture-loaded words. From the perspective of the Eco-translatology, this paper takes the English translation of *Insights into Chinese Culture* as the research object, and analyzes the English translation of culture-loaded words in the book from three dimensions: language, culture, and communication, in order to provide theoretical insights for the translation of culture-loaded words in the present and future, and to better promote cultural dissemination.

**Keywords:** The Eco-translatology; Culture-Loaded Words; *Insights into Chinese Culture*; Translation Strategy

### 1. Introduction

*Insights into Chinese Culture* [1] is authored by Ye Lang and Zhu Liangzhi. This book introduces Chinese culture from a fresh perspective, using some typical in-depth examples to present Chinese culture and philosophical thought, showcasing the spirit and intrinsic meaning of Chinese culture. The book contains many culture-loaded words that help readers deeply understand the core values and spirit of Chinese culture, as well as the spiritual world, cultural traits, and life attitudes of the Chinese people. Due to the differences

in language expression and historical culture between Chinese and English, it is challenging to accurately convey the culturally loaded words in the book to readers during the process of external dissemination. Therefore, researching and handling the culturally loaded words in *Insights into Chinese Culture* is the core task of the translator.

The book *Insights into Chinese Culture* has multiple translations and is widely read by international readers. Among them, the English translation by Zhang Siying and Zhang Haiyan is quite representative. This book retains the illustrations from the Chinese edition and translates its distinctly characteristic content into English, interpreting the profound cultural connotations through the translation. In particular, the translation of culture-loaded words is done exceptionally well, helping readers gain a deep understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture, as well as insight into the spirit and cultural values of the Chinese people. Currently, the Eco-translatology is an emerging translation theory in China, which emphasizes the balance between the language ecology of the source language and the target language. It advocates that translators make adaptive choices and transformations from three dimensions: language, culture, and communication. Therefore, translating culturally loaded words is a practical implementation of the Eco-translatology [2].

Through literature review, the author found that some scholars have studied the translation of culture-loaded words from the perspective of the Eco-translatology, involving fields such as movie subtitles, drug names, and advertising news. However, there is currently no research on the translation of culture-loaded words in Chinese cultural readings from this perspective. Therefore, this paper will conduct a study on the English translation of culture-loaded words in the English version of *Insights into Chinese*

*Culture* under the perspectives of the Eco-translatology, summarizing commonly used translation strategies and methods for the external dissemination of Chinese culture-loaded words, and promoting the spread of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

## **2. The Eco-Translatology**

All The Eco-translatology is a cross-disciplinary field proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen from Tsinghua University, which integrates ecology and translation studies [3]. This theory is the first to transplant and apply the ideas of “adaptation” and “selection” from Darwin’s theory of evolution into translation research, asserting that translation is an activity of choosing to transplant a text based on the translator’s adaptation to the translation ecological environment [4]. The Eco-translatology also advocates a “translator-centered” view of translation [5], arguing that the translator is the center of the entire translation activity and process, playing a leading role. The translator’s role is not to act arbitrarily but to be an effective coordinator [6], seeking balance between the original text and the translated text, creating a harmonious translation ecological environment.

The Eco-translatology advocates the translation principle of multidimensional adaptation and adaptive choice. Ecological translation is a complex adaptive system characterized by continuous adaptive choices and selective adaptations, leading to the comprehensive interaction of the translation ecology. It primarily aims to explain translation phenomena, especially the translation behavior process of translators.[7]

Therefore, the translation method of the Eco-translatology can be summarized as a “three-dimensional conversion” [8], which refers to the adaptive and selective conversion in the linguistic dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension. Overall, in the linguistic dimension, adaptive conversion focuses on making adaptive choices in the aspects of vocabulary, syntax, and discourse during the translation process. In the cultural dimension, adaptive conversion requires the translator to pay attention to the differences between the two cultures and their content.

Translators should strive to avoid misunderstandings of the source language culture during translation. In the communicative dimension, adaptive conversion necessitates that translators focus on achieving the bilingual communicative intent. Translators should ensure that the communicative intent of the source text is reflected in the translation.

## **3. Culture-Loaded Words**

### **3.1 Definition of Culture-Loaded Words**

Culture-loaded words, also known as cultural vocabulary, words with cultural connotations, or words with cultural gaps in meaning, were introduced by Professor Xu Guozhang in 1980 in his article *Culturally Loaded Words and English Language Teaching* published in *Modern Chinese*. He believes that culturally loaded words refer to words, phrases, and idioms used to express unique elements of a certain culture, reflecting a nation’s distinct way of life that has gradually accumulated over a long historical process, setting it apart from other nations [9]. Hu [10] points out that culturally loaded words differ from non-culturally loaded words in that they carry cultural information of a nation and reflect profound national cultural connotations.

Culture-loaded words have a significant impact on foreign readers’ continuous understanding of Chinese culture and the realization of cross-cultural communication. Their accurate and uniform translation is beneficial for promoting Chinese culture. However, due to the differences in the ecological environments of the Chinese and English languages as well as cultural differences, it is difficult to find expressions in English that are completely consistent in both form and content with these culture-loaded words. Therefore, researching the English translation of culture-loaded words is of great significance.

### **3.2 Classification of Culture-Loaded Words**

American translator Eugene Nida divides culture into five major aspects: ecological culture, material culture, social culture, religious culture, and linguistic culture [11]. Corresponding culturally loaded words can be classified into ecological culture words, material culture words, social culture words, religious culture words, and linguistic culture

words.

Ecological culture words reflect geographical environment, weather and climate, plants and animals, etc. For example, the book contains words representing solar terms like “Shuang Jiang” and “Xia Shu”. Material culture words are closely related to people’s daily lives, encompassing social material production activities and their specific products, mainly referring to vocabulary related to tangible cultural inheritance such as musical instruments, clothing, food, housing, and transportation. For instance, in the book, there are words like “Pipa” and “Sha Mao”. Social culture words refer to various customs, etiquette systems, and living norms formed by humans in long-term social life. Examples include “Cheng Zhong Cun” and “liu Yi”. Religious culture words represent the spiritual and cultural accumulation of a nation, referring to the cultural beliefs formed by people during the long process of human social development, including various rituals, concepts, and material vocabulary related to religion. Such words include “Pu Sa” and “Fo Zu”. Linguistic culture words include some slang, idioms, proverbs, and regional dialects. For example, “Dou Quan Zi”.

#### **4. On Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in Insights into Chinese Culture from the Perspective of the Eco-translatology**

##### **4.1 Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in the Linguistic Dimension**

Language conversion translation is the adaptive choice and transformation of language forms by the translator. When translating culturally loaded words, the translator needs to consider the language form of these words and transform them, using the target language to reproduce the connotation of the original text, helping the target language readers understand the language form and connotation of the culturally loaded words.

###### **4.1.1 Transliteration**

Transliteration refers to “a translation strategy that seeks similar-sounding English words based on the pronunciation of Chinese when translating Chinese” [12], that is, using Pinyin to translate. Some language cultural loaded words and material cultural loaded words in the book that represent Confucian thought, porcelain architecture, and other aspects have

profound spiritual and cultural connotations, making it difficult to find corresponding equivalents in English. Using transliteration for these words can better retain the characteristics of the source language and aid in cultural transmission and development.

Example 1: Song ci dai biao zhong guo ci qi de zui gao shui ping, dang shi you jun, ding, guan, ge, ru wu da ming yao, ge yao de ci qi jun ju chuang zao xing, yi zhi shi hou dai mo fang de dui xiang.

Translation: Song dynasty porcelain represented the acme of Chinese porcelain technique. Five famous kilns, the Jun, Ding, Guan, Ge, and Ru, were all creative and original in their respective products, and their porcelain ware has been imitated by later generations throughout the ages.

The Song Dynasty was an era of great prosperity in the history of traditional Chinese ceramics manufacturing. The Song Dynasty ceramics are renowned for their quaintness, simplicity, and versatility in form. Porcelain is an extensive category, generally classified into blue-and-white porcelain and white porcelain based on their systems. Among these, the achievements of the five famous kilns - Jun, Ding, Guan, Gao, and Ru - stand out in particular. Jun, gong, and Ge ware were all celadon; Ding kiln was white porcelain. They are largely named after their kilns. For instance, Ru Porcelain is located in Ruzhou City, Henan Province, while Ding Porcelain can be found in Dingzhou, Hebei Province. And Guan was applied to these vessels not only due to their royal origins but also because they were directly constructed by the state. Each of these renowned kilns bears an inimitable cultural connotation. So the translators employed transliteration to render their names, which preserves the distinct features of the source language while conveying the cultural significance, thus achieving adaptability across linguistic dimensions, conducive to readers’ understanding of ceramic culture.

Example 2: Song dai zhou dun yi shuo: “tian yi yang sheng wan wu, yi yin cheng wan wu. Sheng, ren ye; cheng, yi ye”.

Translation: Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073) said, “Heaven creates life through yang and nurtures life through yin”.

Zhou Dunyi elucidated in this phrase the relationship between the generation of all things and the interplay of yin and yang. Yin

and Yang belong to the realm of ancient Chinese philosophy, serving as the fundamental causes driving the transformation and development of natural laws. They are both one and the same yet in conflict. They abound with profound cultural significance that cannot be adequately conveyed in a few words, let alone a translation that would be lengthy and obscure. “Yin” and “Yang”, two terms unique to Chinese language and culture, are difficult to find equivalent expressions in English. Adaptable translation in Eco-translatology emphasizes the preservation of source-language linguistic forms as much as possible in the target text. When translating these two characters, the translator resorted directly to the phonetic translation method, preserving both the “yin” and “yang” linguistic characteristics while remaining faithful to the original, making it easier for foreign readers to grasp the ancient Chinese philosophical concept.

#### 4.1.2 Literal translation

The translator employs literal translation in the process of translating, converting the source language into the target language word by word, thus maintaining both the content and style of the original text. The translator uses literal translations for some culture-loaded terms in the book, remaining faithful to the original content and form, while also paying attention to the fluency of the target language, effectively preserving the linguistic characteristics and cultural style of the culturally-loaded terms, achieving effective dissemination of Chinese culture.

Example 1: Lian he fang hu bei shi wei chun qiu zhong hou qi zhong guo qing tong yi shu de dai biao.

Translation: Lotus and crane kettles from the late Spring and Autumn Period are outstanding artifacts from China’s Bronze Age.

The lid of the lotus crane kettle is composed of lotus petals, with a white crane standing among the petals, poised to fly, vividly alive. In this sentence, the translator directly translated the term as “lotus and crane kettles” based on the form of the source language, and these simple words convey its form and shape. The lotus crane kettle has a unique design and exquisite craftsmanship, showcasing the wisdom and aesthetic concepts of the Chinese people in the production of bronze ware. The translator directly translated “lotus and crane

kettles”, which not only retains the form of the source language but also clearly introduces the unique shape of the bronze ware to foreign readers, allowing them to deeply appreciate the aesthetic concepts of ancient people in the making of bronze ware. From the perspective of the Eco-translatology, this approach achieves adaptive conversion in the linguistic dimension and plays a role in promoting Chinese bronze culture.

#### 4.2 Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in the Cultural Dimension

The adaptive transformation of cultural dimensions emphasizes that translation is not just a simple language conversion, but should pay more attention to the differences between Chinese and English cultures. In the process of translating culturally loaded words, the translator must first deeply grasp and understand the cultural connotations behind these words, and then accurately convey the cultural elements and values contained within them into the translation, so that the translated text can be effectively spread and expressed in another language and cultural context.

##### 4.2.1 Free translation

Free translation does not follow the structural form of the original text, but instead adopts appropriate sentence structures and expressions to convey the original meaning. When translating many culturally loaded terms in *Insights into Chinese Culture*, the translator employed the method of free translation, which means that on the basis of fully understanding the cultural connotations of these terms, the content of the original text is effectively communicated in a manner that the target audience can understand, thereby eliminating communication barriers caused by cultural differences and promoting cultural transmission.

Example 1: Jie shang che shui ma long, ren men san san liang liang, huo xing huo li, huo cheng qun di ju ji, shen cai fei yang di jiao tan, guo lu ren liang bian guan kan, xin shang zhe jie jing.

Translation: There is heavy traffic on the streets: carts coming and going; some people in twos or threes, either walking in a hurry or stopping for a look of what ever interests them; others in groups talking in high spirits, or looking around enjoying the street scene.

This sentence describes the bustling scene of

people coming and going on the streets in the A Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival. The idiom “Che Shui Ma Long” from the original text is a culturally loaded term that metaphorically depicts the lively scenario of vehicles and horses coming and going on the road. The translator did not translate this idiom literally as “running water and moving dragons”, but instead employed a flexible translation method, using “heavy traffic” and “carts coming and going” to convey its cultural connotation. In the West, dragons are symbols of evil and violence. From the perspective of the Eco-translatology, the translator focuses not only on the cultural differences between the source and target languages but also on a deep understanding of the cultural significance of “Che Shui Ma Long”, and then uses idiomatic translation to better convey its meaning, effectively promoting Chinese culture and achieving an effective transformation of cultural dimensions.

#### 4.2.2 Annotation

The annotation is a translation approach used to convey the original text’s meaning and style completely. It serves to explain and supplement during the translation process, ensuring accuracy and completeness. When translating culturally loaded words in a book, the translator appropriately employed the annotation method to supplement the cultural connotations of these words, which is beneficial for disseminating Chinese culture.

Example 1: Ta chang qi cong shi jiao yu gong zuo, ju shi shu ji zai, ta you di zi san qian, qi zhong tong liu yi de you qi shi er ren.

Translation: According to historical records, Confucius taught for many years and trained 3,000 disciples. A total of 72 of them excelled in the “six arts” (It refers to ritual, music, archery, driving, calligraphy, and mathematics). The “Six Arts” is an important element in Confucius’ educational thought and belongs to socially culture loaded terms. They refer to the six skills of the noble education system of the Zhou Dynasty in China. “Li” refers to the daily behavioral norms of ancient people; “Le” means music; “She” refers to the skill of archery; “Yu” denotes the art of driving vehicles; “Shu” encompasses writing, calligraphy, and painting; while “Shu” represents the skills of mathematical calculation. The ancient emphasis on the Six Arts demonstrates their high regard for holistic

development. In this sentence, the translator directly translated “Liu Yi” as “Six Arts”, and then provided a detailed explanation of these six skills so that readers can deeply understand what these six arts are and appreciate the charm of Chinese educational culture. From the cultural dimension of the Eco-translatology, the use of annotation not only stays true to the original cultural information but also facilitates readers’ understanding of Chinese culture.

#### 4.3 Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in the Communicative Dimension

The adaptive choice transformation of the communicative dimension emphasizes that translators should focus not only on the conversion of linguistic information and the transmission of cultural connotations, but also on the communicative level of choice transformation. Cultural-loaded words often carry rich cultural connotations and specific historical backgrounds; therefore, translators should flexibly adopt various translation strategies and methods during translation to accurately and effectively convey the information that the original text wants to communicate to the target audience, while also ensuring that the translated text can be accurately understood and accepted within the target language and cultural environment, thus achieving the communicative intention.

Example 1: Zhe zuo ji tan zi jian zao zhi jin, jing li le jin liu bai nian de feng yu, ru jin ta hai jing wo zai bei jing de nan cheng.

Translation: Nearly 600 years later, the Temple of Heaven still stands intact in the south of Beijing.

Example 2: Qu jing tong you

Translation: A Winding Path to Places of Interest

The translator adopted a creative translation approach when translating some culturally loaded words in the book. Creative translation combines translation with content creation, meaning the translator is not bound by the semantics and expressions of the source language, but instead adapts and creates based on the source text, making the translation understandable for the target audience to achieve the purpose of communication.

In Example 1, the phrases “Jin Li Feng Yu” and “Jing Wo” are commonly used terms in Chinese, rich in cultural connotations. The translator, while translating, discarded the



rhetorical devices of the original text and used the more familiar words “stand” and “intact” to convey the meaning that the altar remains lying quietly in Beijing after enduring defensive purification, making the translation more suitable for the English context and understandable for foreign readers.

In Example 2, the author uses “Qu Jin Tong You” to introduce the gardens of Jiangnan. The translator did not translate it literally as “a winding path leading to a secluded spot”, but creatively translated it as “A Winding Path to Places of Interest”, which conveys the idea that the scenery deep within the garden is more attractive. This approach reflects the translator’s strong audience awareness and communicative intent, aligning with the adaptive transformation of ecological translation studies in the communicative dimension. It also demonstrates the translator’s proactive attitude and meticulous effort in effectively promoting Chinese garden culture to the target readers.

### 5. Conclusion

Culture-loaded words are cultural products that have been developed and accumulated by a country or ethnic group. Due to the lack of equivalent meanings, it is difficult to achieve equivalence in English translation. Guided by the Eco-translatology, this paper analyzed the translation strategies for various culturally loaded words in the English version of *Insights into Chinese Culture* from the dimensions of language, culture, and communication. It found that the English version of *Insights into Chinese Culture* made appropriate adaptive choices across multidimensional levels of language, culture, and communication, based on a thorough understanding of the source language and a proficient mastery of the target language. It flexibly employed various translation strategies such as transliteration, literal translation, free translation, creative translation, and annotation to accurately convey the cultural connotations of various culturally loaded words, which is beneficial for transmitting Chinese national culture to the world and expanding the international influence of Chinese culture.

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