Subtitle Translation From the Perspective of Eco-Translatology: A Case Study of *China Bouquet*

ZHOU You

East China Jiaotong University, Nanchang, China

China Bouquet shows the uniqueness of Chinese culture from 20 perspectives, serving as an excellent work for disseminating Chinese culture to the world. This paper studies the documentary subtitle translation of *China Bouquet* from the perspective of eco-translatology. Through analyzing subtitle translation of *China Bouquet* from linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions, the paper aims to propose an effective way to translate and transform subtitles with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords: eco-translatology, subtitle translation, *China Bouquet*

Introduction

New media rooted in digitalization and internet dissemination has transformed the one-way communication paradigm of traditional media, fostering a vibrant landscape for two-way interactions between expressing and receiving audiences in recent years. Documentaries have emerged as a vital new medium for cultural transmission. With rich cultural heritage, China combines a long history with diverse cultural traditions, resulting in a unique and enchanting culture. *China Bouquet* aims to excavate and present the essence of traditional Chinese culture bridging the ancient and the modern China and helping Chinese culture go global. In the process of cross-cultural communication, subtitle translation plays a pivotal role, facilitating foreign audiences' understanding of the documentary's content and enhancing their appreciation of Chinese culture.

Using eco-translatology as its theoretical framework and taking the subtitle translation of *China Bouquet* as an example, the specific research questions of the paper are as follows: (1) How are subtitles of *China Bouquet* translated from Chinese to English from the perspective of eco-translatology? (2) What translation techniques had the translator used in the process of translation?

Theoretical Framework and Related Studies

A Brief Introduction to Eco-Translatology

The concept of eco-translatology was first put forward by Professor Hu Gengshen in 2001. It combines "ecology" and "translatology" that studies translation from the ecological perspective. In *A Preliminary Study of Translation Adaptation and Selection*, Professor Hu thought translation discusses the relationship between adaptation and selection, and described the process, principles, and methods of translation from the perspective of adaptation and choice. In the year of 2004, the theory of "translation's adaptation and selection theory" was gradually mature with the publishment of Professor Hu's book *Adaptation and Selection of Translation*. Then as

ZHOU You, School of Foreign Languages, East China Jiaotong University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China.

summarizing the development of the theoretical application and research of eco-translatology, Hu published the book *Eco-Translatilogy—Construction and Interpretation*, which proposed the future development and enlightenment of eco-translatology.

Also, the theory of eco-translatology has attracted the attention of foreign scholars. Valdeon (2004) believed that eco-translatology acts as the representative of an emerging paradigm with enormous potential for further studies and research. Dollerup (2011) held that eco-translatology is in connection with three predominant Western schools namely the Skopos theory, the principle of dynamic equivalence and descriptive translation studies and the theory is superior for explaining actual translation practices even in the West. In the year of 2017, Cronin (2017) elaborated the relationship between the translation and the eco-environment after entering the Age of Anthropology. Therefore, it can be said that the theory of eco-translatology has been internationalized and is a typical example of the construction of China's academic discourse system.

Eco-translatology regards translation as the multi-dimensional transformation in which the three factors are intertwined and indispensable. The three-dimensional transformation refers to the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions (Hu, 2013). The linguistic dimension refers to the translator's adaptive selection and transformation of language form in the process of translation. It requires the translator to pay attention to the linguistic transformation of the source text and the target text. In the context, translator should use various translation techniques according to the different characteristics of the language. When it comes to the cultural dimension, Hu (2013) thought that due to the difference in the cultural background between the original language and the target language, the translator should choose different language and cultural systems to avoid the misunderstanding of the target language users. Therefore, the translator is required to have a corresponding sense of language and culture, so as to overcome the difference caused by different language and culture and to balance the cultural ecology of the two languages. The communicative dimension required the translator to focus on the purpose of communication of the texts. To be specific, the translator pays attention to the bilingual communication intention in the process of translation.

A Brief Introduction to Subtitle Translation

Subtitle translation, as one of multi-media translation, is a subdivision of audiovisual translation. In subtitle translation, the study abroad started earlier and went deeper. Franco (2001) explored documentary subtitle translation from cultural and ideological aspect in *The Translation of Culture-Specific Items in Documentaries*. In *Main Challenges in the Translation of Documentaries*, Matamala (2009) believed that specific working conditions and specific types of difficulties are the main challenges in documentary translation. Also, scholars like Espasa (2004), and Gottlied and Gambier (2001) also made contributions in subtitle translation.

Though starting later, Chinese scholars have also gained some accomplishments in this field. In 1997, Ma Zhengqi summarized five principles for subtitle translation, namely colloquial expression, emotionalization, popularization, personalization, and lip-sync. Qian Shaochang (2001) summarized five features of AVT including audibility, comprehensiveness, instantaneity, popularity, and non-annotation. Li Yunxing (2001) summarized the temporal and spatial characteristics of subtitle translation and proposed corresponding translation strategies. In addition, some scholars also published relevant papers in subtitle translation such as Li Yan (2005), Liang Jing (2011), and Fu Jingmin and Zhang Kaizhi (2021).

The Applicability of Eco-Translatology in Subtitle Translation

Eco-translatology, a new concept in the field of translation, belongs to Chinese native theory. When searching for papers about subtitle translation from the perspective of eco-translatology in CNKI, it can be found that subtitle translation of films and television shows receives the most attention, while there are fewer papers about documentary subtitle translation. One of the reasons is that there are a larger number of audiences and higher financial values in films or television shows, compared with documentaries. In the background of cross-cultural communication and "go global" of Chinese culture, documentary plays a vital role in disseminating Chinese culture to the world. Documentary aims to inform, educate, and provide insights into real-life subjects. Their focus is often on factual representation, making them effective tools for cultural dissemination, which allows audiences to absorb and appreciate the cultural context more deeply.

The core of eco-translatology embodies China's traditional wisdom of harmony between human and nature, providing a new perspective for documentary subtitle translation. "The understanding of life can be regarded as a mainstream of Chinese cultural thought, which contains understanding of ecology and reflects the wisdom in Chinese traditional culture" (Hu, 2010, p.62). *China Bouquet* presents the unique charm and profound cultural connotation of Chinese culture from 20 perspectives. The three dimensions of language, culture, and communication are intertwined in its subtitle. Therefore, this paper focuses on its subtitle translation from the three dimensions, so as to provide effective methods in subtitle translation and better present subtitles containing Chinese culture to the audiences from various cultural background.

Case Study

China Bouquet is a short video documentary that was created by China Internet News Center, aiming to disseminate Chinese culture to the world. In 2019, it was included in film and television promotion project of Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China. There are 20 episodes of the first season of *China Bouquet*. The paper attempted to analyze the challenges in subtitle translation in the documentary and how to overcome those difficulties under the perspective of the three dimensions of eco-translatology. After the analysis, the paper tries to summarize the translation techniques in the subtitle translation of *China Bouquet*, so as to provide suggestions and references for future studies and practice of subtitle translation of future documentary aimed at culture promotion.

Transformation From Linguistic Dimension

The adaptive selection and transformation of language dimension is obviously the adaptive selection and transformation of language form by the translator in the process of translation (Hu, 2008). It is well known that English and Chinese are two languages with obvious differences in language expression and syntactic form. Chinese focuses on parataxis, while English focuses on hypotaxis. English, a low-content language, emphasizes structure with explicit grammar using logic-grammatical connector to express the information. At the same time, Chinese uses implicit coherence, content, and order of time and reason to express meaning. When it comes to language expression, Chinese sentences are short and well structured, interwoven with parallel words and four-character phrases, while English sentences tend to be concise, with clear and rigorous logic. Therefore, in the specific translation ecological environment, the translator should pay special attention to the adaptive transformation of language dimension.

In *China Bouquet*, there is a lot of information with Chinese characteristics and its subtitle plays a crucial role. Therefore, translator needs to be proficient in the two languages and makes adaptive choices in translation to conform to the language habit and norms of the target language so as to convey the information of *China Bouquet* to the target audience.

Example 1：

Source Text: 佛教由印度经丝绸之路传入中国，麦积山石窟是中国的四大佛教石窟。

Target Text: Maijishan is one of the four major Buddhist cave complexes of China that were created when Buddhism came from India along the Silk Road.

"麦积山石窟", the theme of the first episode and the vital information of the sentence was placed in the end of the sentence in source text. If the sentence was translated in the same order as the original text, the target audience may take the origin and path of Buddhism as its core. The target readers prefer to start with the subject of a sentence and then receive contextual information, as English is a hypotactic language. The translator is proficient in the two languages, know their differences, and adjust the order that aligns with English syntactic norms.

The source text presents two independent clauses, using a comma to connect them, conveying both the history of Buddhism and the significance of the Maijishan grottoes. It indicates that Chinese is a paratactic language without using connectives to show relations of clauses. However, English, a hypotactic language, tends to use connectives to show the relationship (Lian, 2010). Therefore, the translator added "that were created" and "when" in the target text. It accurately conveys the original meaning to the audience and effectively highlights Maijishan and its attributes in a way that resonates with the target audience. Through the adjustment of order and addition, the translator achieves a balance in linguistic dimension.

Example 2：

Source text: 考古人员发现，在石窟兴建之时，凿山为窟，劈山为像，这些被砍下来的废石料被用于河坝、山顶寺院和都城的建筑营造，完全没被浪费。

Target text: Archeologists found that when the Yungang grottoes were built, the mountains were sculpted to form the caves and statues and all the excess stones and gravel were transported and used for the construction of the river dam, the mountaintop temple, and structures in the city. Nothing is wasted.

The source text describes the building process of Yungang grottoes, emphasizing the reasonable utilization of resources. In any documentary subtitle translation, the translator must keep in mind the principle of narration and do not translate word by word (Cheng, 2014). The source text employs a more compact structure, with phrases that carry multiple meanings. "凿山为窟，劈山为像" conveys the actions of sculpting the mountains succinctly. Considering the English syntax that clarity and explicitness are preferred, the translator breaks down these actions into clearer segments. The terms of "废石料" is not "waste stone". In the documentary, steels and cements in Datong that had been obsoleted turned into new look of the city like the giant flower pots made from coal carriages and cabins made from drainage pine. All of them are in harmony with visitors and provide convenience for them. To accurately convey the meaning of the source text, the translator applies free translation adding some details to emphasize the utility of the materials and ensure the target audience understands the full context. In addition, through adding "that" and "and", the target text is compact and coherent. At the same time, the translator added the subject "nothing" and made it into an independent sentence, which not only matches with the subtitle but also summarizes the whole information in a clear and direct way. The adaptive transformation of language dimensions improved the fluency and readability of the target text.

Active voice is always used to express ideas in Chinese, while it is more common to use passive voice in English, especially when the agent of the sentence is not important (Lian, 2010). When translating "在云冈石窟兴建之时，凿山为窟，劈山为像", the translator takes "Yungang grottoes" as subject and applies passive voice to translate it as "the Yungang grottoes were built, the mountains were sculpted to…", which accurately conveys the original meaning of the sentence. This is a careful choice and adjustment made by the translator in the linguistic dimension of the translation.

Transformation From Cultural Dimension

Translation does not only mean one language simply transformed into another language, but also acts as an embodiment of the cultural connotation behind languages. The cultural dimensional transformation refers to a fact that the translator needs to pay attention to the cultural connotations of the original and translated texts. Translators need to stress the cultural differences of the two languages avoiding the misinterpretation of the original text. In addition, translators focus on the cultural connotation carried by the two languages in the process of translation (Hu, 2008). Culture has been accumulated for a long time in history. As one of the subjects of translation, the translator needs to fully interpret and convey the cultural connotation of the original text, so as to satisfy the target audience and produce a truly excellent version.

China Bouquet shows the charm of Chinese culture in various aspects and present its unique value system, cultural connotation, and spiritual quality. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator needs to take Chinese culture behind language into consideration so as to maintain balance between the target text and the original text in cultural dimension and help Chinese culture go global.

Example 3：
Source text: 钺
Target text: "Yue" (axe).
Example 4：
Source text: 宣纸
Target text: "Xuan Paper", a kind of rice paper
Example 5：
Source text: 黄酒
Target text: Huangjiu (yellow rice wine)

"钺", "宣纸", and "黄酒" are themes in the second, seventh, and eleventh episode in *China Bouquet*. As the essence of China's traditional craft, art, and diet, they are representatives of long history and profound culture of China. "钺", an ancient bronze ware, appeared in the pre-Qin period (before 221BC) of ancient China. It is not only a tool, but also used as a ritual vessel and weapon, symbolizing power and status in ancient China. "宣纸", originated in Xuancheng, Anhui province, is a witness to millennia of Chinese history. The traditional craft of making Xuan paper was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009. "黄酒", a type of Chinese liquor made from cereal grains, is one of the oldest wines in the world with over 2,500 years history. Together with beer and wine, Huangjiu is considered as the world's three major ancient alcoholic drinks.

According to the characteristic of documentary and its genre in culture, Franco (2001) pointed out that the use of "foreign words" in subtitle translation to a certain extent can be welcomed by audiences as the translation of documentary is a specific practice. In the condition of conveying information of the original text, translators

make choices and apply translation strategies to overcome cultural differences (Liu, 2001). In subtitle translation, the translator adopts transliteration and annotation preserving the pronunciation of the source language that helps audiences understand the meaning of those words and the Chinese culture behind them. In conclusion, it helps to maintain the balance in cultural dimension, spread Chinese culture to the world, and promote cross-cultural communication.

Example 6:

Source text: 上圆下方，象征天圆地方。

Target text: One end being square and the other round symbolized the old idea that the earth was square and Heaven was round.

Example 6 describes the shape of chopsticks and the Chinese culture behind it. "天圆地方" is a significant philosophical concept in Chinese culture that represents the worldview of ancient China. The translator adds context "the old idea that" to clarity the meaning, ensuring that the cultural reference is understood, and help the target audience grasp the importance of Chinese cultural phenomenon. Through interpretation, the translator indicates that this belief is rooted in historical context, attracting the target audience to appreciate its cultural significance.

Transformation From Communicative Dimension

Based on the viewpoint "translation as adaption and selection", Hu (2004) proposed that the translator should take the communicative intention of the source text into consideration. In addition to the transmission of linguistic information and cultural implications, the translator should focus on whether the communicative aim of the original text is uncovered in the translated one or not (Hu, 2013).

In recent years, with China moving closer to the world's center stage, more and more overseas people are eager to understand China and Chinese culture. *China Bouquet* aims to promote Chinese culture to the world. When translating the documentary subtitles, the translator should accurately convey the content of the documentary to the target language audience and ensure that the translation has the same transmission effect and purpose in the target language audience during the transformation of the communication dimension.

Example 7:

Source text: 《万象中国》

Target text: *China Bouquet*

"万象中国" as the name of the documentary determines the first expression of the target audiences. "万象" comes from a Chinese four-character word "包罗万象" that means "to be all inclusive". In the documentary, the word indicates that China is rich in culture with diverse natural landscapes. If translated as "Myriad Aspects of China", it will be less attractive for the target audience and its communicative function as the title will fail. Therefore, the translator uses free translation to translate it as "China Bouquet" that greatly increases the target audience's interests and expectations. "Bouquet" is more familiar for the target audience with positive meaning. Also, the word symbolizes beauty, exquisiteness, and diversity that conveys the same meaning as the Chinese title. The translation helps the target audience gain the same information as audiences in China, thus achieving the communication transformation.

Example 8：

Source text: 经过几轮四季，这坛酒已经脱去稚气。

Target text: With the passing of the seasons, the wine has lost its sharpness and has become smooth and mellow.

The taste of Huangjiu has turned into rich and mellow through more than 20 years of brewing. "稚气", which means "childishness", adopts personification rhetoric in the original text that makes the image of Huangjiu vivid. It is common in Chinese. However, the foreign audiences will feel confused and fail to achieve its communicative purpose, if it's translated as "get rid of childishness" directly. To achieve the purpose of communication, the translator adapts the interpretative translation, or interpretation, to translate it as "lost its sharpness and has become smooth and mellow". It strongly resonates with western culture as those descriptions of wine are frequent in English, such as sharpness, smooth, and mellow. The translator points out the implied connotations in the source text and interpret them explicitly enhancing the target text's expressiveness and readability.

Example 9：

Source text: 女为悦己者容。

Target text: A girl will doll herself up for he who appreciates her.

Target text: Girls wore makeup to please men.

"女为悦己者容" comes from *Stratagems of the Warring States*, a collection of stories, speeches, and historical records from the Warring State Period (490-221 BC), which appeared twice in the 15th episode. In the first time, the sentence was cited to introduce the makeup artist's own concept of makeup that makeup is the individual choice of the girl, which indicates the positive role of makeup. When in the second time, it has become one of the manifestations of the rise of women's status as women have changed pleasing men through makeup to pleasing themselves with the passage of time. The citation here is more critical. Translators should attach importance to the communication and interaction between the subtitles of the original texts and the target audience (Wang & Dai, 2023). Considering the different meaning and intention of the same expression, the translator adapts the free translation to convey the connotation of the original text to the target audience achieving the communicative purpose.

Conclusion

Based on the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimension from the perspective of eco-translatology, the paper studies the difficulties of subtitle translation of *China Bouquet* and summarizes the cultural strategy. In linguistic dimension, the translator mainly adopts addition, free translation, and adjustment of order. In cultural dimension, transliteration and annotation are used to convey the cultural connotation. When it comes to communicative dimension, the translator applies interpretation and free translation to achieve the communicative purpose. Foreign language learners should shoulder the historical mission of introducing China to the world through translation in the new era (Huang, 2022). This paper hopes that *China Bouquet* attracts more foreigners and increases their interests about China through high-quality subtitle translation, and helps Chinese culture "go global".

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