

# Study on Cross-Cultural Adaptation Strategies for the Foreign Translation of Chinese Culture-Loaded Words from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

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**Abstract:** Chinese culture-loaded words are core linguistic carriers that embody China's historical traditions, values, national sentiments and cultural connotations. Their translation for international communication is a key part of cross-cultural transmission, and also an important support for the "going global" of Chinese culture and the construction of China's discourse system. However, due to fundamental differences between Chinese and Western cultural contexts, modes of thinking and linguistic systems, the translation of Chinese culture-loaded words often encounters dilemmas such as cultural default, semantic misreading and ineffective communication, which urgently needs guidance from scientific translation theories and adaptive strategies. Taking Eco-Translatology established by Professor Hu Gengshen as the core theoretical framework and the "three-dimensional adaptive selection and transformation" theory as the analytical tool, this study focuses on the cross-cultural adaptation in the translation of Chinese culture-loaded words in the governance of China IV, and systematically discusses the adaptive selection strategies in the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions with specific corpus.

**Keywords:** Eco-translatology; Culture-loaded words; Cross-cultural adaptation; Three-dimensional transformation strategies.

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## 1. Introduction

As Nida defined in his book, cultural words are those lexical items that are uniquely embedded in a specific cultural context, directly or indirectly reflecting the collective historical memory, values, customs and national sentiments of a speech community, with no exact conceptual equivalents in another linguistic and cultural system [1]. He later classified culture-loaded words into the following five: ecological culture-loaded words, material culture-loaded words, social culture-loaded words, religious culture-loaded words and linguistic culture-loaded words. In China, the term "culture-loaded words" was firstly introduced by Xu Guozhang in his thesis *Culturally Loaded Words and English Language Teaching* in 1980. Language is the carrier of the culture. Culture-loaded words are embedded in the Chinese language system, which is a language sign of historical traditions, values, folk customs, national sentiments and mode of thinking. From the perspective of translatology, culture-loaded words reflect the collective cultural cognition of a speech community, and for which there are no exact conceptual equivalents in another linguistic and cultural system. In the academic circle in China, culture-loaded words are thought to carry deep-seated cultural connotation and sentimental values. They are the words distinguishing Chinese from other languages, manifesting unique Chinese culture.

Whether it is the translation work reflecting political discourses with Chinese characteristics like the governance of China, or external publicity of Chinese ancient books and records, the culture-loaded words and phrases are ubiquitous. The quality of translation of the words has a direct influence on the overseas readers' recognition and understanding of China, which determines the effect of cross-culture communication. However, due to the differences in cultural context, historical development, value system and modes of thinking in the east and west, the translation of culture-loaded

words encounters many difficulties in its way out. Mechanical literal translation is highly prone to causing cultural default, leaving readers from different cultural background unable to grasp the underlying connotations behind the words; excessive free translation and adaptation may erode the cultural uniqueness of the lexical items, resulting in the loss of the intrinsic core of Chinese culture; while translation strategies that fail to align with the receptive habits of target-language audiences can easily trigger semantic misinterpretation, cultural bias and even communication failure, thus falling short of the core goal of cross-cultural communication. This study takes Eco-Translatology founded by Professor Hu Gengshen as its core theoretical framework, focuses on the issue of cross-cultural adaptation in the foreign-oriented translation of Chinese culture-loaded words, and systematically explores the three-dimensional adaptive selection strategies adapted to the international communication of Chinese culture-loaded words, with a view to providing theoretical support and practical guidance for the translation practice of Chinese culture-loaded words.

## 2. Eco-Translatology

Founded by Chinese scholar Hu Gengshen, the theory of Eco-Translatology was regarded as an interdisciplinary research paradigm in translation studies with a complete and independent theoretical system. It is documented in the *Encyclopedia of China* as an original translation theory originated in China.

Based on the philosophy "adaptation, selection and survival of the fittest" from Darwin's *Evolution*, professor Hu introduces ecological holism and systematic theory into translation studies, which make great breakthrough from the traditional studies of binary system of "literal translation and free translation" and "formal equivalence and functional equivalence" to the framework of "adaptive selection" in translation. It is the first time that the essence of translation is defined as an adaptive and selective activity from the

perspective of translation ecology.

In 2001, professor Hu delivered a paper entitled “A Preliminary Study on the Translation Adaptation and Selection Theory” at the 3rd Asian Translators Forum of the International Federation of Translators. For the first time, he systematically elaborated the core viewpoints, basic hypotheses and research scope of the Translation Adaptation and Selection Theory, marking the official debut of the theory and serving as the theoretical starting point of Eco-Translatology. In 2004, Professor Hu Gengshen published his monograph Translation Adaptation and Selection Theory. In this work, he systematically defined the nature, process, principles, criteria and evaluation system of translation, fully constructed the theoretical closed loop of “translation is adaptation and selection”, and clarified the core proposition that “the optimal translation is the cumulative result of the translator’s multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection to the translational ecological environment[2]”, which laid a solid academic foundation for the subsequent official establishment of Eco-Translatology. In August 2006, Professor Hu Gengshen delivered the paper entitled “An Interpretation of Eco-Translatology” at the International Symposium on “Translating Global Cultures: Towards Interdisciplinary Theoretical Construction”. For the first time, he formally put forward and elaborated the core concept, philosophical foundation, research objects and development direction of Eco-Translatology, marking the official establishment of the discipline. In 2008, “An Interpretation of Eco-Translatology” was officially published in Chinese Translators Journal, the top domestic journal in translation studies. The paper systematically presented the core theoretical system of Eco-Translatology to the domestic academic circle, formally defined the academic connotations of core terms including “translational ecological environment”, “multi-dimensional holistic adaptation and selection” and “three-dimensional adaptive selection and transformation”, and aroused extensive attention and sustained follow-up research in the field of translation studies. Since 2015, core theoretical achievements of Eco-Translatology have been continuously published in top international translation studies journals including Meta and Target. The World Congress of the International Federation of Translators has set up special thematic forums on Eco-Translatology on multiple occasions, facilitating the global dissemination and recognition of the theory in the international translation studies community.

In 2020, Professor Hu Gengshen published his English monograph Eco-Translatology: Towards an Eco-paradigm of Translation Studies, in which he systematically elaborated the complete theoretical system of Eco-Translatology for the international academic circle. This publication marked the formal completion of the international dissemination of the theory, and its establishment as an original translation research paradigm founded by Chinese scholars and widely recognized by the international translation academia. In 2025, Professor Hu Gengshen published his new monograph Eco-Translatology: The Dao and Praxis of Translation, which further refined the philosophical system and practical methodology of the theory, put forward forward-looking insights into the reconstruction and adaptation of translational ecology in the era of artificial intelligence, and realized the continuous deepening and evolution of the theory.

### 3. English Translation of Culture-loaded Words from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

In the field of Eco-Translatology, the translational ecological environment refers to the sum of all external conditions that affect the survival and development of the translation subject, and further encompasses the natural economic, linguistic and cultural, social and political environments related to translation activities [3]. The emergence of culture-loaded words is rooted in the divergent cognitive environments, modes of production, folk customs, social mores and value systems among different ethnic groups. These disparities have gradually shaped the cultural differences between nations, which in turn have given rise to culture-loaded words[4]. In this chapter, several examples of culture-loaded words will be analyzed from the three-dimensional adaptive selection and transformation of Eco-Translatology. The culture-loaded words are from the Governance of China IV and the core expressions in the book are socio-cultural and linguo-cultural culture-loaded words that carry China’s revolutionary history, political concepts, cultural traditions and value connotations, and serve as the core carrier for the international communication of political discourse with Chinese characteristics. There are no exact conceptual equivalents for such words in Western linguistic and cultural systems, making them highly prone to dilemmas including cultural default, semantic misinterpretation, and communication failure. Translation must take into account four major levels—the textual level, referential level, cohesive level, and naturalness level—and holds that “these four levels are distinct from each other yet frequently interact with and may conflict with one another, forming the most core micro-ecological system of translation activities[5]”. The core goal of translating these words is to enable the target text to achieve adaptive survival in the translational ecological environment of the target language, including the cognitive level of target audiences, the communication rules of international political discourse, and the cross-cultural communication context.

#### 3.1. Adaptive Selection and Transformation in the Linguistic Dimension

The core of adaptive selection and transformation in the linguistic dimension in Eco-Translatology is that, in the translation process, translators proactively conduct adaptive selection and reconstruction of the linguistic form of the target text in response to the fundamental differences between the source and target languages in terms of linguistic system, syntactic structure, rhetorical habits, and the logic of parataxis and hypotaxis. This process ensures that the target text conforms to the linguistic norms and expression habits of the target language, laying a linguistic foundation for the transmission of cultural connotations and communicative intentions.

Example 1:

Source text:

我们经过北伐战争、土地革命战争、抗日战争、解放战争，以武装的革命反对武装的反革命，推翻帝国主义、封建主义、官僚资本主义三座大山，建立了人民当家作主的中华人民共和国，实现了民族独立、人民解放[6]。

Target text:

Through the Northern Expedition(1926-1928), the Agrarian Revolutionary War(1927-1937), the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression(1937-1945), and the War of Liberation(1946-1950), we fought armed counter-revolution with armed revolution toppling the three mountains of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism, and establishing the People's Republic of China (PRC), which made the people masters of the country. We thus secured our national independence and liberated our people.

Chinese emphasizes parataxis, and political texts frequently use subjectless sentences and run-on sentences with verbs, which realize textual cohesion through semantic logic. In contrast, English prioritizes hypotaxis, requiring complete syntactic structure and explicit logical cohesion, which constitutes the most core linguistic difference in the translation of Chinese-English political discourse. The example above is a run-on sentence containing 5 consecutive actions. Instead of mechanical literal translation, the target text realizes the cohesion of action logic through the participle structures toppling and establishing, uses the core attribute of "the People's Republic of China" with the attributive clause which made the people masters of the country, and finally concludes the sentence with the independent clause We thus secured.... It is reconstructed into a hypotactic sentence conforming to English syntactic norms. Meanwhile, the start and end years of each war are supplemented to fill the cognitive gap of target audiences, realizing the adaptive transformation of linguistic form.

Example 2:

Source text:

不掉队、不走偏，保证全党拧成一股绳，心往一处想、劲往一处使[6]。

Target text:

All Party members should stay on the right track, and join their forces to forge a strong synergy.

The original text of Sentence, “不掉队、不走偏，保证全党拧成一股绳，心往一处想、劲往一处使”，is a typical parallel run-on sentence unique to Chinese. Instead of translating each phrase word for word, the target text is adaptively reconstructed into stay on the right track, and join their forces to forge a strong synergy. It uses concise expressions commonly used in English political discourse to fully convey the core semantics of “the unity of the whole Party” in the original text, avoiding syntactic redundancy and logical confusion caused by literal translation.

### 3.2. Adaptive Selection and Transformation in the Cultural Dimension

The core of adaptive selection and transformation in the cultural dimension in Eco-Translatology is that translators should break through the limitations of superficial linguistic transformation in the translation process, prioritize the complete transmission of the deep cultural connotations of culture-loaded words. Through adaptive strategies such as cultural default compensation, connotation anchoring and cultural adaptation, translators can eliminate the cognitive barriers caused by Sino-Western cultural differences, avoid cultural default and misinterpretation, and enable audiences from heterogeneous cultures to accurately understand the

historical context, political connotations and values behind the words.

In the first example, the Northern Expedition, the Agrarian Revolutionary War, the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, and the War of Liberation are historical events unique to China's revolutionary history, which are typical socio-cultural culture-loaded words with no corresponding concepts in Western historical contexts. The target text not only adopts the official fixed translation of the Party history, but also supplements the start and end years of each war to fill the historical and cultural default of target audiences, enabling them to accurately understand the timeline and background of the historical events.

The three big mountains is a metaphorical culture-loaded word unique to China's revolutionary context, referring to the three major forces of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism that weighed on the Chinese people. The target text adopts the literal translation of the three mountains, supplemented by the connotation explanation of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism, which anchors the cultural core of the word and avoids the target audiences' misinterpretation of the literal meaning.

The people are masters of the country is the core culture-loaded word of socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics. The target text translates it as made the people masters of the country, which accurately conveys the core connotation of China's socialist democracy. It does not mechanically apply relevant expressions of Western-style democracy, while retaining cultural uniqueness and enabling target audiences to accurately understand its connotation.

Example 3:

Source text:

一百年前，中国共产党的先驱们创建了中国共产党，形成了坚持真理、坚守理想、践行初心、担当使命，不怕牺牲、英勇斗争，对党忠诚、不负人民的伟大建党精神[6]。

Target text:

A hundred years ago, the pioneers of communism in China established the Communist Party of China and developed the great founding spirit of the Party, which is comprised of the following principles: upholding truth and ideals, staying true to our original aspiration and founding mission, fighting bravely without fear of death and remaining loyal to the Party and faithful to the people.

The great founding spirit of the Party is the core culture-loaded word unique to the CPC's political discourse system, carrying the Party's founding aspiration and spiritual core. The target text adopts the official fixed translation the great founding spirit of the Party, and through the attributive clause which is comprised of the following principles, carries out a parallel interpretation of the 32-character connotation. It fully conveys the deep cultural connotation of the great founding spirit and avoids cultural default.

Example 4:

Source text:

强调必须铭记生于忧患、死于安乐，常怀远虑、居安思危，继续推进新时代党的建设新的伟大工程[6]。

Target text:

It reminds us that one may thrive in adversity and decline in times of ease. It requires us to see things from a long-term, strategic perspective, and always remain mindful

of potential dangers, and inspires us to continue the great new project of strengthening the Party in the new era.

The great new project of Party building in the new era in example 4 is a culture-loaded word unique to Chinese political discourse. The target text translates it as the great new project of strengthening the Party in the new era, which accurately anchors the political and cultural connotation of “Party building”, and supplements the explanation strengthening the Party to enable target audiences to accurately understand the core meaning of the expression and avoid semantic ambiguity caused by literal translation.

Example 5:

Source text:

领导干部想问题、做决策，一定要对国之大者心中有数，多大大算盘、算大账，少打小算盘、算小账[6]。

Target text:

Leading officials must have a clear understanding of matters of national significance in analyzing problems and making decisions. Build a strategic vision and think about the overall situation, rather than being short-sighted and focusing only on local interests.

The key national priorities (国之大者), derived from China’s traditional philosophy of governance, is a core culture-loaded word of Chinese political discourse, referring to overall major issues related to national development and national rejuvenation. The target text translates it as matters of national significance, which accurately expresses the cultural and political connotation of the word and avoids semantic emptiness caused by literal translation.

### 3.3. Adaptive Selection and Transformation in the Communicative Dimension

Adaptive selection and transformation in the communicative dimension is the ultimate goal of the three-dimensional transformation in Eco-Translatology. Its core is that translators should always be guided by the core communicative intention of the original text in the translation process. When linguistic form, cultural image conflict with communicative effect, priority should be given to the communicative effectiveness of the target text. Centering on the receptive habits and cognitive characteristics of target audiences, translators can achieve the basic consistency between the response of heterogeneous cultural audiences to the target text and that of source language audiences to the original text through adaptive selection and transformation, ultimately realizing the core goal of cross-cultural communication of culture-loaded words.

The core communicative goal of translating political culture-loaded words is to accurately transmit political connotations and avoid political deviations. The 32-character connotation of the great founding spirit in example 3 adopts a parallel structure of upholding truth and ideals, staying true to our original aspiration and founding mission, fighting bravely without fear of death, and remaining loyal to the Party and faithful to the people, which fully corresponds to the parallel logic of the original text. Meanwhile, each phrase adopts the official fixed translation, which accurately conveys the political significance of each connotation, ensures that international audiences accurately understand the core of the CPC’s founding spirit, and realizes the core communicative intention of political discourse communication.

Example 6:

Source text:

“天使白”，“橄榄绿”，“守护蓝”，“志愿红”迅速集结[6]。

Target text:

Doctor and nurses in white coat, military personnel in green uniforms, police officers in blue gear, and volunteers in red vests all played their part.

The core of transformation in the communicative dimension is audience orientation. In response to the cognitive characteristics of Western audiences, the target texts carry out adaptive transformation of localized expressions unique to Chinese, avoiding communication failure caused by cultural barriers. For the angel white (天使白), olive green (橄榄绿), guardian blue (守护蓝) and volunteer red (志愿红), if the color words are mechanically translated literally, Western audiences cannot understand the groups they refer to and the anti-pandemic spirit behind them. The target text directly clarifies the subjects corresponding to each color, while retaining the parallel structure of the original text. It not only enables the audience to quickly understand the core connotation of the original text, but also conveys the spiritual core of the rapid assembly of all forces in China’s anti-pandemic campaign, realizing the communicative intention.

Example 7:

Source text:

一百年来，中国共产党团结带领中国人民，以“为有牺牲多壮志，敢教日月换新天”的大无畏气概，书写了中华民族几千年历史上最恢弘的史诗[6]。

Target text:

Over the past hundred years, the Party has united led them in writing the most magnificent chapter in the millennia-long history of the Chinese nation, embodying the dauntless spirit that Mao Zedong expressed when he wrote, “Our minds grow stronger for the martyrs’ sacrifice, daring to make the sun and the moon shine in the new sky.”

For culture-loaded words with unique Chinese cultural characteristics, the target texts give priority to communication effects while retaining the cultural core. The line “For the sacrifice we have made, our lofty aspirations grow stronger; we dare to make the sun and moon shine in a new sky” is a classic poem by Comrade Mao Zedong, carrying the dauntless revolutionary spirit of the Chinese Communists. The target text not only retains the form of the poem, but also supplements the background information that Mao Zedong expressed when he wrote. Meanwhile, it conveys the spiritual core of the poem with expressions consistent with the cognition of English audiences, enabling Western audiences to understand the spiritual background of the CPCs century-long struggle, and realizing the dual communicative goals of historical narrative and spiritual transmission.

For the metaphor of “big accounts and petty accounts” in example 5, the target text does not adopt mechanical literal translation, but transforms it into a comparison between “overall perspective and local interests” that can be understood by English audiences. It not only conveys the core communicative intention of the original text that leading officials should establish a big-picture perspective, but also avoids cognitive barriers caused by literal translation of the metaphor, realizing the adaptive transformation at the

communicative dimension.

From the perspective of Eco-Translatology, the 7 English translation cases of political culture-loaded words with Chinese characteristics fully implement the core principle of “adaptation and selection, survival of the fittest”. The adaptive transformations in the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions are not isolated, but form a coordinated linkage system of “linguistic carrier - cultural core - communicative goal”. The adaptive transformation in the linguistic dimension lays a formal foundation for the transmission of cultural connotations; the adaptive transformation in the cultural dimension guarantees the complete transmission of the core of Chinese culture; and the adaptive transformation in the communicative dimension anchors the ultimate goal of translation. The three work together to enable the target text to achieve adaptive survival in the translational ecological environment of the target language.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on this analysis, the cross-cultural adaptation strategies for the international translation of Chinese culture-loaded words under the three-dimensional transformation framework can be summarized into three points. First, in the linguistic dimension, it is necessary to proactively adapt to the essential differences between the Chinese and English linguistic systems, reconstruct the target text form conforming to the linguistic norms and expression habits of the target language, adapt to the rhetorical characteristics of the source text, and avoid linguistic barriers caused by mechanical literal translation. Second, in the cultural dimension, it is essential to match the deep cultural and political connotations of culture-loaded words, eliminate cross-cultural cognitive barriers through strategies such as

default compensation, connotation anchoring and cultural adaptation, and retain the uniqueness of Chinese culture while avoiding cultural misinterpretation. Third, in the communicative dimension, it is necessary to always be guided by the core communicative intention, center on the receptive habits of target audiences, balance cultural uniqueness and communication effectiveness, give priority to the cross-cultural communication effect of the target text, and ultimately realize the effective international communication of Chinese culture-loaded words.

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