



# TCM Translation in *a Dream of Red Mansions* of Hawkes' Version from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology: A Case Study of Symptom and Diagnosis Translation

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**Abstract:** *A Dream of Red Mansions* as one of the four classics of ancient China contains a richness of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Among many versions, Hawkes' version is one of the best-known and it is well accepted by western readers. This study focuses on TCM translation of Hawkes' version based on Eco-Translatology. The eco-environment of TCM translation will be first analyzed, including the original author, the source text, the source-target languages, the translator, and the target readers. Then Hawkes' strategies of TCM translation will be discussed in linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions with examples of symptom and diagnosis translation. Under Eco-Translatology, this study finds that a whole and harmonious translational eco-environment constructs this very classic translation, and that Hawkes adapts to the translational eco-environment to a great extent and makes proper transformations in three dimensions when conveying TCM culture to western readers. Taking this as a model, this study expects to throw new lights on further studies of TCM translation from the perspective of Eco-Translatology and expand the application scope of Eco-Translatology.

**Keywords:** *A Dream of Red Mansions*; TCM translation; Eco-Translatology; translational eco-environment; three-dimensional transformation

**List of Abbreviations:** ISO- International Standardization Organization; TAS- Translation as Adaption and Selection; TCM- Traditional Chinese medicine; WHO- The World Health Organization

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*A Dream of Red Mansions*, as one of the four classics of ancient China, not only embodies high aesthetic and literary value for study, but also has great significance in medical research. According to statistics collected, there are more than ten thousand words of the description of TCM knowledge, including 161 medical terms, 114 kinds of diseases, 127 kinds of medicines, 14 different kinds of doctors, and 13 complete medical cases[1]. It also covers a variety of disciplines such as internal medicine, surgery, gynecology, pediatrics, psychiatry, dermatology, forensic medicine, etc.[1]. Many common TCM prescriptions recorded in this great work have been used up to now.

*A Dream of Red Mansions* had been translated into English by foreign scholars shortly after it was introduced to the West. Among many versions, *The Story of the Stone*, co-translated by David Hawkes and Minford, is one of the most complete and renowned versions, enjoying high praise in the translation field. David Hawkes, as a western translator with a totally different cultural background from the source language, not only understands the linguistic and cultural information of the original work, but also successfully conveys the cultural connotations to target readers to a great extent. His translation process and methods are worthy of study.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Previous Studies on TCM Translation at Home and Abroad

Early in the period of feudal society in China, TCM culture was spread to East and South Asia such as Japan, Korea, Vietnam, etc. With the establishment of the Silk Road, TCM was translated into Arabic and spread to the countries of central Asia[2]. It was not until the 1960s that some scholars realized the importance and necessity of standardizing TCM terms. Some foreign scholars made certain contributions during this period.

One of the well-known scholars is Manfred B. Porkert in the time of 1960s and 1970s, who attempted to achieve the goal of standardizing TCM terms and establish a practical terminology system by using only Latin words. Another representative expert of the same time was Joseph Needham who made an innovative strategy of using Greek and Latin roots to create TCM vocabulary system [3]. Nigel Wiseman was a representative expert in the 1980s. One of Wiseman's significant contributions is the dictionary entitled *A Practical Dictionary of Chinese Medicine*, which established "the first most comprehensive and systematic standardized terminology system"[4].

Besides individual foreign experts, international organizations have also put efforts to the cause of TCM translation. In 2002, the World Health Organization (WHO) proposed its strategy for traditional medicine and especially attached importance to TCM. Later, the effects of acupuncture on treating 28 kinds of diseases were released authoritatively by WHO[5]. In 2009, a new department in charge of standardization of TCM translation was set up under International Standardization Organization (ISO), and in 2016, ISO drafted a standardized terminology of Chinese medicine.

At home, the research on TCM translation shows an optimistic trend of growth, especially after 1990 according to the number of publications [6]. Many scholars have made contributions to the study of TCM translation on such themes as translation principles, methods, and cultural influences (e.g., He, 2009; Li, 1996; Tang, 2010; Wang et al., 2005; Chen et al., 2017)[7].

## **2.2. Previous Studies on TCM Translation in *A Dream of Red Mansions***

Studies on TCM translation in *A Dream of Red Mansions* were carried out from different angles, including translation evaluation, theories, and TCM spreading. Yang and Han[12] evaluated Yangs' strategy of foreignization and Hawks' strategy of domestication in the translation of TCM prescriptions. Shao et al.[13] compared the translation for terms of pulse manifestation in Yangs' and Hawks' versions and discussed standards of TCM translation in literary works. Wang[14] elaborated on the translation strategies of philosophical theories, TCM diagnosis, and Chinese patent drugs in Yangs' version, and emphasized co-occurrence of both semantic translation and communicative translation.

Despite some achievements obtained, previous studies were generally conducted under such theories as foreignization, domestication, free translation, literal translation, cultural turn, etc. Only certain points were concerned in these studies like text analysis and translation method, but other factors such as the original author, target readers, the source language etc. was not taken into consideration at the same time. Besides, few studies have analyzed TCM translation in *A Dream of Red Mansions* under Eco-Translatology which integrates a variety of translating factors and provides a theoretical framework to study translated works systematically and comprehensively. Considering limitations of previous research, this study aims at TCM symptom and diagnosis translation in *A Dream of Red Mansions* by David Hawkes under Eco-Translatology, discusses the eco-environment of the translated text, and analyzes the translation method of three-dimensional transformation.

## **2.3. Previous Studies on Eco-Translatology**

In 2006, Professor Hu Gengshen presented his research paper entitled *Understanding Eco-Translatology: An Ecological Approach to Translation Studies* at the International Conference on Translating Global Culture: Towards Interdisciplinary Construction[15]. Eco-Translatology has emerged as a translation theory since then. Many scholars at home and abroad have been doing further research to elaborate on and develop the theory (e.g., Dollerup, 2011; Entron, 2010; Han, 2013; Hu, 2014; Hu, 2019; Jiang, 2019; Meng, 2019; Wang, 2011)[16-23]. Today, Eco-Translatology-oriented conferences, research institutes, global websites and journals have been founded officially. With Eco-Translatology as the theoretical framework, many studies of various disciplines have been carried out (e.g., Paolo, 2020; Tao & Chen, 2020; Wang, 2014; Wang, 2022)[24-27].

## **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1. An Overview of Eco-Translatology**

The birth of Eco-Translatology is based on the ecological principles of eco-holism, oriental eco-wisdom, and Translation as Adaption and Selection (TAS), which compose the theoretical bases of this paradigm [28]. As an inter-disciplinary paradigm of translation studies, Eco-Translatology is endowed with characteristics of natural ecosystems metaphorically.

First, the translational ecosystem is a “certain spatial structure and temporal variation which involves social, communicative, cultural, and linguistic aspects and which is characterized by automatic control”[28]. Second, the translational ecology seeks to form a dynamic balanced system by interactions among the translator, the type of texts to be translated, the needs of target readers and so on. Third, human beings play the roles in improving, impeding, transforming and reconstructing ecological relations by conscious and purposeful activities in the natural ecosystem. Similarly, the translation community represented by the translator also exerts important influences on improving, impeding, transforming and reconstructing the translational ecosystem with purposeful activities. Finally, both translational and natural ecosystems share the principle of Survival of the Fittest. There is little comparability between translations of different genres while the comparability and competition will intensify between translations of the same genre and the one unsuited to needs will be eliminated.

### **3.2. Translational Eco-Environment**

Translational eco-environment (translation ecologies) is one of the research foci of Eco-Translatology. It refers to “the worlds presented by the source text, the source language and the target language”, which compose an organic whole of such interrelated factors as linguistics, communication, culture, society, as well as the original author, target readers, clients, etc.[28]. These factors exert important influence on the translation process because how to deal with them will affect the quality and popularity of the translated text.

Considering the theoretical basis of TAS, especially in view of translational eco-environment, translation is defined here as “a selection activity of the translator’s adaption to fit the translational eco-environment”[28]. Translational eco-environment is the overall environment of the translator and the corresponding translated text to survive. It is the foundation of the translator to select optimal texts which meet the multidimensional requirements, particularly of the aspects of linguistics, culture and communication.

### **3.3. Translation Method: Three-Dimensional Transformation**

The translation method of Eco-Translatology is summarized by Hu[28] as the three-dimensional transformation which refers to linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions. Language, culture and communication are intrinsically and logically related. Translation is the transformation of language; language is the carrier of culture; culture is the accumulation of communication. From the perspective of translation ecologies, the translator should keep a balance among the transformation of the linguistic forms, cultural connotations, and communicative intentions of both the original text and the translated text.

## **4. THE TRANSLATIONAL ECO-ENVIRONMENT OF TCM TRANSLATION IN HAWKES' VERSION**

As described previously, the translational eco-environment comprises many factors influencing the process of translation. This part focuses on the original author, the source text, the source-target languages, the translator, and the target readers.

### **4.1. The Original Author and the Source Text**

The author of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Cao Xueqin, was born in a wealthy family in Jiangning (now Nanjing) on May 28, 1715 during Qing dynasty. Unfortunately, Cao’s family fell in straitened circumstances with dramatic changes of the imperial court. The conflicts within his big family have political, economic and social roots of that era. Cao revealed the great contradictions of the old bureaucratic system by depicting the rises and falls of Jia, Shi, Wang and Xue’s four families[29]. Although the information of Cao Xueqin contains various aspects, his outstanding talent and solid foundation in traditional Chinese medicine are highlighted here for this study focuses on the study of TCM translation.

Among all the plots in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the description of traditional Chinese medicine exceeds 50 thousand words, involving 66 chapters and including the knowledge of medical theories, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, health, and maintenance[1][30]. Through the description of illness and medical treatment, Cao developed the storyline and dealt with the survival or death of characters. The class status of different people in the feudal society, as well as the rise and fall of Jia Fu was also

revealed through the description of diagnosis and medication. Besides, different manifestations of symptoms demonstrate personality traits of different people[1]. Therefore, it is important for the translator to grasp TCM knowledge so that the character images and the story plots can be delivered to target readers successfully.

#### **4.2. The Source Language and the Target Language**

Traditional Chinese Medicine developed from ancient China and it is closely related to the sophisticated Chinese philosophy, together with the culture of Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The origin and content give TCM expressions unique linguistic features.

Abstractness is one of the typical features. Many concepts such as wuxing and qi are unique terms of TCM, and it is difficult to find equivalent terms in English. In addition, influenced by cultural background, some terms have their unique connotations. For instance, zang fu in TCM places emphasis on the functions of the viscera, not the specific anatomical forms, while the western medicine describes the heart, liver, spleen, lung, and kidney merely from the perspective of anatomy[31]. TCM language is also characterized by ambiguity considering that there's no absolutely definite boundaries between concepts. The unity and opposition of yin and yang is a typical example. They are a pair of interrelated and contradictory phenomena in nature, but they are always changing and can transform to each other under a given condition. Another linguistic feature of TCM descriptions is literariness. TCM developed from ancient China. It was commonly recorded in the form of poesy or verses. The use of rhetorical devices such as metaphor, analogy, and hyperbole give TCM language Grand literary flavours distinct from the language for science which stresses conciseness, accuracy, and objectivity.

The contrasts of Chinese and English are listed as follows. First, TCM language is abstract and ambiguous so it stresses the coherence of meaning, but English attaches importance to sentence structure so it needs cohesion markers to present logic relations. Second, the passive voice is frequently used in English while Chinese is commonly expressed through the active voice. Third, Chinese is more dynamic while English is more static. The description of symptom, diagnosis and treatment are verb-dominant in TCM language while English tends to use more nouns. Finally, the sentence type of English is like a tree in which the syntactical status of different constituents is obvious while the sentence type of Chinese is like bamboo in which the sentences are loosely organized syntactically.

#### **4.3. The Translator and the Target Readers**

The translator and target readers are two interrelated factors in the translation process. The quality of a translator's work affects the readers' understanding of the original work. The readers' needs and curiosity to the source culture, as well as the common knowledge of the source culture also affect the translator's selection of the optimal target text.

What helps Hawkes developed bilingual and bicultural competences is his strong interest in and solid foundation of sinology, the study experiences in China, the rich experience in Chinese classic literature translation, and his in-depth research on Redology. All of these advantages with English as the mother tongue make Hawkes ideal for translating the classic work of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. David Hawkes majored in Chinese at Oxford University from 1945 to 1947 and then came to Peking University to further his study as a postgraduate student in 1948. With the guidance of top Chinese scholars and his diligence, Hawkes laid a solid foundation of sinology. As a sinology professor, after returning to Britain in 1951, he focused on sinology teaching and constructed the sinology discipline system at Oxford University from 1959 to 1971. As a translator, Hawkes also showed great talent. It was in his youth that he completed the translation of *Chuci* (The Songs of the South) in 1959. His translation of Tang poetry entitled *A Little Primer of Tu Fu* in 1967 enjoyed great acclamation. Later he spent 10 years translating the first 80 chapters of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, with the last 40 chapters completed by his son-in-law, John Minford under the guidance of Hawkes.

In addition to exceptional competence, Hawkes also put target readers in the central position. His original intention in translating this book is to help western readers appreciate the charm of Chinese classic literature by telling a vivid story[32]. The target readers of English-speaking countries can be classified into two categories[32]. One is the group of average readers who cannot read the original

text but curious about exotic culture. They do not have a good knowledge of traditional Chinese culture so it's a challenge for them to understand the description of TCM. They hope the translated text to comply with the target language, and thus smooth and understandable. The other group contains the readers who are able to read the original text. In addition to seeking artistic enjoyment from the translation, they pay attention to the translating style. Therefore, for the target readers, the translated text is expected to not only maintain faithful to the source text but also comply with the language habits of western readers. Hawkes should take the target readers' needs into full consideration.

## **5. THREE-DIMENSIONAL TRANSFORMATION OF HAWKES' VERSION**

Three-dimensional transformation is the main translation method of Eco-Translatology. In this part the translator's transformation in linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions will be discussed respectively with examples of symptom and diagnosis translation.

### **5.1. Analysis from the Linguistic Dimension**

The different ways of expressing in Chinese and English with the specific linguistic features of TCM language require the translator to make adaptive selection on the linguistic dimension. To adapt to the translational eco-environment, the translator could adopt various methods such as the use of cohesion markers (conjunctions, substitution, reference, etc.), the change of the voices (from the active voice to passive voice), the construction of compound and complex sentences, the inversion of sentence structure, the transformation of word class, etc. The following example shows Hawkes' linguistic transformation at the syntactic level.

Example:

Original:

“据我看这脉息：大奶奶是个心性高强聪明不过的人；聪明忒过，则不如意事常有；不如意事常有，则思虑太过。” [33]

Translation: 'From my reading of her pulse, I should expect your mistress to be a very highly strung, sensitive young woman. Sometimes, when people are over-sensitive, they find a good deal that is upsetting in what goes on around them; and of course, if things are upsetting them, they will tend to worry a lot.' [34]

This example reflects syntactic differences between Chinese and English. Chinese is characterized by parataxis while English is characterized by hypotaxis. In the original text, the psychological process leading to illness can be constructed by coherence of sentence meaning. But when translating to English, logic relations between causes and sentences are reflected by adding such conjunctions as “when”, “and”, and “if”. The translator also transformed the sentence structure. He divided the original one sentence into two and added the omitted subject “people” of the source text. Besides, he used the reference “they” to avoid repetition of the subject, thus achieving coherence of the translated text. By doing so, the target readers can understand the cause-consequence relations of the mistress's disease clearly.

In another two examples, Hawkes transformed the word class from verbs to nouns to adapt to the translational eco-environment at syntactic level. He translated“经期不调，夜间不寐”[33] into “irregularity of the menses and insomnia” [34]and“心内发膨胀，口中无滋味”[33]into “a palpitation in the heart, a loss of taste in the mouth” [34]. Chinese is more dynamic while English is more static. In these two examples, Hawkes substitutes noun phrases for verb phrases when describing symptoms to conform to English expressions.

### **5.2. Analysis from the Cultural Dimension**

It is difficult to find complete equivalent terms for culture-loaded words of TCM in English. Therefore, translation strategies should be decided flexibly according to practical needs so that the target readers can understand TCM terms more easily. Generally, the strategies to deal with the translation of culture-loaded words include domestication, semantic translation, substitution, literal translation with annotation, etc.[35]. The following example shows Hawkes' cultural transformation for culture-loaded words from the perspective of semantic translation.

Example:

Original : “看得尊夫人这脉息 : 左寸沉数, 左关沉伏, 右寸细而无力, 右关虚而无神.....”[33]

Translation: ‘Well, the lower left distal pulse is rapid and the lower left median pulse is strong and full,’ said the doctor. ‘On the right side, the distal pulse is thin and lacks strength and the median pulse is faint and lacks vitality...’ [34]

Pulse-taking is a unique diagnostic method to TCM, which is obscure and unfamiliar to target readers. Here the translator considered the cultural barriers of target readers and adopted the strategy of semantic translation. The Chinese characters“寸”(cun),“关”(guan), and“尺”(chi) refer to the location of pulse-taking. Concerning the corresponding locations in anatomy of western medicine, these expressions are translated into “distal”, “median”, and “proximal” respectively. Therefore, it is easy for the target readers to understand the relative locations of the cun-pulse and the guan-pulse.

The Chinese characters“沉”(chen),“数”(shu),“伏”(fu),“细”(xi),and“虚”(xu) are used to describe features of the pulse condition. Chen-pulse can be felt by strong pressure; shu-pulse is characterized by rapid beating; fu-pulse can be felt by subtle pressure; xi-pulse resembles a thread with low pulse fluctuation; xu-pulse is felt feeble. Hawkes’ description not only shows the characteristics of the pulse condition clearly, but also makes the culture-loaded words easy to understand for target readers.

In another example, Hawkes translated“气血不足”[33]into “was not as robust as she supposed”[34]. “Qi” and “blood” are two terms of TCM theory which may be obscure for western readers. Qi is the most essential substance that constitutes the body and maintains the life activities. Blood is one of the fundamental substances constituting the body and maintaining its vital activities. Deficiency of qi and blood causes weakness and debility. In the translated text, Hawkes did not point out nor explain these two terms directly. Instead, he selected semantic translation to express the main idea of the source text and to avoid obscurity.

### 5.3. Analysis from the Communicative Dimension

Translating is regarded as a kind of communicative activity. The translator should first understand communicative intention of the source text and then deliver it in the target language properly. By doing so, the translator could select the optimum translation approach from various methods, including addition, omission, substitution, semantic translation, transliteration, etc. The following example shows Hawkes’ adaptive selection in the communicative dimension from the perspective of substitution and annotation.

Example:

Original: 大夫便说 : “替夫人奶奶们道喜, 姐儿发热是见喜了, 并非别病。”[33]

Translation: ‘Convey my congratulations to Her Ladyship and Mrs. Lian’—the doctor’s diagnosis was couched in the strange language which custom decrees in such cases—‘I am happy to inform them that the little girl’s sickness is the small-pox!’ [34]

In ancient China, the small-pox is a taboo theme, which is replaced by“见喜”(jian xi, which means something that makes people feel delighted) in Chinese. Without good preventive and therapeutic measures, many children died of smallpox that time. Those who survived would have immunity and never got the small-pox again. Therefore, using the euphemism expresses people’s good wishes to patients, hoping the sufferers can pull through this dangerous time of life. Hawkes knew the folk custom very well. In order to convey the original meaning to target readers, he adopted the method of substitution and annotation. He used the common western medical term “small-pox” to substitute the Chinese euphemism“见喜”(jian xi), thus pointing out the lady’s disease directly and avoiding confusion. Furthermore, Hawkes supplied a note to explain the folk custom of TCM diagnosis by saying that “the doctor’s diagnosis was couched in the strange language which custom decrees in such

cases". By doing so, ambiguity and confusion are avoided, and the communicative function is thus achieved.

Here is another example. In the 10th chapter, Hawkes translated “喜脉”[33] into “pregnancy”[34]. In this case, he substitutes “pregnancy” for the Chinese euphemism “喜脉”(xi mai, which refers to the pulse condition indicating pregnancy) to convey the original communicative intention to target readers directly.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study focuses on TCM translation of Hawkes' version under Eco-Translatology, discussing the translational eco-environment and the translator's transformation in linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions. After analysis, some conclusions can be summarized as follows.

First, the translational eco-environment plays an indispensable role during translating. Only when the translator adapts to the eco-environment, having a good knowledge of the original author, the source text, the characteristics of the source-target languages, the situation of the target readers, the interest and needs of the target readers, the attitudes of the sponsors, and the support of publishers, meanwhile equipped with the bilingual and bicultural competence, can he or she produce the optimal target text. It is the entire and harmonious translational eco-environment that constructs this classic translation by Hawkes.

Second, three-dimensional transformation is both the translation method and translation goals, which requires the translator to make adaptive selections according to practical needs. In different dimensions Hawkes makes transformations flexibly. For example, considering the different ways of expression in Chinese and English, Hawkes made syntactic transformation in linguistic dimension; in view of the folk customs, he adopted the approach of substitution and annotation to explain the information of the cultural background and convey the communicative intention of the original text.

Third, the translator plays a leading role during translating. Hawkes' strong bilingual and bicultural competence is one of the prerequisites of the translation activity. Besides, he takes a holistic approach to various factors of the translational eco-environment. He is also responsible for making decisions about what translation strategies to be adopted.

All in all, a classic translation could be produced based on the condition that an entire and harmonious translational eco-environment exists. From such subjective elements as the original author, the translator, the target readers, and clients to such objective elements as the source-target languages, linguistics, culture, and communication, all of the ecological elements of translation should constitute a harmonious ecological environment. In addition, the translator's choice of translation strategies should also meet the needs of translational eco-environment and the requirements of three dimensions.

Despite a comprehensive analysis of the eco-environment and the three-dimensional transformation of TCM translation in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, limitations still exist. First, this study does not involve such factors as sponsors, publishers, and clients when analyzing the eco-environment. Second, this study focuses on the examples which present Hawkes' successful points but the examples which expose some flaws are not involved. Third, this study concentrates on only two main concepts of Eco-Translatology. Some other concepts of this theory such as translation community ecologies, Eco-Translatology ethics, translator responsibility, etc. are not analyzed in this study. For future research, more factors of the translational eco-environment, more positive and imperfect examples, and more theoretical concepts could be considered to make a more comprehensive and more systematic analysis of the translation process.

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