

**ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF NOVELS IN THE THIRD FRONT CONSTRUCTION PERIOD FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ECOLOGICAL TRANSLATION THEORY: A CASE STUDY OF UNDER THE HAWTHORN TREE**

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**ABSTRACT**

As an essential literary form, novels contain a wealth of historical and cultural information. Under the Hawthorn Tree, a novel originally written in Chinese, depicted the love story of a man and a woman who met and fell in love with each other during the period of the Third Front construction, but ended up being separated by death. The English translation by Ai Mi is popular among overseas readers, and its authentic translation, fluent language, and faithful expression provide a fantastic reference for the English translation of Chinese novels. However, there are few studies on the research strategies and techniques of this English translation in China. In view of this, this paper conducts a holistic study of Under the Hawthorn Tree through the theory of ecological translation and discusses the novel's translation strategy from the following dimensions: language, culture, and communication. Using the three-dimensional transformation method as an instruction, it analyzed the application of translation methods such as semantic addition and word conversion in this translation and provided some theoretical guidance for the practice of English translation of Chinese novels.

**Key Words:** Ecological Translation; Three-Dimensional Conversion; Under the Hawthorn Tree; Third Front Construction.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The economy of China ranked second in the world, highlighting its pivotal role in the world arena. However, China's cultural influence fails to match its political and economic power. To change this situation, China has implemented a strategy of "taking Chinese culture to the global stage" to promote understanding and recognition of Chinese culture among people in other countries. With these increasing efforts, Chinese literature is attracting a growing number of foreign readers, and the derived foreign translations are gaining popularity.

There are two reasons to choose the English translation of *Under the Hawthorn Tree* as the main subject of this research. First, compared with other traditional translation theories, few domestic translators have studied the ecological translation theory for *Under the Hawthorn Tree*. The current study could contribute to academic studies in this field. The second point is to understand and study the culture during the Third Front Construction period in China to provide some potential references for the English translation of novels in specific historical periods. Novels produced in a particular period need translators to make a good connection between Western readers and Chinese works, which can realize the intention of bilingual communication. Dissecting the English translation of *Under the Hawthorn Tree* through the ecological translation theory facilitates better

understanding by readers of the target language and provides ideas for the English translation of novels in specific historical periods.

## 2.LITERATURE REVIEW

Since ecological translation theory was proposed, scholars at home and abroad have conducted various studies in many areas. Yang Yutong (2021) analyzed the linguistic expression, cultural background, and communication level of practical English to select and output according to the three-dimensional theory of ecological translation theory, which can realize the bidirectional communication of information. Hu Gengshen and Li Suwen (2022) pointed out how ecological translation studies can maintain advantages and focus on theoretical interchange with the West to improve the international acceptance of ecological translation theory. Liu Chaowu and Yao Mengyan (2021) argued that translators should make adaptive choices in translation in accordance with the ecological environment of translation to make the translation present the best effect while preserving the meaning of the original text.

Scholars have made some meaningful explorations of the translation methods of the Third Front Construction novel *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, but the total amount is relatively small. Huang Quansheng (2021) argued that in the Third Front Construction novel, both literary works and literary writers have achieved unity in literary space and literary geographical space, and has also become a significant cultural factor and cultural card. Yang Shihan (2020) pointed out that the Third Front Construction novels are adapted to overseas readers by transforming the cultural, linguistic, and communicative dimensions, swapping the relationship between implementer and bearer, and reducing the differences in understanding. Wu Jiaoshu (2012) analyzed how to achieve the purpose of better translation by using the research methods of naturalized translation, reduced translation, free translation, and increased translation.

## 2.THE ECOLOGICAL TRANSLATION

### 2.1The Concept of the Ecological Translation

In 2001, the concept of ecological translatology was first introduced by Hu Gengshen. He indicated that eco-translatology is a multifaceted study that integrates ecology and translatology. The translation is considered to be “a multidimensional adaptive selection activity carried out by the translator to adapt to the translation ecology” (Hu Gengshen, 2004), which requires the translator not only to adapt but also to select. Eco-translation theory is designed to enable the conversion between two languages, like the migration of animals or the transplantation of plants. Plants and animals must adapt to the new environment. Similarly, translations must also meet the needs of the target readers before they can be disseminated. Otherwise, the readers of the translated language cannot understand the connotation of the translated work, and the targeted work cannot be passed down in the new ecological environment.

The multi-dimensional translation is the primary translation method of ecological translatology. It is divided into three dimensions, namely, linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. The basic theory of ecological translation briefly summarizes the translation method as three-dimensional conversion, that is, under the principle of “multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection, relatively focusing on the linguistic dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension of adaptive selection conversion” (Ting Bo, 2014). In the linguistic dimension, translators should start from the linguistic form and make adaptive choices for conversion in many

aspects and levels. In the cultural dimension, translators should consider the entire cultural system to which the language belongs, pay attention to the differences in the content and nature of bilingual culture, and focus on the interpretation and transmission of cultural connotations. However, in the communicative dimension, the translator should make an adaptive selection of bilingual communicative intent to ensure that the translation can accurately convey the communicative intent of the original text (Zuo Dai, 2019). This approach calls for translators to build bilingual harmony through bilingual communication while transmitting and interpreting cultural connotations that go beyond the language itself.

## 2.2 The Aptness of Ecological Translation Theory in Novels

Novel is a literary genre that focuses on the portrayal of characters and reflects social life through a complete storyline and description of the environment. At the same time, novel is an integral part of literary works, containing rich emotional and cultural connotations. Xu Jun and Mu Lei (2009) held that translation of novels belongs to literary translation, i.e., a type of artistic translation to a larger extent. In literary translation, the translator needs to have an accurate grasp of the original work's ideological content and artistic style and reproduce its image and atmosphere in its entirety through specific translation strategies. Only in this way can the readers of the translation obtain the same inspiration, feelings, and beauty as the readers of the original text do. Therefore, the translation of novels requires the translator to break through the huge differences in the way of thinking, language expression habits, and culture between the original and the target language based on a profound understanding of the original storyline, and to reproduce the ideological content and artistic style of the original work in the target language to realize the readability of the text.

## 3. The Background of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*

### 3.1 Third Front Construction

The novel *Under the Hawthorn Tree* is set during the period of the Third Front Construction. The campaign took place during a special time in China roughly between 1964 to 1980 when China divided its territory into the first, the second and the third lines in accordance with the needs of national defense. The “Third Front” was a strategic base to support the front line and provide the force behind the strategic rear. The “Third Front Construction” was a major strategic decision by Mao Zedong in the 1960s to carry out a large-scale defense industry and transportation construction in thirteen provinces in central and western China with war preparation as the guiding ideology (Xu Youwei, 2020). This was a grand self-improvement campaign for the whole country, surrounded by various powerful foreign forces. In such a general background, the main character of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, Sun Jianxin, although he was the son of the military district commander at that time, went deep into the backward areas and was devoted to geological exploration work.

The construction of the Third Front was a strategic vision and idea of the central leadership represented by Mao Zedong in a complex international and domestic environment, which gave the new China a safe strategic rear, and objectively caused the first development of the western part of the country. However, the construction of the “Third Front” was hastily decided under the special circumstances of preparing for the war, and was influenced by the “Cultural Revolution” and the “leftist” guiding ideology, so there was also unbalanced planning, an overly scattered

layout, and blindness (Naughton, 1998). Therefore, there were also a series of problems such as asymmetric arrangements. It was under such historical conditions that *Under the Hawthorn Tree* was produced.

### 3.2 Summary of the Story

*Under the Hawthorn Tree* is a love story written by Ai Mi, a Chinese American, based on the experiences of her old friend. It depicted a true love story about two young people in the 1970s. The story was based on the personal experience of Jingqiu, who met, knew, and fell in love with Sun Jianxin (also called Old Third following his age in the family), but eventually lost him, in a poignant way.

Jingqiu, the main character of the story, was a beautiful city girl who came from the wrong background, as her family's composition was that of a landlord, making her inferior and self-contemptuous since childhood. Therefore, during the construction period of the Third Front, Jingqiu, who was still in high school, was arranged by her school to go to Xi Ping village (a mountain village where there was a hawthorn tree on the road) to complete the task of interviewing local villagers and writing teaching materials. According to Mr. Zhang, the head of the village, originally the tree was blooming white flowers. But during the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, countless counter-Japanese heroes were shot by the Japanese soldiers under this tree, and their blood irrigated the land under the tree. Since the first counter-Japanese hero was killed, the tree's flowers slowly changed, becoming redder. Finally, it became a red-flowered hawthorn tree (Ai Mi, 2013).

Jingqiu lived in Mr Zhang's house, received re-education in the countryside. Living in harmony with the people in Xi Ping village, Jingqiu gradually found she loved Sun Jianxin. However, in the society during the Third Construction period, Jingqiu's age and social status became obstacles to their love. According to the promise to Jingqiu's mother, Sun Jianxin had to wait until Jingqiu graduated, until she worked, until she finally became a teacher, and then they would be together in a proper way. Sun was in love with Jingqiu and was willing to do anything for her, giving her unprecedented encouragement. They met and dated secretly until Sun was diagnosed with leukemia and died. On the first page of Sun's notebook, he had written, "I may not be able to wait thirteen months for you, nor until you are twenty-five, but I can wait for you a lifetime" (Ai Mi, 2013). Sun quietly slept *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, guarding his and Jingqiu's pure love.

*Under the Hawthorn Tree* is rich and sincere in its spiritual content. One is true love in the face of life and death, and another is humanity in the political context. First of all, its ending is not the common "happy" ending. The hero and heroine of the story have gone through a lot. However, they were separated forever. Jingqiu's recklessness after learning of Sun's condition was the purity they showed in the face of life and death, and even if they never saw each other again, there would always be someone in Jingqiu's heart. Secondly, the story took place during the Third Front Construction period and the Cultural Revolution. In such a prominent political context, the novel repeatedly reflected the glory of humanity through the deconstruction of the political context.

#### **4.The Application of Eco-translation Theory in the English Translation**

##### **4.1 Adaptive Transformation of Language Dimensions**

On the linguistic dimension, the translator should pay attention to the linguistic form and linguistic characteristics of the original text and make an adaptive choice of language form for conversion. In this process, the translator should pay more attention to choosing the language expressions that are suitable for the context of the original text and the context of the translated text, and accurately convert the original text into a new one that can be understood by the readers of the translated text (Li Qi, 2022).

###### **4.1.1 Semantic Additions**

In a particular context, the meaning of a word often goes beyond its original meaning and appears context-dependent. Therefore, the translator should go beyond the shackles of the word's original meaning and translate its extra-contextual meaning by relying on the context in which the word is placed.

Example 1: 一切有关他的东西, 对她的嘴来说, 都成了禁忌, 而对她的眼睛她的耳朵她的心来说, 则成了红宝书——要天天看, 天天读, 天天想。

Translation: Everything connected to him had become taboo, and her mouth declined to offend. Nevertheless, to her eyes, ears, and heart, everything about him was as dear as Mao's Little Red Book; she wanted to read, listen, and think about him all day.

Analysis: In China, "Hongbaoshu" was the abbreviation for Mao's writings during the Cultural Revolution. But in modern times, "Hongbaoshu" is closely related to high-valued examination materials. The translation is specifically translated as "Mao's Little Red Book" to add this extra-linguistic meaning, thus ensuring that the readers accurately understand the message of the original text and the author's thoughts through the translation. Here, Jingqiu has gradually developed a secret emotion for Sun Jianxin. But in those days, love could not be expressed boldly because it was against social norms. Instead, people silently vent their emotions in the hearts. At the same time, people of that era were taught to read and show extreme respect for the Red Book. What's more, people could not blaspheme the meaning of the Red Book. The analogy of such emotion to Sun Jianxin portrayed Jingqiu's shyness and ignorance on the one hand and showed Jingqiu's yearning for pure feelings in Sun Jianxin.

###### **4.1.2 Word Conversion**

In terms of word conventions, there are apparent differences between the English language ecology and the Chinese language ecology. Verbs are used more frequently in Chinese, while nouns are used more regularly than verbs in English, and prepositions, coronals, and other imaginary words are used more often than in Chinese. Therefore, to ensure that the original text's meaning is effectively conveyed and the translation is authentic, the translator can adopt the strategy of lexical conversion.

Example 2:至于她为什么进了俄语系, 就只有天知道了, 因为那时俄语早已不吃香了。

Translation: It was a mystery as to why she had decided to study Russian as by that time it was a subject that had long since ceased to be popular.

Analysis: Firstly, “只有天知道.....” is Chinese vernacular. If it is directly translated into “Only the God knows that.....” the output looks clueless and will also be very long because of the use of many “that”. Such translation is very rigid and does not conform to English expressions. As a result, the translator replaces the phrase “God only knows” with the noun “mystery”. The phrase “It is a mystery .....” is a common expression in the English structure, which means “It is her secret why she joined the Russian department when Russian was not in demand.” Secondly, the word “God” in English is associated with Christianity, while it does not have this meaning in the original language. The translator followed the idea of changing the lexical nature and translated the lengthy subordinate clause into a noun, making the translation authentic and natural.

### 4.1.3 Sentence Conversion

As mentioned above, the English language ecology and the Chinese language ecology have their own characteristics in terms of language expression habits. Chinese strongly emphasizes meaning, with many loose sentences, and the meaning is expressed directly by words, often using different phrases for different meanings. In English, there are many long sentences, “many branches share a common stem” (Wenjun Shi, 2019), and the modifying and complementary components can be connected by grammatical structures, and the sentences can be extended infinitely in theory. Therefore, the translator should adjust the sentence structure appropriately to accommodate the difference between the original text and the translated language.

Example 3: “不是小孩子也可以吃糖的，”他说着，又把糖递过来，“拿着吧，别不好意思。”

Translation: “You do not have to be a child to eat sweets,” he said, holding his hand out again. “Take one, no need to be embarrassed.”

Analysis: The implied meaning of “不是小孩子也可以吃糖的 (not children can also eat candy)” was that adults can also eat candy, but the literal translation could not convey the subtle affections in this context. First, the direct translation was easy to cause translation cavities. Second, it needed to be combined with the background of the whole article. Sun Jianxin and Jingqiu encountered each other for the first time. Huan Huan (the daughter of Mr. Zhang) led Jingqiu to find Sun Jianxin in the exploration team, and the episode of giving candy here also depicted Sun’s carefulness and consideration for Jingqiu’s dilemma and quietly relieved her. “You don’t have to be.....” was translated as “You don’t have to be unable to eat candy because you’re not a child”. The use of euphemism was in line with Old Third’s sunny and considerate person, and also with the habits of readers of the translated language.

## 4.2 Adaptive Transformation of the Cultural Dimension

In terms of cultural dimension, the chapter respects the translation method of translators who pay attention to the transmission and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotations in the translation process. The translator should pay attention to the adaptation and selection of the meanings of the two cultures to ensure that the readers of the translated text accurately understand the ideological connotation expressed in the original text. Therefore, the translator should first establish a correct knowledge of the commonalities and differences between the two cultures, and then accurately

translate the cultural connotations contained in the original text on this basis to ensure that the communicative intent can be realized.

### 4.3 Positive Use of Negative Expressions

Example 4: 于是他就成了她的“御用文人”，他每天中午帮她写教材，她每天中午就看他带来的小说。

Translation: So, he became her ‘hired hand’. He came every day at lunchtime to help her write her textbook, and she spent the time reading novels.

Analysis: The original meaning of “御用文人 (imperial literati)” is a tedious and stale literary person who is kept by the emperor and only knows how to sing praises and virtues, but now it is often used as a metaphor to become a writer for a powerful group. Here refers to letting Jingqiu better read works of fiction, Sun Jianxin will help Jingqiu write group discussions of the Xi Ping village textbook. So here “hired hand” can be a good substitute for the cultural connotation of “imperial literati”. The translator takes the strategy of naturalization, equating the English “hired hand” with the Chinese “imperial literati” in two different cultural contexts of “writer”. This reduces the reader’s reading barrier, helps the reader understand the translation better, and increases the readability of the translation.

#### 4.3.1 Supplement and Explanation

Example 5: 进了初中，丁全仍然是静秋的“责任田”。

Translation: This continued into junior middle school, where Ding Quan was still considered Jingqiu’s patch of field, her own ‘household responsibility’.

Analysis: The term “责任田” has a special meaning in modern China. It referred to an important policy of rural economic reform in the early 1960s. If translated into “policy”, it is a direct translation error. Therefore, the translation added an explanation to ‘责任田’, interpreting ‘责任田’ as “household responsibility”, which clarified Jingqiu’s responsibility to teach her classmate Ding Quan well, and depicted that Jingqiu was shy in character, but had a sense of responsibility.

### 4.4 Adaptive Transformation of the Communicative Dimension

In the communicative dimension, the translator should guarantee that the translation conveys the communicative intent of the original text, so the translation should pay attention to the adaptive choice of bilingual communicative intent conversion. The communicative dimension here refers to the interaction between the reader of the translated text and the author of the original text, that is, the reader deeply understands the creative intention of the original author through the translated text, and then resonates with the original author in terms of ideas (Song Dandan, 2022).

#### 4.4.1 Tone Reproduction

Tone refers to the way shown or carried out through a particular grammatical form, that is, the attitude of the speaker toward the behavior or action. The tone of voice is a way of realizing communicative intent because different tones perform different communicative functions and

realize different interpersonal meanings. Especially in dialogues, tone carries the character's emotions and attitudes and is the key to communication.

Example 5: “可是我喜欢‘静秋’这个名字。听到这个名字，即便我一只脚踏进坟墓了，我也会拔回脚来看看你——”。

Translation: I like the sound of your name. I may have one foot in the grave, but when I hear it, I feel that I can take it out . . .

Analysis: Tone in English mainly includes declarative tone, imperative tone, virtual tone, and so on. Usually, there were specific forms for the communication of intonation. The expression “may have sth” was counted as one kind of virtual tone, indicating speculation about what will happen in the future. After completing the adaptation to the ecological environment of the original text, the translator needed to make an adaptive choice of transformation, so that the original text carried the expectations of the characters' emotions reproduced in the translation. At this time, Jingqiu visited Sun Jianxin in the hospital, still unsure whether Sun Jianxin had leukemia. Sun Jianxin knew that he would not live long, but as long as he heard Jingqiu's name, even if he was dying, he would feel something deep in his heart. The translation reproduced Sun's pure feelings for Jingqiu and his strong attachment to her.

#### 4.4.2 Personal Pronouns

The use of pronouns is essential in the communicative dimension. Personal pronouns in English and Chinese have their distinctive characteristics. In English, personal pronouns are more frequent for sentence connection and part-of-speech articulation. The Chinese language focuses on subjective thinking and often describes objective things from the point of view of the self, so the person is often used. But when the person is self-explanatory, it is often implied or omitted (Lian Shuneng, 1993). The difference in the use of personal pronouns between the English and Chinese language ecologies poses a difficulty in translation.

Example 6: 另一条路就是到医院去打胎，然后身败名裂，耻辱地活一辈子。

Translation: The second option would be to have an abortion at the hospital, but that would be a great cost to both her pocket and her reputation, and she would have to live with the shame of it for the rest of her life.

Analysis: In Chinese, the meaning of the word “she” is usually omitted, and the woman who did not dare to have an abortion is Jingqiu in this example, according to the context. However, in English, the personal pronoun “she” is essential as the subject of the sentence, and if it is missing, the sentence cannot be organized and the meaning cannot be conveyed. The translator added the personal pronoun to make it authentic and clear.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Ecological translation theory plays a constructive guiding role, and under the instruction of the methodology of three-dimensional translation, the paper has solved the difficulties in several dimensions.

First of all, linguistic transformation indicates the translator's adaptive choice and adaptation at the linguistic level, mainly around words, syntactic structures, and rhetorical devices. The English translation of *Under the Hawthorn Tree* pays much attention to the transformation of language forms, and adopts additional means to supplement the Chinese with extra-linguistic meaning. Therefore, an excellent translation of novels should adopt appropriate translation techniques to achieve a balance between the two languages in terms of linguistic forms.

Secondly, on the cultural dimension, the translator should pay more attention to the differences between bilingual cultures and the transmission and interpretation of cultural connotations. For words that contain rich cultural connotations, this combination will help readers better understand the translated texts and enhance the readability of the translation if cultural equivalence can be attained between the source language and the translated language. However, if the two are not equivalent and the differences are obvious, the translator can use the source language culture as the basis and adopt the translation strategy of dissimilation to highlight the cultural differences and retain the cultural characteristics of the source language. However, if the translation was not able to convey the key cultural information carried by the original text, the translator should explain the original text and add more additional information to help readers better understand the key cultural connotation of the original text.

Finally, on the communicative dimension, the translator should pay attention to the fulfillment of cross-cultural communication, and ensure that the translation conveys the communicative intent of the original text. To reproduce the tone of the characters' dialogue, the translator should rely on the context, accurately judge the speaker's tone, and deploy an appropriate language form to convey it to ensure that the speaker's communicative intent is realized.

## 6. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

As an emerging translation theory, ecological translation theory still has some limitations, and many translation difficulties cannot be attributed to the linguistic, cultural, or communicative dimensions. Based on ecological translation theory, this thesis analyzed the English translation of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, and made a modest contribution to the study of ecological translation theory and the literary criticism of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*. However, due to time and space constraints, it is not possible to launch a comprehensive exploration of all examples in the English version of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*. Future studies are encouraged to adopt other translation theories and delve into the English translation strategies of literary works in specific historical periods to make up for the shortcomings of this paper.

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