

Original Paper

The Study of English Translation of Tea Wares in China
National Tea Museum from the Perspective of
Eco-Translatology

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Abstract

The tea culture now plays a prominent role in the traditional Chinese culture. Tea ware, the ‘carrier’ of tea culture, is crucial to the global spread of the Chinese tea culture if properly translated. The Eco-Translatology provides translators with a fresh perspective when translating tea wares, allowing them to create a more desirable translation when doing adaptive selection and transformation in terms of tea sets concerning the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. The paper studies the English translation of tea wares at the China National Tea Museum from the perspective of Eco-Translatology, with the objective of providing several insights into the English translation of tea wares so as to facilitate the international dissemination of the Chinese tea culture.

Keywords

Eco-Translatology, English Translation of Tea Wares, China National Tea Museum, Chinese Tea Culture

1. Introduction

China has long been one of the countries widely known for its profound tea culture. On November 29, 2022, the traditional Chinese tea-making techniques were successfully included to the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage, further making the traditional Chinese tea culture recognized by the world. When talking about tea culture, associated elements like tea ceremonies, tea-making techniques and tea wares are inevitably mentioned. Tea sets, the carriers of the Chinese tea culture, serve essential roles in the diffusion of the traditional Chinese tea culture. The G20 Summit was held in Hangzhou, China, in 2016, during which time China was also widely recognized by its traditional culture beyond its

hospitality. The tea wares those leaders used drew their attention, in addition to the Longjing Tea that was delivered to them as national gifts.

Tea culture, part and parcel of the traditional Chinese culture, is formed with the contribution of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and embodies the spirit of “the harmony between man and nature,” “going back to nature,” “harmony as value” and “cosmopolitanism” (Yin, 2018, p. 356). Tea culture comprehensively elucidates China’s humanism, philosophies, and aesthetic values. As a Chinese saying goes, “Water is the mother, and utensil is the father of a fine cup of tea”. Therefore, it is impossible to leave tea wares alone when sipping tea. The evolution of tea ware condenses the profound Chinese tea tradition. *A Dream of Red Mansion*, a world-renowned book by Cao Xueqin, has mentioned tea-related contents, like tea drinking, tea wares and tea poems for more than 260 times. The author devotes an entire chapter to introducing tea and tea sets (Zhou, 2019). Thus, the significance of tea wares cannot be neglected in the traditional Chinese culture. The effective translation of tea wares will contribute to the spread of Chinese tea culture all around the world.

For the development of tea sets, before being specially designed vessels for tea drinking, Chinese people in the ancient time used wares for food, alcohol, and tea indiscriminately. In the Tang Dynasty (618-907), celadon ware was primarily used, and the profound Chinese tea culture could be found in the poems of those literati who would compare themselves to tea wares to demonstrate their purity and nobility. *The Classic of Tea*, written by Lu Yu, mentioned that there were 27 kinds of wares for tea drinking, including some for collecting tea water, some for boiling tea, some for filtering tea water, some for drinking tea and some for washing tea wares etc. (Wang et al., 2021). Tea sets were further developed in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), when there were five major kilns manufacturing wares, and people at that time preferred black-glazed items (Chen & Dong, 2008). The Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) was a turning point for tea wares. Black and white porcelains were the most famous used for drinking tea, and tea wares were considerably changed in shape and functions, becoming increasingly diversified. The Ming (1368-1644) and Qing Dynasty (1636-1912) saw tea wares become more diverse and refined, most of which were made of ceramics and porcelains.

Tea sets, typically used to separate tea water, prepare tea, and serve tea, also embody thousands of years of Chinese culture and the philosophies of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism (Yuan et al., 2008). The global transmission of tea wares can also facilitate the spread of the traditional Chinese tea culture. In order to raise the awareness of the international spread of Chinese tea culture, the study analyzes the English translation of tea wares presented in the China National Tea Museum from the perspective of Eco-translatology. The paper also hopes to raise awareness among researchers and translators regarding the English translation of tea wares. Apart from enriching the theory of eco-translatology, the study also seeks to demonstrate the relevance between eco-translatology and China’s philosophies, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. It also wants to arouse the attention to the Hangzhou tea culture based in China National Tea Museum.

2. Tea Wares and the Theory of Eco-translatology

“Tea and tea culture are being 'rediscovered' and 'redeployed' within China as a means of reinforcing a sense of unique Chinese identity and national character in the 21st century, as China is on track to become the world's largest economy and reshape the global order in ways that are still difficult for Westerners to comprehend” (Sigley, 2015, p. 321). Therefore, it is imperative to take the initiative to do the translation in international publicity of Chinese tea culture, combining the intention of the source language and target language expressing forms so that the effective dissemination of Chinese tea culture could be achieved. Although we have made some progress in popularizing traditional Chinese tea culture, more modifications and improvements are still required for the culture to advance. For the spread of tea culture in Russia, because of different geography, nationality and culture, tea cultures in the two nations learn from each other, enrich each other and merge together (Li, 2017). Against the backdrop of the Belt and Road initiative, the spread of Chinese tea culture in Arab countries is also boosted. Yang (2017) holds the belief that in a bid to facilitate tea culture "going out," apart from containing the essence of the custom of Chinese tea culture, we should also promote the transformation and innovation of tea culture tourism. By contrast, Yan (2021) advocates that China should encourage to create works relating to tea culture, support the translation of outstanding works of Chinese tea culture, provide platforms for the international spread of Chinese tea culture, develop a tea-themed travelling industry, and strengthen the communication between China and foreign countries. Translating tea culture successfully, especially tea wares can not only be beneficial to the export of tea-related products, but also bridge the gap for the international exchanges of tea culture (Guo & Yang, 2019).

For the study of the English translation of tea wares, Zhou (2014), based on the Skopos Theory, compares the translation of tea wares of the book *A Dream of Red Mansion* by Gladys Yang and *The Story of the Stone* by David Hawkes. In Chapter 41, titled Baoyu Sips Tea in Green Lattice Nunnery, a lot of tea sets are introduced and described. Zhou (2014) concludes that Gladys Yang prefers literal translation, while David Hawkes favours free translation in translating these tea wares. Zhou (2019) then continues to compare the English translation of tea wares that appeared in this chapter from the perspective of Cognitive Translatology, discovering that different reconstructions of construal on the same tea set are made, and various translation methods are also adopted due to their different understandings of the Chinese culture. In comparison, Jiang (2017) emphasizes that translators should be equipped with the ability to analyze the picture of tea wares, paying attention to the principle of degree in the process of translation and for the untranslatability, translators can make certain adjustments to achieve the balance between pictures on tea wares and their names. Wang et al. (2021) does a more rigorous analysis of tea ware translation procedures. She points out that translators should not be confined to specific translation methods, and different translation methods should be adopted, especially for those culture-loaded expressions, so that the road towards spreading Chinese tea culture could be paved.

In general, the studies above analyze English translation strategies from different perspectives, with the majority of translators choosing distinct translation methodologies. However, the data they studied still needs to be improved, which may not be applicable enough for the development of Chinese tea culture. In addition, most of the studies analyze the translation strategies of tea wares from the lens of Skopos Theory, seldom from the Eco-Translatology. However, as stated previously, Chinese tea wares are condensed with the spirit of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, emphasizing nature, harmony, and balance, which has enormous relevancy with the Eco-Translatology that emphasizes “ecological paradigm” and “ecological balance” in the translation.

The Eco-Translatology, put forward by Hu Gengshen in 2001, has just experienced 22-year history. As it is a great departure from other translation studies approaches, Eco-Translatology focuses on “ecology”, “a comprehensive and holistic study of translation from the ecological perspective” (Hu & Tao, 2016, p. 123). The theory follows the macroscopic reason, featured by: (1) stressing wholeness and relevance; (2) seeking dynamics and balance; (3) reflecting eco-aesthetics; (4) identifying the “translation community”; (5) adhering to translation ethics; and (6) highlighting unity/diversity (Hu, 2013, p. 82). Dollerup (2010) points out that the theory, different from Western approaches that have been promoted by identifiable circumstances, is based on ancient Chinese notions about harmony between man and his environment. The Eco-Translatology, a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary theory, has three interrelated core translation concepts: “translation as adaptation and selection,” “translation as textual transplant,” and “translation as eco-balance” (Hu & Wang, 2021, p. 1). In the translational eco-environment, the translator, as the center of the translation process, following a particular adaptation and selection, makes a balance between the source text and target text with the aid of three-dimension transformation, that is, linguistic transformation, culture transformation and communicative transformation.

With its emphasis on the harmony between man and his environments, Eco-Translatology exists in close interaction with environments, the source and target words, languages, and cultures, in an interdependent ecological world-system (Dollerup, 2010). In comparison, the Chinese tea culture is formed with the contribution of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, laying upon the harmony between man and nature, going back to nature etc. (Yin, 2018). To analyze the English translation of tea wares from the perspective, Eco-Translatology has its legitimacy and significance, which is not only conducive to the development of the theory itself but also to the standardization of the English translation of tea wares and the international spread of the Chinese tea culture.

3. The Translation Analysis of Tea Wares in the China National Tea Museum

A great many tea wares are displayed in the two branches (one is the Longjing branch and the other is the Shuangfeng branch) of China National Tea Museum. The paper chooses the tea wares from the Longjing branch to study the English translation of tea sets. This chapter will first analyze the Chinese

expression features of tea wares, as they may influence the translation, and then will analyze the English translation of those tea wares from the three-dimensional transformation of the Eco-Translatology.

3.1 The Language Feature of Tea Wares

The paper collects 29 tea wares displayed in the Longjing section with their Chinese and English expressions, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The Chinese and English Expressions of Tea Wares of China National Tea Museum

Chinese	English
邛崃窑执壶 (唐)	Qionglai Kiln Handled Ewer (Tang Dynasty)
越窑青釉花口碗 (唐)	Yue Kiln Celadon Petal Rimmed Bowl (Tang Dynasty)
玻璃带托盏 (唐)	Glass Teacup and Stand (Tang Dynasty)
巩县窑黄釉风炉及鍍 (唐)	Yellow-glazed Stove and Pot from Gongxian Kiln (Tang Dynasty)
长沙窑绿釉茶铛 (唐)	Green-glazed Tea Pot (cheng) from Changsha Kiln (Tang Dynasty)
邛崃窑绿釉铫 (唐)	Green-glazed Pot (diao) from Qionglai Kiln (Tang Dynasty)
越窑青釉刻“茶”字盒 (唐)	Green-glazed Box Carved with the Word “tu” (tea) from Yue Kiln (Tang Dynasty)
吉州窑木叶纹盏 (宋)	Jizhou Kiln Three Leaf Design Calix (Song Dynasty)
吉州窑玳瑁釉盏 (宋)	Tortoise Shell Glazed Teacup from Jizhou Kiln (Song Dynasty)
枢府釉印花折腰碗 (元)	Egg White Glazed Bowl with Pressed Flowers Pattern (Yuan Dynasty)
青花碗 (明)	Blue-and-White Bowl (Ming Dynasty)
龙纹竹节银茶具 (晚清)	Silver Tea Set with Dragon Patterns and Bamboo-like Decor (in Late Qing)
青花诗文茶具 (清)	Blue-and-white Tea Set with Poem (Qing)
锡胎包椰壳雕杂宝纹茶具 (清)	The Enclosed Coconut Shell Miscellaneous Strip Tea Set (Qing)
青花矾红花卉纹小杯 (清)	Blue-and-White Iron Red Glazed Teacup with Floral Decor (Qing Dynasty)
粉彩冠上加冠盖碗 (清)	Covered Bowl in Famille Rose Enamels with Decoration of Rooster and Cockscomb (Qing Dynasty)
珊瑚地留白梅花纹碗 (清乾隆)	Coral Red Glazed Bowl with Pattern of White Plum Blossom (Qianlong Period of Qing Dynasty)

粉彩牡丹纹茶壶（清雍正）	Famille-rose Tea Pot with Patterns of Peong (Yongzheng Period of Qing Dynasty)
三清茶诗文盖碗（清嘉庆）	Covered Bowl with Poem (Jiaqing Period of Qing Dynasty)
紫檀茶壶桶（清）	Red Sandalwood Teapot Bucket (Qing Dynasty)
花鸟纹三托盖碗（晚清）	Three-lipped Tea Bowl with Flower and Bird Motifs with Saucer (The late Qing Dynasty)
藤编茶壶桶（晚清）	Cane Woven Tea Pot (the Late Qing Dynasty)
杭州裕泰茶厂茶叶罐（民国）	Yutai Tea Caddy (The Republic of China)
王裕泰茶叶发行所茶叶罐（民国）	Wangyutai Tea Caddy (The Republic of China)
浙江翁隆盛茶号茶叶罐（民国）	Wenglongsheng Tea Caddy (The Republic of China)
粉彩温壶（民国）	Famille-rose Warmer (The Republic of China)
杭州永春茶叶庄榉木茶箱（民国）	Beech Tea Box of Hangzhou Yongchun Tea House (The Republic of China)
铜胎镀银茶叶罐（近代）	Silver-coated Copper Tea Caddy (Modern Times)
翻簧茶盘（近代）	Bamboo Spring Tea Tray (Modern Times)

The Chinese and its English translation of tea wares are listed in chronological sequence from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) to the Modern Times (1840-1949). Certain linguistic features of these tea sets could be discovered from their English translation. As mentioned above, tea wares could be classified into different categories because of their unique functions, so we can find that there are expressions like bucket, bowl, and calix to show their differences. For the expressions like “Blue-and-White Bowl”, the expression “blue-and-white” refers to the picture portrayed on the tea ware, and the “bowl” refers to its function. This kind of expression is much more common to differentiate those tea wares. By contrast, the “Red Sandalwood Teapot Bucket” is another kind of expression, as red sandalwood is the texture of tea wares, and a teapot bucket is used to represent its distinctive function. In China, it is common to name an object after its place of origin to publicize an unknown place. For instance, in “Qionglai Kiln Handled Ewer”, Qionglai kiln is a well-known place in the Qionglai County of Sichuan Province in China and handled ewer is of course the usage of the tea ware. These three kinds of expression of tea wares are mostly used to categorize tea wares, and they are much more consistent with their Chinese expressions. However, there are a lot of other English translations of tea wares that do not follow their Chinese, which will be analyzed in detail from the perspective of Eco-Translatology.

3.2 *The Transformation in Linguistic Dimension*

In terms of linguistic dimension, transformation is made considering the factors such as lexical, syntactic, textual, and phonetic differences between the source and target language. The linguistic

adaptation and selection priorities the language expressions of the text over the process of translation (Hu, 2013, p. 236). Being the major role in the translation activity, the translator should be aware of the variations between the source language and the target language, making the adaptive selection based on the translational eco-environment. The examples of the transformation in linguistic dimension are as follows.

Example 1: 龙纹竹节银茶具（晚清）

Silver Tea Set with Dragon Patterns and Bamboo-like Decor (the Late Qing Dynasty)

Example 2: 珊瑚地留白梅花纹碗（清乾隆）

Coral Red Glazed Bowl with Pattern of White Plum Blossom (Qianlong Period of Qing Dynasty)

Example 3: 花鸟纹三托盖碗（晚清）

Three-lipped Tea Bowl with Flower and Bird Motifs with Saucer (the Late Qing Dynasty)

In the English translation of tea wares, the transformation in linguistic dimension is mostly used. Chinese is a language of parataxis compared with the hypotaxis feature of English, which Nida believes it is the most obvious difference between the two languages (Nida, 1975). From the above three examples, we can see “with+” structure is used to supplement detail information, which is commonly seen in the English structure, but rarely in Chinese. In addition, the main subject of Chinese is normally put at the end of the expression, like “茶具”, “碗” and “盖碗”, and supplementary details including “龙纹竹节”, “留白梅花纹” and “花鸟纹” are written first. By contrast, in English we can see the order is opposite. This is another different feature of English and Chinese that English tends to put the main subject first followed with other details, while detailed information is normally written first in China. By considering different language environment and habits, the translations of those tea wares well adapt to the translational eco-environment, making them acceptable to target readers.

3.3 *The Transformation in Cultural Dimension*

This dimension puts an emphasis on the transference and interpretation of bilingual cultural contents in the process of translation. The adaptation and selection of cultural dimension rests on focusing on the differences in culture between the source language and target language to avoid misunderstanding towards the source language culture, so translators are required to understand the culture system where the source language belongs (Hu, 2011). The examples of the transformation in the cultural dimension are as follows.

Example 1: 青花碗（明）

Blue-and-White Bowl (Ming Dynasty)

Example 2: 青花诗文茶具（清）

Blue-and-White Tea Set with Poem (Qing Dynasty)

From example 1 and 2, we can see that “青花” is translated into “Blue-and-White”. “青花” is a typical expression in Chinese, not representing “green flower” literally but a kind of porcelain painted with blue and white color. Therefore, when doing the translation, to understand the culture system of the

source language can avoid making mistakes, and it also maintains the original flavor of the source language. The eco-environment of source language is adapted and selected, the successful translation of the tea wares maintains and transfers the Chinese tea culture.

Example 3: 长沙窑绿釉茶铛（唐）

Green-glazed Tea Pot (cheng) from Changsha Kiln (Tang Dynasty)

Example 4: 邛崃窑绿釉铫（唐）

Green-glazed Pot (diao) from Qionglai Kiln (Tang Dynasty)

The translation of tea wares of example 3 and 4 has one similarity: the pot is annotated with “cheng” and “diao”. The two expressions are actually the transliteration of “铛” and “铫”. In Chinese, “铛” can be understood as a kind of container used to warm tea, which cannot be found in the English environment. Likewise, “铫” is also a kind of container used to cook tea water in the Chinese tea culture. Since the two expressions are typical in Chinese, it is impossible to translate them literally, and then “pot” is selected to illustrate “铛” and “铫”. However, as there are still differences between “pot” and “铛”, as well as “pot” and “铫”, transliteration is applied. For one thing, it can help the target reader to know their differences, and for another, it is also a way to maintain the Chinese tea culture. The translation of these tea wares selects “pot” to translate “铛” and “铫” so as to adapt to the translational eco-environment of the target language. In addition, “铛” and “铫” are transliterated to ensure the cultural symbol of the source language.

3.4 The Transformation in Communicative Dimension

As for this dimension, translators should focus on bilingual communicative intention while making adaptive selection and transformation. It requires translators to prioritize the communicative intention of the source text to ensure that the intention should be presented in the target text apart from ensuring the transformation of linguistic information and cultural connotation (Hu, 2011). The examples of the transformation in the communicative dimension are as follows.

Example 1: 吉州窑木叶纹盏（宋）

Jizhou Kiln Three Leaf Design Calix (Song Dynasty)

Example 2: 三清茶诗文盖碗（清嘉庆）

Covered Bowl with Poem (Jiaqing Period of Qing Dynasty)

The above three examples of tea ware translation are not literally translated with communicative intention well considered in the process. In example 1, “Three Leaf Design” is specially added which cannot be found in the source text. However, as the tea ware is displayed in the exhibition hall, visitors can see this tea ware is painted with three leaves. The translation of the tea set is not confined to the literal information of the source but selects the vital information from the tea ware itself so that the target reader can better understand the expression of this tea ware. The same situation can be seen in the example 2 where “三清茶” in the source text is deleted in the translation. The reason is that “三清茶” is actually a special tea with three ingredients signifying elegance and nobility added. However, the

tea ware can also be used to contain other kinds of tea, not just for any specially made tea. Therefore, “三清茶” in the target text is deleted and the translation can be well understood by the target reader.

Example 3: 越窑青釉刻“茶”字盒（唐）

Green-glazed Box Carved with the Word “tu” (tea) from Yue Kiln (Tang Dynasty)

From example 3, we can see “茶” in the source text is translated into “tu” and annotated with “tea” in the bracket. As mentioned above, the transformation in communicative dimension takes communication intention as the top priority when there are barriers in linguistic and cultural dimension. The Chinese character “茶” is transliterated into “tu” rather than directly translated into “tea”, which takes the consideration of cultural dimension. However, the annotation of tea means that the translation takes more concern about the communication in a bid to be better understood by the target reader.

In summary, the translation of tea wares should take the transformation of linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions into consideration, among which the linguistic dimension is more preferred. However, the cultural dimension and communicative dimension are equally important, considering the cultural barriers or communication intentions behind bilingual translation. The literal translation is more preferred in translating those tea wares, especially those concerning linguistic dimension. By contrast, the combination of literal and free translation could be found in the translation of tea wares relating to cultural and communicative dimensions.

4. Conclusion

The successful spread of tea culture is of great significance to China, as it plays an integral part in the Chinese culture. In this globalized era, the Chinese culture is gradually recognized and appreciated by the foreign world. As the world bids adieu to the isolation of Covid-19, the exchanges between nations in official or non-official forms will explode. The Chinese culture will continue to be visited by foreigners. As one of the representatives of the Chinese tea culture, the successful translation of tea wares will lay a solid foundation for its global dissemination. The multi-dimensional and translators' adaptative selection and transformation theories of the Eco-Translatology pave the way for the translatability of those tea wares. The analysis of the English translation of tea wares displayed in the China National Tea Museum from the perspective of Eco-Translatology demonstrates that specific adaptive selections and transformations are applied in translating those tea wares with regard to the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. The literal translation is the first choice in translating those tea wares of the three dimensions, and literal translation and free translation are combined in translating tea wares pertinent to cultural and communicative dimensions.

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