

# A Comparative Study of Five English Versions of *Ding Feng Bo* from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

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**Abstract:** Chinese classical poetry involves abundant information about Chinese traditional culture, playing an important role in the publicity of Chinese culture and history. The proper Chinese-English translation will help eliminate the barriers to target readers' comprehension, promoting the conveyance of cultural connotation and aesthetic value of Chinese classical poetry. Based on Eco-translatology, this paper takes five representative English versions of *Ding Feng Bo* as a research corpus and explores the prosody, onomatopoeia, culture-loaded words, and emotional aspects about whether the three dimensions – language dimension, culture dimension, and communication dimension of *Ding Feng Bo* have been effectively transformed, so as to evaluate the quality of translation. Through multifaceted consideration, it is suggested that the version by Xu Yuanchong is more in accordance with three-dimensional transformation, achieving harmony between selection and adaptation. The research on the value and function of eco-translatology not only provides strategies for the translation of Chinese classical poetry but also facilitates the construction of China's public discourse and images in international communication and external publicity of Chinese culture.

**Keywords:** eco-translatology; three-dimensional transformation; *Ding Feng Bo*; prosody; culture-loaded word; cultural publicity

## 1. Introduction

Su Shi (1037-1101), one of the “Eight Great Men of Letters of Tang and Song”, is renowned for his literary accomplishments, which stand as the pinnacle of the Northern Song Dynasty's literary creation. In spite of frustrations in his political career and banishment to Lingnan, a place with meager substance and a poor climate in ancient times, his optimism and open-mindedness could be found between the lines in his literary works. His poetry was characterized by boldness and without constraint, embodying his broad-minded realm of life, which has influenced generations of Chinese people and integrated with Chinese national character. As an indispensable component of traditional Chinese culture, the proper translation of Su Shi's poetry reveals extraordinary significance in the cultural promotion. Translators at home and abroad show a multi-dimensional character image of Su Shi through diverse text understandings and language expressions, rendering various reading experiences. Therefore, a study of Su Shi's poetry contributes to the accurate comprehension of Chinese cultural connotation and cultural publicity.

## 2. Adaption of Eco-Translatology in Chinese Classical Poetry

Translating ecology was first advanced by P. A. Newmark(1988), referring to the ecological characteristics of translation activities[8]. Later, based on Darwin's survival of the fittest theory, Hu Gengshen(2004) specified eco-translatology, putting forward the theory of translation adaption and selection, indicating that translators should take subjective initiative and choose appropriate translation methods so that source language (SL) can adapt to the cultural environment of the target language (TL)[3]. Hence, the maintenance of the ecological balance in the translation realm could be achieved. In other words, the harmonious coexistence of two languages and cultures is realized. Subsequently, Hu Gengshen(2011) proposed the application of eco-translatology in the translation process as a

three-dimensional transformation, which is the language dimension, culture dimension, and communication dimension respectively. Specifically, translators should convert the language forms, express and interpret the cultural connotation, and convey the communicative intentions of the original text[4]. With the promotion of eco-translatology, it has been applied to poetry. Luo Dijiang and Li Jiayun (2018) emphasized that the translation of forms is the basic requirement of poetry translation. Eco-translatology requires translators to accentuate the intrinsic ecological structure of the original text and reproduce it in the target language system. By retaining the poetry form, the reproduction of beauty in form, sound, sense, and mood of the source language poetry could be achieved[7]. The evaluation criterion of translation works has been settled, which renders the translation of Chinese poetry a brand-new perspective and innovative insights. Chinese classical poetry boasts artistic features and profound history, exerting a far-reaching influence on conveying Chinese culture, so it has been heatedly discussed by academia from home and abroad. In particular, the complexity of Chinese prosody and cultural-loaded words have been brought into focus. To better balance the meaning as well as the form, the translation of Chinese classical poetry requires more sophisticated considerations.

Intriguingly, eco-translatology is applicable to the external publicity of Chinese culture. The reason is that the time-honored Chinese culture contains enduring ideas such as the peaceful coexistence of men and nature, which in turn, has set an ideological basis for eco-translatology. However, there are few studies that combine eco-translatology with poetry, and translators tend to be restricted by their cultural ecosystems or fail to convey cultural flavor because culture-loaded words in Chinese poetry can create great challenges in conveying meaning while keeping rhythm and tone. Additionally, it is of great significance to study Chinese poet Su Shi, a prominent literator whose works contain rich cultural connotations and historical value. Yet, there are few academic studies on the intersection between his works and eco-translatology, and his classic Ding Feng Bo has no previous studies. Hence, this paper conducts an in-depth comparative study of the five English versions of Su Shi's Ding Feng Bo based on three-dimensional transformation theory in eco-translatology, aiming at providing ideas for translators to effectively adapt to the transitional eco-environment, thus realizing the reciprocal conversion between SL and TL and promoting the outreach of Chinese poetry.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

Ding Feng Bo is one of Su Shi's representative works, which has been translated into several English versions. Among them, five versions, respectively translated by Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie, Xu Yuanchong, Xu Zhongjie, Edward C. Chang, and Julie Landau, are widely accepted in the literary world. This comparative study emphasizes the equivalence of translation in language, culture, and communication dimensions. Specifically, the conversion of prosody and onomatopoeia, the expression of culture-loaded words, as well as the embodiment of emotions and attitudes are the research focus.

#### ***3.1. Transformation in Language Dimension***

The characteristics of Chinese classical poetry such as tonal patterns, rhythms, and antithesis are also the difficulties in translation. All literature attaches great importance to rhythm, especially poetry. In literary creation, the finest poetic artistic effect can be achieved by the stress of glossemes flows, the cadence of intonation, and the speed of tempo with the changes of the author's thoughts and feelings[11]. From the perspective of eco-translatology, the process of language transformation involves the selection of vocabulary, sentence structures, and other language forms to fit the ecological translation context, thus reproducing the original language features[6]. The transmission of phonological charm maintains the language style and artistic feature of the source text, satisfying the aesthetic demand of target readers.

##### ***3.1.1. Prosody***

The rhythm rules vary from language to language, thus mechanically imitating the rhythm of the original text is inadvisable. Generally speaking, the prosody of English poetry is reflected in the stress of syllables, while determined by the antithesis of words and the level of tones in Chinese classical poetry[1]. Ding Feng Bo consists of two stanzas with rich rhythms and alternate level and oblique tones. In the first stanza, the sequence of rhyme tones is level, oblique, and level, while the second stanza is oblique, level, oblique, and level, assuming a neat form of "aba, baba". Additionally, there are three two-character added sentences in the poetry, acting as a connecting link between the preceding and the following. Their preceding rhyme tones are oblique, and the following are level. The elaborate prosodic arrangement not only magnifies the rhythms but also significantly embodies Su Shi's frankness and

freedom.

In translation, the versions by Xu Yuanchong and by Xu Zhongjie greatly adapt to the ecological environment of the target language by using abundant single rimes at the end of adjacent two lines, which represent the same vowels and subsequent consonants. For instance, “fain” and “rain”, “chill” and “hill”, and “track” and “back” in the version by Xu Yuanchong, and “way” and “may”, “horse-rides” and “strides”, and “can” and “man” by Xu Zhongjie, preserve the linguistic ecology and cadence of the source language, improve their readability. Besides, alliteration, such as “Let” and “Listen”, is also applied in the version by Xu Zhongjie. On the contrary, the other versions are in the form of prose with no rhythm, which fails to retain the phonological charm and original form.

### 3.1.2. Onomatopoeia

Originating from observation and cognition, onomatopoeia can evoke people’s imagination of objects. Onomatopoeia is not only a kind of word formation but also a rhetorical device that consists of expressing a sound through oral or written language to imitate the phenomenon of reality, which can increase more dynamism of the text. Hence, the proper use of onomatopoeia significantly reproduces the scenes and atmosphere of the original text, leaving a deep impression on the readers[10]. In the version by Xu Zhongjie, there are two onomatopoeic words, respectively being “patter” and “sough”. The word “patter” imitates the soft and continuous sound that rain makes when it hits a surface, and “sough” refers to whistling or rushing sound made by the wind in the trees. These onomatopoeic words completely reproduce the scene and atmosphere of the original text, evoking interactive and immersive feelings in target readers. Surrounded by imaginary drizzling rain and blustering winds, they tend to be impressed by Su Shi’s detachment and freedom. By comparison, the other versions mainly use the words “beat” and “wind”, which are not as faithful as Xu Zhongjie’s version.

### 3.2. Transformation in Culture Dimension

Intelligibility and acceptability are top priorities in the culture dimension. The cultural uniqueness of languages results in the semantic lacuna and lack of cognitive universality of the target language readers, making them difficult to have similar emotional experiences with the source language readers. Therefore, the translators should display subjective initiative in the process of translation, reconstruct and balance the ecological environment of SL and TL[9], especially in handling the culture-loaded words, thus bridging the cultural gap between Chinese and Western rather than mere language-level conversion.

#### 3.2.1. Translation of “Mang Xie”

Table 1 Various Versions of “Mang Xie”

Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie	straw sandals[14]
Xu Yuanchong	sandals[12]
Xu Zhongjie	sandal-shods[13]
Edward C. Chang	straw sandals[2]
Julie Landau	grass shoes[5]

“Mang Xie” was widely preferred in ancient China, which has a history of several thousand years. It was originally made of cuticles of miscanthus stem and later generally referred to the shoes made of straw. In the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the clothing of people from all walks of life and social classes had corresponding regulations. The officials generally wore silk shoes while common people could only wear straw sandals, which were symbols of status. In contrast to straw sandals, which mean trudging in a pristine way, horse ride symbolizes nobility and dignity. However, straw sandals gradually evolved into a symbol of freedom, ease, and seclusion, which were greatly favored by literati and hermits. As an official with a higher position, Su Shi preferred straw sandals to a saddled horse, representing his detachment and indifference to fame and wealth. Therefore, it is necessary to translate “straw” to embody Su Shi’s inner ideal and philosophy of life. Table 1 compares the various versions of “Mang Xie”. The versions by Yang Xianyi and by Edward highlight the raw materials of sandals, allowing readers to have an accurate comprehension. Although the version by Julie also emphasizes the material, it fails in the thorough comprehension of Chinese cultural and historic background, thus misusing “grass” as the material, which is incorrect. The versions by Xu Yuanchong and by Xu Zhongjie use “sandals” and “sandal-shod”, which may make target language readers misunderstand it as “slippers”, hindering their further comprehension of Su Shi’s thoughts.

### 3.2.2. Translation of “Liao Qiao”

Chinese feature in character-based expression, and a single character often has rich meanings. Chinese idioms are mainly four-character phrases, but their connotations are much ampler than the literal meanings. For example, “Liao Qiao” is a formal and elegant phrase that first appeared in Chinese poetry, which is often used in literary creation, describing the slight chill of early spring brought by winds. However, as an implicit interpretation, the slight chill, spring, and wind are not directly expressed literally, which requires particular attention to expression. Table 2 provides five versions, each using the word category of wind with different degrees, sorting from light to heavy as breeze, wind, and gust. “Breeze” refers to the soft warm wind which makes people feel cozy and toasty, while “gust” renders fierce wind and piercing cold to target language readers. Obviously, both of them are biased in degree. However, “wind” generally refers to the natural flow of air, and its speed and force can differ according to the context. Hence, the versions by Xu Zhongjie and by Julie are inappropriate. The other versions both use the words “vernal” and “spring” to reveal the season, but are different in the adjectives for temperature, respectively keen, shrill, and cold. For one thing, “keen” means sharp and intense. For another thing, “shrill” refers to the sound of the wind being high-pitched and unpleasant, so neither lexis is accurate. While the definition of “cold” most accurately describes a temperature that is uncomfortably lower than normal. Thus, the version by Edward relatively corresponds to the source text.

Table 2 Comparisons of five versions

Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie	The keen spring wind[14]
Xu Yuanchong	vernal wind shrill[12]
Xu Zhongjie	Spring breeze[13]
Edward C. Chang	Cold spring wind[2]
Julie Landau	Harsh spring gusts[5]

### 3.3. Transformation in Communication Dimension

In order to avoid cultural misunderstanding and arouse similar feelings, translators should attach great importance to the cultural differences between SL and TL by choosing proper lexical items and forms from the deep connotation and intention of authors.

#### 3.3.1. Translation of “Shui Pa ? ”

Table 3 Five versions of a rhetorical question

Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie	Here’s nothing to fear![14]
Xu Yuanchong	Oh, I would fain.[12]
Xu Zhongjie	Who among us is afraid of the rain?[13]
Edward C. Chang	Don’t be afraid of getting used to a life.[2]
Julie Landau	Why fret?[5]

By using the rhetorical question “Shui Pa?”, Su Shi intended to emphasize his detached and fearless attitude toward a bumpy life, which actually means that I am not afraid of any hardships and tribulations of life. As is shown in Table 3, the versions by Xu Zhongjie and by Julie retain the interrogative form of the original text, while the remaining three versions directly adopt its intrinsic meaning and use a declarative form. Though the interrogative form is faithful to the original form, it fails in meeting the habitual expression of the target language, which may lead to misunderstandings because English is more straightforward and objective. To accentuate Su Shi’s broadminded attitude rather than questioning the readers, it is more appropriate to use a declarative sentence in the translated version. What is more, the enhancement of the author’s emotion and tone can be achieved by using an interrogative form in Chinese, while in English it tends to be in the form of an exclamation or imperative. To sum up, the versions by Edward and by Yang Xianyi both successfully avoid incomprehension and convey the faithful connotation of straightforwardness with appropriate forms.

#### 3.3.2. Translation of “Ye Wu Feng Yu Ye Wu Qing”

Table 4: Comparisons of five versions

Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie	Impervious to wind, rain or sunny weather.[14]
Xu Yuanchong	Impervious to wind, rain or shine, I’ll have my will.[12]
Xu Zhongjie	On our way home, it’s neither fair nor rough.[13]

Edward C. Chang	I feel that it is neither sunny nor windy with rain.[2]
Julie Landau	There's be no rain, no wind – but no sun either![5]

Making use of objects to express ideas is a common technique employed by Chinese poets. The wind, rain, and shine are symbols that mean frustration and triumph in life, integrating the author's emotions and aesthetic orientation. In translation, conveying deep emotions can bridge the gap in the reading experience and understanding between SL readers and TL readers, so as to fully fulfill the communicative purpose. According to Table 4, the versions by Xu Zhongjie, Edward, and Julie simply give a descriptive translation of the objects, which is merely confined to the physical realm rather than elevated to the emotional realm, causing the disparity in comprehension. "Wind and rain" not only refers to the terrible weather that Su Shi encountered on the road, but also alludes to his twisty and tortuous official career. However, whether it is failure or success, Su Shi took the rough with the smooth and freed himself from external disturbance. The central concept that Su Shi wished to express was "one should be neither afraid of failure, nor should he be ecstatic because of success", which reflects his greatly discerning and apprehending mentality. Hence, the other two versions use the word "impervious" to embody Su Shi's broad mind, arousing emotional resonance among target readers. Similarly, "I'll have my will" in the version by Xu Yuanchong, manifests that he is not involved in the material world but abide by his wishes, which improves the acceptability of the translation.

#### 4. Conclusions

Based on the eco-translatology, this paper compares and analyzes five English versions of Ding Feng Bo based on three-dimensional theory, respectively covering language, culture, and communication. Each version features distinct aspects. In terms of language dimension, Xu Yuanchong and Xu Zhongjie pay great heed to rhythm, especially Xu Zhongjie, who uses the rhetorical device of onomatopoeia to reproduce the original scenes and atmosphere. From the perspective of culture dimension, Edward C. Chang most faithfully comprehends and interprets the culture-loaded words to effectively avoid misunderstandings among target language readers. As to the communication dimension, Xu Yuanchong, Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie have a relatively good grasp of the author's thoughts and emotions, which is reflected by the usage of words in the emotional realm. In contrast, there is still room for improvement in Julie Landau's understanding of culture-loaded words, as well as Su Shi's life experiences and thoughts.

This paper sets out to evaluate the practical application of eco-translatology in Chinese classical poetry translation. First, translators should fully comply with the rhythm features of Chinese classical poetry, such as tonal patterns and antithesis, and adapt it to the rhythm rules in the target language. Second, proper use of onomatopoeia can make the target language readers immerse in the author's description of particular circumstances, enhancing the understanding of deeper implications. Third, thorough comprehension of Chinese historical background and distinctive cultural symbols is essential preparation before interpreting, so that the meanings of culture-loaded words can be accurately conveyed. Fourth, it is necessary to take the context, the author's era background, and life experience into account to clarify emotional keynotes of the poetry, thus directly delivering the connotations to promote the comprehension of the target language readers. Overall, by selection and adaptation, a translator plays a positive role in collating the ecosystems of two languages and transmitting cultural connotation from the source language to the target language. To conclude, achieving coordination and equivalence in two language ecosystems can publicize Chinese classical poetry across the world.

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