# Research on the English Translation of Political Texts from the Perspective of Eco-translatology: A Case Study of *Government Work Report* in 2023

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**Abstract.** As China's economy and society develop and its international influence continues to grow, foreign governments and people are paying more attention to China. In this context, foreign publicity work is of great significance for the world to "understand China". As an effective carrier of external publicity work, the political texts translation covers China's current development status, major policies, and strategic plans. Therefore, its importance is self-evident. Based on the ecological translation theory, this study takes the English translation of the *2023 Government Work Report* as an example to explore how to interpret China's path and demonstrate cultural confidence in political texts translation, thereby achieving communicative purposes. The study found that translators often use translation strategies such as conversion of parts of speech, extension, and omission to achieve adaptive selection in the three dimensions of language, culture, and communication in order to achieve an ecological balance between the source and the target language culture, thereby enhancing the appeal and credibility of China's discourse in foreign publicity work.

**Keywords:** *Government Work Report*; Eco-translatology; Three-dimensional Transformation; Translation Strategy.

## 1. Introduction

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has attached great importance to foreign publicity work with the goal of building a discourse system that integrates Chinese and Western cultures, using Chinese narratives and international expressions to tell the story of China in the new era, and enabling the world to have a more objective and comprehensive understanding of a constantly developing China. This work is not only conducive to the "going global" of Chinese culture, but also provides a bridge for mutual learning among different civilizations around the world. It is of great significance for building a human community with a shared future.

The political texts translation is an important carrier for presenting China's present development status, major policies, and strategic plans in foreign publicity work. It is closely related to the national image and discourse right, and has a profound impact on China's domestic stability, interests, foreign relations and so on (Shu & Yu, 2017). Therefore, the significance of political texts translation in this process is self-evident. In recent years, researches on political texts translation have received increasing attention in the domestic academic world. Many scholars have analyzed the linguistic characteristics of political texts translation using the method of building corpora and comparing multiple versions of translations and diachronic corpus. For example, Li and Li (2020) used the dual translations of the Third Plenum of the 18th CPC Central Committee as their corpus to compare the translation styles of official translations and foreign translations, and pointed out that Chinese official translations are more in accordance with the English-speaking audiences' habits. Jia and Sun (2018), according to their self-built diachronic corpus and quantitative scientific statistics, researched into the innovativeness of the English translations of the 19th National Congress report in comparison with the 18th Congress report from the perspectives of vocabulary, syntax, and expression. In addition, some scholars have explored the translation techniques and features of political texts from the view of functional equivalence and Skopos theory. For example, Fang (2019) explored the English translation of the characteristic expressions of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* from the

perspective of Skopos theory, aiming to convey the ideological connotation of political documents and achieve the purpose of effectively disseminating Chinese political ideas.

It can be seen that the current research on political texts translation is relatively limited. On the one hand, the research lacks new theoretical frameworks, and on the other hand, research in this field often focuses on a single disciplinary perspective. Eco-translatology theory is an emerging translation theory that integrates ecological holism wisdom and multidisciplinary knowledge. This theory comprehensively interprets the translation process, principles, methods, and evaluation standards for translation practice. In the translation process, eco-translatology theory requires translators to follow the principle of "multidimensional adaptation and adaptive selection," that is, to achieve adaptive selection transformation in the three dimensions of language, culture, and communication (Hu, 2011). Currently, eco-translatology theory is still not widely used in the study of political texts translation.

Among various political texts in China, the *Government Work Report* (hereinafter referred to as the *Report*) is the most authoritative policy document. It not only summarizes the achievements and shortcomings of government work in the past year or in the past five years, but also points out the priorities and directions in politics, economy, diplomacy, ecology, and other aspects in the future. Therefore, it is not only an important carrier of China's foreign publicity work, but also an essential way for international community to deeply understand China's development status, major policies, and strategic plans. Since the language of such texts is extremely concise and characterized by Chinese culture, it poses great difficulty in translation. From the perspective of eco-translatology theory, this paper takes the three-dimensional transformation of language, culture, and communication as the point of entry, and analyzes the English translation strategy of the 2023 Report through examples, so as to provide reference for the English translation of political texts, and better accomplish the mission of building a major country image and illustrating the Chinese spirit in the new era.

## 2.  Eco-translatology

In the early 21st century, Hu Gengshen started to study the translation practice from an ecological perspective under the guidance of ecological civilization construction. Guided by the adaptation/selection theory in Darwinian evolution, he proposed the concept of eco-translatology. The internal logic and ecological perspective of this interdisciplinary integration broadened the theoretical thinking in translation studies and held significant methodological implications featuring ecological holism (Hu, 2009).

From the standpoint of eco-translation studies, the translator is at the center of the translation process which includes two stages: adaptation and selection. Firstly, the translator needs to adapt to the eco-translation environment of the source language and accept choices within that environment. Secondly, the translator constitutes part of the eco-translation environment and makes choices for the target text (Liu, 2022). Therefore, the translator needs to exert subjectivity and constantly make dynamic choices to achieve ecological balance between the source and target language environments. In the process of translation, the translator should follow the principles of multidimensional adaptation and adaptive selection, which means that the translator should try his best to pursue multidimensional adaptation, or at least three-dimensional transformation, so as to produce high-quality translations (Hu, 2008). The three dimensions refer to language, culture, and communication. In brief, the linguistic dimension focuses on the content and form of the language, the cultural dimension emphasizes the cultural representation, and the communication dimension concerns the transmission of communicative intent.

Eco-translation studies are not confined to theoretical discussions, but have also been widely applied in various fields. In the realm of literary translation, Sun and Han (2021) analyzed culture-loaded words in Liu Yukun's English translation of *Folding Beijing* and suggested that to create the optimal translation with integrated adaptive selection, cognitive transformations should be made during the process of language encoding. The overall translation ecology of the work should also be

taken into account so as to bridge the cultural gap between China and the West. Chen and Wu (2022), starting from Mo Yan's *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* and Ge Haowen's translation, employed the three-dimensional transformation approach to study the translation of passive constructions in Chinese, and concluded that sentence restructuring, intransitive verbs, and active voice in English are adaptable to the reading habits of the target language readers, thus being more acceptable. In the field of political publicity translation research, Qin (2015) did research on the translation of intangible cultural heritage from the aspect of eco-translation environment, translator-centeredness, and the coexistence of multiple translations. He suggested that information should be precisely conveyed based on the multimodality of such texts. Xiao (2014) argued that the translation of Chinese signs should take into account the standard of international society and the actual situation in China. Guided by the principle of three-dimensional adaptive selection transformation, the cultural background and thinking patterns of the target language readers should be considered, and neutral or moderate wording should be used to adapt to the eco-translation environment in China.

Reviewing the literature, it is clear that although Eco-translatology studies have been extensively applied in literary and foreign publicity translation research, it is seldom used in translation of political texts. Under the guidance of three-dimensional transformation theory of language, culture, and communication, this study adopts an eco-translatology approach against this trend to conduct an in-depth analysis of the English translation strategies in the *2023 Government Work Report*. The aim of this study is to enrich the research on political texts translation, contribute to the construction of China's discourse system in international communication, and enhance China's discourse power and credibility on the international stage.

## 3.  Analysis of the English Translation of the *2023 Government Work Report* from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

### 3.1 Linguistic Dimension

The transformation of the linguistic dimension refers to the translator's adaptive selection of linguistic forms during the translation (Hu, 2011). In translation, the translator needs to fully consider the eco-translatological environment of the source and target languages, accurately reproduce the writing style and connotation of the source language to correspond with the reading habits of the target language readers. English belongs to the Indo-European language family, while Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. Therefore, there are remarkable differences in the use of these two languages. These differences mainly consist of differences in length, dynamic and stative differences, and hypotactic and paratactic differences (Ma, 2022). In this light, this study will research into the English translation strategies of the *2023 Government Work Report* from the lexical and the syntactical level.

#### 3.1.1 Lexical Level

(1) Conversion of parts of speech

Example 1

ST: 在重点工程建设中推广**以工代赈**。

TT: **Work-relief programs** in major projects were expanded.

English is a relatively static language, while Chinese is a more dynamic language (Wei, 2022). In the English translation of the *Government Work Report* in 2023, many Chinese verbs are translated into English nouns in order to better adapt to the linguistic environment of the target language. "以工代赈"is a poverty alleviation policy launched by Chinese government that aims to help more disadvantaged people to find employment and increase their income by replacing traditional relief measures with paid labor.

Literally translated, "以工代赈" means "replacing relief with labor," which is a verb phrase. However, a literal translation of this phrase would neither fully convey the formal and concise tone

of *the Report* nor stay in line with English expression habits. Therefore, the translator changed the word class based on the meaning of the phrase and translated it into a noun phrase, "work-relief programs", placed at the beginning of the sentence to conform to the thinking patterns of the target language readers. The noun "programs" helps to convey the systematic and effective efforts made by the Chinese government in poverty relief, which achieved a balance in language and effectively conveyed the essence of the original text.

(2) Addition of logical connectives

Example 2

ST: 持之以恒推进<u>触动政府自身利益的改革</u>。

TT: We made consistent efforts to promote reforms **<u>despite the fact</u>** that they affected the interests of government itself.

In terms of grammatical coherence, English mainly relies on explicit connections and follows a rigorous form and logical structure. By contrast, Chinese relies on implicit connections and emphasizes the overall effect (Yang, Xie, Wang, Shi & Xiao, 2022).

In light of the original sentence structure, example 2 can be roughly translated as "Making consistent efforts to promote reforms that affect the interests of the government itself". However, the translator of this example did not dwell on the original linguistic form. The translator intentionally added the logical connective "despite the fact" instead to form a concessive adverbial clause, so as to highlight the government's determination and courage to lead the fight against corruption. This approach allows the target language readers to clearly understand the logical relations between the semantics. Moreover, as the Chinese text of *the Report* often uses sentences without subject to highlight its objectivity, the translator added "we" to the translation to conform to the grammatical structure and writing habits of English. Through the translator's efforts, the transformation on the level of linguistic dimension between the original text and translation has been realized.

(3) Omission of category nouns

Example 3

ST: 制造业领域基本全面放开，金融等服务业开放<u>水平</u>不断提升。

TT: The entire manufacturing sector was generally opened up, and **<u>opening</u>** in finance and other service sectors was continuously enhanced.

Category nouns refer to words that indicate the category such as concept, behavior, and phenomenon (Xiao, 2016). Category nouns are frequently used in Chinese political and economic texts such as the *Report*. However, most of them do not have any substantial meaning. If all of these category nouns were literally translated, it would result in information redundancy. In Example 3, "level" is an abstract category word. Translating "开放水平" directly as "opening level" complete the communication goal, but the expression is tedious since "opening" already suggests the meaning of "level". To adapt to the liguistic environment of the target language, the translator adopted the translation strategy of omission and deleted "level," making the target text concise and simple, while remaining the original meaning as well as improvng the accuracy of the translation.

(4) Repeated words

Example 4

ST: 国防和军队建设取得<u>一系列</u>新的重大成就、发生<u>一系列</u>重大变革。

TT: **<u>A series of</u>** major achievements were made in national defense and military development. As a result, **<u>a number of</u>** significant changes took place in this domain.

In terms of vocabulary, Chinese prefers to enhance the power of language by repetition, while English favors the diversity of expressions. In Example 4, "一系列" appears twice in a row, which sounds catchy and reflects the rhythmic beauty of the Chinese language. The repetition also enhanced the cohesion between sentences. However, in English linguistic environment, repetition of vocabulary should be avoided. Therefore, the translator used different English translations for the repeated word. The first "一系列" was translated as "a series of," and the second "一系列" was flexibly translated into "a number of." This translation not only avoids monotony but also conveys a sense of vigor, reflecting the prosperous development and vitality of China's national defense construction. At the

level of linguistic dimension, the translation realizes the transformation to the target language to the greatest extent.

**3.1.2 Syntactical Level**

(1) Sentences without subjects

Example 5

ST: <u>提升</u>农业综合生产能力。

TT: <u>**We**</u> worked to enhance overall agricultural production capacity.

In terms of discourse coherence, the *Report* emphasizes the significance of accuracy and conciseness. Subjects are often omitted to communicate the meaning. However, when translating, the translator needs to take into consideration the integrity of the sentence, as omission of the subject in English is often considered a violation of grammatical rules. As the *Report* is a speech made by Premier Li Keqiang on behalf of the State Council to the National People's Congress, the hidden subject in many sentences is "we," as in Example 5 where the subject of "提升" is obviously "we." However, when we translate the *Report* into English, numerous sentences without subjects could leave an impression of giving orders for their resemblance to imperative sentences. In this case, the translation may not have a bad impact on the publicity effects. In order to avoid this problem, the translator uses the method of supplementation to reveal the implicit subject "we" when translating these sentences without subjects, which makes the meaning conveyed more accurate and acceptable.

(2) Parallelism

Example 6

ST: 完善税费优惠政策，对现行减税降费、退税缓税等措施，<u>**该延续的延续，该优化的优化**</u>。

TT: We should improve preferential tax and fee policies, and extend and further refine policies on tax and fee cuts, tax rebates, and tax deferrals <u>**as the situation requires**</u>.

Parallelism refers to arranging components with the same importance in a sentence, paragraph, or discourse in a parallel manner (Guo, 2011). The *Report* often uses parallelism to strengthen the coherence between sentences, emphasize emotions, and reinforce viewpoints. Example 6 is the translation of a China's tax policy that aims to support small and micro enterprises and individual businesses. The original text uses two identical structures to emphasize the need to further implement and improve the tax system according to the actual situation. As the two sentences are closely related in meaning, the translator flexibly translated them into a manner adverbial clause "as the situation requires," to break free from the shackles of the original sentence structure, while making the translation more fluent and natural, thus realizing the transformation on the level of linguistic dimension.

**3.2 Cultural Dimension**

The transformation on the level of cultural dimension requires the translator to pay close attention to the differences between the source and target cultures when converting, conveying, and interpreting two different languages. Its goal is to avoiding misunderstandings caused by cultural diversity. From an external perspective, translation is a linguistic conversion activity. However, viewed its essence, it is also a cross-cultural communication activity (Zheng, 2016). To make the *Report* more easily understood, Premier Li Keqiang used many words with Chinese characteristics in the 2023 Report. These words are not only highly representative of Chinese traditional culture but also embody the core thinking of the Party Central Committee's leadership on national governance. With their special connotations, they symbolize the magnificent creation of both traditional Chinese civilization and contemporary socialism with Chinese characteristics. The accurate translation of such vocabulary into other languages based on a deep understanding presents a major difficulty for translators. Wang (2020) divided vocabulary with Chinese characteristics into five categories: proper nouns, allusions, abbreviations, idioms, and metaphors. She analyzes the corresponding translation strategies for each

category. Based on this viewpoint, this article mainly explores the adaptability of English translations in the cultural dimension from the aspects of proper nouns, allusions, and idioms.

### 3.2.1 Proper nouns

**Table 1.** Comparison of Proper Nouns between English and Chinese in the *2023 Government Work Report*

| ST | TT |
|---|---|
| 相机调控 | well-timed regulation |
| 全民健身 | Fitness-for-All activities |
| 大食物观 | all-encompassing approach to food |
| 集体林权 | collective forest tenure |
| 财政贴息 | loan interest subsidies |
| 专项再贷款 | targeted re-lending |
| 供销合作社 | supply and marketing cooperatives |
| 供给侧结构性改革 | supply-side structural reform |
| 精准扶贫 | targeted poverty alleviation |
| 帮扶机制 | assistance mechanisms |

Proper nouns refer to specific people, things, places, institutions, organizations, systems, etc. (Wang, 2020). As the *Report* is a condense expression of China's basic principles and development concepts, it covers a large number of proper nouns. Therefore, target language readers are usually unfamiliar with such the cultural information communicated by such vocabulary. To solve this problem, the translator needs to fully leverage their subjectivity in the eco-translatological environment and choose appropriate methods for translation. Table 1 compares the proper nouns in Chinese and their corresponding translations in English that appeared in the 2023 Report. For example, the term "相机调控" refers to the government′s action of making appropriate decisions and choices based on interval regulation to cope with economic downward pressure. As there is no corresponding expression in English, literally translating it as "camera control" would make it difficult for target language readers to understand. Therefore, the translator, on the premise of not losing the cultural connotation of the source language, used a domestication translation strategy. The term "well-timed" is explained in the Oxford English Dictionary as "occurring, done, or made at a suitable or favourable time", which vividly reflected the essence of this policy, bridging the cultural differences between China and the West, and achieving cultural transformation on the level of linguistic dimension.

### 3.2.2 Allusion

Example 7

ST: …既帮助企业渡过难关、**留得青山**，也放水养鱼、涵养税源,…

TT: This policy not only helped enterprises overcome difficulties and **stay afloat**, but also nurtured business growth and cultivated sources of tax revenue.

An allusion is a figure of speech in which authors refer to mythology, fables, legends, historical stories, or famous people (Liu & Guo, 2000). Such expressions have historical origins and cultural backgrounds. The use of this rhetorical device may cause obstacles for foreign readers to understand if not handled properly. For instance, the phrase "留得青山" comes from *Slapping the Table in Amazement* (Ling, 1999) Volume 22. Its meaning is that one must first preserve the fundamental conditions to solve other problems. The implied meaning of this allusion is well known in China, and its usage in the *Report* on the work of government significantly increases the affinity of the linguistic expression and demonstrates the governing wisdom of the Party. Due to the readers' lack of relevant cultural knowledge, the translator made an adaptive choice of cultural compromise by translating "留得青山" as "stay afloat." Although the function and cultural connotation of the translated text are not entirely equivalent to that of the original text, this expression is understandable and fits the English eco-translation environment. It can help extend the influence of the *Report* and contributes to the cause of external publicity.

### 3.2.3 Idioms

Example 8

ST: <u>大道至简</u>，政简易行。

TT: **<u>Great truths are always simple</u>**, and simple government administration is always most effective.

Idioms refer to idiomatic archaisms in language that cannot be altered with a long history, rhetorical function, and a classical style (Xu, 1997). In the *Report*, the idiom "大道至简" is used to emphasize that effective governance does not rely on complexity, but on pragmatism. This idiom comes from the Taoist classic *Tao Te Ching* (Chen, 1984). It describes that the basic principles and methods are extremely simple. In Chinese philosophy, "道" (Dao) is a core concept that represents the ultimate truth. If one blindly pursues literal equivalence and translates "Dao" as "road," the meaning will not be conveyed accurately, and the eco-translatological balance between the source and target language will not be achieved.

Therefore, the translator combined free and literal translation to convey the underlying cultural information behind the idiom. "Great truths" is used to express the extended meaning of "Dao," and "simple" is used to directly translate the Chinese character "易." This translation method achieves the maximum of adaptive transformation on the level of cultural dimension.

### 3.3 Communicative Dimension

Apart from the communication of linguistic and cultural information, transformation on the level of communicative dimension refers to the realization of communicative intent that focuses on the system of source language. British translation scholar Peter Newmark (2005) divides translated texts into three major categories: informative, expressive, and vocative texts. The English translation of the *Report* can be classified as informative and vocative texts. The aim of the *Report* is to present China's development ideas, policies, and guidelines to foreign friends in an easily understandable way, so that confrontational attitudes can be eliminated while building bridges for communication and mutual learning.

Therefore, in terms of communicative dimension, the translator should not only preserve the source language image but also avoid obscurity and abstraction, while continuously adapting to the specific eco-translation environment to enhance the readability and promote dissemination of the translation.

### 3.3.1 Numbers + Abbreviations

Example 9

ST: "<u>三公</u>"经费大幅压减。

TT: **<u>Spending on official overseas visits, vehicles for official use, and official hospitality</u>** was slashed.

In Chinese, certain long words and sentences are often condensed into combinations of a number and an abbreviation for the sake of simplicity and convenience. This practice is very common in government documents that condense a huge amount of information such as the *Report*. However, directly translating these "number+abbreviation" combinations can lead to a loss of information and cause difficulty in conveying the communicative intention of the original text. In Example 9, "三公" refers to "Spending on official overseas visits, vehicles for official use, and official hospitality." While a literal translation of "三公" as "Three Officials" is possible for Chinese readers, it can lead to ambiguity and fails to convey the true meaning for foreign readers. Therefore, the translator chose a translation strategy of explanation, which specifies the meaning of the abbreviation without affecting the fluency of the translation. Although the translation does not include the character "三", the meaning of the abbreviation is more intuitive and better suited to the communicative needs of the target audience.

### 3.3.2 Animate/Inanimate Subjects

Example 10

ST: <u>财政性教育经费</u>占国内生产总值比例每年都保持在4%以上...

TT: <u>**We**</u> kept annual budgetary spending on education at over 4 percent of GDP...

In grammar, a inanimate subject refers to a noun whose referent is not alive serves as the subject of the sentence, while an animate subject is just the opposite (Chen, 2008). Example 10 concerns the data on China's educational funding. The original text uses a non-animate subject "财政性经费," which can be translated into "The proportion of budgetary spending on education to GDP has remained above 4% every year." However, when translating it into English, the translator rephrased the subject into a reader-friendly and emotional first-person animate subject "we." This not only enhances the readability of the translation but also highlights China's emphasis on education, and ingeniously achieves an adaptive transformation on the level of communicative dimension.

## 4. Summary

This article takes the English translation of the *2023 Government Work Report* as an example and studies the use of translation strategies guided by the three-dimensional adaptive selection and transformation principle based on eco-translatology theory. In terms of linguistic dimension, this article proposes that translators should adopt translation strategies such as conversion of parts of speech, addition, and omission based on the differences between Chinese and English usage in vocabulary and syntax, or deal with repeated words, parallel structures, and sentences without subjects to reproduce the writing style and connotation of the source text. In terms of cultural dimension, the study takes proper nouns, allusions, and idioms as examples, suggesting that translators should have a profound understanding of the cultural information implied in the original text and adopt translation strategies such as literal translation and free translation flexibly to bridge the cultural differences between China and the West. In terms of communicative dimension, the article focuses on the processing of numbers+abbreviations and animate/inanimate subjects, and proposes that translators should not only preserve the image of the source language but also avoid obscurity and abstract information in the translation process to enhance the readability and promote dissemination of the translated text. In summary, political documents translation differs from ordinary translation in three main aspects. Firstly, the language employed must be precise and faithful to the connotation of the original text. The translator should do all one can to convey the equivalent information from the source text and avoid arbitrary interpretation while adhering to the norms of expressions, especially those related to national political positions, basic principles, and territorial sovereignty. Secondly, political texts translation such as the *Report* must be kept up to date. Therefore, translators are not only required to deliver translations in time but also advance with times. For example, they need to constantly improve English translations of new words and expressions while modifying outdated and inappropriate ones. Thirdly, the meaning of political texts translation must be incontestable. Translators must avoid ambiguous words and sentences and ensure the rigor and objectivity of the    translation by adding contexts, necessary determiners and modifiers to elucidate texts. This study summarizes some translation strategies for the English translation of the *Government Work Report* in 2023, aiming to provide reference and application value for the research on political texts translation and better accomplish the mission of building China's image as a major country and elucidating Chinese spirit.

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