

Revisiting Eco-Translatology: An Exploration of “Dynamic Priority” within Multidimensional Transformation in Translation*

Changyu Guo and Ruichen Zhou*****

This article presents a conceptual exploration aimed at enriching the analytical framework of “multidimensional transformation” within Eco-Translatology by introducing the concept of “dynamic priority” as an extension. It begins by examining empirical studies grounded in “multidimensional transformation.” Through a re-evaluation of the analytical methods of the said studies, this paper highlights the necessity of further discussions on the interplay among various dimensions. The study posits two hypotheses: (1) a priority dimension typically exists in the multidimensional adaptation; (2) the priority is inherently dynamic rather than static. Engaging with established theoretical perspectives of translation studies, it elucidates on the uneven prioritization of dimensions and how this priority can shift in response to changes in the translational eco-environment, illustrated with examples from the English-Chinese context. By delineating the fluid and complex nature of prioritization across the diverse dimensions of the translation process, this study seeks to refine and expand the theoretical underpinnings of Eco-Translatology.

* This article is revised and expanded from a presentation delivered at the “3rd UK-China Symposium on Translation Studies The Human Touch in Translation and Interpreting in the Age of AI”, 11 April 2025, Zhuhai, Guangzhou province.

** Shandong University

*** Autonomous University of Madrid

Keywords: translation theory, Eco-Translatology, adaptation and selection, multidimensional transformation, dynamic priority

1. Introduction

This article presents a conceptual exploration aimed at enriching the analytical framework of “multidimensional transformation” within Eco-Translatology (Hu 2013). Section 1 provides a critical review of Eco-Translatology and its application in current empirical studies. Through a re-evaluation of the analytical methodologies underpinning “multidimensional transformation,” this section underscores the necessity of investigating the interplay among various dimensions, while postulating two hypotheses concerning the new concept of “dynamic priority”. Section 2 expands on the first hypothesis by engaging with the established Skopos Theory literature and presenting an empirical analysis of three English-Chinese translation cases studies. Section 3 develops the second hypothesis, examining how the priorities can shift across diverse dimensions in response to fluctuations within the translational eco-environment, thereby elucidating the fluid and complex nature of prioritization throughout the translation process.

1.1. An Overview of Eco-Translatology and its Application in Empirical Studies

The Eco-Translatology, conceptualized by Hu Gengshen (2008a) and subsequently expanded by diverse Chinese academics, has established itself as an autonomous and innovative paradigm within Chinese Translation Studies. This framework has garnered considerable international and domestic attention (Fu 2023: 26) and becoming the most frequently cited and academically influential Chinese translation theory (Fang 2024: 3). As Valdeón (2020: 651) notes, Eco-Translatology reflects a concerted effort by Chinese scholarship to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western translation research. Nonetheless, it calls for in-depth development of

www.kci.go.kr

research and further exploration of its theoretical framework, as acknowledged by Hu and other prominent Chinese scholars (Hu 2008a, 2020; J. Wang 2021a, 2021b; N. Wang 2011; Fu 2023; Fang 2024).

Developed upon the foundation of the theory of “translation as adaptation and selection” (Hu 2003), Eco-Translatology steers translation studies towards an “ecological approach” (Hu 2020; Gu and Huang 2023). Utilizing a conceptual metaphor that aligns the discipline of translation studies with ecology, this framework defines the “translational environment” as a concept encompassing all the linguistic, cultural, natural, social, economic, and political contexts of the source text (ST), the source and target languages, and the individuals involved (Hu 2003; Fang 2011, 2020). Furthermore, it positions the translator at the center of the translation ecosystem, tasking them with selecting the most appropriate textual strategies to adapt to the translational eco-environment, driven by the imperative of survival (Hu 2003). Over the past two decades, this new paradigm has sparked rigorous debate among Chinese academics (Wang Ning 2011; Chen 2014; Tan 2022; Gu and Huang 2023; Fu 2023; Fang 2024). Indeed, analysis by Han Ziman and Qian Hong (2021) of 14 international journals indexed in the Web of Science database indicates that Hu Gengshen’s work had garnered 25 international citations by 2020, accounting for over half of the citations received by Chinese translation studies within international journals.

The concept of “multidimensional transformation” represents a pivotal methodological approach within the Eco-Translatology (Hu 2020: 72), characterized on certain occasions as a “translation doctrine” (Hu 2020: 158). In essence, it serves as the foundational guiding principle to which translators are expected to adhere. Within Hu’s theorization, the operational focus of “multidimensional transformation” is encapsulated in the “three-dimensional transformation,” which addresses the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. These specific dimensions align with established research foci among translation theorists and correspond to the inherent logic of translation (Hu 2020: 72-73). Hu (2011: 8) provides a comprehensive definition of these three planes: linguistic dimension encompasses various facets and levels of linguistic form; cultural adaptation

emphasizes the transmission and interpretation of cultural connotations between the source and target languages; meanwhile, communicative adaptation focuses on the selective transformation of communicative intent in the target language, extending beyond mere cultural conversion. Viewing the translated text as the culmination of the translator's decision-making and finalization, Eco-Translatology suggests that the translator bears the responsibility to preserve and transform, to the greatest extent possible, the linguistic, cultural, and communicative ecologies of the ST, ensuring the best “survival” and “longevity” of these ecologies within the target translational eco-environment (Hu 2020: 73). The ultimate objective is to produce a translation that achieves a high degree of holistic adaptation and selection, thereby attaining a state of “balance and harmony” across these dimensions (Hu 2020: 72-73). Importantly, these linguistic, cultural, and communicative elements are constantly interconnected and rarely to isolate during the translation process (Hu 2013: 236). By integrating the diverse dimensions inherent to translation, this method reflects a systemic nature that embodies the holistic perspective of Oriental philosophy (Hu 2021: 13).

Numerous empirical studies have been conducted across various domains—encompassing both literary and applied translation—utilizing “three-dimensional transformation” as the analytical framework (Jiao 2010; Bo 2014; Yu 2017; Wang and Yang 2018; Guo and Liu 2022; Chen 2023; Zhou and Guo 2025). Within the linguistic dimension, applied scholarships have examined translators’ transformation in writing style (Jiao 2010; Guo and Liu 2022), word usage (Bo 2014; Yu 2017; Chen 2023), grammatical structures (Bo 2014), and register (Wang and Yang 2018; Zhou and Guo 2025), reflecting and underlying concern with the divergent characteristics of both languages. In the cultural dimension, scholarly attention has been directed toward the transformation of cultural terms (Guo and Liu 2022; Chen 2023; Zhou and Guo 2025), alongside translation shifts involving religious content (Bo 2014) and sexually sensitive materials (Yu 2017). Regarding the communicative dimension, these investigations have focused on the transmission of the communicative purpose of the ST and the effect of the translated text on its audience (Jiao 2010; Bo 2014; Yu 2017; Guo and Liu 2022; Chen 2023; Zhou and

Guo 2025). However, existing empirical literature have typically analyzed these dimensions in isolation, and, at times, arbitrarily for the sake of convenience, with minimal attention paid to the interactions among them.

This methodological simplification reveals a conceptual divergence from underlying philosophy of Eco-Translatology stands for. As Hu (2020: 240) notes, among the applied studies guided by this paradigm, there is a problem of “a mixed bag,” and “some of them are superficial and that the phenomenon of an isolated relationship between them and the theories of Eco-Translatology exists.” By overlooking the intricate interdependencies among these dimensions, such simplification results in subjective idealizations, thereby compromising the objectivity and robustness of the theoretical framework. Crucially, Hu (2008b: 4) acknowledged, albeit without further theoretical elaboration, that ‘translators frequently engage in adaptive decision-making regarding the sequence or precedence of language, culture, and communication.’ To date, however, this observation remains largely an implicit assumption, lacking systematic theoretical discussion and empirical investigation. The present study therefore seeks to examine this issue explicitly by proposing that the components of multidimensional transformation are not uniformly distributed but may exhibit hierarchical relations that are dynamically shaped by contextual factors. In other words, within multidimensional transformation, a dimension may subsume others depending on the translational eco-environment and the dynamic interplay among all dimensions considered in the translation process. Levý (1967) conceptualized translation as a sequence of decisions where the translator chooses from available alternatives. Similarly, Vermeer (1972) posited that, like any other action, translation is intentional behavior in a given situation. In the process of “multidimensional transformation,” translators do not simply operate heuristically; rather, they engage in thoughtful decision-making driven by considerations of given circumstances. As rational agents, translators methodically evaluate the translational eco-environment and identify the dimension they deem paramount most significant among the various dimensions. Consequently, this study conceptualizes and operationalizes this dominant dimension as the “priority dimension.”

1.2. Analyzing “Dynamic Priority” to Enrich the Framework of Multidimensional Transformation

In light of the foregoing analysis, this article aims to delineate a theoretical extension to the analytical framework of multidimensional transformation. Specifically, it investigates the interrelationships among the various dimensions within which translators execute adaptive selections to achieve optimal viability within the translational eco-environment. To this end, two central hypotheses are postulated:

- (1) A priority dimension predominates in multidimensional adaptation and adaptive selection, rendering alternative dimensions secondary in hierarchy;
- (2) The priority dimension is dynamic rather than static, contingent upon the translator's strategic choices influenced as modulated by the translational eco-environment.

As Tan (2009) underscored, the Chinese scholarship can only benefit from interacting with external academic traditions, nothing that Sinocentrism poses as significant a threat to the evolution of translation studies as Eurocentrism. For Eco-Translatology to thrive, it must draw sustenance symbiotically from both Chinese traditions and Western translation studies. Aligned with this principle, this study fosters a dialogue with established international scholarship on decision-making theory to enrich the theoretical discussions. Additionally, the article includes an empirical study, presenting representative examples from English-Chinese context to illustrate our hypotheses. Additionally, the theoretical framework is operationalized through an empirical component, utilizing purposive examples from the English-Chinese translation context to validate the proposed hypotheses.

2. The Priority Dimension in a Hierarchical System

In the execution of multidimensional transformations, prevailing theoretical assumptions dictate that it is optimal for translators, leveraging their expertise and creativity, to adapt the ST to the translational ecology of the TT across as many dimensions as possible. Hu (2006: 50) asserted that “the more dimensions of the translational eco-environment the translator adapts to, and the more appropriate the adaptive choices made, the higher the degree of holistic adaptation and selection.” This highlights the necessity of maintaining a balance among the various dimensions encompasses within the translational process.

Nevertheless, there are inherent gains and losses in these adaptive dimensions. Even among translations executed by highly experienced translators, attaining a flawless equilibrium across different dimensions and elements remains atypical. Empirical observations reveal pervasive asymmetries in the distribution of priority across various levels and dimensions, this frequently culminates in adaptive transformations that accentuate specific aspects while relegating others deemed less contextually salient. Seidensticker, the English translator of *The Tale of Genji* (1021), conceptualizes this tension as a “dilemma between balance and compromise,” posting the necessity of sacrificing certain details or cultural nuances of the ST to preserve its linguistic beauty and emotional impact (Shikibu 1993). Similarly, Alicia Relinque, the Spanish translator of *The Peony's Pavilion* (1617), highlights the friction of balancing musicality with cultural elements, observing that “sometimes some element necessarily affects the elegance of the compositions” (Tang 2016: 16-17).

This dilemma accentuates the pivotal role of the translator's agency, requiring a meticulous examination of the translational eco-environment to execute a series of deliberate choices that ensure the evolutionary viability of the translated text. Existing scholarship has extensively scrutinized the translator's decision-making process (Levy 1967; Vermeer 1972; Reiss 1981; Robinson 1991; Venuti 1995). Among these contributions, the Skopos theory stands out as one of the most influential and macroscopic frameworks, offering a systematic understanding of the

determinants governing translational choice. By formulating the Skopos Theory, Vermeer (1972) and Reiss (1981) transcended the previously dominant paradigm of functional equivalence, which emphasized the linguistic approach and the ST-based translation at the micro level. According to this theory:

Each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose...The Skopos Rule thus reads as follows: translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function (Nord 1997).

To further delimit the concept of “purpose,” Reiss (1981) conceptualized translation as a communication action, emphasizing that every written text harbors single or multiple intentions; however, in most cases, a primary intention (referred to as the “text’s dominant function”) generally prevails. Based on this premise, Reiss (1981) proposed the Functional Category Modal (FCM), which classifies texts according to their predominant communicative function into three types—informative, expressive—while prescribing specific translation strategies for each.

Skopos Theory and FCM offer valuable insights for refining the framework of “the multidimensional transformation.” First, their departure from the traditional functional equivalence theory challenges the long-held myth of attaining a perfectly balanced translation. By broadening the focus beyond the ST to include the TT and other agents involved in the translation process, this integration fosters a more nuanced understanding of the “intentional and unintentional changes” (Reiss 1981: 121-122) introduced by translators. Second, the classification of text types based on their dominant communicative function sheds light on the prioritization and sequencing of various factors within the translator’s decision-making process. This approach reveals a hierarchical structure among different dimensions within the translator’s decision-making system. Importantly, the concept of “priority dimension” should not be equated with the notion of skopos. Skopos primarily refers to the intended purpose or function of a translation and is typically established prior to the translation process. By contrast, a priority dimension

describes the relative prominence of linguistic, cultural, or communicative adaptation within the translator's ongoing decision-making system. While translational purposes may influence the emergence of a priority dimension, the latter is not predetermined but dynamically shaped by the interaction of multiple factors within the translational eco-environment. In this sense, priority dimension concerns the internal organization of adaptive translational choices rather than the external purpose of translation itself.

However, two significant issues remain unresolved. First, while the means-end linear logic of Skopos Theory offers a practical approach for analyzing translations in real-world contexts, the elements that define the purpose of a translation are insufficiently operationalized in Vermeer's Skopos rule. Conversely, withing the FCM, these elements are often reduced solely to the communicative function of the ST; the influence of other variables—such as the linguistic characteristics of the ST, the social and cultural contexts of both languages, and external stakeholders (including commissioners, revisors, editors and readers)—is either insufficiently addressed or merely conceptualized in general terms. Second, the Skopos Theory's emphasis on the TT renders it less applicable to texts intended primarily to exist autonomously. Nord (2012) argues that, as a functionalist theory, it inherently oversimplifies the linguistic situation of a text, thereby complicating a comprehensive contextual survey. For example, scholars have demonstrated its limitations in addressing literary works characterized by highly stylized languages (Snell-Hornby 1990; Schäffner 1998; Du 2012).

Therefore, the concept of the "priority dimension" should be incorporated into the framework of multidimensional transformation. This concept should simultaneously reflect the hierarchic nature of the translator's decision-making system while comprehensively accounting for all elements influencing this process. Accordingly, the "priority dimension" can be defined as follows:

- (1) Translators generally designate a specific dimension as the priority dimension when engaging in multidimensional transformation, while relegating alternative dimensions to a secondary status;
- (2) The determination of the priority dimension is informed by a multitude of factors within the translational eco-environment, encompassing the textual the

www.kci.go.kr

ecologies of both the ST and TT, boarder socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts, alongside the roles of all the individuals involved in the translation process;

- (3) Once the priority dimension is identified, translational dispositions are formulated to ensure optimal adaptation withing that specific dimension, while adaptations in alternative dimensions may be compromised when necessary.

The following sections present three cases studies in which the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions precede as the primary focus. These cases demonstrate how translators identify the priority dimension during multidimensional transformation and how this subsequently dictates the translational dispositions.

2.1. Linguistic Dimension as the Priority Dimension

The first cases study analyzes the Chinese translations of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem *Ode to the West Wind*. As Wang Dongfeng (2022: 82) observes, "many metrical poems, both Chinese and foreign, are celebrated not for their content but for their form—the artistic impact of their poetic structure." This literary piece exemplifies the aesthetics principle of "art for art's sake". Aligning with this perspective, Reiss (1981: 124-128) posits that the primary challenge in translating a highly expressive text—where the poetic function predominates—requires the creation of an "analogy of artistic form."

Since the poem's introduction to China in the 1920s, translators have consistently strived to achieve adaptive transformations at the linguistic level, employing various techniques to replicate the auditory effects of iambic pentameter inherent in the ST (Shelley 1990, 1996, 2010). In his 1996 translation, Bian Zhilin employed the concept of "replacing foot with dun" (Bian et al. 1959), which accentuates rhythm based on the semantic units of the Chinese language. More recently, Wang (2022) proposed "ping-ze for foot," a method leveraging ping-ze (平仄, the flat-oblique tone sequence in Chinese) to represent the metrical foot characteristic of English poetry. These versions highlight the persistent focus on linguistic adaptation among

www.kci.go.kr

Chinese translators, who continuously refine their methods to enhance adaptability in this dimension, thereby aligning the translation with the linguistic patterns of the target language.

Preserving the artistic form often necessitates sacrificing certain cultural details from the ST, as adaptations in these peripheral dimensions are typically deemed less critical in the translation of poetic texts. In the realm of poetry translation, Benjamin (2004: 75) argues that the essence of a poem “is not statement or the imparting of information, hence, something inessential”, asserting that any effort to preserve what a literary work explicitly states “is the hallmark of bad translations.” For example, in Wang Dongfeng’s 2022 translation, some details are minimally aligned with the ST to achieve the desired metrical effect: the “clarion” of the West Wind and the “lyre” are replaced by 螺号 [shell trumpet] and 竖琴 [harp], respectively (Wang 2022: 89-90), thereby generating disyllabic words that fit the ping-ze metrical structure of the TT.

2.2. Cultural Dimension as the Priority Dimension

A comparable case is found in Fu Donghua’s 1940 translation of *Gone with the Wind* (Mitchell 2008). This translation prioritizes the social-political context of the era and reflects the translator’s agency, having been produced in Shanghai during the Japanese occupation in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1931-1945). This historical period was characterized by stringent censorship policies that targeted serious anti-war novels, while demonstrating relative leniency towards popular literature (Zhou and Xu 2015: 41). Within this restrictive environment, Fu intended to introduce *Gone with the Wind*, which depicts the protagonist’s struggle for survival during the American Civil War (1861-1865). Despite the geopolitical constraints imposed by the Japanese authorities, the translation aimed to inspire hope among Chinese readers. During the early twentieth century, the limited influx of Western literature translations into Chinese posed significant challenges for the acceptance of foreign works among Chinese readers (Yang 2016: 137). Consequently, extensive cultural adaptation was imperative to facilitate the

comprehension and acceptance of the novel by the Chinese audience.

Fu's translation strategy prominently featured the domestication of foreign cultural elements to enhance comprehension among target-text readers. For instance, socio-cultural terms such as "chamberlain," "king and queen," and "maid" were translated into Chinese equivalents with similar social functions 头等的太监 [chief eunuch], 皇帝皇后 [emperor and empress consort], and 丫头 [young domestic servant]. In this version, the exotic attributes of the ST were minimized, thereby portraying the protagonist, Scarlett, as a Chinese woman who contents with love, life, and freedom. This approach aimed to foster greater empathy among Chinese readers, encouraging resilience in the face of their own adversities.

However, this domesticating strategy exemplifies what Venuti (1995: 20) describes as an "ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values," which frequently induces a loss of information from the ST (Gile 2002: 251). Consequently, adaptation within the informative dimension is often marginalized to prioritize socio-cultural alignment. For example, Christian religious concepts such as "shrine," "convent," and "God" were replaced with Buddhist analogues: 神龛 [Buddhist niche], 尼姑庵 [nunnery], and 天 [Heaven]. At the textual level, descriptions of the Civil War, alongside specific geographical and character backgrounds, were omitted. As Fu notes in the preface, "the American Civil War as depicted in this book is 80 years and tens of thousands of miles away from us, so what relevance does it have to our own affairs?" (Mitchell 2008). Thus, the reduction of information from the ST is strategically employed to achieve optimal transformation within the cultural dimension.

2.3. Communicative Dimension as the Priority Dimension

Yan Fu (1854-1921)'s 1898 translation of *Evolution and Ethics* (Huxley 1947) represents a pivotal intersection of intellectual endeavor during a transformative period in Chinese history. Following the end of the First Opium War (1840-1842), which terminated the Qing Dynasty's isolation, China entered an era characterized by increasing foreign encroachment. By the 1860s, reform-minded officials

www.kci.go.kr

spearheaded the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861-1895). This initiative, symbolized by the slogan “Learn the advanced military technology from the foreigners to counter their invasion” (師夷長技以制夷), sought to modernize China’s military and industrial capabilities. However, the disastrous defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (甲午戰爭) necessitated a critical reassessment of the prevailing policy “Chinese Learning as Substance, Western Learning for Application” (中體西用). This military failure prompted reforms to advocate for systemic socio-political reforms aimed at establishing a constitutional monarchy. In response to simultaneous external threats and internal instability, Yan Fu engaged with Western thought, aiming to “reinforce Chinese nationality and preserve the nation” (Huxley 1947: 3). Crucially, that intellectual stance was not merely a subjective choice but rather a direct manifestation of dialectical influences between the individual agency and the boarder socio-political milieu. Furthermore, the sociological adaptation of natural concepts in Huxley’s work is not an isolated phenomenon in China; it paralleled similar developments in Japan and South Korea, profoundly shaping respective histories of modernization (Yu 2014).

In Yan Fu’s adaptation, an essay originally focused on the natural laws of biological evolution was reinterpreted as a discourse on social evolution, and the title was translated as *On the Evolution of Tian* (1898). Within Chinese cosmology, 天 denotes a supreme objective entity governing both the natural and human realms. Through this title, Yan Fu implied that social reform was not only necessary but mandated by a higher, quasi-divine will. Consequently, he extended the discussion of natural evolution to include human societies:

(1)

ST: [...] not merely the world of plants, but that of animals; not merely living things, but the whole fabric of the earth; not merely our planet, but the whole solar system; not merely our star and its satellites, but the millions of similar bodies which bear witness to the order which pervades boundless space, and has endured through boundless time, are all working out their predestined courses of evolution. (Huxley 1894: 7)

TT: 凡兹运行之理，乃化机所以不息之精，苟能静观，随在可察；小之极于行倒生，大之放乎日星天地，隐之则神思智识之所以圣狂，显之则政俗文章之所以沿革，言其要道，皆可一言蔽之，曰天演是已。(Huxley 1947: 5)

[All things are in constant flux. If you can observe carefully, it is everywhere. From the smallest organism to the largest sun, stars and the heavens, this law is universally applicable. When this law is obscured, it induces intellectual turmoil; when it is revealed, it calls for reforms in political essays. In essence, it embodies the evolution of Tian.]

Through a significant translation shift, descriptions originally detailing the biological laws affecting “animals and plants” were broadened to articulate a universal principle applicable universally. Furthermore, the translator introduced a political dimension, positing that social transformation was preordained. This adaptation underscores his communicative intent to persuade the populace to support transformative actions aimed at preserving the Qing dynasty (1644-1911).

Culturally, however, Yan Fu omitted most religious concepts from the ST, while political terms associated with Western democracies, such as “laws” and “administrative authority” were translated into Qing terminology as 刑与礼 [laws and rites] and 君 [emperor], without further distinction. This strategy was designed to make the text more accessible to Chinese readers, who were largely unfamiliar with western political contexts, thereby reducing cultural barriers and more and potentially fostering support for social reform.

Upon its release, Yan Fu’s translation profoundly impacted Chinese society. The Darwinian principle of the “survival of the fittest” resonated widely and influenced key reformers during the Hundred Days’ Reform (1898), with Kang Youwei (1858-1927) notably hailing Yan Fu as “the first Chinese scholar of Western studies.” Concurrently, Yan Fu’s translation philosophy, encapsulated in his preface through the criteria of “faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance” (信达雅), became seminal in modern Chinese translation theory. Huang Zhonglian (2009: 7-8) attributes the success of this work of the Yan Fu’s translation profound understanding of contemporary sociopolitical needs and his adept adaptation within the translational eco-environment of his era. Firm in his belief that translation

www.kci.go.kr

should catalyze social reform, Yan Fu prioritized the communicative effectiveness of his work, whereby cultural adaptation served a secondary role in fulfilling his primary communicative objectives.

The three cases discussed above constitute quintessential examples of how English literary and academic genres—specifically poetry, prose fiction, and scientific treatises—are successfully translated into Chinese. An analysis of these examples demonstrates that the framework of “multidimensional transformation” possesses a robust explanatory power regarding the mechanisms and rationales underlying translator’s engagement in adaptive transformation across linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. However, the analysis also reveals that withing this transformation, a specific dimension is frequently prioritized, governed by the translator’s assessment of the translational eco-environment. In empirical studies, the prioritized dimension may be identified through translators’ prefaces, commentaries, and other paratextual materials, or inferred inductively from recurring translation features and strategic patterns throughout the translated text. In the pursuit of optimizing adaptation within this priority dimension, adjustments in other dimensions are either strategically implemented or compromised. Importantly, no dimension operates in isolation; instead, they interact dynamically withing a unified system.

3. The Priority Dimension in Dynamic Shift

Rather than being static, the priority dimension is inherently dynamic. This inherent dynamicity manifests at both the macro and micro levels.

On a macro level, the priority dimension fluctuates across different texts and contexts, conditioned by shifts within the broader constituents of the translational eco-environment. These include the linguistic and stylistic characteristics of the ST, the cultural distance between the source and target languages, the socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts surrounding the translation, as well as the ideologies, economic interests, and intellectual backgrounds of the agents involved.

www.kci.go.kr

This dynamicity is thoroughly documented within existing scholarship on the factors shaping the translation process. For instance, the linguistic approaches to translation theory delineate distinct methodologies or criteria predicated on the linguistic characteristics of the ST (Reiss 1981; Newmark 1988). Since the cultural turn of the 1990s, scholars have increasingly focused on the role of cultural distance between languages and the power relations embedded within socio-economic and political contexts of translation (Bassnett and Lefevere 1996). Furthermore, constructivist perspectives adopt a sociological lens, incorporating the roles of various agents involved in the translation process (Bourdieu 1977). Recent case studies on retranslation demonstrate that identical source texts can yield divergent translational dispositions across varying spatiotemporal contexts. This variability is exemplified by contrasting Yan Fu's translation of *Evolution and Ethics* with the 1971 version published by Science Press (Huxley 1971). Yan Fu's rendition tends to omit or domesticate most foreign religious and political concepts, whereas the 1971 translation employs a foreignization strategy, preserving these terms in their original form. This shift can be contextualized within the political and cultural milieu of the era, which saw Chinese authorities promoting the assimilation of Enlightenment-era culture from capitalist countries. As noted in the translator's preface of the 1971 edition, drawing from *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (1893-1976), "The culture of the Age of Enlightenment of the capitalist countries should be absorbed, as much as we can use it today" (资本主义国家启蒙时代的文化, 凡属我们今天用得着的东西, 都应该吸收) (Huxley 1971: 1-2). Consequently, a comparative analysis of these adaptations elucidates how the prioritization of specific dimensions during the adaptation and selection processes fluctuates in response to shifts in the translational eco-environments.

However, micro-level shifts translational strategies remain comparatively under-researched. Within a single text, the determination of the priority dimension is not monolithic; the priority dimension initially established at the textual level does not necessarily dictate adaptive transformations throughout the entire corpus and may undergo dynamic shifts at various linguistics strata. This notion aligns with Bassnett's opposition to "absolute and inflexible translation" (Bassnett 2002: 96).

Similarly, Grimm's analogy, as quoted by Reiss (1981), illustrates this viewpoint by likening translation to navigating a ship across diverse maritime conditions. In this analogy, the translator is compared to a seasoned captain who adeptly steers the vessel through varied environments such as shoals, lakes, and seas, implying the lack of flexibility jeopardizes the translational endeavor. Complementing this view, Reiss (1981: 123) posits that the translator's decision-making process should follow a three-stage procedure, starting with the text as a whole and concluding with the smallest textual units. This approach underscores a dynamic and integrative perspective on translation. Accordingly, while a priority dimension may be established at a macroscopic level—determined by the translator's negotiation within the translational eco-environment and guided by teleological purpose of the translation—this priority may shift continuously across chapters, paragraphs, and even sentences or words, necessitating the strategic recalibration of other dimensions.

Consequently, the priority dimension in multidimensional transformation undergoes dynamic shifts at both the macro and micro levels. In the following sections, three examples of such shift within the translations introduced in Section 2 are analyzed in order to elucidate the dynamic nature of this phenomenon.

3.1. Cultural Adaptation Prevails over Linguistic Adaptation

An examination of Wang's 2022 translation of *Ode to the West Wind* demonstrates that the linguistic dimension is prioritized, owing to the expressive nature of the ST's artistic form and the translator's overriding purpose. However, significant cultural adaptation remains evident, particularly in the second stanza.

(2)

ST: Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread / On the blue surface of thine
aery surge, / Like the bright hair uplifted from the head / Of some fierce
Maenad, even from the dim verge / Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
/ The locks of the approaching storm. (Shelley 1820: 180)

www.kci.go.kr

TT: 疑是雷雨天使：延亘千里， / 风染蓝韵如有天纵神遣， / 雷暴将至，天上云
卷风起， / 浑若司酒狂女身隐天边 / 昏暗深处高据九霄之最， / 撩起额上
云发，豪放无限。(Wang 2022: 88-89)

[The angel of the thunderstorm and rain: it stretches for thousands of kilometers,
/ the wind stains the blue rhyme as if gods were sent by Tian, / the thunderstorm
is approaching, the sky is swirling with clouds and the wind is rising, / the fierce
woman in charge of wine is hidden in the sky, / in the dark top of nine levels
of the sky, / lifting up the cloudy hair on her forehead, with unlimited boldness
and freedom.]

This section underscores the dominion of the wind over the sky through a series of allusions to Greek mythology. The storm is metaphorically conceptualized as the Maenads—the frenzied worshipped of Dionysus renowned for their ecstatic cries and disheveled hair during ritualistic intoxication (Wilcox 1950: 640). This metaphor not only visualizes the potency of the west wind but also highlights the intricate connection between the human and supernatural realms within a sacred universe, a connection mediated through the recitation of verse. Thus, the poet capitalizes on a motif of witchcraft, assuming the tripartite identity of poet, witch, and prophet (Zhang 1993: 84). Hence, decoding the aesthetic value and creative intent of this stanza necessitates a comprehensive grasp of the cultural background underlying these mythic figures, which typically lie outside the cultural repertoire of the target-text audience. Cultural adaptation, however, becomes a semiotic necessity in the translation of this passage.

In Wang’s rendition, rather than opting for a literal transfer, cultural adaptations are employed to achieve “dynamic equivalence”—a translational benchmark wherein the message of the ST is so effectively conveyed into the receptor language that the response of the target receptor closely mirrors that of the original audience (Nida 1969: 200). Specifically, the phrase “some fierce Maenad” is translated as 司酒狂女 [the fierce woman in charge of wine], which clarifies her identity while explicitly linking it to her irrational nature. Furthermore, the concept of 九霄 [nine levels of the sky], which denotes the highest heaven in tradition Han cosmology

www.kci.go.kr

汉族, is integrated into the text. The stormy blue sky is depicted as a locale for mythic figures dispatched by 天—the supreme deity in Chinese cosmology who serves as an analogue to the concept of “God” in Christian traditions. This cultural adaptation enables target language readers to perceive the mythic tone of the piece, thereby eliciting a similar aesthetic impact and receptive response.

3.2. Communicative Adaptation Prevails over Cultural Adaptation

In a similar vein, within Fu Donghua’s translation of *Gone with the Wind*, although cultural adaptation remains the predominant strategy, alterations in other dimensions are equally apparent. One such instance occurs during Rhett’s inquiry:

(3)

ST: “You are well enough, I see. Then, tell me this. Was I the only iron you had in the fire?” His eyes were keen and alert, watching every change in her face. (Mitchell 1947: 571)

TT: “我看是可以的了。那么，请你告诉我一句话，你所钓的鱼儿是不是只有我一条？”他一面问，一面尖着眼睛，注意观察着她脸上的变化。
(Mitchell 2008: 587)

[“I think it’s OK. So, tell me one thing. Am I the only fish you’ve caught?” He asked with his keen eyes and attentive to the change in her face.]

Within this context, by questioning whether he is “the only iron in the fire,” Rhett probes Scarlett’s sincerity, thereby exposing his jealousy. In English, the phrase “iron in the fire” metaphorically denotes having multiple options or alternatives; consequently, an individual with “many irons in the fire” possesses a multitude of plans or opportunities. Rhett employs this idiomatic expression to subtly ascertain if he is the exclusive object of Scarlett’s flirtation, adopting a playful tone. In this dialogue, the communicative purpose—which centers on interpersonal relationships and behaviors—is paramount. Instead of utilizing a

www.kci.go.kr

cultural adaptation—such as providing a literal translation of the metaphor accompanied by an explanatory footnote, which constituted a viable alternative—Fu replaces it with the domestic metaphor 所钓的鱼儿 [caught fish]. This substitution effectively captures the communicative intent and the playful tone inherent in the ST.

3.3. Linguistic Adaptation Prevails over Communicative Dimension

The dynamic nature of translational priorities is further exemplified in Yan Fu's translation of *Evolution and Ethics*. In textual segments not directly pertaining to the laws of evolution, the importance of communicative fidelity diminishes, while linguistic considerations assume precedence. Consider the following case:

(4)

ST: In other words, let sympathy be your guide; put yourself in the place of the man towards whom your action is directed; and do to him what you would like to have done to yourself under the circumstances. (Huxley 1894: 31)

TT: 泰西者曰：施人如己所欲受。又曰：设身处地，待人如己之期人。
(Huxley 1947: 34)

[A famous Western scholar said: "Treat others as you would expect to be treated." He also says: "Put yourself in others' shoes and treat them as you would expect to be treated."]

The ST features highly concise, scientific language, nevertheless Yan metamorphoses the linguistic style to align with that of the Tongcheng School (桐城派), a prominent Qing dynasty (1644-1912) literary movement that advocated Neo-Confucian (新儒學) values and emulated the prose styles of the Pre-Qin period (221 BC). This classical style is characterized by its syntactic conciseness, adherence to the metrical conventions of ancient Chinese, and the employment of archaic vocabulary (Han 2006). Yan's stylistic shift, motivated by both the

www.kci.go.kr

linguistic characteristics of the ST and the ideological and aesthetic preferences of contemporary Chinese scholars, was so masterfully executed that the renowned Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881-1936) (1973: 375) lauded the translation for its conceptual lucidity and aesthetic beauty.

These case studies illustrate the intricate interplay inherent in translational adaptations, where various dimensions interact within a system characterized by a fluid hierarchy, subject to the perpetual fluctuations of the translational eco-environment. First, the priority assigned to specific dimensions varies across different texts. Second, even within the translation of a singular source text, the prioritized dimension may shift across different contexts, as demonstrated in the comparison of the two versions of *Evolution and Ethics*. Third, the preeminence of a priority dimension does not preclude adaptations in other dimensions; on the contrary, these subordinate adaptations enhance the overall translation by subserving the needs of the prioritized dimension. The three core dimensions should not be understood as a fixed hierarchical structure. Rather, their relative prominence is dynamically generated by contextual conditions, and the dominant dimension may vary according to specific translational eco-environments. In some instances, significant adaptations in other dimensions may be undertaken when deemed necessary by the translator, thereby underscoring the dynamic nature of the priority dimension.

4. Conclusion

Drawing upon a critical overview of the widely applied analytical framework of “multidimensional transformation” within Eco-Translatology, and engaging with relevant scholarship on the translator’s decision-making process, this article demonstrates the necessity of dispelling the myth of balanced adaptation and further explores the interplay among the various dimensions in which the translator adapts to the translational eco-environment. Consequently, the concept of “dynamic priority” is proposed as an extension of this framework, underpinned by three key

principles:

- (1) The various dimensions in adaptive transformation must be examined as an interconnected whole rather than in isolated entities;
- (2) Among these dimensions, a priority dimension is permanently operative, delineated by the translator in accordance with the specific translational eco-environment. This dimension assumes precedence in adaptive process, while others may be strategically compromised to accommodate situational demands;
- (3) The priority dimension is inherently dynamic, shifting at both macro and micro levels in response to the fluctuations of the specific translational eco-environment.

As Richards posited, translation “is probably the most complex type of event in the history of the cosmos” (Nida 1993: 1). Addressing this inherent complexity requires an interactive and dynamic analytical approach. This refined framework harmonizes the *systemic* and *focused* aspects of the “multidimensional transformation”, where the system is both comprehensive and centralized, and the focus is an integral part of the system. This enhancement fortifies the theoretical robustness of the framework and expands its explanatory power, thereby facilitating more rigorous and integrative empirical inquiries.

As Popper (1963) asserted, every scientific theory is fundamentally provisional and open to revision in the light of new evidence. The incompleteness of theoretical research is a fundamental characteristic of scientific progress and serves as an enduring driving force for academic inquiry. Due to the spatial constraints, this article leaves unaddressed the application of the refined framework to additional textual genres beyond those examined herein. Acknowledging the framework’s current limitations, future theoretical discourse and empirical investigations are invited to continue to refine and expand this promising analytical model.

References

- Bassnett, S. and Lefevere, A. (1996). *Translation, history, and culture*. Continuum-3PL.
- Bassnett, S. (2002). *Translation studies* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Benjamin, W. (2004). The task of the translator: an introduction to the translation of Baudelaire's TABLEAUX PARISIENS. In L. Venuti (ed.), *The translation studies reader*. Routledge, 75-83.
- Bian, Z., Ye, S., Yuan K. and Chen S. (1959). Ten years of translation and research in foreign literature. *Foreign Literature Review* 5: 41-77.
- Bo, T. (2014). A study on advertisement translation based on the theory of Eco-Translatology. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 5(3): 708-713.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge University Press.
- Chen S. (2014). The paradox of Eco-Translatology: discussion with Professor Hu Gengshen. *Chinese Translators Journal* 35(2): 68-73.
- Chen, Y-C. (2023). An Eco-Translatology approach to investigating the translation of comics: case study of *The Sayings of Zhuangzi*. *Meta* 68(2): 224-244.
- Du, X. (2012). A brief introduction of Skopos Theory. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 2(10): 2189-2193.
- Fang, M. (2011). On translation eco-environment. *Shanghai Journal of Translators* 1: 1-5.
- Fang, M. (2020). Further thoughts on Eco-translation environment. *Chinese Translators Journal* 41(5): 20-27.
- Fang, M. (2024). Eco-Translatology going out to the world. *Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education* 1: 3-8.
- Fu, J. (2023). Action/system/function: a sociological approach to Eco-Translatology. *Chinese Translators Journal* 44(5): 26-34.
- Gile, D. (2002). *Basic concepts and models for interpreter and translator training*. John Benjamins.
- Gu, J. and Huang, Z. (2023). On the generation of translation thoughts of Hu Gengshen. *Foreign Languages Research* 40(6): 103-107.
- Guo, C. and Liu, R. (2022). A study on the Chinese translation of *The Vegetarian*: from the perspectives of Eco-Translatology. *Studies of Chinese & Korean Humanities* 74: 255-273.
- Han J. (2006). *Yan Fu's discourse system and cultural transformation in modern China*. Shanghai Translation Publishing House.
- Han, Z. and Qian, H. (2021). International dissemination of contemporary Chinese translation theories: present status and prospect. *Chinese Translators Journal* 6: 103-110.
- Hu, G. (2020). *Eco-Translatology: towards an eco-paradigm of translation studies*. Springer.
- Hu, G. (2003). Translation as adaptation and selection. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 11(4): 283-291.
- Hu, G. (2006). Exemplifying the translation principle and translation methods of "adaptation and selection theory". *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching* 3: 49-52.
- Hu, G. (2008a). Eco-Translatology: a primer. *Chinese Translators Journal* 6: 11-15.

- Hu, G. (2008b). Interpreting the theory through its terminologies. An overview of the adaptation and selection theory. *Shanghai Journal of Translators* 2: 1-5.
- Hu, G. (2011). Eco-Translatology: research foci and theoretical tenets. *China Translators Journal* 2: 5-9.
- Hu, G. (2013). *Eco-Translatology: construction and interpretation*. The Commercial Press.
- Hu, G. (2021). The Dao of “eco-life” oriented translation: tracking three philosophical questions about Eco-Translatology. *Chinese Translators Journal* 42(6): 5-14.
- Huang, Z. (2009). Adaptation and choice: exploring Yan Fu’s translation thought. *Shanghai Journal of Translators* 4: 7-11.
- Jiao, W. (2010). Yan Fu’s translation of *Evolution and ethics* revisited: an Eco-translatological perspective. *Shanghai Journal of Translators* 4: 6-10.
- Levy, J. (1967). Translation as a decision process. In *To honor Roman Jakobson: essays on the occasion of his 70. birthday, 11. October 1966*. De Gruyter Mouton, 1171-1182.
- Lu, X. (1973). *Selected Works of Lu Xun. Vol. 4*. People’s Literature Publishing House.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A textbook of translation*. Prentice Hall.
- Nida, E. A. (1969). *The theory and practice of translation*. E.J. Brill.
- Nida, E. A. (1993). *Language, culture, and translating*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Nord, C. (1997). *Translating as a purposeful activity: functionalist approaches explained*. St. Jerome Publishing.
- Nord, C. (2012). Quo vadis, functional translatology? *Target: International Journal of Translation Studies* 24(1): 26-42.
- Popper, K. (1963). *Conjectures and refutations: the growth of scientific knowledge*. Routledge.
- Reiss, K. (1981). Type, kind and individuality of text: decision making in translation. *Poetics Today* 2(4): 121-131.
- Robinson, D. (1991). *The translator’s turn*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Schäffner, C. (1997). Skopos Theory. In M. Baker, and G. Saldanha (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. Routledge: 235-238.
- Shikibu, M. (1993). *The Tale of Genji* (E. Seidensticker, Trans.). Everyman’s Library.
- Snell-Hornby, M. (1990). The turns of Translation Studies. In S. Bassnett, and A. Lefevere (eds.), *Translation, history and culture*, edited by Susan Bassnett, and Andre Lefevere. Pinter, 79-86.
- Tan, H. (2022). Eco-Translatology: towards an eco-paradigm of translation studies. (Hugs) Gengshen Hu, Singapore, Springer, 2020, XXIV, 312 pp., (hardcover), ISBN 978-981-15-2259-8, (e-book), ISBN 978-981-15-2260-4, (softcover), ISBN 978-981-15-2262-8. *Studia Neophilologica* 94(1): 133-137.
- Tan, Z. (2009). The “Chineseness” vs. “Non-Chineseness” of Chinese translation theory. *The Translator* 15(2): 283-304.
- Valdeón, R. A. (2020). Literary translation research in China. *Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice* 28(5): 645-658.
- Venuti, L. (1995). *The translator’s invisibility*. Routledge.
- Vermeer, H. (1972). *Allgemeine sprachwissenschaft. Eine einföhrung*. Rombach.
- Wang, C. and Yang, Y. (2018). A study of English translation of public notices of TCM hospitals from

- the perspective of Eco-Translatology. *Shanghai Journal of Translators* 4: 39-43.
- Wang, D. (2022). A new approach to rhythmic translation of English poems: with a retranslation of *Ode to the west wind* as an illustration. *Chinese Translators Journal* 4: 82-91.
- Wang, J. (2021a). An analysis of the problems of Eco-Translatology from the perspective of “pure” translation studies. *Journal of Foreign Languages* 44(4): 85-93.
- Wang, J. (2021b). Philosophical contradictions and misuse of metaphors: an analysis of “translation as adaptation and selection”. *Chinese Translators Journal* 42(3): 133-141.
- Wang, N. (2011). Eco-literature and Eco-Translatology: deconstruction and reconstruction. *Chinese Translators Journal* 32(2): 10-15.
- Wang, D. and Shen, D. (1999). Factors influencing the process of translating. *Meta* 44(1): 78-100.
- Wilcox, S. C. (1950). Imagery, ideas and design in Shelley’s *Ode to the west wind*. *Studies in Philology* 47(4): 634-649.
- Yang, X. (2016). On Fu Donghua’s translation strategies and techniques for English and American literature: taking the translation of the American novel *Gone with the wind* as an example. *Journal of Hubei University of Economics (Humanities and Social Sciences)* 13(7): 136-137.
- Yoo, B-H. (2014). Acceptance of East Asia social evolution theory and its genealogy: introductory study on the epistemology of social evolution theory of new novel writers. *Korean Studies Research* 32: 177-207.
- Yu, Z. (2017). Translation as adaptation and selection: a feminist case. *Perspectives* : 25(1): 49-65.
- Zhang, D. (1993). The witchcraft motive of *Ode to the west wind*. *Foreign Literature Review* 4: 83-89.
- Zhou, R. and Guo, C. (2025). How Translation Survives? Adaptation and Selection in the Spanish Version of *The Peony Pavilion*. *T&I Review* 15(2): 113-145.
- Zhou, W. and Xu, J. (2015). Analysis of Fu Donghua’s translation of *Gone with the wind* from the perspective of Eco-Translatology. *Masterpieces Review* 35: 40-42.

[Analyzed Texts]

- Mitchell, M. 1947. *Gone with the wind*. Penguin Books.
- Mitchell, M. (2008). *Gone with the wind* (D. Fu, Trans.). Zhejiang Literature & Art Publishing House.
- Huxley, T. H. (1894). *Evolution and ethics, and Other Essays*. Macmillan.
- Huxley, T. H. (1947). *Evolution and ethics* (F. Yan, Trans.). The Commercial Press.
- Huxley, T. H. (1971). *Evolution and ethics* (Anonymous, Trans.). Science Press.
- Shelly, P. (1820). Ode to the west wind. In P. Shelly (ed.), *Prometheus unbound, a lyrical drama in four acts*. C. And Ollier Vere Street Bond Street: 188-192.
- Shelly, P. (1990). *Selected lyric poems of Shelley* (L. Cha, Trans.). People’s Literature Publishing House.
- Shelly, Percy. (1996). Ode to the west wind (Z. Bian, Trans.). In *Selected English poems*. The Commercial Press: 149-155.
- Shelly, P. (2010). *Ode to the west wind* (F. Jiang, Trans.). China Machine Press Co., LTD.
- Tang, X. (2016). *El Pabellón de Las Peonías: o Historia del alma que regresó* (A. Relique Eleta, Trans. and ed.). Editorial Trotta.

This paper was received on 8 May 2026; revised on 7 June 2026; and accepted on 15 June 2026.

Authors' email addresses

guochangyu0520@163.com

ruichen.zhou@hotmail.com

About the authors

Changyu Guo (first author) received his PhD from Beijing Foreign Studies University and is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Shandong University. His interests include Eco-Translatology and the dissemination of the Chu Ci in South Korea.

Ruichen Zhou (co-author and corresponding author) is a PhD candidate at the Autonomous University of Madrid and an Expert Member of the Translators Association of China. His research interests include Spanish impersonal structures and the Spanish translation of Chinese literature.

www.kci.go.kr