

On Terminology Translation of Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage under the Eco-translatology

-- Case Study of the English Translation of the Terms “Danjia” and “Xianshuige”

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Abstract

Guided by the Eco-translatology theory, this article attempts to explain the phonetic and semantic features, cultural connotations and ecological reasons of the terms “Xianshuige” (in Chinese pinyin) and “Danjia” (in Chinese pinyin) from linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions. It takes a qualitative and descriptive approach in analyzing the existing English translations of the terms “Danjia” and “Xianshuige” with five databases at home and abroad as the data source before June 2022, and thereafter concludes that the term “Danjia” should be translated into “the Tanka (boat dwellers)” and “Xianshuige” into “salt water songs (the Tanka folk song)” from the perspective of Eco-translatology, respectively. Translation strategies such as dialect-based transliteration, transliteration with category words or annotation and back translation verification with computer-aided resources are advised in translation, and the Eco-translatology is recommended for intercultural communication, especially that of intangible cultural heritage to achieve the best translation with the highest degree “of holistic adaptation and selection” by selective adaptation and adaptive selection in the translation of China’s ICH items (Hu, 2013, p. 129).

Keywords

Intangible Cultural Heritage, Terminology Translation, Eco-Translatology, The Tanka (boat dwellers), salt water songs (the Tanka folk song).

1. Introduction

The “Intangible cultural heritage” (ICH) refers to the “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (UNESCO, 2020, p. 5). The ICH helps maintain cultural diversity and intercultural communication in the age of globalization, while translation plays a big part in the promotion and dissemination of ICH diversified elements. Therefore, it would behoove us to conduct the translation study of ICH items. However, many problems like inconsistency, inaccuracy, under-translation or over-interpretation still exist in the translation of ICH items, which may bring about confusion and even hinder intercultural communication.

Against this backdrop, this study can be of immediate relevance to the ICH translation study. It selects 92 Chinese results and 87 English journal articles related to the research of the ICH from five online influential databases, and elaborates the existing translation problems of the ICH item “咸水歌” (Xianshuige in Chinese character) of the Chinese community “疍家” (Danjia in Chinese character) based on the Eco-translatology, a theory developed in China with an ecological perspective of translation studies, and aims to explore how the ICH items can be translated to the globe via translation through the Eco-translatology.

2. Research Design

(I) Research questions

The present study is guided by the following two research questions. Specifically, (1) Why is the Eco-translatology theory advised to be utilized in the translation of ICH items? (2) What translation suggestions can be offered based on the Eco-translatology in the ICH translation studies? To this end, this article takes the China's national ICH item “咸水歌” and its community “疍家” as a case study to explore the ecological rationale behind the proposed translation suggestions.

The major reason why the two terms “疍家” and “咸水歌” are chosen as the case study relies on the fact that the special community “疍家” and its oral tradition “咸水歌” are indispensable parts of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, yet somehow they have been marginalized to a great extent, which would go against the cultural diversity in the whole globe.

(II) Data collection

A comprehensive research was performed by June 2022 from five online databases: *China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI)*, *Wanfang Data* and *VIP Chinese Journal Database (CQVIP)*, *Web of Science* and *ProQuest*. *CNKI (since 1994)*, *Wanfang (since 1989)* and *CQVIP (since 1998)* are three widely-applied Chinese electronic databases which all cover journal articles about social sciences and humanities with at least 300 thousand full texts, while *Web of Science (since 1964)* and *ProQuest (since 1938)* are two western interdisciplinary databases that are highly accessible and cover various journals including humanities. Therefore, the authenticity and coverage of data related to the research can be ensured.

In the journal article sub databases, the study adopts the advanced search and combined query of keywords such as “疍家” (the Tanka), “咸水歌” (the Saltwater Song), “非物质文化遗产” (intangible cultural heritage), “术语” (terminology) and “生态翻译学” (Eco-translatology), which provides 92 Chinese results and 87 English results. Upon manual selection by topic relevance, 50 effective results in Chinese and 28 in English are finalized.

(III) Research theory and tools

In the present study, the Eco-translatology theory is utilized; three monolingual corpus tools and the China Books Database are referenced for translation analysis. The corpuses are Peking University CCL Corpus, BLCU Chinese Corpus (BCC), and iWeb. As Chinese monolingual corpuses, BCC has approximately 15 billion characters by Beijing Language and Culture University and CCL has approximately 700 million characters by Peking University, and iWeb corpus is one English counterpart with approximately 14 billion characters. The China Books Database is a precise, authoritative, credible and continually updated encyclopedic knowledge base, referred to as “CNKI tool library” or “CNKI tool library,” which provides multilingual dictionaries, encyclopedias, bibliographies, biographical dictionaries, indexes, even compilations, etc.

Apart from the large scale of the corpuses, they are all updated over time, which helps ensure that the selected data and analysis results are more accurate and truer to life.

Eco-translatology theory evolves from the Translation as Adaptation and Selection (TAS), a translation approach initiated by the Chinese scholar Pro. Gengshen Hu in 2001 by assimilating the metaphorically Darwinian theory of “adaptation/selection”. This theory proposes that translation strategies can be mainly summarized into “multidimensional transformations”, which focuses on “three-dimensional” transformation. In other words, in the principle of “multidimensional adaptation and multidimensional selection,” the transformation of adaptive selection is relatively focused on the lingual dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension (Hu, 2020, p.161).

According to Hu (2020; 2021), the Eco-translatology is “an emerging Eco-translation paradigm

of translation studies from the ecological perspective” (p. 305) and grounded in the metaphor between translational ecology and nature ecology, conceives of the translation process as selective adaptation and adaptive selection, “taking ecological holism as its core” (p. 53). Valdeón (2012, p. 5), the editor-in-chief of *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, once stated that “Eco-translatology represents an emerging paradigm with a great potential for research and study.” Dollerup (2011, p. 34; 2007/2013, p. 2), a Danish translation theoretician, has also discussed Eco-translatology in the context of Western translation studies and pointed out that “Eco-translatology is related to these schools [three influential Western schools, namely, the principle of dynamic equivalence, the Skopos school, and descriptive translation studies].”

3. Literature Review

Current translation studies on intangible cultural heritage, especially their elements or items, have not received enough attention in China. Domestic translation researches on the ICH are often carried out in terms of international publicity, translation principles, translation quality evaluation, computer-assisted teaching etc. Some researches are made based on the self-made corpus. (Wen & Jiang, 2022; Jiang, 2022; Zhao & Song, 2021; He, 2020; Qi, 2018). Gao (2019) analyzed, based on Harold Lasswell’s 5W communication factors, the status quo and proposed that the ICH Chinese-English translation and international communication should give full play to the translator’s subjectivity construction, multi-dimensional integration of communication content and adaptive design of communication style. Hu and Wen (2016) believed that the English translation of ICH should follow the communication rules and focus on the target readers. Qin Y. et al (2022) carried a brief study of the translation of ICH culture-loaded words and pointed out the translation methods of foreignization and domestication should be flexibly utilized. Tan and Wang (2019) advocated the combination of images and texts in the ICH translation from the multimodal perspective. However, these findings care more about the text itself yet lack in conveying the cultural and communicative meanings behind the text, and interdisciplinary theories like the Eco-translatology are not fully applied.

In China, applicable studies on Eco-translatology are often conducted on the translation of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) terms or stories, accounting for 26% of all the above mentioned 50 results. Deng and Shen (2017) utilized methods of literature review and comparative study translation to explore the English translation of “德” as a term for nurturing life in *Huangdi’s Canon of Medicine* based on Prof. Gengshen Hu’s Eco-translatology and presented a new idea about how to translate TCM terms for life nurturing. Wang et al. (2022) explored the English translation of Chinese medical Qigong terms from the perspective of the theory of adaptation and selection through the method of comparative study. Thirteen articles (26%) discuss the publicity translation of intangible cultural heritage with examples and the terminology translation in fields such as finance, technological science and politics. Du (2021) discussed three basic principles of the publicity translation of Gansu intangible cultural heritage mainly from the perspective of Eco-translatology. Zhong (2019) analyzed the intangible cultural heritage translation of Kashi city, focusing on the “ecological environment” and “translator responsibilities” as well as text transplantation. Only one article (2%) examines Tanka culture translation based on the Eco-translatology. Li (2020) tried to discuss about the publicity of traditional Chinese cultural elements under the Eco-translatology in a macro-perspective and proposed three suggestions like improving the translation ecosystem for the Tanka culture like increasing efforts in governmental funding and staff arrangement, encouraging language learning and focusing more on intercultural exchanges behind words. However, Li didn’t delve into details about how to translate the culture-loaded words in the Tanka culture.

On the other hand, the Eco-translatology hasn't received much attention from the western scholars. Instead, related studies are mostly conducted by Chinese scholars in English journal articles, and they cover such four areas as traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)-related translation, comparative study of English versions of certain Chinese classics and language teaching with the Eco-translatology approach as well as other sporadic themes. Mao and Qiu (2019) analyzed the causes of the translation differences between the two translation versions of Synopsis Golden Chamber based on the Eco-translatology and pointed out that translation methods such as domestication, foreignization, transliteration and annotation should be chosen for different disease names. Yu (2017) presented a feminist case of translation as adaptation and selection through the comparison of two Chinese translations of *The Vagina Monologues*, examined the translators' adaptive transformations in their linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions and tried to explain why one translation prevails over the other in the specific translational eco-environment. Jing (2018) explored how translators could use Eco-translatology theory to adapt to the complex translational ecological environment by analyzing the English webpages of Shaanxi universities. Zhai (2020) analyzed a college translation course from the Eco-translatology perspective and decoded it through the dimensions of linguistics, culture and communication and the level of choice and adaptation.

From the above literature review, the current translation studies on intangible cultural heritage are insufficient compared to the invaluable ICH significance in China; the Eco-translatology approach is mainly applied in the translation of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) terms or stories, comparative English translation of Chinese classics and language teaching in and out of China, yet it hasn't received enough attention from the western scholars. The Eco-translatology is advised to be utilized in the research of the ICH translation studies, because the translation studies of national intangible cultural heritage from an ecological perspective may help raise the public awareness of protection and dissemination thereof, and develop a favorable social and cultural ecology for the ICHs and their holders, some of whom are marginalized like the community “疍家” and their folk song “咸水歌”, and further provide a foundation for locally-appropriate sustainable development thereof.

Take the community “疍家” and its folksong “咸水歌” for example. The community was renamed the “boat people” and classified into the Chinese Han nationality after the founding of the People's Republic of China. According to the *Chinese Dictionary of Folklore in and out of China*, the boat people take boats as their homes and are mainly located in the coastal bays and inland rivers along the southeast coast of Guangdong, Fujian, Guangxi, Tianjin and other places and have been engaged in fishing and river transportation for generations. Related studies on the community mainly focus on their origins and cultural characteristics, such as historical processes, production and life, as well as dialect pronunciation from the perspectives of history, anthropology, sociology, economics, medicine and geography (Bai, 2007, 10). And there are quite few studies on the translation of terms related to the community “疍家” and their intangible cultural heritage “咸水歌”. And related researches on the standardized translation of intangible cultural heritage based on the Eco-translatology have not attracted sufficient attention, especially the terminology translation of the ICH item folksong “咸水歌” from the perspective of Eco-translatology in academia, which is unfavorable to their self-identity recognition and the protection, maintenance, revival and inheritance of their cultural heritage, which may even hinder the process of Chinese culture “going global” and intercultural dialog around the world.

According to the Eco-translatology, the translator should, by means of selective adaptation and adaptive selection, make efforts to convey the information, cultural connotations and communicative intentions of the source text and realize the harmony and balance of the source text and target text in linguistic, cultural and communicative ecologies.

In order to offer some practical ideas for delivering accurate and standard translation of cultural terms and calling for a higher degree of recognition and protection of the ICH items on all sides, the following part will take China's ICH item “咸水歌” and the heritage carrier “疍家” as specific cases to elaborate the English translation of ICH items guided by the “Translation as Adaptation and Selection” approach and the “three-dimensional transformation” method under the framework of the Eco-translatology.

3.1. “Three-dimensional” analysis of the terms “咸水歌” and “疍家” under the TAS approach

In Eco-translatology, the translation method of the “three-dimensional transformation” is mainly about the translation operation. Translational eco-environment ecology involves the source text, the author, the reader, etc. The dimensions of language, culture and communication interlace, interconnect and interact with each other.

Language is the carrier of culture, which is the accumulation of communication. Hence, language, culture and communication have internal logical relevance. Any fading away or loss of a language would constitute a hit or even a disaster to the whole language ecology and to human beings' global intangible cultural heritage. As an important language of the ICH item folksong “咸水歌”, however, the Tanka dialect has become an endangered language in terms of the “intergenerational language transmission” and “proportion of speakers within the total population” according to UNESCO's *Language Vitality and Endangerment* 2003 (pp. 7-9). In this sense, conducting translation studies on the Tanka's folk song “咸水歌” in line with the cultural ecology of China's “going global” strategy would help improve the lingual ecology of the Tanka dialect and further contribute to the communicative ecology of the ICH item folksong “咸水歌” in the world.

In this regard, the following section will elaborate the phonetic and semantic features, cultural connotations and communicative intentions of the terms “咸水歌” and “疍家” from these three dimensions based on respective existing English translations and explore the ecological reasons behind the selective adaptation translation suggestions.

3.2. “Three-dimensional” analysis of the term “疍家” in translation

In the lingual ecology, by the phonetic connotation, the character “疍” in the term “疍家” is interpreted as “an interchangeable word of the characters ‘蠻, 蛋, 彈, 彈’ and pronounces as ‘Dan’ in Chinese pinyin”. It often refers to the “boat dwellers with rolled up trousers” (Gu, 2003, p. 607) in the *Chinese Etymology Dictionary*. Similarly, the *Chinese Vowel-Sequenced Dictionary* describes the “疍” as the “same as the Tanka or boat dwellers who are engaged in fishing or water transportation on inland rivers or coastal harbors of Guangdong, Fujian and Guangxi provinces in southeastern China” (Deng, 2010, p. 54).

In terms of cultural and communicative ecology, the term “疍家” used to be a special community with a disadvantaged social position due to certain historical reasons, and they were renamed “boat dwellers” and governed by the Han ethnicity after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. By the *Chinese Dictionary of Folklore in and out of China*, the term “boat dwellers (水上居民)” is interpreted as “people known as the ‘疍民’ or ‘疍’ in the old times, who dwell on boats and engage in fishing and water transportation for generations, a common phenomenon in southeastern China and other regions in Southeast Asia” (Zhang, 1991, p. 109). Tian (2015) concluded that the mainstream opinion in academia about the origin of the Tanka (boat dwellers) is that this community are the descendants of the ancient Yue people. However, existing English translations of the term “疍家” are not standard and easily cause confusion among English readers. According to Gu (1998) and Zhang et al. (2015), improper translation can easily lead to confusion, misinterpretation, and even mislead Chinese academic research.

Based on the database analysis, the English translation of the term “盩家” can be divided into three types by translation methods, which specifically refer to the following: (1) transliteration, (2) free translation, and (3) transliteration combined with free translation. In transliteration, “盩家” is translated into “The Tangka” or “Danjia” in Chinese pinyin. In free translation, English versions include “boat people”, “boat dwellers”, “boat tribe”, “fishermen” and “Chinese sea gypsies”. In transliteration combined with free translation, the results include Tanka plus community or people, residents, fisherfolk, or boatmen, Dan ethnic group, Dan people, Dan boat dwellers, Water-Faring Community (Dan Jia) and Dan fishing community.

None of these above translations of the term “盩家” can represent the term itself from the phonetic, cultural and communicative aspects. According to the Eco-translatology, translation never just means the transformation of texts from the source language to the target language, or varied symbols, but also includes more of the text’s cultural connotation and communicative intention. For the sake of retaining the phonetic beauty and cultural features of the special community “盩家” in translation, transliteration may be regarded as the best translation method. From the phonetic correlation in terms of the Tanka dialect, the character “盩” corresponds to the pronunciation of “Tan” and hence “家” corresponds to “ka”. (Bai, 2007, p. 104).

A “Character-Sound Table” (Bai, 2007, p. 199) of the two characters “盩” and “家” is shown in Table 1 below for clarity.

Table 1. “Character-Sound Table” for “盩” and “家”

	Character	Character		Character	Character
Region*	盩	家	Region*	盩	家
北海	tan	ka	南宁	tan	ka
贵港	tan	ka	运江	tan	ka
桂平	tan	ka	武宣	tan	ka
贺州	tan	ka	昭平	tan	ka
怀远	tan	ka	融水	tan	ka
来宾	tan	ka			

Note: “Region” with “*” mark refers to the cities in Guangxi province of South China.

The “specialization of terms is first manifested in the terminalization of word translation, which means that the target word has the exact characteristics of the source word, like noun nature, strictness, monosemantics, thus distinguishing terms from ordinary words”. (Huang & Li, 2004, p. 21) The word “tanka” itself however is present in the English vocabulary. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, “Tanka” refers to a noun, specifically a “type of Japanese poem, 1877, from Japanese tanka, from *tan* ‘short’ + *ka* ‘song;’” and WordNet Search 3.1 explains the “tanka” as “a form of Japanese poetry; the 1st and 3rd lines have five syllables and the 2nd, 4th, and 5th have seven syllables” or “a Tibetan religious painting on fabric”. For further communicative convenience and confusion avoidance, it is advised to add an annotation “boat dwellers” to the transliteration “the Tanka” for the term “盩家” so that readers can well grasp the feature of the community at a quick glance. Upon comparison and analysis, using “Tanka” for “盩家” in translation is more in line with the linguistic and cultural transformation in Eco-translatology.

Hu (2020) believes that the translational eco-environment is essentially an “aggregation of all the factors related to the translator’s optimal adaptations and selections”, among which the

publishers or the editors are indispensable in the translation activity (p. 12). And the authority of the publishers or editors are crucial for assessing the translation quality of the translated materials. Moreover, back-translation is a commonly used quality assessment tool in cross-cultural research (Colina, S. et al, 2017).

To verify the accuracy and availability of the translation “the Tanka (boat dwellers)” for the term “疍家”, the article intends to consider back translation verification and refers to professional dictionaries, multimedia resources and other academic sources which are published, released or edited by prestigious institutes or scholars at home and abroad. The results show that almost identical English expressions such as “the Tanka” for “疍家” are adopted in the translation. In *the 21st Century Unabridged English-Chinese Dictionary (2nd Edition)* (Li, 2005, p. 2155) and *English-Chinese Dictionary (2nd Edition)* (Lu, 2019, p. 2071), products by two prestigious publishers in China, the “tanka” may be defined as “boat dwellers in the regions including Guangdong province in China”. In the Chinese film *The Star and the Sea* released by China’s state-owned New United Film in 2011, there are 18 times of “疍家” in the performers’ lines and they are all translated into “the Tankas, Tankas boy or the Tankas (boat people) in the English subtitles. The film was released in celebration of the 60th anniversary of the founding the P.R. China and the 10th anniversary of Macau’s return to the motherland, which tells the biographical tale of the childhood of the worldwide renowned musician and composer Mr. Xian Xinghai, who was born as a “Tanka boy” (“疍仔” in Chinese). In the English-written book *Inside Canton* by D.R. Yvan and published by Henry Vizetelly, a reputable English publisher, in 1858, the expression “tanka” was utilized for at least 10 times to refer to the community “疍家”. After 151 years upon its publication, the book *Inside Canton* was translated into Chinese in 2008 by the Guangdong People’s Publishing House, and all the “tanka” related words including “tanka girl” and “tankas” were translated back into Chinese term “疍家/疍民/疍家人/疍家女”.

In summary, the term “疍家” is advised to be translated into “the Tanka (boat dwellers)”, which well achieves ecological harmony and balance between the source text and target text. Transliteration based on the phonetic feature of dialects and proper annotation is proposed for retaining the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the source text and avoiding over-foreignization in the Chinese-English translation of ICH items. In addition, back translation with computer-aided resources is a logical way to verify whether the translation is well grounded.

3.3. “Three-dimensional” analysis of the “咸水歌” in translation

This section will elaborate the linguistic connotations, cultural characteristics, practical meaning and communicative significance of the English translation rationale for the term “咸水歌”. Online dictionaries and monolingual corpuses in Chinese or English are utilized in this discussion.

On the side of linguistic connotations and cultural characteristics, the folk song “咸水歌” is an oral expression, cultural tradition and a valuable intangible cultural heritage item in China. In the *Chinese Dialect Dictionary Volume 3* (1999), the term “咸水歌” is interpreted as the “romance song of boat dwellers in the history and folk song of residents in the regions near the Pearl River Delta Area in China” (p. 199). It is a unique manner of artistic expression and entertainment among the community “疍家” that constitutes an independent part of the Tanka folk culture. According to the records in the *Dictionary of Famous Historical and Cultural Cities in China* (Luo et al, 1998, p. 1667), the songs “咸水歌” were often created improvisationally in life or at work by the Tankas who used to inhabit the boats floating on salty waters from generation to generation, hence the name “Saltwater Song”, literally “Xianshuige” in Chinese pinyin. *The Guangzhou Encyclopedia* (1994) suggests that the songs “咸水歌” have absorbed new contents such as singing for the happy life of the fishermen along the Zhujiang River Delta

regions after the founding of the People's Republic of China, and the majority of people who sing such songs are middle-aged or senior Tankas.

As mentioned in the previous section, the Tanka dialect is a vital expression of the salt water songs (the Tanka folk song). However, due to the initially negative attitude of the Tanka community toward the Tanka dialect and the socioeconomic pressure of a dominant speech community, the Tankas have changed their living places from salt waters to lands and have increasingly abandoned their native language in favor of Mandarin Chinese, including for childrearing and formal education. Hence, the ecology for the Tanka dialect and the Tanka folk song Saltwater Song has become socially and culturally unfavorable.

Therefore, in terms of the practical meaning, research on the translation studies of the ICH item folksong “咸水歌” (the Saltwater Song) is a worthwhile effort that is beneficial to the language stabilization and revitalization of the Saltwater Song, which would help enhance the communicative effect of intangible cultural heritage in and out of China.

To determine the best translation for the term “咸水歌”, the following will start with a qualitative analysis and comparison of its existing English translations. Analysis in this section is mainly made based on the data from three monolingual corpuses Peking University CCL Corpus, BLCU Chinese Corpus (BCC) and iWeb, and the China Books Database. In response to the search of the keyword “咸水歌”, the BCC produces 35 results and the CCL produces 19, adding up to 52 effective results with six articles on Sino Weibo, a counterpart to Western Facebook. A deeper analysis of these data reveals that the term “咸水歌” is mostly active in news by Xinhua Net and *People's Daily* (Overseas Edition) in the period between 1958 and 2016. The limited word frequency and news reports show that the Saltwater Song (“咸水歌”) is facing great communicative challenges.

In addition, the China Books Database produces four English versions for the terms “咸水歌”, “saltwater song”, “sea song”, “salty-water song” and “salty water song”, covering fields of Chinese literature, culture, music and dance, and tourism, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. English Translations and Field Distribution of “咸水歌”

Chinese	Existing English translations (word frequency and percentage)	Field
咸水歌	saltwater song (3, 0%)	Chinese literature
	sea-song (2, 14.3%)	Chinese literature; music and dance
	salty-water song (1, 57.1%)	music and dance; culture; tourism
	salty water song (1, 28.6%)	Chinese literature

From the viewpoint of social pragmatics, the word frequency in the iWeb database can reflect the actual application of words in today's social language life. By searching the word frequency of the four mentioned English translations for the term “咸水歌”, the word frequency is as follows: “saltwater” 19,283 times, “salt-water” 1,450 times, “salty water” 2,505 times, “salty-water” 6 times, and “sea-song” 0 times. In this sense, the universally accepted norms would dictate choosing the word with the highest frequency, “saltwater” song, as the English translation of the term “咸水歌”, which is conducive to the international dissemination and acceptance of Chinese cultural terms. This is also an application of the proposition of “universality as the first standard of terminology translation” (Wang, 1987, p. 41).

In terms of back translation verification of “saltwater”, “salt-water”, “salty water” and “sea song” with computer-aided resources, this section utilizes representative online English dictionaries such as Merriam-Webster, OED and the Free Dictionary. According to the online Merriam-Webster, “saltwater” has the meaning of “relating to, associated with, or suitable for salt water”. This conforms to the linguistic and cultural ecology of the term “咸水歌” and the naming rationale in the *Dictionary of Famous Historical and Cultural Cities in China*, as discussed above. By comparison, the “sea song” (with the lowest word frequency of 0 in the iWeb) is interpreted in the online OED and the Free Dictionary as the following, “A sea song is a sailor’s song - when expressly working songs, they are often sea shanties (a shipboard song-type which flourished in the Age of Sail’s 19th century to the 20th century’s first half)”. This means that “sea song” itself has its own cultural memory. Moreover, these two words are mostly capitalized when used in combination, that is, Sea Song, which refers to a location (a resort in Florida, USA) or the exclusive song name.

Therefore, it is advised to adopt a combined translation method of transliteration with category words and back translation verification with computer-aided resources in translating the term “咸水歌” into “Saltwater Song (The Tanka folk song)”. The former part “Saltwater Song” is composed of one qualifier “saltwater” and a category word “song”, directly manifesting the word structure of the term “咸水歌”, and the latter part in the bracket “The Tanka folk song” explains the cultural correlation of the song and the Tanka “疍家”, which helps facilitate the communicative effect of this intangible cultural heritage.

4. Conclusions

Based on the theory of Eco-translatology, this article proposes that “疍家” should be translated as “the Tanka (boat dwellers)” and “咸水歌” should be translated as “Saltwater Song (The Tanka folk song)” or as Tankas and Saltwater Song, respectively, when they reappear in the same text, to comply with the “concise” principle of the translation. And from the case study, it is advised to apply the Eco-translatology in the ICH translation studies.

By exploring the rationale for the ecological adaptation and selection strategy for the translation of “the Tanka (boat dwellers)” and “Saltwater Song (The Tanka folk song)”, it is suggested that from an ecological translation perspective, the translation strategies of dialect-based transliteration, transliteration with category words or annotation and back translation verification with computer-aided resources should be adopted for the translation of Chinese intangible cultural heritage terms to determine the translation with the highest degree “of holistic adaptation and selection” guided by the Eco-translatology (Hu, 2013, p. 129). Specifically, (1) the transliteration should be based on the phonetic characteristics of the dialect and follow the principle of “name after the originating person or place”, considering the phonetic beauty of the language of nonheritage culture. (2) The interpretation must be based on the principle of “convention” and reflect the diversity of languages. (3) The back-translation can be utilized to reverify the suitability of the target text to the source text in terms of linguistic, cultural and communicative ecology by inferring from existing multimedia resources or other academic sources. Moreover, although limited by the quantity of terms discussed in this article, the authors have endeavored to conduct detailed and reliable comparative studies of the terms “疍家” and “咸水歌” to deliver plausible and well-founded conclusions. Moreover, this study is expected to facilitate the intercultural communication of intangible cultural heritage around the globe in a more accurate manner via translation, including but not limited to providing practical ideas for intangible cultural heritage item translation based on the Eco-translatology with Chinese characteristics, enhancing the explanatory effect of Eco-translatology theory in intercultural communication, and offering some suggestions for translation practices, such as introducing the Eco-translatology.

Acknowledgements

Funded by Interdisciplinary Research Foundation for Doctoral Candidates of Beijing Normal University [No. BNUXKJC2315]

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