

Research Article

Literal Reference in Eco-Translatology: Analyzing Wang Wei's Landscape Poetry Through the “Three-Life Phases” Framework

Ting Shi* 

School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Wuhan University, Wuhan, China

Abstract

Metaphorical reference studies and literal reference studies are “two sides in one” of eco-translatology, while in fact the former one takes overwhelming dominance. As eco-translatology enters its third decade, it's the turn for literal reference studies to serve as a necessary supplement to the long-lasting dominant metaphorical reference studies in eco-translatology. In the dialogue between Chinese and American poetry in the 20th century, American poets translated a splendid array of landscape poetry by Chinese recluse poets, among which Wang Wei was the most popular. In terms of its ecology-related content and translation influence, the translation and introduction of Wang Wei's landscape poetry in America makes a translation representation so as to be an ideal research object of literal reference studies. By adopting the “three-life phases” framework—translation ecology, translator's survival, and textual life—this research provides a systematic analysis of how Wang Wei's ecological worldview, rooted in traditional Chinese harmony between humans and nature, is transplanted into Western cultural contexts. Seven significant English translations were selected based on their representation of Wang Wei's ecological philosophy and their influence on American poetic movements. Using a qualitative analytical approach, the study examines the socio-cultural context of translation, the ecological literacy of translators, and strategies used to adapt Wang Wei's poetic imagery and philosophy for English readers. It is a relatively novel attempt to combine the literal sense with a specific translation event, facilitating to substantiate literal reference studies in eco-translatology and enrich the academic mode for foreign publicity of Chinese ecological culture.

Keywords

Eco-translatology, Literal Reference Studies, Wang Wei's Landscape Poetry, English Translation, Three-life Phases

1. Introduction

Eco-translatology emerged at the turn of the century and has since navigated through a landscape of both support and skepticism. Over more than two decades of continuous examination, reflection, revision, and innovation, it has garnered sustained attention and increasing recognition. Rooted in the

principles of ecological holism and inspired by traditional Chinese ecological wisdom, eco-translatology constructs an organic translation ecosystem with the concepts of “translation as text transplantation”, “translation as adaptation and selection”, and “translation as ecological balance”, repre-

*Corresponding author: shi.ting@whu.edu.cn (Ting Shi)

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senting an attempt at holistic research into translation studies and serving as a scientific exploration of an ecological paradigm. The ecosystem involves three primary research subjects: the translation context, the translator, and the text. A theoretical framework of “macro-meso-micro” is established to facilitate a discourse system for translation studies that incorporates the ecological wisdom of Chinese culture while harmonizing Eastern and Western academic standards.

Eco-translatology, in its developmental trajectory, adheres to a path of pluralistic integration. Alongside a series of theoretical innovations, it also emphasizes the practical applications of eco-translatology theory in various contexts. As an indispensable research part of eco-translatology, its literal reference studies are crucial for enhancing the applicability and explicability of the theoretical discourse system of eco-translatology. Wang Wei's landscape poetry, which focuses on natural scenery, stands as one of the most distinguished representations of ancient Chinese landscape poetry. It not only showcases the beauty of natural ecology but also embodies the Chinese wisdom of harmony between humans and nature, challenging the mechanistic view of nature prevalent in modern Western science and possessing significant ecological value. This is closely related to the growing ecological awareness in the Western world. In the 20th-century Sino-American poetic dialogue, many American poets and translators chose Chinese landscape poetry for introduction and translation, with Wang Wei being their most popular poet of reclusive landscape poetry. A literal reference study of eco-translatology and the translation of Wang Wei's landscape poetry in America form a well-suited combination, mutually illuminating each other.

As the field of translation studies continues to evolve, eco-translatology has emerged as a significant theoretical framework. However, several crucial aspects remain to be explored. Firstly, in the context of the growing international ecological discourse and the ever-expanding realm of translation studies, it is essential to inquire into what the status of eco-translatology is in the international ecological discourse system and its academic positioning in translation studies. This will help us understand how eco-translatology contributes to both ecological discussions and the development of translation theory.

Secondly, within the framework of eco-translatology itself, literal reference studies play a unique role. Thus, we need to delve into what the academic positioning of literal reference studies in eco-translatology is. By clarifying this, we can better grasp the internal structure and significance of eco-translatology as a whole.

Finally, considering the rich cultural and ecological connotations in Chinese classical poetry, especially Wang Wei's landscape poetry, and the challenges in translating them into English, we must ask how the “three-life phases” framework of eco-translatology, namely translation ecology, translator's survival, and textual life, offers a comprehensive method for analyzing the English translations of Wang Wei's landscape

poetry. Answering these questions will not only deepen our understanding of eco-translatology but also provide valuable insights for future translation research and practice.

2. The Development Trends of Eco-translatology

With the rise of global ecological movements, the theoretical framework of ecology has continuously developed and improved, expanding its scope beyond traditional ecological studies to include various fields, increasingly focusing on the impact of human behavior on the environment. In this context, interdisciplinary research between humanities and ecology has proliferated. As Huang Guowen (2016) states, “Scholars from different disciplines focusing on ecological issues have made it a transdisciplinary topic.” Eco-translatology draws theoretical resources from the holism in Western ecological rationality, the harmony between humans and nature in Chinese ecological wisdom, and the biological adaptation and selection theory. It integrates Eastern and Western ecological wisdom, breaking down the rigid barriers between natural science, social science and humanities. By adopting an inclusive, interdisciplinary ecological perspective, eco-translatology examines translation through a unique lens.

Over more than two decades of development, eco-translatology has consistently drawn attention from the academic community, demonstrating a thriving and vigorous trend of growth. Its emergence and development reflect the growing recognition of the ecological value of traditional Chinese culture within the global ecological discourse, offering an essential complement to Western translation studies. Trends in the interdisciplinary research between translation studies and ecology in China have emerged at the right time, and supported the growing academic recognition of eco-translatology experimental conclusions that can be drawn.

2.1. Eastern Wisdom in the International Ecological Discourse

Plato's metaphysics and Aristotle's logic form the theoretical foundation of the Western view of nature, which upholds a dualistic approach to the relationship between humans and nature. The modern ecological crisis, emerging in the Western world since the 1960s, has prompted a re-examination of this human-nature relationship, with the modern environmental movement in the West serving as a prominent example. In response to the modern ecological crisis, scholars like Lynn White [1] generally argue that the crisis is closely linked to the anthropocentric worldview rooted in Christianity. Within the dualistic, mechanistic view of nature promoted by modern science, humans are regarded as the rulers of nature, and

nature is viewed as an object to be transformed and exploited by humans. It can be said that the root of the ecological crisis lies in the traditional Western anthropocentrism, which essentially regards nature as a resource and tool for human use. Reevaluating and redefining the relationship between humans and nature has become a core issue in modern ecological research. A fundamentally new perspective is urgently needed to approach the interpretation of this relationship.

The traditional Chinese worldview of “harmony between man and nature” is rooted in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. It advocates for a harmonious and unified relationship between humans and nature, emphasizing a non-dualistic approach. This worldview promotes living in the present world while aligning with the natural order [2]. Since the early 20th century, more Western scholars have recognized the unique ecological value of the Chinese traditional view of nature and have sought inspiration from Eastern wisdom to address Western cultural and ecological crises.

Chinese scholars have pioneered eco-translatology in translation studies, exploring translation issues through an ecological lens. The most prominent and distinctive theoretical foundation of eco-translatology lies in the Eastern ecological wisdom of harmony between humans and nature and the principle of perpetual regeneration. This approach has attracted considerable interest from international scholars, facilitating the global dissemination of eco-translatology’s core concepts and theoretical framework. Its development aligns with the prevailing “trend” of the times.

2.2. Academic Positioning of Eco-translatology from the Perspective of the Four Symbols

Interestingly, Professor Meng Fanjun from Southwest University, China, who is deeply versed in Book of Changes, analyzes and anchors the academic positioning of eco-translatology within both Chinese and Western translation studies through the unique lens of the Four Symbols. By examining the strengths and weaknesses in the construction of translation theory systems across Chinese and Western traditions, he correlates these with the Four Symbols using James Holmes’ framework of translation studies. Professor Meng argues that Holmes’ theoretical model is incomplete, as it lacks a dimension corresponding to “*old yin*” representing metaphysical translation research. From this perspective, the emergence of eco-translatology as part of Chinese translation scholarship serves as a necessary complement to the waning focus within Western translation studies. Meng Fanjun [3] further proposes that the characteristics of different stages of eco-translatology research correspond to the Four Symbols, encapsulated in the phrase, “The interconversion of Yin and Yang is infinitely subtle and profound.” Meng Fanjun [4] argues that the theoretical construction of eco-translatology reflects the systematic and comprehensive nature of traditional Chinese thought, aligning with the integrative approach of *Dao* (道), *Li* (理), *Fa* (法), and *Shu* (术) in Chinese rational speculation and theoretical development. He further elaborates on eco-translatology’s theoretical framework through these four dimensions, showcasing its innovative qualities as a reflection of China’s rich ecological cultural wisdom.

Table 1. Four dimensions of translation studies corresponding to the Four Symbols.

Old Yin ==	Lesser Yang ==	Old Yang ==	Lesser Yin ==
	Theoretical translation research	Descriptive translation research	Applied translation research

Thus, eco-translatology has developed a Chinese academic discourse system by drawing on Western translation research paradigms and inheriting the rich cognitive wisdom of China. It fills the void in metaphysical translation research, making its rise a natural “trend” within international translation studies.

Like any emerging research paradigm, eco-translatology is progressing from its initial stages toward greater maturity. As a domestically developed translation theory in China, eco-translatology remains in the process of ongoing refinement. This developmental phase inevitably presents challenges, such as ambiguous terminology and an incomplete theoretical framework. Moreover, the relatively low confidence in domestically developed theories within the Chinese academic community, along with an incomplete understand-

ing of eco-translatology’s growth and theoretical foundation, has led to some biases in argumentation and presentation. Over the past two decades, eco-translatology has consistently attracted both support and criticism. Its proponents recognize the theory’s strengths while acknowledging its current limitations, working continuously to enrich and clarify its framework. As it evolves, eco-translatology is gaining increasing attention and positive feedback from scholars. Julian House has identified eco-translatology as one of several emerging trends in translation studies, noting that “The eco-translatological approach is new because the notion of ‘context’ propagated here is broader than in earlier theories, and time will tell whether such an extensive conception of context can pass the test of translational practice” [5]. This growing international recognition signals the increasing rel-

evance of eco-translatology in the global field of translation studies.

Currently, Eco-translatology, founded by Hu Gengshen, has formed a distinctive school of thought, a substantial academic team, stable academic bases, and regular conferences. Its domestic recognition is gradually increasing, and its international reputation is also on the rise, showcasing significant academic vitality and development potential.

3. Literal Reference Studies in Eco-translatology

At present, the intersection of humanities and ecology offers a diverse range of research approaches, broadly categorized into two types. The first involves metaphorical interpretation, or metaphorical reference studies, where ecological methods and findings are applied to reinterpret phenomena within a specific field through analogy and conceptual transference. The second type, focusing on a direct ecological analysis of discourse and behavior, investigates how language use reflects and shapes the relationship between humans and the broader ecological system. This non-metaphorical approach is termed literal reference studies [6]. Over the past two decades, eco-translatology has produced a wealth of research, primarily concentrating on the metaphorical reinterpretation of translation phenomena through ecological insights. However, it has paid insufficient attention to the ecological crisis itself, presenting a critical opportunity for literal reference studies in this field. Given the current state of interdisciplinary studies between translation and ecology, exploring literal reference studies at the intersection of these domains is not only necessary but also highly feasible.

3.1. Justification of Literal Reference Studies in Eco-translatology

“As a whole, eco-translatology research encompasses both ‘metaphorical’ and ‘literal’ reference approaches. The metaphorical aspect involves metaphorical analogy between translation ecology and natural ecology for holistic research, while the literal aspect focuses on the living conditions and capacity development of translators within the translation ecology” [7]. There is essentially no substantive difference between metaphorical reference and literal reference here. Scholars have questioned the predominant focus on metaphorical reference studies in eco-translatology, arguing that it lacks an ecological critique perspective and primarily borrows the terminology or discourse framework of “ecology” without engaging in translation research for the sake of an “endangered world” [8]. Additionally, due to the conflation of the terms of metaphorical reference and literal reference, some scholars believe that while eco-translatology mentions literal reference, its research path is predominantly metaphorical, leading to a mismatch between name and reality of the term

“literal reference” [9].

3.2. Initial Exploration of Literal Reference Studies in Eco-translatology

Hu Gengshen [10] published “Green Translation” for “Green Development”, defining green translation as the translation involving the theme of ecological civilization construction and green development, encompassing the spiritual and material achievements of ecological civilization, and related content such as ecological criticism, ecological language, ecological literature, ecological writing, ecological culture, and ecological society. He argued that green translation for green development is a practical hallmark of eco-translatology and a potent tool for its development of literal reference studies in the new era of ecological civilization. This represents an initial exploration of literal reference studies in eco-translatology. Hu [11] formally defined literal reference studies in eco-translatology, advocating for this research orientation. According to Hu’s updated definition, literal reference studies in eco-translatology involves the translation of natural ecological works and specific green themes, as well as interdisciplinary research integrating ecological translation with ecological language, ecological literature, and ecological criticism. It specifically includes choosing natural ecological materials, translating natural ecological content, exploring the ecological significance of texts, revealing the ecological thoughts of authors (and translators), practicing ecological principles, focusing on environmental issues, and integrating other ecological studies to promote the translation practice that contributes to ecological civilization development and linguistic and cultural diversity. Thus, literal reference studies in eco-translatology are well-grounded and justified.

Another diligent researcher of literal reference studies in eco-translatology is Chen Yuehong. Chen’s work [12] involves literal reference in eco-translatology, focusing on the ecological translation ideas of Ernest Fenollosa, guided by Eastern organic nature, and Ezra Pound’s use of ideographic methods for ecological translation. Chen later proposed principles for ecological translation under the concept of literal reference [6, 13], comparing studies of literal reference in Chinese and Western academic fields, summarizing the status of literal reference studies in China, and offering prospects for future research.

Overall, literal reference studies in eco-translatology represents an inevitable shift following the development of the metaphorical reference studies, aligning with the values advocated in current global ecological movement. However, the research by these scholars remains at the macro level, emphasizing the importance of literal reference studies without extensively exploring the specific combination of literal reference studies and ecological translation events. Therefore, this paper’s integration of literal reference studies in eco-translatology with the translation of Wang Wei’s land-

scape poetry in America is such an attempt at in-depth literal reference studies.

4. The “Three-life Phases” of Wang Wei’s Landscape Poetry

The core of eco-translatology can be summarized with four concepts: “one-life essence”, “two-life changes”, “three-life phases”, and “four-life perspectives”. The term “life” permeates the entire framework of eco-translatology, whether it refers to the life of the text, the survival of the translator, or the ecology of translation. “Life” is its most crucial nucleus, representing the very foundation of eco-translatology. Therefore, the concept of “one-life essence” here can be regarded as the “root metaphor” and “meta-narrative” of eco-translatology theoretical research. This concept is a defining characteristic that distinguishes eco-translatology from other translation research approaches or paradigms [11]. The notion of “two-life changes” can be traced back to the core concept in *Book of Changes* where “the production and reproduction is called ‘change’”, meaning continuous regeneration, cyclical renewal, and the creation of the new from the old as the source of all things. In eco-translatology, the expression of “the production and reproduction are called ‘translation’”, signifies the adaptation of this concept to translation, where “two-life changes” focuses on the source and target language ecologies, referring to the “life forms” within these ecologies. The translator’s role is to transplant

the life forms from the ecology of source language to the ecology of target language, essentially transplanting the life of the text. The notion that “the production and reproduction are called translation” involves “two lives” which have now evolved into the “four lives” theory, analogous to the idea that “the Supreme Ultimate produces the Two Modes, which in turn produce the ‘four lives’”. The four lives perspective refers to the continuous cycle and transformation of “cherishing life”, “nurturing life”, “transforming life”, and “creating life” in translation, embodying an ever-regenerating view of life’s cycles.

The “three-life phases” refer to the three core domains in eco-translatology: textual life, translator’s survival, and translation ecology. Textual life deals with the vitality and contextual environment of the text, while translator’s survival focuses on the translator’s skill development and quality of life. Translation ecology encompasses the environmental and systemic context in which translation occurs. These phases place priority on textual life, which subsequently links translator’s survival with translation ecology. The formation of these domains highlights eco-translatology’s emphasis on an integrated approach that connects textual life, translator’s survival, and translation ecology into a unified framework. The concept of the “three-life phases” is fundamental to eco-translatology, as it serves as the theoretical basis upon which the field has evolved. It aligns with the natural flow of literary transmission—from text, to author, to reader—encompassing all factors influencing the translation process.

Table 2. Seven translations for Wang Wei’s landscape poetry.

Translation Title	Translator(s)	Publication Year
Translating Wang Wei	Witter Bynner	1922
<i>The Poetry of Wang Wei</i>	Chang Yin-nan and Lewis Calvin Walmsley	1958
<i>Hiding the Universe: Poems by Wang Wei</i>	Wai-lim Yip	1972
<i>The Poetry of Wang Wei</i>	G. W. Robinson	1973
<i>An Album of Wang Wei</i>	Ch’eng Hsi and Henry W. Wells	1974
<i>Empty Mountains: The Poetry of Wang Wei</i>	Willis Barnstone and Tony Barnstone	1992
Selected Poems of Wang Wei	David Hinton	2006

This part provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing translation events, focusing on the ecological values present in the three dimensions of translation ecology, translator’s survival, and textual life.

4.1. Translation Ecology

The translation and reception of Wang Wei’s landscape

poetry in America can be summarized within the context of two “anti-tradition” movements in American poetic innovation. The pictorial and Zen-like qualities of Wang Wei’s poetry, which reflect an Eastern perspective on nature and ecology, resonate with the value orientations of these two cultural movements.

During the first poetic revolution in the early 20th century, known as the New Poetry Movement, there was a fascination

with Chinese poetry. This movement marked the beginning of American modern poetry, where imagist poets discovered new modes of poetic expression in Chinese poetry. They were dissatisfied with the 19th-century British poetry's tendency to be overly rational or lyrical, believing that it obscured the richness of objects themselves. Therefore, they advocate against using logical language in poetry for argumentation, analysis, or explanation, instead favoring the direct presentation of images themselves through vivid and concrete imagery. Many Chinese poems feature distinct images that are naturally arranged and appear seamless, without relying on pronouns or prepositions to clarify the logical connections between these images. This has provided a model for the "modern" poetic language sought after by the New Poetry Movement. This movement began in 1912, referred to in American literary history as the "American Poetry Renaissance". It was a movement aimed at modernizing American poetry, while also fostering a sense of national identity within it. American poets absorbed a wide range of foreign influences, among which Chinese influence held a particularly significant place. The extent to which the New Poetry Movement was influenced by China has long been a subject of interest. The distinguished "New Poet" Marianne Moore [14] observed that "the new poetry seems to exist as an intensified form of Japanese poetry—or, more accurately, Chinese poetry—although a more sustained interest in Chinese poetry emerged later". The New Poetry Movement embraced Chinese influences, and to some extent, the movement itself was part of a larger cultural fascination with China. The influence of Chinese poetry became a significant trend of the time, widely accepted by various poetic schools and literary magazines within the movement. Harriet Monroe [15], the founder of Poetry magazine, believed that one of the greatest contributions of the New Poetry school was its discovery of Chinese poetry, even suggesting that Imagism within the movement was essentially another name for a "Chinese style".

The second "anti-tradition" movement occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, characterized by the countercultural and anti-establishment poetry of the Beat Generation. Participants in this movement questioned the alienation and opposition between humans and nature in industrial society and modern civilization, advocating for the restoration of a harmonious relationship between the two. For them, the Eastern Zen philosophy, which emphasizes the unity of self and nature and the integration of the self into the natural world, provided a philosophical foundation. American Zen scholar Alan Watts played a key role in integrating Zen with the countercultural and anti-establishment poetry during this second poetry movement. His works, such as *The Spirit of Zen* (1936), *Zen Buddhism: A New Outline and Introduction* (1947), *Zen* (1948), and *The Way of Zen* (1957), sparked a lasting interest in Zen in America. Watts' "American-style Zen" greatly contributed to the popularization of Zen in America. Westerners viewed Zen as the ultimate explanation of the magic behind Chinese poetry, finding inspiration in poetry for addressing

the relationship between humans and nature, and transcending dualistic thinking. Amidst the clamor of the poets of the Beat Generation in the 1950s and 1960s, Gary Snyder's voice was a solitary one. However, after returning from Japan and settling in the U.S. in 1967, many of his readers embraced his call to follow Chinese masters and return to nature. Snyder's ideas became one of the intellectual pillars of the environmental movement in late 1960s America, and he himself became a "hero of the new American culture". In Snyder's view, modern Western civilization was on the brink of collapse, facing not only the threat of nuclear destruction but also ecological devastation caused by endless production for profit. The only way to save humanity, he argued, was by seeking a way of life in harmony with nature. "Almost all contemporary American poets involved in the environmental movement, without exception, are interested in Chinese poetry. It is no coincidence that these poets have spent years in self-imposed exile, living as monks, hermits, or peasants—they are following in the footsteps of Tao Qian, Han Shan, Lin Bu, and Wang Wei, centuries before them" [16].

The starting points of both poetry movements were reflected not only in their interpretation of the essence of classical Chinese poetry but also in their selection of the types of poetry to translate. The focus on imagery and Zen philosophy led American poets to favor Chinese landscape poetry. Zhong Ling [17] observes that "translations during the New Poetry Movement included many nature-related poems by Li Bai, Bai Juyi, Wang Wei, and Du Fu". In the case of Wang Wei, although his surviving corpus of over 400 poems spans a wide range of themes and styles, most English translations focus predominantly on his landscape poetry.

4.2. Translator's Survival

Translator is the main agent in translation activities, and his selection of texts and translation strategies are influenced by his subjectivity. From the perspective of eco-translatology, translator's ecological ethics—such as ecological awareness, a sense of ecological moral responsibility, and the ability for ecological reading—are reflected in his choice of texts and translation strategies. The ecological literacy of a translator also impacts the effectiveness of his translation.

The major translators of Wang Wei's landscape poetry in America include Witter Bynner, Chang Yin-nan and Lewis Calvin Walmsley, Wai-lim Yip, Ch'eng Hsi and Henry W. Wells, G. W. Robinson, the father-son duo Willis Barnstone and Tony Barnstone, and David Hinton. Notably, there were no pioneers of the anti-establishment poetry movement among Wang Wei's translators. Although these translators were influenced by the countercultural movements of their time, they were more deeply connected to the early 20th-century New Poetry Movement. The poetics of Imagism, in particular, shaped the translators' approach to Wang Wei's landscape poetry, while the second countercultural and anti-establishment poetry movement further enhanced the

translators' ecological awareness and understanding of the ecological values inherent in Chinese landscape poetry. These two movements exerted influence on both a micro and macro level, leading the translators to focus on Wang Wei, whom they regarded as the epitome of the reclusive landscape poet and a model of the classical Chinese "landscape poet".

Witter Bynner published 15 translations of Wang Wei's poems along with a short essay titled "Translating Wang Wei" in *Poetry*, one of the main platforms of the New Poetry Movement. These translations were selected from 30 of Wang Wei's poems included in *Three Hundred Tang Poems*, and most of the selected works relate to nature and human experiences within the natural world. Bynner [18] believed that Wang Wei's poetry predominantly consisted of pastoral landscape poems that "follow the rhythms of nature, like a fisherman's song—without anxiety, jealousy, boasting, or vexing struggle; only harmony, humility, and a merging with nature". Another translator, Lewis Calvin Walmsley, was drawn to Wang Wei's poetry and wrote a biography of the poet because he was attracted to the harmonious relationship between humans and nature in the poems. Walmsley believed that Chinese characters are ideographic, and Chinese poetry is visual and pictorial. Therefore, he chose to translate Wang Wei's landscape poems and not his court or social poems, which lack natural beauty. His poetry collection includes 11 landscape paintings intended to highlight the imagistic beauty of the poems.

Wai-lim Yip is considered the most influential translator of Wang Wei's landscape poetry. His poetics align with those of the early 20th-century Imagist poets, and he developed a theoretical framework on this basis. By comparing Wang Wei's descriptions of nature with those of English and American poets such as Wordsworth, Stevens, and Snyder, Yip demonstrated the differences between Chinese and Western poetic forms. Henry W. Wells' connection to the New Poetry Movement is evident in his early writings. His 1924 work on imagery in Elizabethan poetry was influenced by Imagism. The translation by Ch'eng Hsi and Wells, titled *An Album of Wang Wei*, includes 50 poems, most of which are landscape poems. Each translation is accompanied by the original Chinese text and a painting by Ch'eng Hsi that complements the poem, aiming to showcase both the beauty of Chinese characters and the pictorial quality of the poetry.

G. W. Robinson's personal tastes aligned with the spirit of the countercultural movement, particularly its emphasis on restoring harmony between humans and nature. He believed that the appeal of Wang Wei's poetry lies in its depiction of the unity between humans and nature under the influence of Buddhist and Daoist thoughts. "The nature he observes is neither objective nor aesthetic, for he is part of nature itself, and it is this wholeness that he celebrates" [19].

After the 1980s, Willis Barnstone and Tony Barnstone made some exceptions in their selection of Wang Wei's poems. On one hand, they were influenced by Ezra Pound and other modern American poets who engaged in dialogue with Chi-

nese poetry. Their translations incorporated the latest research on Wang Wei from the 1970s and included a comprehensive introduction to Wang Wei's historical context, his life, social connections, and Zen philosophy. On the other hand, in their selection of poems, they aimed to represent the diversity of Wang Wei's work by including not only landscape poems but also court, social, and frontier poems. David Hinton, although familiar with Wang Wei's diverse corpus, chose to translate only his landscape poems. This decision was closely related to Hinton's personal philosophy and practice of living in harmony with nature. Living in a small town at the foot of a mountain in Vermont, where he long supported himself by working part-time as a stonemason, Hinton found in Wang Wei, the reclusive landscape poet, a reflection of his own creative and existential journey.

4.3. Textual Life

The textual life refers to the vitality and existential condition of a text. In the context of eco-translatology, translation is seen as the transplantation of the textual life. Wang Wei's landscape poetry, as a text, contains immense ecological value, and translating it is a process of transplanting this ecological value. However, this transplantation is often hindered by the significant differences between Chinese and Western views of nature and linguistic expression. There are numerous English translations of Wang Wei's poetry, including *Translating Wang Wei* (1922), *The Poetry of Wang Wei* (1958), *Hiding the Universe: Poems by Wang Wei* (1972), *An Album of Wang Wei* (1974), *The Poetry of Wang Wei* (1973), *Empty Mountains: The Poetry of Wang Wei* (1992), and *Selected Poems of Wang Wei* (2006).

Wang Wei's landscape poetry is characterized by its depiction of the real world and its emphasis on the fusion of emotion and scenery. His poetry is filled with rich natural imagery, as seen in the fifth poem of *The Joys of the Countryside*, where the entire poem consists of juxtaposed images—a rarity in the history of Chinese poetry. The prevalence of such image juxtapositions in Wang Wei's work results from his painterly perspective of "learning from nature", gathering poetic material to create pictorial scenes in his poetry [20]. Chinese landscape poetry is rooted in Buddhist and Daoist philosophy, originating in the 4th and 5th centuries, with the highest poetic ideal being the view of "observing objects through objects" and "forgetting both self and objects". It is one of the most prominent vehicles for expressing the Chinese philosophy of harmony between humans and nature. The charm of Wang Wei's landscape poetry lies in its portrayal of the unity between humans and nature under the influence of Buddhist and Daoist thought. This meditative and Zen-like spiritual realm is presented through "selfless" observation of the world, dissolving dualistic thinking.

On the other hand, the Western view of nature, based on Christianity and anthropocentrism, is grounded in the mechanistic view of nature in modern science, filled with the du-

alistic separation between humans and nature. Compared to China, the development of Western landscape poetry occurred much later. Frodsham [21] remarked that the European Romantic tradition is considered the origin of Western landscape poetry, noting that “it was not until the mid-17th century that the West truly began to appreciate landscapes, while China had already reached a comparable level more than 1,500 years earlier”. However, even in the works of Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, the human subjectivity remains omnipresent. For instance, in *Wordsworth's Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, considered one of his most nature-focused poems, the “I” is still positioned as a spectator, admiring the world without reaching the state of self-forgetfulness that ancient Chinese landscape poets achieved in their immersion in nature.

The traditional Western view of nature, along with its strict linguistic conventions, constrained the way Western poets perceived and described nature. Translating the textual life of landscape poetry into the English context is particularly challenging. Pioneers of Imagism, such as Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound, recognized this difficulty. They devoted their lives to introducing the organic view of nature from Eastern traditions to the West and attempted to “Sinicize” English poetry through vocabulary and syntactic structures to better capture nature in English [22]. Highlighting imagery in Chinese poetry to better recreate the original poetic ambiance was Pound's constant pursuit. Imagery, in this sense, is akin to Fenollosa's “words charged with electricity” or Pound's “luminous details” [12]. This is one aspect of textual life, and Pound's strategy of Sinicizing English sentence structures aided the transplantation of the textual life of Chinese landscape poetry. Pound advocated using the ideographic method in translating Chinese poetry, Sinicizing English syntax by avoiding references to “I”, eliminating the subject-object distinction typical of English poetry, and minimizing grammatical markers. By using the ideographic method, Pound sought to recreate the original poems' non-dualistic harmony between humans and nature, aiming to challenge Western metaphysical traditions and express a more unified relationship between humanity and the natural world.

As mentioned earlier, most translators of Wang Wei's landscape poetry were more closely connected to the early 20th-century New Poetry Movement in America, particularly Ezra Pound's Imagism. Several translators of Wang Wei's landscape poetry shared poetic principles aligned with Imagism. Overall, the translations of Wang Wei's poetry adhered to a translation philosophy oriented towards an Eastern organic view of nature. This is reflected in the translated texts through the selection of classical Chinese poems that express the traditional harmony between humans and nature, especially the Daoist-Zen view of nature. Although Wang Wei's poetry is diverse, the texts chosen for translation are predominantly his landscape poems. In terms of form, translators often Sinicized English syntax to simulate and recreate the traditional Chinese non-dualistic view of nature, faithfully transplanting this

non-dualistic perspective by breaking through the constraints of English logic. They avoided copulas, function words, and other purely grammatical markers, imitated the sentence structures of Chinese poetry, and juxtaposed images to fully convey the text's vitality, akin to nature's ceaseless life force.

Wai-lim Yip's *Hiding the Universe: Poems by Wang Wei* (1972) is a typical example of how Pound's Imagism influenced translations of Wang Wei's landscape poetry. Yip's translation preserves the syntax of the original poems, juxtaposes images, and avoids using personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, or prepositions to clarify the logical connections between images. Another notable feature of Yip's translation is his tendency to nominalize verbs or omit them entirely. This translation method excludes the human element from the phenomenal world, but since many of Wang Wei's poems describe human experiences in nature, excluding human action results in a loss of the integrity of the phenomenal world in the translated poems. Balancing the preservation of the natural essence with maintaining the coherence and completeness of the world presented in the translation is a challenge in translating Wang Wei's landscape poetry—a challenge that cannot be fully resolved by the Imagist approach.

It is also worth mentioning *An Album of Wang Wei* (1974), a translation that does not prioritize fidelity to the original text but seeks to convey the “mood and form” of the original poems. It also attempts to use English poetic meter to reflect the rhythms of Chinese poetry. Additionally, the translator, Henry W. Wells, was himself influenced by Wang Wei's poetry in his own creative work. Shortly after the publication of *An Album of Wang Wei*, Wells privately printed his own poetry collection titled *Quietly in Harpswell*, in which he claimed to transplant Wang Wei's poetic style. He used Wang Wei's imaginative depictions of the Wangchuan landscape, enchanting poetic forms, and apt imagery to describe his experiences of a beautiful summer spent in his country cottage in Maine. His poems adopted the quatrain form commonly used in *The Wangchuan Collection by Wang Wei*, with a rhythm, meter, and syntax that closely mimic the original, juxtaposing images to depict natural scenes and convey the relationship between humans and nature, thereby transplanting the ecological view of nature in Wang Wei's poetry in a different way.

5. Conclusions

Wang Wei's landscape poetry, with its primary focus on nature and landscapes, is imbued with rich ecological thought and stands as one of the key representatives of the Eastern organic view of nature, which emphasizes the harmonious coexistence and mutual dependence between humans and nature. The translation of Wang Wei's landscape poetry reflects the conflict and adaptation between Chinese and Western ecological perspectives, deepening Western reflection on the dualistic, mechanistic view of nature that

stems from modern Western science. The ecological critique that arises from translating ecological texts highlights the academic contribution of literal reference studies in eco-translatology. In an era when literal reference studies in eco-translatology have become increasingly urgent, this paper breaks through the traditional research approaches of eco-translatology. By adopting the eco-translatology framework of the “three-life phases” (translation ecology, translator’s survival, and textual life), this study offers a comprehensive analysis of the translation of Wang Wei’s landscape poetry in America, further exploring the ecological value embedded in his work. This paper features its theoretical enrichment and cultural and academic significance. By applying the “three-life phases” framework of eco-translatology to analyze the translation of Wang Wei’s landscape poetry, it enriches the literal reference studies in eco-translatology by providing a new perspective on understanding the ecological value of translation events, which helps to further develop the theoretical system of eco-translatology. At the same time, the research deepens the understanding of the conflict and adaptation between Chinese and Western ecological perspectives through the translation of Wang Wei’s landscape poetry. It promotes Western reflection on the dualistic, mechanistic view of nature, and contributes to the international dissemination of Chinese ecological culture. It also broadens the research pathways in the field of eco-translatology, inspiring more in-depth research on the translation of ecological texts.

Author Contributions

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Biography



Ting Shi is a PhD candidate in the Translation Studies Department at the School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Wuhan University, China. She is also a visiting PhD student at the University of Glasgow. Her research focuses on literary translation, with a particular interest in theatre translation, poetry translation, and comparative literature. Her work seeks to bridge Eastern and Western literary traditions through translation theory and practice.

Research Field

Ting Shi: translation theory, theatre translation, poetry translation, and comparative literature