

## **Translation of *Ebing and Sangluo*: The Classical Narrative Poetry of the Dai People and Its Value as Rainforest Literature**

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### **Abstract**

Research on the translation of *Ebing and Sangluo* remains limited, despite its extensive translation activities. This study integrates a corpus-based approach, utilizing THULAC, HanLP, and AntConc, with close reading to discern major similarities and differences among three bilingual translations of *Ebing and Sangluo*. It quantifies specific translatorial choices and agency through six key observations that emerged from the results, namely, character, locale, theme, linguistic choice, cultural context, and natural environment, thereby validating the application of creative treason in these translations. For instance, one bilingual adaptation converts the narrative poetry into prose story, foregrounding characters and plots for improved readability, though at the expense of certain cultural nuances. The other two bilingual editions in poetic form share nearly identical Chinese texts but differ prominently in their English renderings; the Yunnan edition adheres closely to the Chinese text, while the Wuhan edition demonstrates greater flexibility, supported by numerous annotations. These findings exemplify the dynamics of creative treason, revealing how translators balance readability, fidelity, and cultural expression through creative adaptation. Given the unique geographical and environmental context of the Dai people, the study then identifies the distinctive features that characterize the work as rainforest literature, and explores the significance of its translation as an essential bridge connecting the Dai people with other rainforest communities worldwide for broader cross-cultural dissemination and intercultural communication.

**Keywords:** Corpus-based, creative treason, Dai ethnic group, narrative poem, rainforest literature, translation of *Ebing and Sangluo*.

### **1. Introduction**

*Opem and Saamlua* [1] or *Ebing and Sangluo* is one of the three tragic narrative poems that passed down from the ancient Dai civilization. It has been primarily preserved and transmitted within the Dai community and nearby areas, and some editions have also been collected by institutions abroad, such as the national libraries of Australia [2] and Singapore [3]. While the work has been the subject of diverse scholarly inquiry, its translations have received little attention. Moreover, the dissemination of the work and the translation of Dai literature remain insufficient, as several significant works are still unavailable in English and known only to a few people. Therefore, this paper aims to address the following research questions concerning its translation and dissemination:

- (1) What is the historical development of the translation and publication of *Ebing and Sangluo*, and how do the versions differ?
- (2) How does the translatorial agency, as revealed through the major features of these translations, reflect the principles of creative treason?
- (3) How can the translation and international circulation of *Ebing and Sangluo*, one of the classical narrative poems of Dai literature, be further enhanced?

## 2. Literature Review

*Ebing and Sangluo*, one of the representative literary works of the Dai ethnic group, originates from an oral tradition and was subsequently transcribed in the old Dai script, and then translated and published in modern Dai, Chinese and English in China. The initial Chinese translation is widely regarded as the definitive version, produced through the collaborative efforts of experts, scholars and local contributors who classified and translated a number of manuscripts during the 1950s. Through a comprehensive process of analysis and integration grounded in faithfulness and meticulous, word-for-word scrutiny, the translators balanced the work's literariness with the coherence and completeness of its plot, refining the details to produce a final version that received wide acclaim [4, pp. 97-107]. Notably, it is said that Dao Bao-Qian [5], one of the translation collaborators, retranslated the finalized Chinese version into modern Dai. In addition, following the publication of the Chinese translation, a series of derivative works appeared, including a comic and several dramatic scripts, and three Chinese-English bilingual translations were later released. Therefore, the translational nature of *Ebing and Sangluo* is evident. Although the original version of the oral poem has been lost to history, its traces can still be discerned through subsequent translations. The initial Chinese translation and three bilingual versions are summarized below [6, p. 123].

| Name                                 | Series                                                                                       | Press                                           | Edition                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 《娥并与桑洛》<br><i>Opem and Saamlua</i>   | 傣族民间叙事长诗<br>Dai Folk Narrative Poetry                                                        | 云南人民出版社<br>Yunnan People's Publishing House     | 1960 年 2 月第一版<br>Feb. 1960, 1st edition<br>1978 年 12 月第二版<br>Dec. 1978, 2nd edition   |
| 《娥并与桑洛》<br><i>Ebing and Sangluo</i>  | 中国经典文化故事系列<br>Chinese Classic Cultural Stories Series                                        | 广东教育出版社<br>Guangdong Education Publishing House | 2007 年 9 月第 1 版<br>Sep. 2007, 1st edition                                             |
| 《娥并与桑洛》<br><i>Ebing and Sangluo</i>  | 云南少数民族经典作品英译文库<br>Classics of Yunnan Ethnic Groups in English Translation                    | 云南人民出版社<br>Yunnan People's Publishing House     | 2020 年 2 月第 1 版<br>Feb. 2020, 1st edition                                             |
| 《娥并与桑洛》<br><i>E'BING AND SANGLUO</i> | 中国南方民间文学典籍英译丛书<br>English Translation Series of Folk Literature Classics from Southern China | 武汉大学出版社<br>Wuhan University Press               | 2020 年 7 月第 1 版<br>Jul. 2020, 1st edition<br>2022 年 1 月第 2 次印刷<br>Jan. 2022 reprinted |

Current scholarship on this narrative poem primarily explores perspectives such as comparison, narration, rhetoric, aesthetics, religion, and its adaptation into Dai Opera, a traditional performing art recognized as one of China's national intangible cultural heritage [7] items. In the field of translation studies, however, only one translation practice report [8]

is available. Among these existing studies, comparative analyses with other literary works, both within and beyond China, have been examined most extensively. For instance, several studies compared it with *Romeo and Juliet*, the play by William Shakespeare [9][10][11]; and with *Lilit Phra Lo*, a Thai narrative poem [12], focusing on their shared theme of tragic love. Some studies compared it with Chinese narrative poems, such as *Shuang He Lian* (《双合莲》) [13], *The Peacock Flies Southeast* (《孔雀东南飞》) [14], and the Han folk tale *Lady Meng Jiang* (《孟姜女》) [15]. Other studies compared it with *Ashma* (《阿诗玛》) of the Yi (Sani) people [16], *Song of Niang Mei* (《娘梅歌》) of the Dong (Kam) people [17], and the earlier *Xian Xiu* (《线秀》) of the Dai people themselves [18], or with variant texts from multiple Dai branches [19]. To summarize, despite the abundance of existing scholarship, research on its translation remains limited, especially considering that the poem itself is a translated work. As traditional Chinese translation theory holds, “译即易, 谓换易言语使相解也” (to translate is to change, namely, to replace the parole to clarify both) [20, p. 2], a principle that also resonates with Roman Jakobson’s (1959) tripartite classification of translation—intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic [21, p. 157]—as well as George Steiner’s (1975) philosophical concept of “understanding as translation” [22, p. 1].

Corpus-based approaches in linguistics and translation studies have been closely linked since Mona Baker’s (1993) landmark work [23, pp. 233-250], which is widely recognized as the starting point for the systematic integration of corpus tools into translation studies, moving beyond their earlier application in general linguistics. This integration marked a shift from prescriptive rules toward descriptive and empirical research methods—an ideal foundation for quantitative analysis aimed at identifying translation norms and universals through large text collections. Another significant concept relevant to this paper is Robert Escarpit’s (1971) notion of creative treason [24, p. 23]. This idea emphasizes the translator’s inevitable “betrayal” of the source text’s original cultural or literary context, a betrayal that is not only unavoidable but also productive. To succeed within the target culture, the translator must creatively adapt the text, producing a new cultural or literary artifact that meets the expectations of the target audience. Escarpit’s concept anticipates later developments in translation studies, such as the Manipulation School and skopos theory [25, pp. 161, 110] by foregrounding the translator’s agency and the target-oriented nature of translation. In doing so, it shifts the focus from linguistic equivalence to functional and cultural relevance.

### 3. Methodology

This paper combines corpus-based analysis with close reading, employing quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the initial Chinese translation and three C-E bilingual editions of *Ebing and Sangluo*. It aims to identify the similarities and differences among these translations, as well as to explore the translators’ intentions behind their choices. The specific forms of these bilingual versions vary significantly. The first is an adapted story published in Guangdong province (2007), whereas the other two, published in Yunnan (2020) and Wuhan (2022) respectively, are rendered in poetic form following the style of the initial Chinese translation (1960/1978). These translations also differ in length. The initial Chinese translation contains approximately 15,000 characters; the first bilingual translation includes over 25,000 Chinese characters and more than 15,000 English words; the second has around 15,000 Chinese characters and about 10,000 English words; and the third comprises over 14,000 Chinese characters and more than 12,000 English words. To offer a clearer and more comprehensive overview, this study employs THULAC [26] and

HanLP [27] for Chinese word segmentation. AntConc [28] is then used to extract the top 100 n-grams and word-frequency lists from these translations, as well as to generate keyword lists for cross-comparison. Analysis of these results reveals several distinctive features, and at least six aspects stand out, including character, locale, theme, linguistic choice, cultural context, and natural environment. Three methodological points warrant attention: (1) All translators' notes are retained for analysis; (2) The default AntConc setting (2-gram) is used; (3) The resulting lists in this paper are selected, classified, and integrated based on the top 100 results obtained from AntConc.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The English translations of *Ebing and Sangluo* tend to be simplified in accordance with general translation conventions. While the adapted Chinese version introduces additional characters and plotlines, its English rendition presents a more streamlined narrative. For instance, the passage “荤菜有干巴牛肉、油炸竹蛆、蚂蚁蒸蛋，还有一个牛撒皮凉菜拼盘，有一锅青苔汤” [29, p. 101] is translated as “including dry beef, fried bamboo maggots, steamed eggs with ants, vegetable salad, and moss soup” [29, p. 102]. Such culinary details appear only in the story version, and the renderings of “干巴牛肉” and “牛撒皮凉菜拼盘” as “dry beef” and “vegetable salad” illustrate a clear simplification intended to enhance readability for English-speaking audiences.

As for the Chinese translations in poetic form, notable differences can still be observed, even though both bilingual editions claim to have derived their texts directly from the 1978 Chinese edition. The Chinese text in the Yunnan bilingual edition adheres much more closely to the initial version, showing only minor lexical variations. In contrast, the Wuhan bilingual edition diverges more substantially, as all the original Chinese annotations have been removed; its English counterpart, however, contains a considerably greater number of annotations—most of which were added by the English translator—to elucidate culturally specific terms. For example, “象脚鼓” is annotated as “Xiangjiaogu is a drum shaped like an elephant's foot and one of the folk musical instruments in Yunnan” [30, p. 3]; this annotation appears exclusively in the English translation of the Wuhan edition and is absent from both the corresponding Chinese text and the original 1960/1978 version. Additional variations involve not only wording but also stanza segmentation, punctuation, and occasional omission of lines. Regarding the English translations in poetic form, the most prominent distinction is that the Yunnan version is markedly more concise than the Wuhan version. For instance, the opening verses of the two English translations read as follows:

“景多昂是个热闹的地方，

赶街的人来来往往，

牛马成群结队，

牛脖子上挂着铃铛。” [31, p. 7]

“Jingduo'ang was a lively place.

In the market people came and went.

Cattle and horses grazed in herds,

With bells hanging on the cattle's necks.” [32, p. 3]

“Jingduo'ang<sup>①</sup> was a lively place, full of hustle and bustle:

fair-goers coming and going,

cattle and horses moving in herds or in lines,

and bells hanging like pendants worn around the necks of the cattle.

① Jingduo'ang is a local village in Yunnan province which is in south-west of China and comprises 8 Ethnic Minority Autonomous Regions inhabited by the vast majority of ethnic groups." [30, p. 3]

#### A. Character

| Characters (Chinese)           |                            |                                     |                                  |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| N-Gram_results                 |                            | Word_results                        |                                  |
| 诗歌 Poem 1978                   | 故事 Story 2007              | 诗歌 Poem 1978                        | 故事 Story 2007                    |
| 桑洛 的 / 哥哥 呀<br>sangluo/brother | 桑洛 的 / 儿子 的<br>sangluo/son | 桑洛 / 哥哥 / 儿子<br>sangluo/brother/son | 桑洛 / 儿子<br>sangluo/son           |
| 的 姑娘 girl                      | 娥并 的 ebing                 | 娥并 ebing                            | 娥并 ebing                         |
| 娥并 的 ebing                     | 大 管家 housekeeper           | 姑娘 (们) girl(s)                      | 妈 妈 / 妈 / 老 婆<br>mother/mom/wife |
| 的 母亲 mother                    | 的 妈妈 mom                   | 母亲 mother                           | 沙铁 shatie                        |
|                                | 沙铁 家 shatie                |                                     | 帕雅晚 payawan                      |
|                                | 的 女人 women                 |                                     | 管家 housekeeper                   |
|                                | 的 小伙子 young man            |                                     |                                  |
|                                | 和 安佐 anzuo                 |                                     |                                  |

As shown in the table, the number of characters in the story is significantly greater than in the poem, and the emphasis on these characters increases accordingly. For example, the story introduces a new term of address, “老婆” (wife), used by Sangluo's father, along with three additional characters, two “管家” (housekeepers), serving the two wealthy families, and “帕雅晚” (Payawan), Sangluo's maternal relative and the father of the two sisters, all of whom significantly enrich the plot and its dynamics. However, the appearance of the girl “安佐” (Anzuo) in the list of the Chinese story version is somewhat unexpected. As one of the two sisters who loved Sangluo, she is referenced far less frequently (11 times) than her elder sister Abian (17 times). A closer reading reveals that Abian and Anzuo are paired nine times, suggesting that the N-gram results are reasonable when their collocations and positional patterns are considered. Actually, the collocations around the two sisters are structured much more reasonably in the story, making the plot more coherent. In contrast, their representation is clearly uneven in the poem; although Abian (11 times) and Anzuo (5 times) are introduced as sisters, only Abian continues to appear in contexts concerning character relationships, rendering Anzuo rather redundant. By count, their names co-occur four times; Anzuo appears alone only once, whereas Abian is emphasized seven times.

“桑洛的姨妈，  
有两个女儿，  
一个叫阿扁，  
一个叫安佐。” [31, p. 17]  
“Sangluo's aunt  
Had two daughters,  
One was called Abian

And the other Anzuo.” [32, p. 23]

“听说桑洛母亲喜欢阿扁、安佐，

阿扁的母亲，

走起路来洋洋得意，

踩在狗尾巴上也不觉得。” [31, p. 19]

“Hearing that Sangluo’s mother liked Abian and Anzuo,

Abian’s mother

Was walking on air;

She didn’t even know when she stepped on a dog’s tail.” [32, p. 27]

“母亲要桑洛娶阿扁，

说阿扁是他家的亲戚。” [31, p. 20]

“Sangluo’s mother wanted him to marry Abian,

Saying that Abian was their relative.” [32, p. 29]

| Characters (English)          |                           |                                       |              |                 |                 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| N-Gram_results                |                           |                                       | Word_results |                 |                 |
| Story                         | Yunnan                    | Wuhan                                 | Story        | Yunnan          | Wuhan           |
| his mother/old woman/his wife | sangluo s/brother sangluo | e bing                                | sangluo/son  | sangluo/brother | sangluo/brother |
| rich man/her husband          | ebing s                   | young women                           | ebing        | ebing           | e/bing          |
| sangluo s/her son/in law      | s mother                  | sangluo s/big brother/brother sangluo | mother       | girls/girl      | women           |
| ebing s                       | the girls                 | his mother                            | man          | mother          | mother          |
| the housekeeper               | the people                | a bian                                | girls        | people          | people          |
| his friends                   | young man                 | young men                             | woman        |                 |                 |
| old man                       |                           |                                       | payawan      |                 |                 |
| the girls                     |                           |                                       | housekeeper  |                 |                 |

In the three English translations, the female protagonist is rendered as “Ebing” in both the story and Yunnan versions, and as “E’bing” in the Wuhan version. The story and Yunnan versions also tend to translate “姑娘” as “girls”, whereas the Wuhan version prefers “young women”. Additionally, the Wuhan version renders “哥哥” as “big brother” while the other two simply use “brother”. In fact, within Chinese cultural norms, it is common for romantic partners of different ages who are not related by blood to address each other as “brother” or “sister” as terms of endearment. This practice, however, differs significantly in other cultural contexts; therefore, the Wuhan version includes a note explaining this usage, “Big brother doesn’t mean a family member. It’s Dai’s custom to call a young man older in age or

being loved by young women.” [30, p. 23] Moreover, while the poem generally refers to others collectively as “people”, the story introduces specific individual characters, thereby contributes to a more developed narrative structure. The N-gram results also reveal notable differences in the collocation and placement of character names between the Yunnan and Wuhan versions, indicating variation in narrative style. For instance, pronouns and conjunctions occur more frequently in the Wuhan version, whereas the Yunnan version prefers to maintain greater fidelity to Chinese syntax or omits such elements altogether.

“你说这里没有娥并，

你却有娥并一样的眼睛，

有娥并一样的手臂，

有娥并一样的嘴唇！” [31, pp. 47-48]

“You said Ebing isn’t here,

But you have Ebing’s eyes,

Ebing’s arms,

And Ebing’s lips!” [32, p. 87]

“You say there is no E’bing here,

but you have exactly the same eyes,

same arms

and same lips as her!” [30, p. 91]

“桑洛的歌声娥并听不清，” [31, p. 43]

“Ebing could not hear Sangluo’s voice clearly,” [32, p. 77]

“Sangluo’s singing did not yet quite reach E’bing,” [30, p. 81]

“只是不见娥并。” [31, p. 87]

“But he could not find Ebing.” [32, p. 167]

“but E’bing was nowhere to be seen.” [30, p. 171]

“娥并也准备回家，

把洗好的衣服放进水桶。” [31, p. 52]

“Ebing put the washed clothes into the bucket,

Ready to go home.” [32, p. 95]

“and E’bing was also ready to go home,

putting the cleaned-up clothes into water buckets.” [30, p. 99]

“娥并回到家，

只望月亮快升起。” [31, p. 53]

“Ebing returned home,

Just hoping the moon would rise sooner.” [32, p. 97]

“When E’bing went home,

all she longed for was the moonrise<sup>①</sup>.

① It’s one of Dai’s tradition that young men go to visit their beloved at their houses at night, waiting outside, playing the qin or whistling the flute, until the young women go out of their house by themselves.” [30, p. 101]

**B. Locale**

| Locale (Chinese)    |                    |                |                |
|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|----------------|
| N-Gram_results      |                    | Word_results   |                |
| 诗歌 Poem             | 故事 Story           | 诗歌 Poem        | 故事 Story       |
| 猛根 的 menggen        | 家 的 home           | 猛根 menggen     | 家 home         |
| 景多昂 的 jingduoang    | 猛根 的 menggen       | 景多昂 jingduoang | 景多昂 jingduoang |
| 的 家/在 家里 home       | 景 多 昂 的 jingduoang | 家 home         | 猛根 menggen     |
| 街子 上 street         | 去 景算 jingsuan      |                |                |
| 到 远方 faraway places |                    |                |                |

| Locale (English) |                   |             |              |             |             |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| N-Gram_results   |                   |             | Word_results |             |             |
| Story            | Yunnan            | Wuhan       | Story        | Yunnan      | Wuhan       |
| the village      | jingduo ang       | jingduo ang | home/family  | menggen     | menggen     |
| the temple       | in menggen        | in menggen  | menggen      | home/house  | home/house  |
| the room         | at home           | the village | jingduoang   | jingduo ang | jingduo ang |
| at jingduoang    | the street/market | at home     |              |             |             |
|                  | the village       |             |              |             |             |

The analysis of locations reveals four key aspects, but this discussion excludes locations referring to natural environments which will be examined in a later section. First, the poem features poetic sites such as “街子” (street) and “远方” (faraway places), which contribute to its lyrical tone. Second, the story repeatedly emphasizes the sisters’ hometown “景算” (Jingsuan), which is referenced only once in the poem, reflecting a more complex plot in the story. Third, the translation of proper nouns in *Ebing and Sangluo* deserves further discussion; following the translational principle of preserving formal consistency—retaining the source language’s pronunciation and spelling, place names are often rendered in Chinese pinyin rather than reproducing the original Dai pronunciations. This practice parallels the treatment of character names, and is common in retranslations of ethnic literatures made from Chinese editions [33, p. 137]. Last but not least, the translation of “猛根城” as either “city” or “village” remains open to debate, since the two translations diverge.

“猛根城里很热闹,

城外流过一条大河, ” [31, p. 34]

Menggen was a busy city.

There was a big river outside the city.” [32, p. 59]

“The Menggen village was very lively,

with a big river running by it from outside” [30, p. 63]

**C. Theme**

| Theme (Chinese)             |          |                            |          |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------------------------|----------|
| N-Gram_results              |          | Word_results               |          |
| 诗歌 Poem                     | 故事 Story | 诗歌 Poem                    | 故事 Story |
| 的 爱情/亲爱 的/心爱<br>的 love/dear | 的钱 money | 爱 情 / 爱 / 亲 爱<br>love/dear | 钱 money  |

| Theme (English)                |        |       |              |        |       |
|--------------------------------|--------|-------|--------------|--------|-------|
| N-Gram_results                 |        |       | Word_results |        |       |
| Story                          | Yunnan | Wuhan | Story        | Yunnan | Wuhan |
| the rich/rich<br>man/the money |        |       | money/rich   | love   | love  |

When retrieving thematic keywords, the results show that in the 1960/1978 Chinese rendition of the poem, the keyword “钱” (money) occurs four times and “爱” (love) sixty-eight times, whereas in the story, they appear forty-four and twenty-four times, respectively. In the three English versions, “money” and “love” occur forty-one and twenty-six times in the story, six and fifty-nine times in the Yunnan version, and three and sixty times in the Wuhan version. These figures clearly indicate that the story places greater emphasis on material concerns—money, whereas the poem highlights emotional and romantic themes—love.

**D. Linguistic Choice**

| Linguistic Choice (Chinese) |          |               |           |
|-----------------------------|----------|---------------|-----------|
| N-Gram_results              |          | Word_results  |           |
| 诗歌 Poem                     | 故事 Story | 诗歌 Poem       | 故事 Story  |
| 呀/啊/吧/呵 oh/ah               |          | 象 be like     | 啊 ah      |
| 得 象 be like                 |          | 啊/呀/吧/呵 oh/ah | 像 be like |
| 漂亮/美丽 的 beautiful           |          | 漂亮 beautiful  |           |

| Linguistic Choice (English) |        |        |              |           |        |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|--------------|-----------|--------|
| N-Gram_results              |        |        | Word_results |           |        |
| Story                       | Yunnan | Wuhan  | Story        | Yunnan    | Wuhan  |
|                             |        | oh big |              | beautiful | oh/ah  |
|                             |        |        |              |           | please |

The linguistic choices render the 1960/1978 Chinese version of the poem distinctive, such as “象” and “像” (to resemble), or “作” and “做” (to do). The former one was more common in earlier usage, whereas the latter is more frequently used today; these changes thus represent minor stylistic updates. Another noteworthy linguistic feature is the frequent use of interjections, which contributes to the oral and performative qualities characteristic of

Dai folk traditions. In the Chinese translations, interjections occur more often in the poem, and adjectives like “漂亮/美丽的” (pretty/beautiful) also appear with greater frequency and directness than in the prose. In the English translations, the Wuhan version retains interjections and the word “please” wherever possible, whereas these elements are often omitted in both the Yunnan version and the prose story. In some cases, the Wuhan rendition even introduces additional instances of “please” to reproduce the tone and stylistic effect of the original.

“娥并的名字呵！” [31, p. 44]

“Ebing’s name,” [32, p. 79]

“Oh, the name of E’bing!” [30, p. 85]

“桑洛的爱情啊！

打动了娥并的心。” [31, p. 46]

“Sangluo’s love

Moved Ebing’s heart.” [32, p. 83]

“Ah, Sangluo’s love!

It made E’bing so moved.” [30, p. 87]

“水银般的妹妹呀！” [31, p. 55]

“Mercurial sister!” [32, p. 103]

“Oh, my mercury-like E’bing!” [30, p. 107]

“我的这些歌，

请你把它好好保藏。” [31, p. 45]

“My songs

Should be kept well.” [32, p. 81]

“My songs,

please take good care of them.” [30, p. 87]

“亲爱的姑娘，

把我俩的爱情包起来，

紧紧地锁在箱子里吧，” [31, p. 60]

“Dear girl,

Wrap up our love,

And lock it tightly in a box.” [32, p. 111]

“Dear young lady,

please pack up our love

and lock it up in a box” [30, p. 115]

In addition, another interesting Chinese wording choice—“不好在” versus “不好住”—though not listed in the results, is worth highlighting based on a close reading. The Yunnan version retains “在” as seen in the initial 1960 Chinese translation, an expression familiar mainly to local speakers. By contrast, the Wuhan version replaces “在” with “住” which is more familiar to speakers of standard Mandarin, following the usage found in a 1963 Chinese edition published by a different press [34].

“我家的屋子不好在，  
你就快些离开！” [32, p. 148]  
“If my house is not good,  
Get out quickly!” [32, p. 149]

“我家的屋子不好住，  
你就快些离开！” [30, p. 152]  
“If the rooms in my house are not comfortable for you,  
you can leave now.” [30, p. 153]

### E. Cultural Context

Concerning Dai cultural elements, the tables below demonstrate that the poetic version incorporates a greater number of Dai-specific expressions than the story version.

| Cultural Context (Chinese) |                        |              |                   |                 |               |
|----------------------------|------------------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| N-Gram_results             |                        | Word_results |                   | Keyword_results |               |
| 诗歌 Poem                    | 故事 Story               | 诗歌 Poem      | 故事 Story          | Poem vs Story   | Story vs Poem |
| 的歌 songs                   | 的竹楼 bamboo houses/huts | 歌 songs      | 琴 fiddle/harp/qin | 戴 wear          | 牛车 ox-cart    |
| 织的 weave                   |                        | 戴 wear       | 牛车 ox-cart        | 织 weave         |               |
| 挑水的 carry water            |                        | 唱 sing       |                   | 歌 songs         |               |
|                            |                        |              |                   | 傣族 Dai people   |               |
|                            |                        |              |                   | 金 gold/golden   |               |

First of all, singing and playing the “qin” (琴) are important aspects of Dai culture, and often used to express love between lovers such as Ebing and Sangluo. Second, Dai women are traditionally skilled in “weaving” (织) cloth and brocade, and they frequently “wear” (戴) decorative accessories. Third, “gold” (金) and the color gold hold significant cultural value among the Dai, and many objects are depicted in this color. Fourth, the “bamboo house” (竹楼), adapted to the rainforest environment, represents the typical form of Dai housing. Additionally, it is customary for Dai women to “draw water” (挑水) from wells which also serve as important social gathering places—similar to practices found in other cultures, including those recorded in the Bible [35].

| Cultural Context (English) |          |                                          |              |        |       |
|----------------------------|----------|------------------------------------------|--------------|--------|-------|
| N-Gram_results             |          |                                          | Word_results |        |       |
| Story                      | Yunnan   | Wuhan                                    | Story        | Yunnan | Wuhan |
| the door                   | the door | the dai/dai s/in dai/dai people/dai area | door         | songs  | dai   |
| the temple                 | the dai  | the cloth                                |              |        |       |
| to play                    | s songs  | ethnic minority                          |              |        |       |

| Keyword_results |                |                 |                 |                |                 |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Story vs Yunnan | Story vs Wuhan | Yunnan vs Story | Yunnan vs Wuhan | Wuhan vs Story | Wuhan vs Yunnan |
| cart            | cart           | songs           | harp            | dai            | dai             |
| fiddle          | fiddle         | harp            |                 | cloth          |                 |
| building        | building       | shatie          |                 | songs          |                 |
|                 | jade           |                 |                 | qin            |                 |

The “temple” in the English versions also plays an important role, reflecting the Dai people’s deep faith in Buddhism. Another noteworthy lexical item is “door” as two major festivals described in the story, the Close-Door Day or Buddhist Lent Day (Wan Khao Phansa, 关门节/进洼节) and the Open-Door Day or Exit-Vassa Day (Wan Ok Phansa, 开门节/出洼节) [36]. It is worth noting that Buddhism and Buddhist literature exerted profound influence on *Ebing and Sangluo*, and Dai literature as a whole, particularly in their use of simile and metaphor. As for the term “shatie” (沙铁) in the context of Dai culture, it signifies a person of considerable wealth and is used to refer to Sangluo’s father in the work. Two other important cultural elements introduced in the story are “cart” and “jade”. The cart serves as a means of transportation, whereas in the poem the female protagonist always travels on foot; and jade, a local specialty, appears as part of an added plotline. Furthermore, the frequent use of expressions such as “Dai people” and “ethnic minority” in the Wuhan version indicates that this translation includes a great number of explanatory notes provided by the translator.

#### F. Natural Environment

| Natural Environment (Chinese) |          |                     |          |                     |               |
|-------------------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|---------------|
| N-Gram_results                |          | Word_results        |          | Keyword_results     |               |
| 诗歌 Poem                       | 故事 Story | 诗歌 Poem             | 故事 Story | Poem vs Story       | Story vs Poem |
| 的花 flower                     | 的马 horse | 花 flower            | 马 horse  | 森林 forest           |               |
| 森 林 里<br>forest               |          | 森林 forest           | 火 fire   | 小鸟 bird             |               |
| 在 地 上<br>ground               |          | 鲜 花 fresh<br>flower |          | 荷 花 lotus<br>flower |               |
| 树 上 tree                      |          | 月亮 moon             |          | 鲜 花 fresh<br>flower |               |
| 河 里 river                     |          | 太阳 sun              |          | 河水 river            |               |

| Natural Environment (English) |                 |            |              |          |        |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|------------|--------------|----------|--------|
| N-Gram_results                |                 |            | Word_results |          |        |
| Story                         | Yunnan          | Wuhan      | Story        | Yunnan   | Wuhan  |
| the bamboo                    | the river       | the river  | bamboo       | water    | water  |
| his horse                     | the forest      | the forest | horse        | flower/s | bamboo |
| the fire                      | the ground/road | the bamboo |              | bamboo   | cattle |

|  |               |               |  |        |          |
|--|---------------|---------------|--|--------|----------|
|  | the sun       | the water     |  | river  | flower/s |
|  | the water     | lotus flower  |  | forest | forest   |
|  | the moon      | the moon      |  | horse  | river    |
|  | the mountains | the ground    |  |        |          |
|  | the sky       | areca nuts    |  |        |          |
|  | a flower      | fresh flowers |  |        |          |
|  |               | the cattle    |  |        |          |
|  |               | the horse     |  |        |          |

| Keyword_results |                |                 |                 |                |                 |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Story vs Yunnan | Story vs Wuhan | Yunnan vs Story | Yunnan vs Wuhan | Wuhan vs Story | Wuhan vs Yunnan |
|                 |                | flower/s        | cows            | flower/s       |                 |
|                 |                | cows            |                 | fresh          |                 |
|                 |                | forest          |                 | forest         |                 |
|                 |                | water           |                 | cattle         |                 |
|                 |                | lotus           |                 | lotus          |                 |
|                 |                | bird            |                 |                |                 |

The final aspect concerns the environment. The poem presents a much lusher and more vivid natural setting than the story. Although the three English translations have comparable word counts, the story devotes considerably less attention to environmental description. Conversely, the poem enables readers to visualize the background more vividly, as shown in the table. The most prominent lexical items pertain to flora and fauna, particularly plants native to the tropical rainforest, such as betel (areca nut). Many species recorded in the poem but largely absent from the story include the elephant, peacock, parrot, muntjac, *Ficus hookeriana* (大青树/高山榕), *Laccifer lacca* (紫胶), *Bombax ceiba*/ silk-cotton flower (攀枝花), *Nicotiana tabacum*/ tobacco, *Nandina domestica* (天竹), bamboo groves, tea bushes, mango trees, and sugarcane. Other ambiguous terms with uncertain identification and translation include “龙银鸟” (silver dragon bird/ Longyin bird), “红皮树” (red tree bark) or “红树皮” (red bark or *Bruguiera gymnorhiza*), “帕贡菜” (*Crateva unilocularis* or possibly *Toona sinensis*), “板宝花” (Banbao flower), and “丁香花” (lilac or *Syringa yunnanensis*/ *Syzygium aromaticum*). Overall, most of these animal and plant names are missing from the story, resulting in a less detailed and less ecologically rich depiction of the Dai environment.

Impressively, some of these terms describe the natural environment, while others are used metaphorically or as similes. For instance, bamboo shoots are used to describe Ebing's fingers, ivory her arms, and lotus flowers her beauty. She is also compared to a carp, elephant, golden peacock, golden bamboo, and various flowers. Sangluo, on the other hand, is likened to a full moon for his round baby face and to purple pepper for his red lips at birth. He is also associated with a bee, bird, swallow, deer, duck, elephant, frog, fruit, flower, and spring water. Environmental imagery is also used when they appear together, such as lawns, reeds, and stars. Other comparisons include flowers, fruits, golden ants, peacocks, or roosters for young women; a tiger for Sangluo's mother; and fishes for ordinary people.

These natural metaphors are not limited to human figures but also express emotions: the papaya symbolizes a sour or unpleasant expression; a swirling leaf suggests a light-hearted mood; the dog tail, soil, or spring water represents the heart; and bamboo, golden vines, mountains, or plant roots evoke love. Further striking examples include descriptions such as the room as crowded and noisy as a hive, the money piled like hills or heaps of grain, the river water as sweet as a sugarcane and as green as grass, the winding road like a rooster's comb, songs as fresh as flowers, tea groves as dense as paddy fields, and fields as flat as butterfly wings. To sum up, the poem vibrantly highlights ecological elements, particularly through its portrayals of the rainforest.

Two additional points are noteworthy. First, the Yunnan version uses “cow”, whereas the Wuhan version prefers “cattle”, and the story alternates between the two words. Second, “fire” is an important element in Dai tradition, around which people dance and sing; in the story, however, it primarily serves the plot, such as in the depiction of a house on fire. Linguistically, choices in vocabulary, interjections, and stylistic devices differentiate the poetic and story versions. These textual and translational choices can be understood through the lens of creative treason, the deliberate deviations, additions, or reinterpretations that translators employ to adapt the narrative for different audiences or media, prioritizing readability, poetic effect, or cultural explanation over strict fidelity.

### **G. Further Exploration**

Inspired by sea literature [37], this paper identifies a prominent feature of classical Dai literature as “rain forest literature” [38], a concept that receives far less attention in China than ecological literature. The texts of classical Dai literature are always rich in depictions of tropical fauna and flora, and embody the ecological unconscious of the Dai people, revealing a profound, innate harmony between humans and nature. As a narratological comparison of *Ebing and Sangluo* with *Ashima* reveals, unlike the intense and dynamic narrative style characteristic of the Yi people, *Ebing and Sangluo* adopts a more lyrical and static mode of expression. It suggests that the two works resemble two travelers walking side by side, one of whom frequently pauses to admire the surrounding scenery, becoming both enchanted by it and fully immersed within it. Then another Dai narrative poem, *Pa Han* (《帕罕》), is introduced as a parallel example, in which the male protagonist sets out on a rescue mission—though the act itself is not as urgent as one might expect. Instead, he becomes absorbed in the beauty of the surrounding landscape, as the poem deliberately slows the narrative pace through vivid descriptions of the scenery encountered along his journey [16, pp. 116-117].

The following excerpts from Dai literature further illustrate its defining features. “The ancestors of the Dai grew up in the wilderness, making the forest their home and clothing themselves in flowers, grass, and leaves.” “Their songs are composed from the sounds of flowing water and the twittering of forest birds. The melodies of Dai songs, along with their language and poetry, all originate from nature—transmitted through tangible elements, expressing what the eyes see and the heart feels before being transformed in the mind.” “Everything in the world, from animals and plants as large as elephants and cattle to those as small as ants, flowers, and grasses, is believed to possess its own spirit.” [39, pp. 72, 27, 90] The Dai people venerate nature, stating, “The forest is the father, and the land the mother; of all things in the universe, grain is supreme.” To them, “Cutting down a green tree is equivalent to killing a young monk.” “Felling a single tree can dry up a spring.” “If the mountains are stripped bare, the people below will suffer.” [40, p. 162] The Dai proverbs articulate a blunt ecological wisdom: “Forests bring water, water nourishes fields, fields yield grain, and grain sustains people.” [41, p. 186]

In addition, the “竜林” Longlin (forest) culture passed down through generations is not only an expression of primitive religious worship and taboos, but also reflects the Dai people’s rainforest unconscious and ecological wisdom. “When establishing a ‘勐’ Meng (chiefdom), the Dai people would worship the headwater forests surrounding the settlement as ‘竜社勐’ Tongshemeng, the sacred forest of the Meng, where the spirits of tribal ancestors are believed to dwell. Similarly, when building a ‘寨’ Zhai (village), they would venerate the headwater forests behind it as ‘竜社曼’ Longsheman, the sacred forest of the Zhai, where the spirits of the clan ancestors reside.” “The Longlin carries the spirits of forebears; therefore, everything within it—animals, plants, soil, and water sources—is regarded as sacred and inviolable. Activities such as logging, gathering, hunting, or land reclamation are strictly prohibited. Even dry twigs or withered leaves blown down by the wind, or overripe fruits that have fallen naturally are not to be collected but left to decay.” Even in regions with abundant rivers, “the Dai people still rely on the forests—their ‘green reservoirs’—to conserve water for their paddy fields.” [42, pp. 177, 186]

As Chinese scholars have pointed out, “Tropical rainforests on Earth are distributed along the equatorial zone, extending northward and southward to the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, respectively. They are mainly located in the Amazon Basin of South America, Southeast Asia, and the Congo Basin of Africa. In China, tropical rainforests begin on the southern foothills of the Himalayas in the west and extend eastward through Xishuangbanna in Yunnan, the southern parts of Guangxi and Guangdong, Hainan, Fujian, and southern Taiwan, forming a discontinuous belt. Among these areas, Hainan and Xishuangbanna account for the largest proportion of rainforest coverage, while the others are relatively scattered.” “A special type of tropical seasonal rainforest develops under extreme conditions at relatively high latitudes and altitudes, occurring in South China and the northern Indochina Peninsula. Among the tropical seasonal rainforests in South China, the one in Xishuangbanna is considered the most representative. It is not only a rare ecosystem in China but also globally significant.” [43, pp. preface, 7] Therefore, the Dai ethnic group in Yunnan and their rainforest literature may be linked to other rainforest communities based on shared ecological and cultural contexts.

## 5. Conclusions

This paper first offers a brief introduction to *Ebing and Sangluo* and its background, and then outlines the currently available standalone editions of its translation (two Chinese and three bilingual C-E versions). Drawing on corpus tools and comparative analysis, the study examines six key aspects—characterization, setting, theme, linguistic choice, cultural context, and natural environment. Each aspect is then discussed in detail, revealing the translators’ intentions as well as subtle interpretive differences across versions. The study finds that while the later Chinese edition contains only minor updates, the bilingual prose retelling introduces substantial revisions in pursuit of greater readability. The two bilingual poetic renditions also differ considerably; the Yunnan version maintains strong fidelity to its Chinese text to preserve the poetic form, whereas the Wuhan version adopts greater flexibility to convey cultural nuances. These divergences reflect different manifestations of translational creative treason, whereby translators deliberately modify, adapt, omit or add elements to achieve specific aims. Such creative interventions enrich translation practice and contribute to the linguistic and cultural exchange between the two traditions.

Furthermore, by identifying the work as a piece of rainforest literature, the paper underscores the significance of translating *Ebing and Sangluo* within the broader context of rainforest literary studies. It argues that classical Dai literature, deeply rooted in ecological perspectives and portraying an intuitive harmony between humans and the natural

environment, can be significantly connected to global literary traditions. By sharing rainforest culture and ecological wisdom through translation, the study contributes to the dissemination of ethnic literatures and fosters a more diverse and inclusive development of world literature. Further research could first focus on improving translation practices, providing a solid foundation for subsequent studies. In particular, the translation of proper nouns—including names of people, places, plants, and animals—necessitates further attention; and current annotations are insufficient, as much of the cultural information embedded in the text remains unexplained and requires further elaboration. Subsequently, comparative studies of *Ebing and Sangluo* with a broader range of rainforest literatures worldwide could provide valuable insights and further promote intercultural communication.

### Limitations and Acknowledgments:

This study did not take the Dai version into account because the author lacks proficiency in the Dai language. Due to time constraints, the author, after completing an initial draft, acknowledges that this paper benefited from AI-assisted language editing (ChatGPT, Gemini, DeepSeek) to enhance expression and readability.

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