

On the Significance and English Translation of “Micro-Family Instructions” in China’s New Rural Areas: Taking Xunli Village as an Example

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Chinese family instruction culture has a long history and profound influence. Researches on traditional family instructions have always been of great concern. In the context of rural revitalization, the “micro-family training” in the new countryside can highlight its extraordinary significance even more. This article takes the “micro-family instructions” in Xunli Village, Nianbadu Ancient Town, Quzhou City as an example to explore the contemporary value of “micro-family instructions” in rural construction. It also attempts to explore how to translate them into English to maintain consistency with the local tourism landscape language and enable tourists to have a deeper understanding of local culture. It not only inherits excellent traditional culture, cares for modern rural spiritual civilization, but also promotes the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Keywords: rural revitalization, micro-family instruction, Xunli Village, English translation

Introduction

After the rural revitalization strategy was proposed at the 19th CPC National Congress, the Rural Revitalization Strategic Plan (2018-2022) was compiled. The Plan points out that “with the core socialist values as the guidance, promote rural civilization. It is necessary and urgent to inherit and develop fine traditional rural culture, cultivate civilized local customs, good family traditions, and simple folk customs, build civilized villages with neighborhood harmony, integrity, etiquette, and thrift, and promote the revitalization of rural culture”. Subsequently, Zhejiang provincial government issued the corresponding “plan”, defining the task of “promoting rural culture revitalization, building a clean civilized countryside”. Quzhou, a city in the west of Zhejiang Province, well-known for its crucial and crossing-positing location, enjoys a long history of Confucian culture. Quzhou City has issued “Quzhou City rural revitalization strategic planning” to promote traditional Chinese culture and build “the politest countryside” in the rural areas. Therefore, it is of great significance to carry out a research on rural family instructions.

Family instruction is a concentrated reflection of China’s excellent traditional culture, and is a specific interpretation of national culture based on the family as a unit. Paying attention to protecting and inheriting the

Acknowledgement: This work is one of the results of “A Study on the English Translation of Rural Family Instructions in Western Zhejiang Province Under the Background of Rural Revitalization Strategy and Its Functional Interpretation” (Project No. 21QSKGLX) and supported by Course Ideological and Political Construction Project (Project No. KCSZ201928) in Quzhou University.

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excellent family instruction culture can enhance the sense of cultural identity and strengthen our cultural self-confidence.

Brief Introduction to Xunli Village

Nianbadu Ancient Town is located at the border of Zhejiang, Fujian, and Jiangxi Provinces, within the territory of Quzhou City, Zhejiang. It was known as a historic and cultural town, a must-have place for military strategists, and is known as the “key to Fengxi stream”. It has been regarded as a “cultural enclave” with a nickname of “a dream left in the mountains”.

Xunli Village, one of villages in Nianbadu Ancient Town, has a long history and rich culture. It survived the war due to the protection of dangerous mountains and peaks. Xunli Village has been an influential tourism village, with numerous buildings inherited from Ming and Qing Dynasties, featured with exquisite woodcarving gatehouses, rich and colorful cultural landscapes, and unique and profound cultural heritage that attract tourists from both domestic and foreign countries, making Xunli Village widely recognized for its value and significance. In 2016, Xunli Village was included in the fourth batch of traditional Chinese village lists. In 2020, it was selected as one of the second batch of national key rural tourism villages. In 2022, it was in the list of rural revitalization demonstration villages in Zhejiang Province.

Xunli Village not only preserves the complete, large-scale, and various-styled ancient buildings, but also continues the intangible cultural heritage of “local-inherent flavor”. On the door wall of each family is pasted with their own “micro-family instruction”, which has become a unique card, which is a way to inherit the excellent family culture and demonstrate the new view of the new countryside. Based on traditional cultural resources, each family has compiled meaningful sentences from past family rules and ethnic traditions, and concluded their typical “micro-family instruction” that guides villagers to start with cultivating good family traditions, resist and abandon bad habits, cultivate civilized and simple folk customs, and promote rural revitalization with good local customs and traditions.

Traditional Family Instructions vs. Contemporary “Micro-family Instructions”

Family instruction culture has a long history in China. Family instructions, also known as family precepts, family rules, or family education, mainly refer to the obedient teachings of parents and ancestors to their descendants, parents to their families, and clan leaders to their members, as well as the instructions between spouses and siblings.

Family instruction contains various ideas of both family ethical norms and social moral norms, including enlightenment and understanding, settling down, pursuing adulthood, seeking employment, loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, managing families, making friends and career choices. Family teachings have a restraining effect on the personality cultivation and principles of handling affairs of family members. In ancient China, both aristocratic families and ordinary people attached great importance to family instructions, emphasized the social function and role of the family, and valued the persuasion and guidance among members within the family. Traditional family teachings can be passed down in the form of books or genealogies. According to the statistics, there are over a hundred family instructions publicly published in Chinese history, among which are *Di Zi Gui: Standards for Being a Good Students and Child*, *Family Instructions for the Yen Clan*, *Zhu Zi Family Instructions*, *Yuan Ts'ai's Precepts for Social Life*, *Liao-Fan's Four Lessons*, and *Family Letters From Zeng Guofan* still well-known and consequential today.

The main content of ancient traditional family instructions emphasized respect for ancestors, filial piety to parents, harmony with brothers as well as with husband and wife, discipline of children, harmony with clans, kindness to neighbors, seeking diligence, frugality, and honesty. With family ethics as the main body, diligence and frugality as the fundamental principle, great importance has been attached to the harmonious neighbors and the cultivation of moral character. Family instruction is the core value of the family, and the construction of family instruction is an inevitable requirement for inheriting and promoting excellent traditional culture. The traditional family teachings left by the ancestors embody wisdom, philosophy, and emotions still exhibit magical charm today. They are a very rich and valuable ethical and cultural heritage. In line with the principle of historical materialism, critically inheriting this heritage has certain enlightenment and reference function for today's family education, moral construction, and even the spiritual civilization construction of the whole society.

However, traditional family teachings are complex, lengthy, and difficult to remember, greatly weakening their excellent value in contemporary society. In the context of the rural revitalization strategy, rural cultural revitalization is an important component of rural revitalization, and an effective measure to address the imbalance in urban and rural cultural development in the new era and achieve the aspirations of rural residents for a better life. Family ethics and teachings can purify social atmosphere, strengthen the national position, build cultural confidence, improve national quality, improve social morality, and demonstrate national integrity.

In recent years, many rural areas in China have delved deeper into the stories of local celebrated family traditions and teachings. Through oral transmission from elders and family discussions, family rules and teachings have been carefully selected and refined to form "micro-family instructions". By using plaques, the golden phrases of family instructions have been "exposed" at the doorstep of villagers' homes, advocating for "promoting micro-family instructions and building good family traditions". Through the micro-family instructions, it is beneficial to create a clean and upright atmosphere, and strengthen the sense of responsibility of villagers to participate in rural revitalization.

The Contemporary Value of Micro-family Instructions

Beneficial to Individual Growth With Virtue

Excellent family education culture is based on each family, which is the foundation for the growth and development of individual's ideas and values.

Excellent family instruction culture emphasizes the use of personal interest to express one's aspirations, guiding children to establish correct worldviews, values, and outlook on life in the pursuit of ideals. The benevolent concepts of respecting the elderly and loving the young, poverty alleviation, and compassion for the weak provide spiritual nourishment for children to cultivate moral qualities. The spirit of learning through extensive reading and diligent learning enables individuals to actively explore and self-organize knowledge into the spiritual and ideological level, in order to experience knowledge acquisition and achieve spiritual richness. Cultivating individual spiritual and moral qualities with benevolence, righteousness, honesty, and a broad mindedness towards the world helps family members build a national perspective and elevate the height of life's aspirations. The cultivation of good moral principles, ways of doing things, and national sentiment in excellent family instruction plays a correct guiding role in the worldview, outlook on life, and values of individuals, which is the solid foundation for them with success and virtue in the future life.

Beneficial to Promoting the Construction of a Good Family Atmosphere

The excellent family instruction contains abundant concepts of family management and is a key element in guiding people to cultivate a good family tradition. China has a fine tradition of emphasizing family education with the “foundation of the country at home”, emphasizing the construction of family culture and treating the family as the first classroom for future generations’ lives.

Excellent family instruction culture carries the successful experience and spiritual perception of family governance and harmonious family cultivation. Excellent family instruction can correctly guide children’s determination, develop good habits and correct value-oriented consciousness, and create a harmonious and beautiful family environment. It is advancing with the times, so correctly understanding and promoting it plays an important role in promoting the construction of modern excellent family culture.

Beneficial to Improving the Effectiveness of Modern Rural Governance

Excellent family instruction culture is an important resource and ideological foundation of rural governance. Rural governance emphasizes the concept of participation and co-governance, and the farming and reading concepts contained in excellent family education culture, as well as moral norms such as respecting integrity and promoting harmonious coexistence, have a similar impact on rural governance. The concept of farming and reading encourages people to active learn scientific and cultural knowledge, improve their quality and ability, and better serve rural governance. The rules of dealing with things in a rational and harmonious way are flexible blessings under moral ethics. The ecological system of advocating honesty and integrity in official work is a practical direction of winning trust from the people and governing for the people. The ecological system of honesty and integrity in governance is a powerful atmosphere for clean administration of rural grassroots organizations and cadres. Family motto has an inherent impact on ethics, thinking patterns, and value orientations, enhancing consensus and resolving disputes in rural governance.

In short, promoting the construction of family ethics by means of micro-family instruction has extremely important practical significance in addressing the negative phenomena of missing family education, declining family rules, lack of integrity, moral misconduct, and the infringement of materialism and promoting the construction of socialist spiritual civilization in urban and rural areas.

Main Contents of Contemporary “Micro-family Instructions” and Difficulties in English Translation**Main Contents of Contemporary “Micro-family Instructions”**

Educating people with culture is a slow and quiet process. Family ethics and family precepts are the foundation and source of happiness for a family. Hanging a family precept sign in front of the door can always guide family members to follow and practice them in the daily life. Through visiting and investigating Xunli Village, micro-family instructions hanging at the entrance of every house have been collected (as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2), and summarized (see Table 1 below for details).



Figure 1. Family instruction (凡是人，皆需爱).



Figure 2. Family instruction (夫妻相敬，举案齐眉).

Table 1

Micro-family Instructions in Xunli Village

(1) 遵纪守法 (2) 以德治家、勤俭持家 (3) 和谐相处、勤劳踏实 (4) 勤奋学习，付出才有收获。 (5) 勤俭立身之本，耕读保家之基。 (6) 勤俭持家，虚心治学，仁爱治德。 (7) 诚实守信，勤劳致富，家庭和睦。 (8) 勿以恶小而为之，勿以善小而不为。 (9) 堂堂正正做人，踏踏实实做事，兢兢业业读书，勤勤俭俭持家。 (10) 诚信、和善 (11) 尊老爱幼 (12) 助人为乐 (13) 凡是人，皆需爱 (14) 邻里相亲，以德交友，以诚服人 (15) 有胆有识，有礼有节，有情有义，有失有得 (16) 口中有德，目中有人，心中有爱，行中有善 (17) 学高为师，身正为范，勤学苦练，努力登攀 (18) 孝敬老人，严教子孙 (19) 家法当守、耕读为本 (20) 清廉正家、事业振兴 (21) 夫妻相敬，举案齐眉 (22) 父母是孩子最好的老师。 (23) 守德，守信，守孝，守义 (24) 孝老敬亲，尊师重教 (25) 以静养心，以动养志 (26) 动中静是真静，苦中乐是真乐 (27) 一寸光阴，一寸金，寸金难买寸光阴。 (28) 披星戴月走过的路，最终将会繁华遍地。 (29) 无益之书勿读，无益之话勿说；无益之事勿为，无益之人勿亲。 (30) 七彩世界，不失个性，坚持过有梦想的生活。

These family instructions are catchy, easy to understand, and full of philosophy. In terms of language form, some directly cite ancient classic works, such as “凡是人，皆需爱” from *Di Zi Gui*, “勿以恶小而为之，勿以善小而不为” from *The History of the Three Kingdoms* by Chen Shou. Some use four character idioms, such as “口中有德，目中有神，心中有爱，行中有善”. others use maxims and aphorisms, such as “父母是孩子最好的老师”. The contents are mainly reflected in strict governance of the family, filial piety to parents, understanding of matters, abiding by the law, valuing faith and righteousness, neighborly harmony, promoting good deeds, advocating diligence and frugality, and promoting education. They have become a distinctive landscape in the construction of rural civilization, serving as the education for every family to establish themselves, conduct themselves, manage their families, and manage their businesses. They are the “cultural genes” passed down from generation to generation.

Consequently, it can be seen that there are not many Chinese characters in the micro-family instructions, but their meanings are profound with each family’s representativeness and uniqueness, in which demonstrates a family story, embodies the spiritual culture of a family, and represents the spiritual inheritance of the family, the ways of managing the family, the rules of dealing with people, and the wisdom and excellent traditions of the family elders. Hanging the plaque of micro-family instruction at the doorstep not only reminds and constrains family members, teaches children and grandchildren the principles of how to behave in society, but also influences others and creates a good social atmosphere.

Exploration of English Translation of Micro-family Instructions

The dissemination of traditional Chinese family instructions to the outside world is mainly reflected in interlingual translation. The earliest work can be traced back to 1914 when Xie Fusheng translated *Di Zi Gui* into English. Subsequently, some scholars translated *Yan Family Instructions* (Deng Siyu, 1966; Zong Fuchang, 1995) and *Zhu Zi Family Instructions* (Zhang Xiangtong, 1993; Guo Zhuzhang, 1995) into English, introducing traditional Chinese family instructions and culture to people in English speaking countries, which is conducive to the dissemination of excellent traditional Chinese culture. However, according to CNKI statistics, researches on contemporary rural “micro-family instructions”, especially about their inheritance, dissemination, and internationalization, have received almost no attention, which is not conducive to rural cultural construction.

Xunli Village is a famous cultural and tourism village. Introductions to scenic spots and various signs in Chinese and English can be seen everywhere, making it convenient for tourists from all over the world to better understand and experience local culture. However, the family instruction hanging at the doorstep did not receive this “honor” and was only displayed in Chinese, which is inconsistent with the local tourism landscape language and affects the unity of Xunli Village’s tourism. The micro-family instruction on the plaque at the gate of each family is the essence of the family spirit, the excellent traditional quality, and the spiritual outlook of the contemporary new countryside that Xunli Village unfolds to tourists as a cultural tourism village, and the important content of cultural tourism. Therefore, their English translation will inevitably become an indispensable and important link in the promotion of cultural tourism village.

Micro-family instructions in Xunli Village are found to be short, concise, only with several Chinese characters, but contain profound philosophical ideas and moral implications. In addition, they will be hung at the doorstep serving as public signs. Therefore, translating them into English, it is necessary to consider not only the choice of words and sentences structure, cultural loaded words, stylistic features, but also the public signs function of being unified, concise, and easy to understand. So, domestication and foreignization will be good

choice. In the following, English translation will be explored in conjunction with the collected micro-family instructions.

(1) 遵纪守法

a. Observe law and discipline.

b. Stay within the law.

(2) 尊老爱幼

Respect the aged and take good care of children.

(3) 父母是孩子最好的老师。

Parents are the best teachers for their children.

(4) 守德，守信，守孝，守义

Be a person with virtue, trustworthiness, filial piety and righteousness.

(5) 以德治家、勤俭持家

Rule the house with morality and run the house with honesty and frugality.

(6) 和谐相处、勤劳踏实

Harmonious, industrious, dependable

(7) 勤奋学习，付出才有收获。

a. Diligence yields rewards.

b. No pains, no gains.

(8) 无益之书勿读，无益之话勿说；无益之事勿为，无益之人勿亲。

No reading useless books, no articulating useless words. Never do anything without good, never close people without good.

(9) 勿以恶小而为之，勿以善小而不为。

Do not do evil things however trivial they are. Do not give up good things however trivial they are.

(10) 一寸光阴，一寸金，寸金难买寸光阴。

a. Time is money.

b. Time has wings.

c. Time and tide wait for no man.

d. An inch of time is an inch of gold but you can't buy that inch of time with an inch of gold.

Example (1) and Example (2) use a simple structure with a four-character idiom consisting of verb + a noun + verb + a noun. When converted to English expression, the same expression structure is also used. Example (3) emphasizes the importance of family education. It is short, clear, and direct. So the literal translation method is used. Examples (4) and (5) are featured with typical parallel structure in Chinese, highlighting four excellent qualities. In English translation, the phrase structure of “with + noun” is used to keep its consistency.

Example (6) emphasizes ways to deal with people and uses three adjectives in the English to highlight “和谐、勤劳和踏实”, omitting the word “相处” to be concise and more comprehensive.

Example (7) shows a clear and straightforward connotation, emphasizing the relationship between diligence and gain. In the English translation, ellipsis is employed, with 7(a) being clear and conveying the original meaning well, while 7(b) appropriately borrowing English maxim to eliminate cultural differences, allowing foreign tourists to feel the unity of excellent culture.

Example (8) and Example (9) are also parallel, so the corresponding structures are also maintained during English translation.

Example (10) is a proverb about the importance of time. There are similar aphorisms related to the same meaning in English. So, it is a good choice to make use of them. For example, 10(a), (b), and (c) are simple, clear, and well-known, and 10(d) is based on the original meaning and adopts a literal translation, using “gold” to reflect the value of time, vividly conveying the value of time which should not be wasted.

How to translate Chinese micro-family instructions into English has always been a challenge to translators. In terms of language proficiency, they must be proficient in both Chinese and English in order to be faithful to the original text and able to make the target audience appreciate the English version. For the choice of translation strategies, they are confronted with the choice whether to choose a translation that is faithful to the adequacy of the original text or to the acceptability of the target language, or to integrate domestication and foreignization to make a better translation.

Conclusion

Chinese family instruction culture not only has a great influence on Chinese people, but also plays an indispensable role in family education and personal cultivation of people around the world. In the context of rural revitalization strategy, family instruction is an indispensable part of rural culture. The micro-family instruction printed on the plaque hanging on the wall in contemporary Chinese rural areas tells the way each household follows in their life. It not only serves as a self-reminder, but also serves as a mutual supervision among neighbors. It is a concentrated manifestation of positive energy and cohesion in rural culture, continuously improving the level of family education and spreading positive social energy, vigorously promoting the traditional virtues and excellent culture of the Chinese nation.

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