

A Comparative Study of Two English Translations of *The Book of Changes* From the Perspective of Translator's Subjectivity

MA Jing

Qingdao University of Science and Technology, Qingdao, China

As an influential work of metaphysics and symbolism, *The Book of Changes* represents magic and wisdom of Chinese culture. Since the 17th century, varieties of English translations of *The Book of Changes* have been published which have made great contributions to the “going out” of Chinese classics. However, due to the profound differences between Chinese and Western cultures, the existing English versions of *The Book of Changes* still have some deficiencies to some extent. Based on this, researches from different perspectives are being carried out. This paper, with the help of corpus, attempts to study translator's subjectivity in the English versions of *The Book of Changes* by Legge and Wang Rongpei/Ren Xiuhua in terms of purposiveness, restriction, and creativity.

Keywords: translator's subjectivity, *The Book of Changes*, comparative study

Introduction

The Book of Changes is highly regarded as the leading one among the “Five Classics” of the Chinese nation. It embodies the long cultural tradition as well as the most profound wisdom and courage of the Chinese people. Since the 17th century, scholars from all over the world have been exploring this treasure of human civilization and wisdom. Various languages and styles of *The Book of Changes* have emerged one after another. According to the incomplete statistics, *The Book of Changes* has already been translated to Latin, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, etc., among which 28 are still enormously influential nowadays.

In Western world, James Legge's version of *The Book of Changes* is deemed as the representative work of the English translation as well as the first authoritative translation of *The Book of Changes* in the world. The merit of James Legge's English translation lies not only in the fact that this translation has aroused the further attention of the Western world to the culture of the *The Book of Changes*, but also in the fact that his translation has laid a foundation for the spread and academic research of *The Book of Changes* in the West.

In China, the first English translation of *The Book of Changes* published after the founding of the People's Republic of China was jointly translated by Wang Rongpei, a famous expert in classical English translation, and Ren Xiuhua (hereinafter referred to as W/R version for short). According to Li and Zhang, it is equal to modern Yimutology (1995, p. 43).

Acknowledgements: This paper is granted by the projects “A Corpus-Based Multidimensional Comparison of the Three English Versions of *The Book of Changes* (16-ZZ-WX-10)” and “A Study of English Translation of *The Book of Changes*—Under the Strategy of Chinese Culture ‘Going Out’” (1607435).

MA Jing, M.A., associate professor, English Department, Qingdao University of Science and Technology, Qingdao, China.

From the perspective of linguistics and literature, studies on the translation of *The Book of Changes* mostly focus on the background, guiding ideology, the important influences, the characteristics and problems of the translated versions, etc. This paper, with the James Legge's and W/R versions as the research objects, highlights the embodiment of translator's subjectivity.

An Overview of Translator's Subjectivity

In traditional translation theories, translation is regarded as a linguistic transformation, whereas the translator is regarded as the "servant" of the author and the target readers. With the emergence of "cultural turn", the study of translation has shifted from the perspective of original-centeredness and linguistic transformation to the target-text-centeredness and cultural level. Thus, the translator's subjectivity is highlighted. Although there is no uniform definition of translator's subjectivity in the academic circles, they generally believe that the translator has initiative and creativity. The translator carries out translation activities with a certain purpose, and at the same time is restricted by many internal and external factors.

Definition of Translator's Subjectivity

It is universally acknowledged that the translator plays a vital role all through the translation process. Nowadays, more and more scholars have been studying and probed into the translator's subjectivity. Nevertheless, different scholars hold dissimilar views on its definition. Xu Jun (2003, p. 345) believes translator's subjectivity is the self-awareness and creativity of the translators consciously revealed in the translation activity. According to Tu Guoyuan, translator's subjectivity is the translator's subjective initiative with the characteristics of autonomy, purposiveness, and creativity in the translation behavior which is constrained by the external factors in order to cater for the cultural needs of the target language (Tu & Zhu, 2003). Zha Mingjian holds that translator's subjectivity refers to the translator's subjective initiative in translating activities, which is based on the translator's cultural consciousness, humanistic character, and aesthetic creativity. (Zha & Tian, 2003, p. 22).

Features of Translator's Subjectivity

From the above definitions, we can conclude that there are three striking features of purposiveness, restriction, and creativity in translator's subjectivity.

As a subjective factor, the translator always unconsciously puts his or her own intention and selection into the target language, thus making translation as an intentional and purposeful activity. In order to attain the purpose or intention of translation, the translator is confronted with various selections, such as what should be translated, who will be the target readers, and what translation strategy and methods could be applied. All the above-mentioned selections are greatly determined by the translator's particular purposes and intentions.

Even though great importance has been attached to translator's subjective initiative in the translation activity, it should be pointed out that the subjective initiative is constrained by internal and external factors. The external factors mainly focus on the restrictions of the source text, the historical and social environment around the translator. The internal factors mainly include the translator's world outlook, language ability, life experience, cross-culture awareness, and individual aesthetic preference, etc.

Though restricted by various factors, the translator still has some possibility to display the creativity in the

translating activity. According to Liu Miqing, the translator can give best of his or her subjectivity to overcome the negative aspect of objective restriction during the translating process. To a certain extent, the translator can recreate the language form, structure and style of the source language, etc. (1999, p. 53).

Comparison of Two English Versions of *The Book of Changes* From the Perspective of Translator's Subjectivity

Purposiveness in the Two Versions

Purposiveness in James Legge's version. James Legge is a greatly renowned British missionary in the mid-19th century which is the most affluent period during the British Industrial Revolution, as well as the cultural prosperity of British Empire. On the contrary, China was suffering from the merciless invasion of Western countries. After the Opium War, Christian missionaries got the privilege to swarm into China with the belief that Confucianism was inferior to Christianity and the Chinese needed to be civilized.

Like his fellow missionaries, James Legge set out his journey into Chinese life with the purposes to spread the doctrine of Christianity to the "uncivilized" Chinese people. However, it was not an easy work to replace deeply-rooted Confucius ideas with Christianity for the spiritual prop of Confucius in Chinese people's minds. Therefore, James Legge and other missionaries found the shared elements between the doctrines of Christianity and Confucius and worked hard to integrate them. He once said that his "grand goal" of translation is to serve Western missionaries who wish to understand China through the translation of his classics.

Purposiveness in Wang Rongpei's version. Wang Rongpei published the English version of *The Book of Changes* in 1993 so that Chinese people have their own first English version of it. In 1990, Wang visited Cloud Taoist Temple which is the sacred place of Taoism. He was shocked by the fact that Tao Te Ching was translated by foreigners who did not catch the essence. From that moment, he realized that people would be proud with Chinese people's own English versions of Chinese classics. Shortly after coming back, he set out to translate the Chinese classics.

Huo believes that translator's choices and selections mirror his or her views on life and belief (2005, pp. 68-70). According to Huo, Wang Rongpei's world outlook and life philosophy coincide with the wisdom of *The Book of Changes*. Therefore, he can catch its essence and express himself better. In a word, Wang Rongpei's purpose of translating *The Book of Changes* is to serve his personal goals of winning honor for Chinese people and displaying his own life philosophy through translating.

Restriction in the Two Versions

Ideology. Any discourse is associated with politics and ideology. Therefore, from the selection of the source text to the translation strategies and methods, the translator will be greatly affected by politics and ideology. This will be illustrated with "Di (帝)" and "Hui (悔)" in the following part from two perspectives, namely religion and culture.

In Example 1 of Table 1, the big difference between the two versions is the translation of "Di" which is translated into "God" by Legge whereas "gods" by W/R. On the surface, the only difference lies in whether god is capitalized and in plural form or not. However, it is more than that. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary* defines "God" as creator and ruler of the universe and "gods" as an individual who is greatly admired. With a firm belief that God is the only perfect guide to human beings, Legge translates "Di" into

“God” to help westerners understand its religious connotation. On the contrary, Wang Rongpei and Ren Xiuhua translate “Di” into “gods” because Chinese people believed in polytheism in the ancient time. According to Chinese mythology, more than 400 gods exist. As Chinese translators, it is a duty to disseminate Chinese traditional culture to the Western world.

In Example 2, “hui”, as a high frequency word in *The Book of Changes*, is mostly often translated into “repent” or its noun form “repentance” by Legge. According to the definition given by Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary, “repent” means “to feel regret or sorry for something bad or wrong that you have done”, which is especially used in religion. According to Christianity, human beings are born with sins and if people want to gain pardon from God, they must repent. Therefore, Legge’s version obviously reflects the constraint of religion. On the contrary, W/R select a very general word “regret” without any sense of Christianity in order to keep the original meaning the source text.

Table 1

Restriction in the two versions

Source text	Legge’s version	W/R version
1. 王用享于帝，吉。（《益卦·六二》）	Let the king, employ them in presenting his offerings to <u>God</u> , and there will be good fortune. (Legge, 2016, p. 189)	The king is making offerings to the <u>gods</u> ; this is a sign of good omen. (W/R, 2007, p. 87)
2. 艮其辅，言有序，悔亡。（《艮卦·六五》）	The fifth line, divided, shows its subject keeping his jawbones at rest, so that his words are (all) orderly. Occasion for <u>repentance</u> will disappear. (Legge, 2016, p. 163)	Restrain your mouth/so as to speak in order/ and your <u>regret</u> will disappear. (W/R, 2007, p. 107)

Personal aesthetic preference. Translator’s aesthetic preference is one of important internal factors affecting translator’s subjectivity. It is the translator’s personal aesthetic preference that makes diversified translations possible with different styles for the same source discourse. The following examples in Table 2 can fully interpret the influence of personal aesthetic preference on translator’s subjectivity.

Table 2

Personal aesthetic preference

Source text	Legge’s version	W/R version
1. 或鼓或罢，或泣或歌。（《中孚卦·六三》）	Now he beats his drum, and now he leaves off. Now he weeps, and now he sings. (Legge, 2016, p. 189)	When you confront an enemy, you either advance or retreat, either weep or sing. (W/R, 2007, p. 125)
2. 泰，小往大来，吉亨。（《泰卦·卦辞》）	In Tai (we see) <u>the little gone and the great come</u> . (It indicates that) there will be good fortune, with progress and success. (Legge, 2016, p. 35)	The tai hexagram (the symbol of prosperity) predicates good fortune and success. <u>Out goes the small and in comes the great</u> —everything is going to its proper place. (W/R, 2007, p. 23)

The Book of Changes is rich in rhymes and poetic characteristics. Example 1 is a poem written in Chinese four-character, presenting a word-picture of different mental states of soldiers after a victory. The poem is full of rhyme and artistic beauty. However, the artistic quality is not reserved in James Legge’s translation because he considers the language of it as rigid and insipid. Legge’s lives in the period of Victoria which advocates flowery and lengthy style. Therefore, his personal aesthetic preference is greatly influenced by the writing style of the

time. On the contrary, Wang Rongpei applies parallel structure “either...or...” to reflect the sharp contrast in actions and emotions of soldiers so as to keep the original features of the source language.

In Example 2, Wang Rongpei resorts to antithesis to convey the essence and artistic feature of the source language. While Legge constantly seeks for a compromise between Jesus and Confucius, so he cares little literary characteristics of *The Book of Changes* in his translation.

Creativity in the Two Versions

In the lexical aspect. Example 1 in Table 3 means that more attention should be given to the reform even though it has already achieved initial success. Wang Rongpei and Ren Xiuhua translate “三” into “fully” by means of free translation, reflecting the depth of change and reform. Legge’s version, with literal translation and free translation combined, not only preserves the literal meaning of the original text, but also conveys its deep cultural connotation.

In the syntactic aspect. In order to achieve poetic and rhythmic effect, some special sentence structures which are quite different from contemporary Chinese are employed in *The Book of Changes*. To some extent, it creates more barriers for westerners to understand it. As a native Chinese, Wang Rongpei is more proficient in the Chinese sentence structure than James Legge. Example 2 in Table 3 is a good one to illustrate this aspect. The former part of source text is an inverted sentence in which “见” is a loan word of “现”. The latter part should be “利大人见” implying that it is good for the great man to emerge. However, James Legge does not quite understand the special sentence structure of the sentence and translates improperly.

In the stylistic aspect. In the stylistic level, James Legge intends to reproduce the deep meaning the source text in order to make the westerners understand *The Book of Changes* better. However, he abandoned the striking feature of conciseness of the ancient Chinese. In this aspect, Wang Rongpei’s version is better than James Legge’s. Please refer to Example 3 in Table 3.

Table 3

Creativity in the two versions

Source text	Legge’s version	W/R version
1. 革言三就。《《革卦·九三》》	If the change (he contemplates) have been three times fully discussed,... (Legge, 2016, p. 153)	If the reform has been <u>fully</u> discussed,... (W/R, 2007, p. 100)
2. 飞龙在天，利见大人。《《乾卦·九五》》	(We see its subject) the dragon on the wing in the sky. It will be advantageous to meet with the great man. (Legge, 2016, pp. 3, 5)	The dragon is flying in the sky. It is time for the great man to come to the fore. (W/R, 2007, p. 3)
3. 利永贞。《《乾卦·用六》》	(The lines of this hexagram are all weak and divided, as appears from) the use of the number six. If those (who are thus represented) be perpetually correct and firm, advantage will arise. (Legge, 2016, pp. 7, 9)	Potentiality lies in eternal perseverance. (W/R, 2007, p. 5)

Conclusion

The translator acts as a decisive and subjective role during the whole translation activity. Nowadays, the study of translator’s subjectivity has become one of the most popular topics in the translation filed. Under this background, the author conducts a comparative study on two English versions of *The Book of Changes* from the aspects of purposiveness, restriction, and creativity which are the three features of translator’s subjectivity.

Through the elaborate study with numbers of examples, it is found out that the translators' subjectivity does exert a powerful influence on the translation activity.

References

- Huo, Y. H. (2005). Natural translator—Wang Rongpei [J]. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 5, 68-70.
- Legge, J. (2016). *The book of changes* [M]. Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Ancient Classics Publishing House.
- Li, Y. Y., & Zhang, C. B. (1995). A comparative study of four English versions of *The Book of Changes* [J]. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, 4, 37-43.
- Liu, M. Q. (1999). *Contemporary translation theories* [M]. Beijing: China Translation & Publishing Corporation.
- Tu, G. Y., & Zhu, X. L. (2003). The translator's subjectivity: A hermeneutic exposition [J]. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 6, 8-14.
- Wang, R. P., & Ren, X. H. (2007). *Book of change* [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Xu, J. (2003). *The theory of translation* [M]. Wuhan: Hubei Education Press.
- Zha, M. J., & Tian, Y. (2003). On the subjectivity of the translator [J]. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 1, 20-24.