

The English Translation of *Lunyu* and the Dissemination of the Confucian Culture*

LU Ming-yan, ZHANG Shun-sheng

College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

As one of the carriers of Confucian culture, and from ancient times to the present, *Lunyu* or *The Analects* or *The Analects of Confucius*, has been well received by readers at home and abroad, and there are more and more English translations of *Lunyu*. This article will select some of the vocabulary translations with ancient Chinese characteristics in *Lunyu* as the object, employ the method of a comparative analysis to explore the cultural connotation behind the text and the dissemination of the translation, and discuss the translator's translation strategies. Judging from the research on *The Analects* by scholars from home and abroad and the opening and development of overseas Confucius Institutes, *Lunyu* has exerted an enlightenment effect in different times.

Keywords: *Lunyu*, Confucian culture, culture-loaded words, Amoy Ku's version, William Edward Soothill's version, translation

Introduction

As one of the Four Ancient Civilizations, China has an unbroken cultural legacy of 5,000 years of excellence. In 1970, Hannes Alfven, Nobel Prize laureate in Physics, stated that if mankind is to survive it must go back to 25 centuries in time to tap the wisdom of Confucius (Marnham, 1988, p. 1). *The Analects*, originally known as *Lunyu* in pinyin, embodies much of the wisdom of Confucius. President Xi Jinping has also repeatedly quoted classic phrases from *Lunyu* at international conferences, and in 2019 when President Xi met with French President Macron, he received a gift, the first original French-language edition of the Introduction to *The Analects*.

For a country, an excellent culture is the support of people's faith and an important guarantee and source of strength for economic development. China has a long history and its culture has endured for a long time. While the country is developing and the nation is revitalized, it is vital to highlight the role of culture. In the process of social development, regions can learn from each other or even copy from other countries' high-tech achievements indiscriminately. Even so, culture is the foundation. A country must keep the excellent culture that adapts to the development of the times and promote the inheritance and development of splendid traditional culture, show the

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LU Ming-yan, currently undergraduate student majoring in Sci-tech Translation, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology.

ZHANG Shun-sheng (Corresponding author), Professor of English, MA supervisor, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology.

charm of Chinese culture, shape a good national image, and improve the affinity of China's image and persuasive power of discourse. Confucian culture conveys the concepts of "harmony" and "benevolence" that can benefit China in any era, and the current path of peaceful development pursued by China is inextricably linked to these concepts.

As a classic of Confucianism, *the Analects* has been influential in China and the world, and scholars' enthusiasm for its exploration has not faded, either in the past or in the present. According to incomplete statistics, from 1687 to the present, *the Analects* has been translated into dozens of languages, among which English translations are the most numerous. The most famous translations include *The Confucian Analects* by the famous modern British sinologist James Legge (1815-1897), and the British sinologist William Edward Soothill (1861-1935)'s *The Analects of Confucius*. Besides, there is *The Discourses and Sayings of Confucius*, a translation by Amoy Ku (1857-1928), and Xu Yuanchong (1921-2021)'s *Thus Spoke the Master*, published in the 21st century. Translators have translated many versions in different contexts and for different purposes and motives.

Review of the Previous Studies

In the past five years, many scholars have explored and analyzed the English translation of *the Analects of Confucius* from various aspects. ZHANG Xiaoxue (2017) conducts a cluster analysis of the literature on the study of the English translation of *the Analects* from 2001 to 2017, arguing that there is a need to investigate and study the dissemination effect of the English translation of *the Analects*, and to explore the corresponding translation strategy options through the factors affecting the spread of the translation, and to form the relevant theories and principles of the English translation of the Chinese classics, so as to help Chinese traditional culture to go global better. LI Guangwei (2018) takes the concept of "origin" as the starting point and uses the Adaptation theory to conclude that translators should use different translation strategies to translate and explain different concepts of origin, thus promoting the dissemination of Chinese culture. JUN Xu (2018) analyzes the Legge's and Wiley's translations on the basis of rewriting theory and Adaptation theory, exploring how translators can exert their subjective initiative in the translation process. FAN Min (2019) analyzes the strategies for translating *the Analects* in the new era and discusses the new ways of *Lunyu*'s dissemination from four aspects. GU Huijuan (2019) discusses the problems of cross-cultural communication in the English translation of *the Analects* in terms of the linguistic differences between Chinese and other countries, and the time difference between ancient and modern history as well as the translation difference in the understanding of core concepts finally gives suggestions for the publication of the translation of *the Analects* in the context of Chinese culture's overseas promotion. CAI Xinle (2020) discusses the English translation of *The Analects* in the context of its "origin of heart" orientation, and evaluates and analyzes the modern Chinese and English translations of *The Analects*.

In addition to research on the content and methods of English translations of *the Analects*, other scholars have made outlooks on the dissemination of Confucian classics in the new era. YANG Lin (2020) compares and analyzes the translations by Amoy Ku and Roger Ames, pointing out that the subjective selection function of the translator in the translation of the classics can boost cultural transmission. In an interview with TAO Youlan (2021), the sinologists E. Bruce Brooks and his wife A. Taeko Brook consider that translation with annotation is "real translation," and point out that *the Analects* is a global classic, and the new task of a translator is to deepen

the reader's understanding of a work or a specific word that has been known to a certain extent in the past. ZHANG Defu (2021), using a typical case study to evaluate the English translation of Ni Peimin's *Analects*, points out that the "kung fu" orientation of Ni's translation is an effective way to understand the core concepts of Confucianism and interpret the original text of *the Analects*.

Different scholars have analyzed the English translation of *the Analects* from various perspectives, providing many ideas and methods for the English translation of the text and opening up new horizons for later studies. However, they mostly focus on theoretical application and translation of specific concepts, with less attention to the dissemination and use of Confucian culture represented by *the Analects* in the new era. Therefore, This paper will take Ku's and Soothill's versions as examples to analyze the translations of culture-located words with Chinese characteristics by different translators and their purposes of translation. Besides, the author will discuss the importance and value of the dissemination of Confucian culture at present.

Case Study

It is undeniable that Ku has made a great contribution to the spread of Chinese culture. Then, in terms of translation purpose, Ku wants to show cultural confidence and let the world see the excellence of Chinese culture. Therefore, he mostly adopts the translation strategy of "naturalization", trying to stand in the perspective of Western readers and to fit the Western way of thinking. The English translation of Ku's *Lunyu*, published in 1898 by Kelly and Walsh in Shanghai, is subtitled "A special translation of the commentary quoting Goethe and other Western writers." The use of literature familiar to Western readers to annotate *the Analects* is one of the main features of Ku's English translation of *the Analects*, so that his translation enables Western readers to better understand the ideological truths in *the Analects*, and the translation is highly communicative.

Soothill's English translation of *the Analects* was published in 1910, and in the preface to his translation, he wrote: If anyone asks why I should translate this book separately, my answer is that the importance of this work is far greater than the attention it receives from students. And a new translation would at least once again bring more attention to its existence and value. With the purpose of promoting *the Analects* and scholarship, Soothill translates and explains it as he goes along, even to the point of translating and annotating one word at a time. His meticulous translation and commentary of *the Analects*, with its concise and accessible text, can be said to be an excellent choice for Western readers who want to understand *the Analects* in depth.

Example (1)

ST: 一簞食，一瓢饮，在陋巷，人不堪其忧，回也不改其乐。——《论语 雍也》

Ku's version: Living on one single meal a day, with water for his drink, and living in the lowest hovels of the city, —no man could have stood such hardships, yet he—he did not lose his cheerfulness.

Soothill's version: A single bamboo bowl of millet; a single bamboo bowl of soup; living in a mean alley!

Others could not have borne his distress, but Hui never abated his cheerfulness.

The translations of “簞(dan)”, “瓢(piao)” and “陋巷(louxiang)” are particularly different. The former translation omits the utensils used by Yan Hui for eating and drinking, as Ku writes in the preface to his English translation of *the Analects*: In order to eliminate as much as possible the sense of strangeness and eccentricity for the English reader, we have tried to remove all those Chinese proprietary names whenever feasible (Ku, 1996). The latter translates “簞” as “bamboo bowl” (the translation of “瓢” as “bamboo bowl” should be a

misinterpretation of the word by the translator). The word “簞” is explained in the *Shuowen Jiezi* as “簞, 筥也。从竹, 单声”, which means “簞, also known as 筥, from bamboo, single sound”. The original meaning is a round bamboo vessel used to serve rice in ancient times. In other words, this character has a specific material expression in the original text, and it also reflects a major feature of ancient Chinese tools that are made of bamboo. At the same time, Yan Hui lived at the end of the Spring and Autumn Period, a period when not only the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE) was in decline, but most of the old noble families of Lu were also going to the dogs.

Therefore, when comparing the two translators' translations, the latter's is more reflective of Chinese culture and more imaginative of the noble virtues of the wise man in *Lunyu*. What is more, it presents a clearer picture and a better view of the character to the reader. When it comes to the translation of Yan Hui's life in “陋巷” by the two translators, Mr. Ku translates it into “living in the lowest hovels of the city,” whereas Soothill renders it into “living in a mean alley”, which is much the same as James Legge's “living in his mean narrow lane.” Through comparing their versions, we find that Amoy Ku does not translate “陋巷” directly, while both Soothill's and James Legge's translations follow the original text faithfully. Still, Ku's translation is also highly readable in terms of how the phrase interprets Yan Hui's humble living environment.

Example (2)

ST: 子曰：“道听而途说，德之弃也。”——《论语 阳货》

Ku's version: Confucius remarked, “To preach in the public streets the commonplaces which you have picked up on the way is to throw away all your finer feelings.”

Soothill's version: The Master said: “To proclaim on the road what you hear on the way is virtue thrown away.”

From the original text, we cannot tell whether Confucius is referring to “听” and “说” in a pejorative or positive sense, and Ku chooses “commonplaces” to translate the content of “道听途说”, while Soothill adopts “what you hear on the way.” The former's choice of words has a pejorative connotation, meaning that bad content should not be spread, while the latter means whatever you hear should not be spread freely. Thus, it seems that the two translators' translations reflect the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, with Ku's translation showing the Chinese cultural characteristic of wishing to spread good things for a thousand miles, and Soothill's translation showing the need to “refrain from speaking” as much as possible in another language environment. It is still important for the translators to balance as much as possible the number of words in the original and target texts on the premise of faithfully expressing the original meaning, and from this point of view, Soothill's translation is more faithful to the source text and more readable.

Example (3)

ST: 道不同，不相为谋。——《论语 卫灵公》

Ku's version: Confucius remarked, “Men of totally different principles can never act together.”

Soothill's version: The Master said: “Those whose ways are different do not make plans together.”

The concept of “道” existed before the birth of Confucius, and it has distinctive Confucian and Chinese characteristics. Confucius gave a new meaning to the category of “道” in the sense of inheriting the heavenly concept of “道”, and directed the connotation of “道” more to the humanistic concept (WANG Lizong, 2008). However, Confucius' “道” is so rich in connotation that it is difficult to summarize it in one word in English or any other foreign language. The word “principles” refers to beliefs, creeds and moral codes, and Ku chooses this

word to lead the reader to appreciate the meaning of “道” from the spiritual aspect. Besides, The word “way” can refer to methods and means as well as styles and customs. The choice of “ways” by Soothill to blur the meaning of “道” corresponds to a certain extent to the abstract meaning of “道” in Confucianism, and gives readers more room for reflection. It is also very readable.

Example (4)

ST: 子曰：见贤思齐焉，见不贤而内自省也。——《论语 里仁》

Ku’s version: Confucius remarked, “When we meet with men of worth, we should think how we may equal them. When we meet with worthless men, we should turn into ourselves and find out if we do not resemble them.”

Soothill’s version: The Master said: “When you see a man of worth, think how to rise to his level. When you see an unworthy man, then look within and examine yourself.”

Confucius considers a “贤者” to be a man of manners, virtue and value. Both translators translate “贤” as “man of worth,” which is consistent with the meaning of the original text. Amoy Ku expands the meaning of “自省” by translating it as “turn into ourselves and find out if we do not resemble them”, which shows both the act of self-reflection and the expected result of introspection. Although Soothill’s translation is close to the original in terms of word count and formatting, it stops at “examine yourself” and does not show the object of “自省/inner self-reflection.” In terms of this phrase, Ku’s translation is more reflective of Confucian culture and allows readers to better understand the meaning of “见贤思齐”.

Example (5)

ST: 子曰：君子不器。——《论语 • 为政》

Ku’s version: Confucius remarked, “A wise man will not make himself into a mere machine fit only to do one kind of work.”

Soothill’s version: The Master said: “The higher type of man is not a machine.”

The term “君子” in *Lunyu* has copious meanings, reflecting a sharp opposition and contrast with the “小人” in terms of origin and status, temperament, academic ambition, morality and ethics, economic value and political position (JUN Xu, 2018). The main connotation of “君子” is “a person of high moral character and a certain status.” Ku translates “君子” into “a wise man”, which reflects “virtue,” while Soothill translates it as “the higher type of man”, which to a certain extent reflects “virtue and position.” Therefore, the latter translation is more faithful to the original text in terms of the term “君子.” It is important to note that “器” in this sentence is not a simple apparatus, but a metaphor for a person who has only one talent and one skill. The translation of “器” as “a mere machine fit only to do one kind of work” not only translates the metaphor but also explains its metaphorical meaning, which is faithful to the original text and has a strong readability.

Conclusion

Lunyu, a Confucian classic with strong universal value, is a treasure trove for governing and a guiding light for life. In the context of the unstable international situation, countries and regions should join hands to help each other in order to overcome difficulties and achieve better development. At the same time, with the development of science and technology, various kinds of information spread rapidly, people’s views are easily affected. Thus, as the saying goes, “The commander of the army may be carried off, but the will of even a common man cannot

be taken from him”. No matter what kind of difficulties and challenges you encounter, you have to stick to your original intention, without a firm ambition, you cannot travel a thousand miles.

Finally, when it comes to the dissemination channels and media of the current English translation of *Lunyu*, it is suggested that apart from enhancing the embellishment of the translation, attention should be paid to the selection of the cover and paper for the publication of the translation to meet the readers’ requirements for the texture of the paper book. At the same time, cooperation can also be made with well-known foreign film companies to create short animated films or movies of *Lunyu* in English to expand the spread of *the Analects of Confucius* and enhance its international influence.

The thought of Confucius has remained influential for thousands of years, and it was first spread to Europe and America by European Jesus missionaries in the 17th century with the help of translators, formed the moral basis of the American philosophy of governance in the 18th century, and prompted Pound to form the modernist poetic thought in the 20th century (Hornung, 2022, pp. 16-26+165). Centuries have passed, and Chinese and Western scholars have discussed and analyzed the Confucian classics, spreading Confucian culture to varying degrees. The author believes that, there will be more lovers of good Confucianism, and excellent Chinese culture will continue to play an important role in the history of world civilization.

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