

Interpretation and Translation: A Case Study of the Translation of “Péng (朋)” and “Yǒu (友)” in *The Analects of Confucius**

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Lun Yu or *The Analects*, a masterpiece of ancient Chinese thought, contains Chinese Confucianism and the values and ways of doing things that it represents. This paper focuses on the interpretation and translation of “péng (朋)” and “yǒu (友)” in the translations by James Legge, Arthur Waley, Koo Hung-ming, and Xu Yuanchong respectively to explore the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures and the concepts held by different translators in the way of conducting oneself in society.

Keywords: *The Analects of Confucius*, yǒu, Confucian culture, translation

Introduction

Lun Yu or *The Analects*, a collection of quotations compiled by the disciples and descendants of Confucius, a thinker and educator during the Spring and Autumn period, records the words and deeds of Confucius and his disciples and influences the thinking structure of the whole society. The philosophies contained in *the Analects of Confucius*, such as the ideas of benevolence, mediocrity, and joyfulness in knowing the destiny have had a very important impact on the ancient and modern worlds. So Zhao Pu (922-992) said, “One who is familiar with half of *The Analects of Confucius* may govern the world,” while the master of Chinese studies, Qian Mu (1895-1990), said, “The Chinese reader today should have two major responsibilities. One is to read *The Analects* himself, and the other is to persuade others to read *The Analects*” (Qian, 1985, p. 1). Even in the late 1980s, 75 Nobel laureates met in Paris, France, and joined forces to declare, “If mankind is to survive in the 21st century, then it must go back 2,500 years to draw on the wisdom of Confucius.”

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to gain insight into the comprehension and communication of the wisdom conveyed in *The Analects of Confucius* by many translators from different cultural backgrounds and with different motives, as well as the differences and similarities between Chinese and Western values in essence.

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This paper will analyze the interpretation and translation of “péng (朋)” and “yǒu (友)” by James Legge, Arthur Waley, Koo Hung-ming, and Xu Yuanchong.

Interpretation and Translation of “Péng (朋)”

Different ways do not conspire against each other! The author believes that making friends is about opportunities, and if we can share the same aspirations, it can be considered as luck. James Legge (1815-1897), Arthur Waley (1888-1966), Koo Hongming (1857-1928) and Xu Yuanchong (1921-2021) have different understandings so their translations vary. “有朋自远方来，不亦乐乎?” (*The Analects* 1.1) can express the theoretical connotation and cultural tradition of the aesthetics of Confucian interaction behavior to the greatest extent.

Example (1)

ST: 有朋自远方来，不亦乐乎？

James Legge's TT: Is it not pleasant to have **friends** coming from distant quarters?

Arthur Waley's TT: That **friends** should come to one from afar, is this not after all delightful?

Koo's TT: A greater pleasure it is when **friends** of congenial minds still come from afar to seek you because of your attainments.

Xu's TT: Is it not a pleasure to meet **friends** coming from afar?

The meaning of “péng (朋)” is not limited to the interaction of “friends”, for it has the meaning of generalizing Confucian ethical interaction and relationship (Zeng, 2020, pp. 110-122). Mr. Qian Mu defined “a friend” as “a peer,” the same kind of people that cherish the same ideals and follow the same path (1985, p. 3). And Koo Hongming’s translation of “friends of congenial minds” emphasizes that aspiration is an important attribute of friends, and the remaining translations mostly use the term “far-away” as the qualifiers of friends. It reveals that the former emphasizes the subjective nature of congenial minds among friends, while the latter highlight the objective difference in the location of friends from afar.

Furthermore, the verb “有” has been translated in many ways, including “have” by **James Legge**, “should” by Arthur Waley, “to seek you” by Koo Hongming, and “meet” by Xu Yuanchong. What “有” wants to reveal is why “peers” come from afar. Koo believes that the process of seeking similar interests despite the hardships and dangers is delightful, Xu Yuanchong believes that the gathering between friends is enough to inspire people, Waley is moved by the unfading friendship despite the distance, while Jacob **Legge** seems to be more willing to consider the friendship as a gift from heaven, affirming its value of the existence.

Additionally, Koo’s translation of the term “friends of congenial minds” and “because of your attainments” emphasize the reason why a friend travels to find you which reflects the passionate from Chinese literati to find a soulmate.

Not surprisingly, there are obvious differences between Chinese and foreign translators in interpreting the preciousness of friendship—Chinese translators sigh the hardship in finding a soulmate and should be cherished, foreign translators are moved by the sincerity of a friend who travels thousands of miles for friendship. But both China and the West attach importance to friendship and cherish both material help and spiritual support from

friendship (Zhou, 2015, pp. 11-15). The translation from Koo Hung-ming can better convey the idea that a confidant alone has a keen ear for idyllic melodies.

Interpretation and Translation of “YǒU (友)”

Inspired by the principle of making friends, people can not help but start thinking about the positive and negative sides of a friend through the “益者三友，损者三友。友直，友谅，友多闻，益矣。友便辟，友善柔，友便佞，损矣。” The possible outcomes of socializing with various types of friends were elaborated through deduction and induction.

Example (2)

ST: 益者三友，损者三友。友直，友谅，友多闻，益矣。友便辟，友善柔，友便佞，损矣。

James Legge’s TT: There are three **friendships** which are advantageous, and three which are injurious. **Friendship** with the upright; **friendship** with the sincere; and **friendship** with the man of much observation:—these are advantageous. **Friendship** with the man of specious airs; **friendship** with the insinuatingly soft; and **friendship** with the glib-tongued:—these are injurious.

Arthur Waley’s TT: There are three sorts of pleasure that are profitable, and three sorts of pleasure that are harmful. The pleasure got from the due ordering of ritual and music, the pleasure got from discussing the good points in the conduct of others, the pleasure of having many wise **friends** is profitable. But pleasure got from profligate enjoyments, pleasure got from idle gadding about, pleasure got from comfort and ease is harmful.

Koo’s TT: There are three kinds of **friendship** which are beneficial and three kinds which are injurious. **Friendship** with upright men, with faithful men, and with men of much information: such **friendships** are beneficial. **Friendship** with plausible men, with men of insinuating manners, and with glib tongued men: such **friendships** are injurious.

Xu’s TT: Three kinds of friend will do you good, said Confucius, and other three will do you harm. To **make friends with** the upright, the faithful and the well-informed will do you good; to **make friends with** the prejudicial, the insidious and the hypocritical will do you harm.

Analysis:

First of all, we can notice that Waley differs in understanding the Chinese character “友”. The other three naturally understand “友” as friend, friendship, while only Waley translates “友” as “pleasure” that created by a kind of “friend”, which is more like a thing or a state from which we can derive pleasure. So it can be divided into two categories: “favorable” and “unfavorable”. Although Waley’s translation is based on his own understanding and makes logical sense, the author believes that he has violated the principle of “faith” in translation and therefore will not include it in the scope of following analysis and comparison.

The other three translators understand “友” as friend, so the choice of words and the overall syntax are very similar in terms of the good qualities possessed by friends. However, there is a difference in the choice of words in the second half of the sentence regarding the characteristics of a harmful friend. “便佞” means flattering and fawning, but both Koo and Legge choose “plausible”, “specious”, which convey a sense of vain and impractical, which cannot directly point out the harmful effects for readers. While Xu Yuanchong, on the other hand, uses “prejudicial” to describe the direct harm. Similarly, the first two choose to use a direct translation of “善柔”, but

it is confusing. Because “善柔” itself has no obvious pejorative meaning in English or Chinese, so it is not necessarily bad to be friends with them. But with Mr. Xu Yuanchong’s word “insidious”, it is immediately clear that a person featured with “善柔” is only the external disguise of a sinister and cunning person, and is bound to be harmful as a friend.

In addition, for the translation of “友”, both Legge and Koo choose the noun “friendship”, while Mr. Xu Yuanchong chose the verb phrase “make friends”. This choice of vocabulary does not have a great impact on the perspective of “conveyances”, but the author believes their emphases vary. The former is emphasizing the objective existence of “friendship”, while the latter is more subjective, demonstrating that it is the “friend” instead of the objective-existing “friendship” that will drag “me” into the abyss. So translating “友” as “make friend” is a greater emphasis on the importance of the process of choosing a friend, and the subjectivity generated by the friend.

Through the above arguments, this author considers Mr. Xu Yuanchong’s translation is superior, concise and easy to understand. At the same time, it can be found that despite the considerable cultural differences, there are some commonalities in some basic human emotions, nature and the judgment of right and wrong (Yang, 2018, pp. 72-78).

The way friends get along with each other can also be viewed as a specific expression of the way of dealing with people in the world. Friends are made up of individuals, and society is also made up of people. The way friends get along with each other will have an impact on individuals, whether they become virtuous people with high ideals or continue to live a mediocre life for the general public, these seemingly small changes will be infinitely magnified in society as a whole, and will be presented at the speed of social progress and development. It is also a good strategy to understand the way to get along with friends through the way of “getting the big picture from small details”.

Example (3)

ST: 君子以文会友，以友辅仁。

James Legge’s TT: The superior man on grounds of culture meets with his friends, and by friendship helps his virtue.

Arthur Waley’s TT: The gentleman by his culture collects friends about him, and through these friends promotes Goodness.

Koo’s TT: A wise man makes friends by his taste for art and literature. He uses his friend to help him live a moral life. A cultured man will make friends of with men of letters, and his friend will help him to promote virtue.

Xu’s TT: A cultured man will make friends of with men of letters, and his friend will help him to promote virtue.

Analysis:

The first thing we can notice is the diversity of translations of “君子”. Legge’s choice of “superior” can be regarded as “virtuous” or “person of position,” while Koo’s scribbled choice of “wise” is a more general adjective. The word “cultured” by Xu Yuanchong is emphasizing the well-educated trait, while Waley’s choice of “gentlemen” means “a man who is polite and well educated, who has excellent manners and always behaves well” (Hornby, 2018). The meaning of “gentleman” is not the same as “君子”, but is more related to “noble birth”

and “a person behaves according to high standards” (Feng, 2013, pp. 46-51). So “gentlemen” can be served as an entry point to magnify the difference between Chinese and Western views of friendship, the former does not carry any hierarchical differences, while the latter carries an inherent class consciousness.

However, from the cultural communication aspect, based on the remarks of Venuti, “there are two possible ways of translation, one is ‘to move the reader closer to the author without disturbing the original author’; the other is ‘to move the author closer to the reader without disturbing the reader as much as possible’” (Venuti, 2014) then the choice of “gentleman” is not a bad strategy to provide a shortcut for foreign readers to understand the text.

Next is the difference in the translators’ treatment of the friendship practice “以文会友”, which can be divided into three types. The first is to take “文” as a separate medium of friendship, and translate it as “on grounds of culture”. The second is found in Waley’s and Koo’s strategies, in which “文” has a specific attribution, “I “have “文”, so “friends” are willing to make friends with me. The last one is adopted by Mr. Xu Yuanchong, “friends of men of letters”, which classifies the attribute of “文” to friends, so I am eager to be friend with him. The author prefers to consider “文” as a medium of friendship, rather than assigning this attribute to a specific subject.

“以友辅仁”, in other words, the gentleman makes friends with his friends by means of articles and studies, and then helps them cultivate virtue together. The “无友不如己者” mentioned earlier in *the Analects* is a prelude to this, so by default, the friends will surely be a person with virtue and benevolence according to this standard. Then, whether the “friend” or the “friendship” can help “me” to improve the morality and self-cultivation? Here, James Legge chose “friendship” as the emitter of the action of “辅仁”, while the remaining three attributed the “credit” to the “friend” himself. This author agrees with Legge’s translation. First, this echoes Confucius’ idea that friends should respect and encourage each other. Furthermore, the encouragement of friends is conducive to the improvement of personal moral quality, and from a macroscopic view of development, social morality will be improved to a great extent, that is, harmonious interpersonal relationships will accelerate the building of a harmonious society and significantly improve the social morality (Wang, 2017, pp. 143-147).

After analyzing and taking the strengths of various schools of thought, the translation proposed by the author is “A cultured man on grounds of culture meets with his friends, and by friendship helps his virtue.”

Example (4)

ST: 主忠信，无友不如己者。

James Legge’s TT: Hold faithfulness and sincerity as first principles. Have no friends equal to yourself.

Arthur Waley’s TT: First and foremost, be faithful to your superiors, keep all promises, refuse the friendship of all who are not like you.

Koo’s TT: Make conscientiousness and sincerity your first principles. Have no friends who are not as yourself.

Xu’s TT: He should be truthful and faithful, and befriend his equals.

Here, Waley’s understanding of “友” is no different from the other three, but the four translators have different understandings on the emphasis of “友”. Koo and Legge maintain their selection of “friends”, Waley strengthen the subjective-existence of “friendship”, while Mr. Xu Yuanchong still utilizes “befriend”, a verb,

which means to become a friend of somebody. This is consistent with the “make friend” used by Xu Yuanchong in the third example. In the current context, however, the emphasis is less on the significance of the act of making friends per se but more on the articulation of the characteristics of friends with a view to employing this criterion later in the process of choosing friends.

And the translation and understanding of “主忠信” has been a source of ambiguity since ancient times. Cheng Yi (2018, pp. 118-122) points out the significance of loyalty in interpersonal relationships, so it is easy to see that he treats faithfulness as a principle. I prefer the approach of Li Yaege and Koo Hongming to “主忠信”—take it as a separate guideline in a sentence, and only then is the advice on how to make friends. This is meant to show that principles should be observed before friendships are made and methods should be followed after friendships are made, and that the two should not be confused and have a sense of logic from the general to the specific. Xu Yuanchong and Wiley’s translation, on the other hand, chooses to use a series of parallel verb phrases to put the principles of dealing with friends and the criteria of making friends on the same level of importance, with the intention of emphasizing that principles and methods are complementary and closely integrated.

Based on the above interpretation and the combination of various ideas and versions, the author would like to translate this sentence as—Make conscientiousness and sincerity your first principles. Have friends equal to yourself.

Conclusion

With the advancement of globalization, people are more and more aware of the importance of cross-cultural communication, and at the same time we are eager to speed up the process of promoting Chinese culture “going out” and to concentrate our efforts to promote cultural self-confidence and self-improvement.

The differences in the concepts of friendship between China and the West summarized in the article reflect differences in thinking between China and the West and there is no need to judge them as merits or demerits. On the contrary, an open and tolerant mindset can help us better appreciate the excellent traditional cultures of China and abroad and treat cultural differences rationally and objectively. The translation and analysis of *The Analects of Confucius* and other classics may provide us with a new opportunity to analyze Chinese and foreign values, to understand and appreciate each other from different perspectives, and to communicate in a better manner and in a more effective way across cultures and countries.

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