

Analysis of the Influencing Factors of the Diversity of Translations of *The Analects*

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The Analects, as the most important Confucian classic record, is one of the most important Chinese classics in the history of Chinese intellectual thinking and culture. There are about 60 English translated versions of *The Analects* by western missionaries and scholars all over the world. The paper aims at analyzing some factors which influence the diversity of translations of *The Analects* from cultural and the translators' perspectives by comparing three famous versions of translation, and thus points out that the cultural identity, the purpose of the translator, and the consideration of the target readers may greatly affect the results of translation.

Keywords: translation, influencing factors, *The Analects*, diversity

Introduction

The book of *Lun Yu*, also known as *The Analects*, recorded the sayings and deeds of Confucius by his disciples. As the classic of Confucianism, it greatly influenced Chinese thought and culture, and became one of the most influential books in the world after being translated into many foreign languages. The translation of *The Analects* can be traced back to the end of the 16th century. The first English version was made in the 17th century. At the beginning of the 19th century, the first official English translated version—*The Works of Confucius*—by Joshua Marshman, had great contributions to the overseas spread of the great thought. Among all the different versions of the translation in the 19th century, the most famous one belongs to James Legee, a Scottish missionary, who translated *The Analects* in 1861, and it was also by him that *The Analects* had begun to be widely accepted. Since then, increasing numbers of domestic and foreign missionaries and scholars were involved in the translation of *The Analects*, until it reached its prosperity in the 20th century. Among them, there are well-known Chinese scholars, such as Ku Hongming (1898), Lin Yutang (1938), Liu Dianjue (1979), Ma Dewu (2004), and Xu Yuanchong (2005). Famous American translators are Arthur Waley (1938), poet Ezra Pound (1952), and the modern scholars Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont (1998). These scholars from different countries of different periods mentioned above have all made a profound research into the Confucian thought and due to their different culture backgrounds, thinking ways, and translating strategies, especially the different purposes of these translators, all of the works were shining with their unique style in the worldwide translation circle. How did these factors contribute to the translation result? Among all the influencing factors, which plays a more important role? The paper tries to analyse them by comparing three translations of *The Analects* in different stages—the versions of James Legee, Ku Homing, and Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont.

Major Translators of *The Analects*

James Legee (1815-1897), a renowned British missionary and sinology, went as a missionary to China in 1839, and stayed in Hong Kong for half of his life. With the firm belief that the missionaries were able to comprehend the ideas and culture of the Chinese, in 1841 he began his translation career of Chinese classics. Through more than 20 years of painstaking research on Confucianism and dedication to translating the Chinese classics, he finally accompanied his works under the title *The Chinese Classics*. *The Confucius Analects* was first published in 1861 as a part of his works. He was regarded as the first person who had a systematic study on Confucian thought in English and who named “Analects” in English version of Confucian thought. Even though he gave some negative comment on Confucian thoughts compared with Christian principles, his version of *The Analects* had spread all over Europe, and was claimed as the standard translation version of Confucian thought.

Ku Hongming (1857-1928), who was well-known for his great attainments of foreign languages, was the first Chinese intellectual that introduced the Chinese classics abroad by translating *The Analects* into English. As the first influential Chinese translator of *The Analects*, Ku Hongming’s translation aimed at challenging former translations by missionaries and disapproval against Legee’s translation. In his translation, he let Confucius and his disciples talk with each other in a way as if they were educated Englishmen. He removed most of the Chinese proper nouns to eliminate the sense of strangeness from the westerners towards the eastern culture, and cited comments of well-known western writers and thinkers on the scripture to replace Confucian terminology (Ku, 1906, p. 12). His version was welcomed by most part of the western world.

With the fast development of China in the late 20th Century, more than 30 translations of *The Analects* have been published by domestic and foreign translators, characterizing more accurate and proper effects of translation of Confucian thought in modern times. Among them, Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont plumbed the depths of Confucius’ thinking with a keen sensitivity to philosophy and linguistics. Following up his work *Thinking Through Confucius*, Roger Ames teamed up with Henry Rosemont to put theory into practice, portraying Confucius in light of his communitarian learnings. In a translation that comes off as surprisingly relaxed and colloquial, they are the adherence to strict rules of propriety and righteous moralizing.

Influencing Factors of the Diversity of Translations of *The Analects*

Cultural Identity of the Translator

The translation of *The Analects* has a long history of 300 years, during which about 60 English versions have been produced. If we take the translation of *The Analects* as a cultural event, cultural identity of the translator, such as his gender, region, history, nationality, race, religious beliefs, ideology, and so on is inescapably remarked in the translation. Edwin Gentzler pointed that translation research, in fact, is the study of cultural interaction (2001, p. ix). Li Bingmei (2015) demonstrated three stages of translation of *The Analects*—missionary translation, post missionary translation, and powerful free translation periods in 300 years of history. The three stages presented the communication, influence, and power relationships between the two cultures in different periods. When the west was strong, western missionaries, such as James Legee, in their prior values, translated *The Analects* with the mission of transforming the Chinese people; when the world is in chaos, the intellectuals, such as Ku Hongming, did it with the mission of exploring wisdom and saving human beings; when China revitalized and developed, the translators, such as Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, did it with the mission of spreading

Chinese culture and understanding China. Translators of different cultural identities put their own positions, views, and attitudes in their translations, prefaces, and postscripts.

Purpose of the Translator

According to Skopos theory, all translations should follow three principles: skopos rule, coherence rule, and fidelity rule. Skopos theory focuses above all on the purpose of the translation, which determines the translation strategies to achieve a functionally adequate result. In other words, “the end justifies the means” (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984, p. 101). There are mainly three purposes in the translation process: the purpose of the translator, the communicative purpose, and the use of a certain translation strategy to achieve the goal of translation. It is Skopos theory that allows the diversity of translations of *The Analects* due to different purposes and missions of the translator.

James Legge, as a famous sinology of the Great Britain, took the translation of the Chinese classic as a part of his career in his service for the God. The purpose of him is “To let the rest of the world have a true understanding of this great eastern empire, in particular, in the light of the rich culture resources and guide, we can ensure our missionary work have a long-term effect” (Legge, 1861, p. 109).

The motivation of Ku Hongming, as he himself commented in his *The Spirit of Chinese People* on the translations produced by James Legge, was extremely simple,

That the work of translating the Chinese Classics had to be done was also a necessity of the time, and Dr. Legge has accomplished it, and the result is a dozen huge, ponderous tomes. The quantity of work done is certainly stupendous, whatever may be thought of the quality. In presence of these huge volumes we feel almost afraid to speak. Nevertheless, it must be confessed that the work does not altogether satisfy us. (Ku, 1898, p. vii)

He was so disappointed at the work done by Legge. It was obvious that Ku wanted to use his more than accurate version of *The Analects* to show the essence of Chinese culture and Chinese value, and by this way to gain the understanding and respect from the west to China.

The purpose of Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont in translating was to inspire American readers to understand the original meaning of the Confucian thought without any influence from the culture and language background.

Strategies of the Translator

Due to the different purposes of the translators mentioned above, their versions of *The Analects* vary from the word chosen, the sentence exerted, and the strategies used, even to the scope of the translation. The translator aiming at enhancing and promoting the meaning and the culture of the original context will use the strategies as domestication or free translations, while the one who is intended to make his translation accepted by the foreigners with less strangeness or to embody the foreign culture would like to use foreignization and literal methods.

As a missionary, the main reason for Legge to translate *The Analects* into English was that he wanted to introduce the Chinese culture and philosophy to his fellow workers and to let them know more about the life and thought of the far-reaching country before they started their sacred task in this country. Therefore, when he was doing the translation, his principle was to be faithful to the original version rather than to be beautiful or decent on the English expression. Ames and Rosemont were intending to let the audience grasp the authentic image of the great Chinese sage without being disturbed by other non-literal elements. Consequently, literal translation was employed in both versions.

Professor Ku Hongming pointed out what James Legge showed in his translation of *The Analects* must have been extremely strange and weird in the native English people's eyes. He wanted to translate *The Analects* into a booklet with Chinese wisdom and virtues which ordinary English readers can understand. In order to enable the common westerners to accept *The Analects*, Ku exerted great efforts to express his English translation version as an educated English gentleman by utilizing the strategies as the domestication and free translation.

Only taking the most frequently used word “子曰” in *The Analects* as an example, we can easily and clearly get the strategies used in these translators' versions.

There is no doubt that “Zi (子)” here means Confucius, but its translations are different. To call “孔子” as “Confucius” accords with the western tradition where people are called by their names without any title. Ku's version followed the domestication strategy, rendering “子” into Confucius obviously for the sake of western readers, while Legge and Ames and Rosemont's versions followed the alienation rule, rendering “子” into “the Master” in order to express the relationship between “子” and his students to show Chinese culture to the target readers. Although this kind of expression is unfamiliar to western readers, it could help them have a better understanding of the content, style, and intention of the original author.

Consideration of the Reader

Each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose. The Skopos rule thus reads as follow, “translate in a way that enables your text to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function” (Nord, 2001, p. 29). Thus, the targeted reader is a decisive factor of the translation.

子曰：“自行束修以上，吾未尝无诲焉。”

Legge: The Master said, “From the man bringing his bundle of dried flesh for teaching upwards, I have never refused instruction to any one.”

Ku: Confucius remarked, “In teaching men, I make no difference between the rich and the poor. I have taught men who could just afford to bring me the barest presentation gift in the same way as I have taught others.”

Ames and Rosemont: The Master said, “I have never failed to instruct students who, using their own resources, could only afford a gift of dried meat.”

In this verse, Confucius intended to say that the poor and the rich, the noble and the humble, etc., should have right to be educated. In traditional Chinese, “束修” is 10 pieces of the dried fresh, which refers to the expensive present taken by the students to their teachers. There is no doubt that the English readers will be puzzled by the relation between “dried flesh” and “teaching”. In order to inform the great teacher's thought to the reader, the above translators did some adjustment in translating. Legge added “for teaching” to tell his readers the function of the dried flesh. Ku just threw away the irrelative word “dried flesh”; instead, he used a direct sentence to explain the splendid thought involved “In teaching men, I make no difference between the rich and the poor”. Ames and Rosemont also used “using their own resources” to give a short explanation for their readers to the strangeness in the context. Based on these translations, there's no doubt that Ku is the most considerable for his reader, and then comes Legge, and later Ames and Rosemont. Anyway the translators of both cultures are free to adjust their translations when considering their readers. Thus it will beyond doubt be another important factor contributing to the diversity of the translation results.

Conclusion

Translation is first of all not only a kind of linguistic activity but also a kind of cultural interaction, and thus cultural differences exert great influence on translation. Translation of *The Analects* is greatly influenced by cultural factors such as the strength of a country, the power of discourse, cultural identity, national consciousness. Besides, the purpose of the translator truly plays a significant role in regarding the diversity of the translation results. It is well acknowledged that translation is a subjective career mainly decided by the willing of the translator and their consideration of the readers. Accordingly, the translators would employ flexible translation methods to achieve their target effect. Thus, the translation process would never be transparent and purely objective. What we can grasp from the finished translation work is more about the translator rather than the translated work. Once the answer is ascribed to the mind of men, then the diversity will be unavoidable (Hermans, 2000, p. 12).

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