

CHINESE CULTURAL VALUES IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF CHINESE CLASSICS

Lei Li and Han Xiao

Guangdong Polytechnic College, Zhaoqing, Guangdong, China

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.37500/IJESSR.2020.3612>

ABSTRACT

The purpose of English translation of Chinese classics is to spread Chinese cultural values and the spirit of Chinese civilization to the world. Translators should establish “cultural translation theory” and use domestication and foreignization reasonably. Domesticating strategy is easier for target readers to understand and accept Chinese culture in the early stage of translation. Foreignization strategy is conducive to highlighting the cultural differences between China and the west, which should be promoted in the present era. Due to the different readers and the continuous enrichment of the research, retranslation is very necessary. Based on the practice of translating Chinese classics into English, the construction of translation theory should be further strengthened and the elements of traditional Chinese culture should be highlighted, in order to form diversity of translation theories.

KEYWORDS: English translation of Chinese classics; cultural translation theory; domestication and foreignization; construction of translation theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese classics carry the spirit of the Chinese nation and embody the essence of traditional Chinese culture. English Translation of Chinese Classics is an important part of cultural heritage. It enables the people of the world to understand the broad, profound, time-honored and splendid Chinese civilization and draw from it a source of wisdom for the sustainable development of our nation. From the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century, there was a wave of English translation of Chinese Classics in Europe. The Book of Songs, The Analects of Confucius, Chuang-tzu, Tao Te Ching and The Songs of Chu were translated and introduced by western sinologists. Chinese translators have started their studies in this field relatively late, but they have also made active attempts in the past 100 years. Scholars such as Gu Hongming, Lin Yutang, Liu Wuji, Yang Xianyi, Dai Naidie and Xu Yuanchong have achieved fruitful results. In the current strategic situation of "going out" of Chinese culture, more and more domestic translators are taking up the important task of translating Chinese classics into English. This is a concrete practice to realize the great rejuvenation of Chinese traditional culture and enhance the international influence of Chinese culture. It also reflects the deep sense of national pride and the pioneering spirit in translation.

1. Domestication and Foreignization Should Embody the Concept of Cultural Translation

English Translation of Chinese Classics is not only about Chinese-English language conversion, but also a matter of cultural and spiritual interpretation. Susan Bassnett points out that translation should

be based on culture, not on text. Translation is not only a simple process of “decoding and recombination”, but also an act of communication. Translation should not be limited to the description of the original text, but to the equivalence of the function of the text in the target language culture. Different historical periods have different principles and norms for translation, but when all goes to all, these principles and norms are designed to meet different needs (Xie 2008). Translators should be good at combining the foreignization based on the source language with the domestication based on the target language. The translation strategy is usually related to the translator's historical background and social context.

In the early stage of English translation of classic books, translation with a preference for domestication strategy can shorten the distance between target language readers and Chinese culture. For example, Gu Hongming, a famous scholar in the late Qing Dynasty, translated *The Analects of Confucius* into English at a time when the Chinese nation was being oppressed and ravaged by western powers. Chinese culture was in an obviously weak position. Most British readers do not know about China, and they are full of prejudice against ancient China with their oddly eyes and imagination. According to Gu, Confucianism in *The Analects of Confucius* and other classics is not only a core part of traditional Chinese culture, but also an important thought of global significance and universal value, which can correct the shortcomings of modern western civilization. Gu Hongming said he tried to translate the dialogues between Confucius and his disciples in the same way that the British express their thoughts. In the social and historical background of the time, the awareness of following the norms of target language culture and poetics embodied the concept of cultural negotiation, that is, interpreting and spreading Confucianism in a proper way, and reflecting the cultural translation view of translators at that time.

Western translators may also be influenced by the historical context and tend to domesticate translation. The English translation of Hawkes' *The Songs of Chu* published by Clarendon Press in 1959 is a typical example. In order to make the image, allusion, appellation, myth and other special items of Chinese culture in the original text easier to be understood by the target language readers, the English Sinologist often borrowed some western cultural concepts in comparison with Chinese cultural concepts. For example, he translated “太公” into “Duke Tai”, because under the feudal system, the rank of titles in western countries was similar to that in ancient China, which was divided into five categories: duke, marquis, earl, vicomte, baron and so on. He translated “素餐” into “bread of idleness”, because the bread is a staple food in the west, domestication translation is closer to their life experience. The translator also used more Christian terms “Pure Ones” and “Immortals” to express the Chinese Taoist terms “真人” and “登仙” in order to get through some of the similarities. Cultural exchange is a gradual process from the shallow to the deep. In order to translate the obscure and ancient Chinese classics into modern English, it is quite normal for translators to do some creative translation and even rewriting, which is a way of collision and fusion between different cultures. It can be seen

that the domestication has its historical rationality, but to a large extent, it also dispels and fades the characteristics of Chinese culture.

In the 21st century, the English translation of Chinese classics, dominated by the sense of foreignization, can better demonstrate the national cultural characteristics, and then strengthen the cultural identity of the Chinese nation. Cultural differences are always key and difficult points of translation. The English translation of Chinese classics does not erase or narrow the cultural differences between China and the west, nor does it mean the one-way export of Chinese cultural values to the western world, but fully respects and seeks for the diversity of values. The translator must faithfully reproduce the cultural connotation, ideological depth, values and historical atmosphere of the classic texts. The pursuit of authenticity does not mean mechanical translation, but the flexible use of literal translation, free translation, transliteration, interpretation, addition, deletion and other translation methods to convey meaning and feelings. In particular, transliteration with interpretation can be used in translating core concepts and terms of Chinese culture, such as “仁”, “义”, “忠”, “礼”, “和”, “道” and “中庸”. “Conceptual terms are the cornerstone of Chinese cultural classics and the cornerstone of English translation of Chinese classics. Accurate English translation of conceptual terms is the key to the success of English translation of Chinese classics” (Yang 2011) . The translator should carefully study the notes of scholars in the past dynasties, explain the important concepts and terms in English, and note their origins, so that the target language readers can understand the deep connotation and historical origin of the source text, which is also the concrete practice of the concept of cultural translation. Foreignization aims to retain the original Chinese cultural connotation and spiritual characteristics. Although there will be some problems in readers’ accepting mentality and cognition in a certain period of time, it just reflects the historical and progressive characteristics of literary translation and introduction.

2. The Retranslation of Classic Books Should pay Attention to Readers and to Balance Translation and Research

In view of the openness of the meaning of the texts, the difference of the readers and the continuous innovation of the academic research results, it is necessary and a long way to do the retranslation work. It can make the original text continue to radiate vitality, and form a situation of multiple complementary translation. Retranslation can be understood by means of “The translation prototype theory”. Wittgenstein, the British scholar who pioneered “The prototype view”, put forward the concept of “family resemblance”. Based on the prototype view, Yang Bingjun puts forward the translation prototype theory, whose main idea is that translation includes ideal prototype and real prototype. The ideal prototype is an abstract concept based on the common features of things that appear frequently, which cannot be replaced by any typical examples. The real prototype is equivalent to the best sample, which is the most typical sample or the original model which is relatively stable in a certain space and time. It can be expressed in some form in the objective or subjective world (Yang 2012). The retranslation work is a process of getting closer to the real prototype, which reflects a kind of Excelsior translation attitude.

The value of the text and the spirit of the era ultimately depend on the reader to achieve. A translator should have a preset group of readers both at the beginning of translation and in the actual translation process. Although these readers have different educational backgrounds and reading levels, they are all in the same sociocultural context, and their value judgments, moral concepts, aesthetic standards and poetic tendencies are basically the same. English translation of Chinese classics is generally aimed at two types of readers: (1) A few sinologists and professional readers. They pay more attention to the artistic taste and cultural characteristics of the original works, and the translation should reflect the academic and literary style. (2) The general readers who love traditional Chinese culture. They lack the background knowledge of the original work and pay more attention to the content of the text. The translation should reflect the characteristics of readability and popularity. Western sinologists are the main force spreading Chinese culture from above to below, so they should give full play to their leading role and guiding function. In terms of quantity, the general readers account for a large proportion, which should stimulate their interest in reading the English translation of ancient books. Only in this way can the cultural communication gradually develop to the depth level from the point to the surface.

The reader and the reading experience influence the translator's choice of translation strategies. For professional readers, in-depth translation can be adopted, that is, the appropriate use of annotations, postscript, comments and other compensation means, to make the translation more contextualized. For the general reader, explicit translation can be used. "As a translation phenomenon, explicit (and implicit) should not only narrowly refers to the change of the language cohesion in form, but also include the transformation of manifestation in the sense, that is to add explicit expressions in the translation to help the translation readers understand. In other words, the implied information of the original text is manifested in the translation to make the meaning clearer and the logic clearer. This is also a phenomenon peculiar to translation" (Ke 2005). The translation of classic books into English reflects the emotional resonance and soul of the translator and the author. Only by blending and matching can translators become more involved in translation. High-quality translation can arouse similar psychological feelings between target language readers and source language readers. The more fully the translator understands preset readers, the better the effect of the translation will be, and the values and the spirit of The Times will be more easily understood and recognized.

The translation activity permeates the research process. The retranslation of classic books should reflect the translator's research level, cultural translation view and craftsman's spirit of forging words and sentences. Only when the translator deeply studies the author's life and thoughts, the content of the works, the background of creation and the spread of history, can he thoroughly grasp the profound meaning of the classic texts. In this respect, Sun Dayu can be regarded as a model of "research-oriented" translation. His English translation of The Songs of Chu is the product of his research results. The long preface, postscript and detailed annotation not only help target language readers to understand the ideology and artistry of The Songs of Chu, but also help to carry forward Qu Yuan's spirit in the world. From this point of view, Sun has tried a way to reconstruct the Chinese classical literature in

the English cultural context. To advocate the combination of translation and research does not mean that everything should be verified by the translator himself. Rather, the translator should be good at making a comprehensive survey of the abundant achievements such as proofreading, annotation and comment made by predecessors, so as to preserve the essence. When choosing a specific translation method, it is necessary to analyze and compare the morphology, syntax and chapter of Chinese and English, and try to spread Chinese culture in the way the target language readers are used to. The old version is the basis of the new version, but the new version is not necessarily superior to the old one. Different versions have their own reasons for existence and their own characteristics.

3. The Theoretical Construction of English Translation of Classic Books Should Highlight the Perspective of Traditional Chinese Culture

In recent years, the practice of translating Chinese classics into English has become more and more active, But the theoretical construction still needs to be further improved. The theory of English translation of classical books should not only describe the translation facts, interpret the translation phenomena and summarize the translation rules, but also embody the value judgment and the elements of national culture.

The theory of English translation of classical books is closely related to traditional Chinese translation theories and traditional Chinese culture. “Chinese cultural thought has always been a dominant thought in the theoretical form of translation studies” (Cai 2013). Although the western translation theories are very rich, they are not fully applicable to the practice of translating Chinese classics into English. We should fully understand the general characteristics of traditional Chinese translation theory, “The consistent theoretical basis of traditional Chinese translation theory: philosophical rather than scientific, aesthetic rather than religious. The research methods and presentation characteristics of traditional Chinese translation theory: concise rather than abundant, qualitative rather than quantitative. The stylistic features and thinking orientation of traditional Chinese translation theory: multiple rather than single, vague rather than clear. Division of sound and meaning, the debate on words and meanings and the resemblance of form and spirit have become the core topics of the traditional Chinese translation theory” (Wang 2003). The theory of English translation of classic books also has such general characteristics. Although there are limitations in category, proposition, method and expression, its advantages are very obvious. Based on the characteristics of the Chinese language and the Chinese nation's theory that man is an integral part of nature the spirit of virtue, the spirit of virtue as a root, traditional aesthetics and poetic nature are its strengths. We can directly borrow traditional Chinese translation resources to interpret and transform them in modern times, and construct consummate theory of English translation of classic books. In this regard, many Chinese scholars have made active explorations and highlighted the traditional Chinese cultural perspective of translation theory. For example, Xu Yuanchong's “art of beautification” centered on the theory of Three Beautifulness is the embodiment of carrying forward tradition and basing on local culture. Zhuo Zhenying constructed a relatively complete theoretical framework of Chinese classical poetry

translation from the aspects of standards, principles, methods, evaluation system and the translator literacy. It can be said that the theory of English translation of classic books should keep its own poetic form and humanistic spirit, because the theory system is based on traditional Chinese culture.

Under the premise of adhering to the Chinese cultural position, the construction of the theory of English translation of Chinese classics should also reasonably draw on the views and methods of Western translation theories to provide an alternative perspective for translation studies. In other words, “the core theory on which modern translation theory is based should take national language and culture as its foothold, and explore and carry forward the advantages of traditional Chinese translation theory. At the same time, western scientific and systematic research methods are used to transform and sublimate the traditional translation theory. Thus, generating a new translation theory which not only contains the rich connotation of China, but also incorporates the advantages of western research methods and embodies the spirit and style of the times” (Zhang&Zhang 2001). Chinese-western translation theories are two different discourse systems, both of which are closely related to their historical origins and cultural traditions. However, there are many similarities among them, which reflects the universal characteristics of translation theory. By absorbing the beneficial factors of western translation theories and making them useful through integration, it is helpful to build the Theory of English translation of classic books with Chinese characteristics and form the diversification of translation theories.

4. CONCLUSION

The translation of Chinese classics into English as the core communication carrier can enhance the western world's recognition of Chinese cultural values, which is a process of the coordination, integration and symbiosis between Chinese and Western cultures. From the perspective of translation nomenclature, judging the English translations of classic books can be positioned as the principle of "function". That is to analyze whether the translation has properly conveyed the profound meaning and artistic features of the original text in popular, concise and fluent modern English, especially whether it has spread the spirit of the times contained in classic books. In addition, we should also pay attention to the translator's identity and the external factors affecting the translation, such as poetics, culture, history and society, and discuss the differences and causes between the translation and the original. The English translation of Chinese and the inheritance of traditional Chinese cultural values is a long and systematic project. There is still much concrete work to be done. This not only depends on the translator's translation level and objective and relevant translation criticism, but also depends on relevant national policies and the strong support and cooperation of the publishing and distribution departments.

Cai Xinle. (2013). A Preliminary Study on Translation Theory from the Perspective of Chinese Thought: Also, on the Western “prototype” Translation Thought. Chinese Translators Journal.

- Ke Fei. (2005). Implicit and Explicit in Translation. Foreign Language Teaching and Research.
- Wang Hongyin. (2003). From Dao An to Fu Lei's Interpretation of Classical Theories of Traditional Chinese Translation. Hubei Education Press.
- Xie Tianzhen. (2008). Introduction to Contemporary Foreign Translation Theories. Nankai University Press.
- Yang Bingjun. (2012). The system function framework of translation prototype theory. Shandong Foreign Languages Teaching Journal.
- Yang Chenghu. (2011). On the Construction of the Conceptual System of the English Translation of Chinese Classics from the Perspective of the Chinese Translation of Buddhist Scriptures. Ningbo University Journal.
- Zhang Boran, Zhang Sijie. (2001). The Construction of Translation Studies: Traditional Positioning and Choice. Journal of Nanjing University (Philosophy, Humanities, Social Sciences).