ITS

A Comparative Study on the English Versions of *The Great Learning*

Anqi Rong[1*], Honghui Tan[1]

[1] School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, China

Email Address
1252771686@qq.com (Anqi Rong)
*Correspondence: 1252771686@qq.com

Abstract:
This paper compares three English versions of *The Great Learning* to study the different choices of translation strategies adopted by the translators. Through comparison, it finds that the different cultural backgrounds of the three translators greatly influence the translation strategies. The two foreigners mainly adopt the domestication strategy while the others adopts foreigniztion strategy.

Keywords:
The Great Learning, English Version, Translation Strategies

1. Introduction

The world has left rich and tremendous cultural heritages such as the world canonical texts in the long process. And the translations as well as the spread of those ancient books are the main ways of promote the development of human civilization. China, as one of the four great ancient civilizations in the world, has also left voluminous classics. For this perspective, the translations and dissemination of those Chinese classics have become more and more important and a special field in the academic world.

1.1. The Book of Rites and its Influence

The Book of Rites, as one of the representative works of Chinese classics, contains several comprehensive and rich ideas. The book records all kind of etiquette systems of the pre-Qin period in details, including almost every aspects of Chinese feudal society, such as politics, daily life, culture, economy, philosophy, education, moral and ethical concepts and so on [10]; those etiquette systems from the book are of high cultural values and regarded as the precious heritages by Chinese people. Also this book is an indispensable part of the academic exchange programs. Therefore, analysing the passages excerpted from The Book of Rites of different English versions will play an important role in spreading the Chinese traditional culture throughout the world.

1.2. The Translations and the Translators

The dissemination of the Book of Rites is due to its translation process. Early in 16 century, the translating campaign began,while the dissemination of its English

versions started in 19 century,with the publishment of English version from Legge in 1885 [5]. According to research, there are not many complete versions, but many partial translations, such as those partial translations from Arthur David Waley, Herbert Allen Giles and so on. In 1938, the partial translation of the Book of Rites from Lin Yutang was collected in the Wisdom of Confucius. And Chinese scholar, An Zengcai translated the book on the guidance of deconstructivism and published the Book of Rites: Bilingual Books（礼记英汉对照）in 1999, Translations of Confucian Classics: The Book of Rites（儒学经典译丛：礼记）in 2000. To sum up, the dissemination of this book has three stages: the beginning period from late 1800s to 1900s; the prosperity period in 1900s which was the booming development of partial translation versions; and the decline period as well as the resurgent time in the early 21 century, which is the republishing time of the book [17].

Among these above, three popular English versions are translated by three translators: Gu Hongming, Muller and Legge. Here are the general introductions of the three.

1.2.1. Gu Hongming

Gu Hongming is the first Chinese to introduce the Chinese culture to the West. He has a thorough knowledge of both Chinese and western culture and excels in several languages. Also, he is the first Chinese to translate the Great Learning, the Doctrine of Means and the Analects of Confucius independently [14]. Unlike the missionaries such as Legge, Gu's purpose of translation is to spread the traditional Chinese culture and the Confucianism. The translations translated by him are not only for the scholars but also for those western readers who do not understand the Chinese and the Chinese culture. From this perspective, Gu tries to follow the thinking patterns of educated ordinary British to translate. Here is an example, he translates the title of the Great Learning 《大学》 into "higher education".

1.2.2. Muller

Muller is a Buddhist, and it can be easily found in his translation. Because in his translation, he regards the Confucianism as a school of religion, and believes the Confucianism is as important as the Buddhism and Taoism. As a devout Buddhist, Muller has gained some valuable things for the further studies of ancient classics. In his translation of the Great Learning, he transliterates "仁" as "jen". he notes that "仁" is the unique concept in traditional Chinese culture, encompassing varied meanings like benevolence（仁慈），kind policy（仁政），kindheartedness（仁德）[14]. There is no equivalent concept in English context, so he uses transliteration approach to illustrate this concept.

1.2.3. James Legge

James Legge is the first scholar to systematically study and translate ancient classics in the modern west. There is a long preface in his translation and there are detailed notes attached to the translation, some of which are much longer than the translation itself [8]. The representative translation works of Legge are mainly two series: "Chinese Classics" and "Sacred Books of the East". Those two series win a high reputation in the western world and they are also the necessary materials for the westerns to know the Chinese culture and morality of the people. Similar to Muller, the style of writing is heavily influenced by religions. As a result, his translation is full of subjective opinions. He disagrees the opinions that the Great Learning should be

ITS

regarded as the reading book for educating the ordinary or children rather should be read only by the royal [12].

1.3. The Studies of English Versions

Regarding the English versions of the Book of Rites, the studies are mainly focus on the analysis of translations from Legge, such as Comparative studies on the Two English Versions of the Book of Rites [5], the Translation Strategies of the culture-loaded words based on the Skopos Theory [10]. There are no so much theses on the English versions studies of the Book of Rites. There are 9 theses on the studies of English versions of the Book of Rites included in the CNKI and many of them focus on the translations by Legge. So this paper will compare the three translations by Legge, Muller and Gu Hongming and to discuss how the different cultural background influence the translation strategies they choose.

2. Case Studies

2.1. The Translation of "诚其意"

The interpretation of "诚其意"(making the thoughts sincere)varies slightly in the three versions. Based on self-understanding, Gu and Legge translate "意" into "idea" and "thoughts" respectively after referring to the "Variorum of Four Books" [18], while Muller translates it into "will". According to the most popular version--"Variorum of Four Books" and the oldest version--the annotated version, "所谓诚其意者，毋自欺也" (what is meant by "making the thoughts sincere") is intended to remind us that we should not deceive ourselves. Compared the three versions, the translators adopt the literal translation and provide the target readers with a clear explanation so as to better deliver the meanings of the original texts.

Table 1."诚其意".

	诚其意	Translation Strategies
Gu	true ideas	Literal translation
Muller	Making the will sincere	Free translation
Legge	making the thoughts sincere	Free translation

2.2. The Translation of Numerals

The three translators all adopt literal translation to translate the numerals in these sentence. According to several materials published by scholars, the numerals sometimes isn't a kind of congruent reference, but a kind of phantom reference in the ancient classics [13]. Thus, the literal translation in this sentence may be a misunderstanding of the original meaning to some extent. For example, "三人行，必有我师焉" (In the company of three, one can always learn from others), the "三" (three) is a phantom reference; anther example from the Book of Rites is the "五刑" (Chinese ancient punishments), and the "五" (five) is also a phantom reference, so the translation of "五刑" could be the "various penalties" which has been widely agreed by the academic world. Thus, in this aspect, the literal translation in the sentence regarding the numerals may not be perfectly applicable; rather it may well suitable for free translation.

The two examples above prove that literal translation, as an important method of translation, can convey the meaning and style of the original text, as shown in Table 1. However, if we do not pay attention to the context and then adopt literal translation in

ITS

some special conditions, we may not be able to correctly convey the meaning of the original text, making things go contrary to our wishes, such as Table 2. Free translation, on the basis of faithfulness to the original text, breaks free from the shackles of the original structure and can restore the meaning of the original text to a certain extent. Therefore, from the perspective of Reception Aesthetics Theory, we should choose the appropriate strategies according to the context in order to better achieve the readers' desire or expectations.

Table 2. Numerals.

	十目所视，十手所指	Translation Strategies
Gu	ten eyes are looking upon you and ten fingers are pointing at you	Literal translation
Muller	What ten eyes see,what ten fingers indicate	Literal translation
Legge	What ten eyes behold, what ten hands point to	Literal translation

2.3. The Translation of "君子" "小人"

For the translation of "君子" (gentleman), Gu translates it into "a gentleman" while the other two translators translate it into "the superior man"; for the translation of "小人" (villain), Gu translates it into "immoral man", Mueller translates it into "inferior man", and Legge translates it into "mean man". To sum up, the three translators find the equivalent concept between the source language and the target language and all adopt the domestication translation method. However, according to "Han Dian Website" (汉典), a website which provides people interested in Chinese with a approach to better understanding the Chinese ancient culture, the two words have various meaning, see Table 4. Also, in the opinion of hermeneutics, when translating those unique Chinese culture-loaded words, the translators must adopt all kind of methods to illustrate which is called "thick translation". Because in this way, the translation can complete the purpose the author wants to deliver. The translation and dissemination of Chinese Classics are intended to make the world better understand the rich and varied cultural heritage. In this sense, the domestication translation may not satisfy the purpose; rather, it is necessary to keep some unique Chinese culture-loaded words in the process of translating .Beside, as the society developing and the constant emerging of the foreign culture, the target readers have been used to the expression patterns of other culture. Therefore, it's better to adopt the domestication strategy to spread the unique culture-loaded words.

Table 3. "君子" "小人".

	君子	小人	Translation strategies
Gu	a gentleman	an immoral man	Free translation and domestication
Muller	superior man	inferior man	Free translation and foreignization
Legge	superior man	mean man	Free translation and foreignization

Table 4. Connotations of "君子" and "小人".

	connotations
Gentleman (君子)	1.As a general term for rulers and noble men, it is often used against "villains" (小人)or "savages" (野人); 2. It generally refers to people with outstanding talent and morality, also refers to people with high status, and later refers to people with noble personality; 3. Respect for people, similar to Mr;
Villain (小人)	1. A person of humble personality or humble insight; 2. In ancient times, the common people generally referred to the ruled;

ITS

	3. In the old days, men's modest words to those who are superior to themselves;

2.4. The Translation of "肺肝然"

Compensation strategy is the last stage of the fourfold translation motion [8]. The fourfold translation motion is proposed by George Steiner, and he divided the translation process into four stages --trust, intrusive, incorporation and enactment of reciprocity [1]. The last stage, enactment of reciprocity, is to provide some necessary information in the process of translation after completing the above three stages, so as to maintain the integrity of translation work whose original meaning, to some extent, has been destroyed in the understanding. The four stages, particularly the last stage, play important role in maintaining the integrity as well as accurately expressing the meaning which the original text desired to express. [8]

Regarding to the sentence, "人之视己，如见其肺肝然，则何益？" (The other beholds him, as if he saw his heart and reins;-of what use is his disguise?), Gu and Legge adopt the literal translation and they also add an image, "hearts", based on the literal translation; thus this kind of strategy could make the meaning expressed clearer and achieve the desire which the author wants to deliver to the readers. While Muller adopts the free translation to demonstrate the above sentence and obliterate the "肺肝然" (it is a metaphor to represent the inner quality). The free translation strategy excavates the connotation and directly demonstrates it which will help the readers understand better; however it will, to some extent, ignore the cultural value of the classics which can introduce the Chinese culture to the whole world.

Table 5. "肺肝然".

	人之视己，如见其肺肝然	Translation strategies
Gu	But men see through us as though our hearts and reins lay open to them	Literal translation
Muller	When people observe you, they see right to your core	Free translation
Legge	The other beholds him, as if he saw his heart and reins	Literal translation

3. Factors Influencing the Strategies Adopted

Since the three translators are from different countries and they have different cultural backgrounds, the strategies they adopted in the process of translating are largely influenced. The two foreign translators are both missionaries, so their translation purposes are mainly to disseminate the religions they espoused. Namely, Muller is a devout Buddhist while Legge is a missionary of Christian, thus they largely adopted the domestication strategies so as to better disseminate the principles of the religions. And the Chinese translator, Gu Hongming, wanted to make the whole world have a better understanding of the Chinese culture as well as the spirits. Gu has a better understanding of the Chinese culture and the western culture, also he can speak various languages. And he was heavily influenced by the Confucianism, and he didn't agree the opinion that the western culture is prior to the Chinese culture especially experienced the inequities by the westerners. Therefore, he hoped he can change the stereotype of the westerners treated our Chinese through translation and the westerners could recognize China as well as Chinese people in a new way.

4. Conclusions

ITS

Analyzing the three translations through several examples, it is easy to find that the three translators adopt different translation strategies based on their personal purposes. Legge and Muller are not only the translators but also the missionaries; thus, influenced by their background and cultural diversity, their purposes of translation are to pave the way for their missionary works to a large extent. And according to the reception aesthetics theory, the two translators mainly adopt the foreignization method in the translation of the Great Learning. As a result, they have achieved their translation purposes and in terms of the readers' reception, the two translators have satisfy the readers horizon expectations and actually accepted by the target readers. In terms of the Chinese translator, Gu, his purpose to translate the Great Learning as well as other cultural classics, is to make the whole world recognize the diverse and rich traditional Chinese culture and introduce the "moral code"(道德法则) hidden in the culture. In this way, people in the western world will have the sense of obligatory to practice the morality more correctly and when regarding Chinese issues, they can handle with morality rather than the spirit and attitude that generates in a civilization of violence in Europe [14]. But, it is hard for the target readers to accept and understand since there are many culture-loaded word in the translations. In general, the translations from Legge and Muller better realize the purpose and satisfy the target readers.

Now, the world has been more closer and developed better. To introduce the fine Chinese culture to the world, the translators need to grip the prospective purpose of the work and then to decide which strategies and methods should be adopted in the process of translating, considering the various readers horizon expectations in the different background so as to produce better translations of ancient classics and show great vitality in the torrent of world culture.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

Acknowledgments

References

[1] Jeremy, M. Introducing Translation Studies. Routledge. 2008.

[2] LEGGE J. The Chinese Classics. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960; pp. 1.

ITS

[3] MULLER C. The Great Learning [EB/OL].(2018-06-05)[2020-09-26]. Available online: http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/greatlearning.html (accessed on 25 April 2021).

[4] Peter, N. A Textbook of Translation. Prentice Hall. 1987.

[5] Fang, M.Z. Comparative Studies on the Two English Translations of the Book of Rites. *Journal of Wuyi University,* 2017, 36(05), 36-38.

[6] Fang, M.Z. Studies on English Translations of the Book of Rites Based on the Functional Equivalence Theory. *Journal of Shandong Agriculture and Engineering University,* 2017, 34(02), 183-184.

[7] Gu, H.G. Higher Education, The Universal Order or Conduct of Life. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2017.

[8] Hou, F.Y. An Analysis of the Thick Translation Strategy Adopted in the English Version of The Great Learning by James Legge from the Perspective of Hermeneutics. *Journal of Jiangnan University (Humanities & Social Science),* 2019, 18(02), 122-128.

[9] Li, H.X. A Brief Analysis of Skopos Theory. *Journal of Chongqing University of Science and Technology (Social Science),* 2009, 5, 145-146.

[10] Song Z.X. Studies on James Legge's Translation of the Book of Rites. Fujian Normal University, 2006.

[11] Song, Z.X. Studies on the Culture-loaded Words of the Chinese Classics from the Perspective of Skopos Theory. *Journal of Changsha University,* 2012, 26(01), 102-104.

[12] Xu, X. Studies on Translation Styles of the Great Learning Based on Text Mining. *East Journal of Translation,* 2020, 05, 36-40.

[13] Yang, C.C. The Application for Thick Translation in the English Versions of Great Learning of James Legge. Henan University, 2014.

[14] Yuan, X.L. Studies of Chinese English Translations of the Great Learning. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies,* 2015, 10, 43-45+79.

[15] Wang, X.M.; Yang, Zi. The Styles and Functions of Thick Translation in the English Versions of Classics. *Chinese Translators Journal,* 2012, 3, 103-108.

[16] Wang, J. Luo, L.J. An Analysis of Translation Strategies from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetic and Readers. *Journal of Xiangtan Normal University (Social Science Edition),* 2008.

[17] Wu, Y.Y.; Liu, J.P. Analysis of Dissemination on the English Versions of The Book of Rites Based on the Theory of Communication and Translation. *International Communications,* 2017.

[18] Zhu, X. Variorum of Four Books. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2016; pp. 286.