

An Overview of Studies on English Translations of *Huainanzi*: From 1990-2020

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Abstract:

Huainanzi is a philosophical and political masterpiece written by Liu An in the early Western Han Dynasty in China. Although it has been more than one century since *Huainanzi* was firstly introduced into English, studies on English translation of *Huainanzi* began thirty years ago. This article reviews 10 English papers and 8 Chinese ones from Google Scholar and CNKI. The researches abroad focus on paratexts and term translation while domestic on targeted text and paratexts. There are still some limitations, including inadequate translated versions, partial angles of translation and study, and simple research methods. The author suggests that further studies should be promoted by taking surveys of target readers, innovating research methods from interdisciplinary perspectives.

Keywords:

Huainanzi, English Translation, Overview

1. Introduction

In the early Western Han Dynasty, Liu An, king of Huainan, “recruited thousands of alchemists as guests to write *Neishu*, *Waishu* and *Zhongpian* with twenty one chapters, many sections and eight volumes respectively, narrating magic arts of burning elixir into gold and silver with over 200 thousand characters. [1]” *Waishu* and *Zhongpian* have been lost for many reasons, which is extremely pitiful. About the *Neishu*, its author says in the last chapter *The Essentials* “This is what the Taizu expresses in the *Honglie*.” People speculate that *Neishu* was called *Honglie* at that time. Hence, it was named *Huainanhonglie* which was also called the *Huainanzi* by the later generations. The *Huainanzi* is extensive and profound because it elaborates the principles of heaven and earth, kingcraft and matters of the world. Liang Qichao [2] ever said “*Huainanhonglie* gathers the vast and systematic concepts of the Way, belonging to the first rank in the writings of Han dynasty.” In addition, Hu Shi [3] said “The Way gathers the great achievements of ancient thoughts while *Huainan Wangshu* of the Way.” What’s more, the culture of Chu state greatly influence romantic *Huainanzi* which can compare favorably with *Lisao*. [4]

The research achievements of *Huainanzi* at home and abroad are fruitful while the English translation studies are rare. The papers(including dissertations) related to the

study of *Huainanzi* are up to 2000 in the CNKI but to the English translation studies are relatively scarce. This article plans to comprehensively review the English translation studies of *Huainanzi* at home and abroad to learn about the current situations, promote the systematic and deep development and help it become popular around the world.

2. English Versions of *Huainanzi*

Compared with other classics, especially Confucian works, *Huainanzi* is disseminated overseas with a long process. A few verse translations were published in the 1880s and more in the 1970s. What's more, most of them come from the research works of scholars. In 1884, Balfour translated the first chapter *Originating in the Way* in English. Later, Sailey, Morgan, Harper, Blanc, Major, Ames, Lau and etc also translated a part of *Huainanzi*. On this basis, three full translations were published in succession. The Major's team [5] spent 12 years in translating *Huainanzi* and published the full translation in 2010 which was listed in the "Translation from the Asian Classics" of Columbia University Press. In 2012, this essential version [6] of the full translation was published. In 2010, the *Huainanzi* [7] translated by Zhai Jiangyue and Mou Aipeng was published by Guangxi Normal University Press.

Table 1. Information of Huainanzi Translations.

Translations	Translator	Publication Time	Works
Originating in the Way	Balfour, Morgan, Ames and Lau	1884;1974;1998	Taoist Texts: Ethical, Political, and Speculative;Yuan Dao: Tracing Dao to Its Source; Tao, the Great Luminant: Essays from the Huai Nan Tzu.
Activating the Genuine	Morgan	1974	Tao, the Great Luminant: Essays from the Huai Nan Tzu.
Celestial Patterns	Chatley, Major	1939;1993	Ancient Chinese Astronomy; Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi.
Terrestrial Forms	Major	1993	Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi.
Seasonal Rules	Major	1993	Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi.
Surveying Obscurities	Blanc	1985	Huai-nan Tzu: Philosophical Syntheses in Early Han Thought: The Idea of Resonance (Kan-ying) with a Translation and Analysis of Chapter Six.
Quintessential Spirit	Morgan	1974	Tao, the Great Luminant: Essays from the Huai Nan Tzu.

The Basic Warp	Morgan	1974	Tao, the Great Luminant: Essays from the Huai Nan Tzu.
The Ruler's Techniques	Ames	1983	The Art of Rulership: A Study of Ancient Chinese Political Thought.
Profound Precepts	Harper	1978	<i>Huai-nan Tzu</i> Chapter 10: Translation and Prolegomena.
Integrating Customs	Wallacker	1962	The Huai-nan-tzu, Book Eleven: Behavior Culture and the Cosmos.
Responses of the Way	Morgan	1974	Tao, the Great Luminant: Essays from the Huai Nan Tzu.
Boundless Discourses	Morgan	1974	Tao, the Great Luminant: Essays from the Huai Nan Tzu.
Sayings Explained	No translation		
An Overview of the Military	Morgan, Ryden	1974;1998	Tao, the Great Luminant: Essays from the Huai Nan Tzu; Philosophy of Peace in Han China: A Study of the Huainanzi Ch. 15 on Military Strategy.
A Mountain of Persuasions	Sailey	1971	An Annotated Translation of <i>Huai Nan Tzu</i> Chapter XVI.
A Forest of Persuasions	Birdwhistell	1968	A Translation of Chapter 17 (Shuolin) of the <i>Huainanzi</i> .
Among Others	No translation		
Cultivating Effort	Morgan	1974	Tao, the Great Luminant: Essays from the Huai Nan Tzu.
The Exalted Lineage	No translation		
An Overview of the Essentials	No translation		
All chapters	Major	2010	The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China.
All chapters	Zhai Jiangyue and Mou Aipeng	2010	Huai Nan Zi.
All chapters	Major	2012	The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China.

Table 1 shows that twenty-one chapters are translated unevenly and the contents about philosophy, politics and military are more popular. Rank the verse translation according to its number: *Originating in the Way*(3)> *Celestial Patterns, An Overview of the Military*(2)> *Activating the Genuine, Terrestrial Forms, Seasonal Rules, Surveying Obscurities, Quintessential Spirit, The Basic Warp, The Ruler's Techniques, Profound Precept, Integrating Customs, Responses of the Way, Boundless Discourses, A Mountain of Persuasions, A Forest of Persuasions* (1)> *Sayings Explained, Among*

Others, The Exalted Lineage, An Overview of the Essentials(0). In addition, Major's full translation is better than Zhai's one in oversea publications, reception of readers and influence force. The differences between them lie in paratexts, structures of contents and etc.

The translations of *Huainanzi* go hand in hand with research. After the publication of Major's work *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four and Five of the Huainanzi* [8] and his full translation, many articles about English translation studies of *Huainanzi* emerge in large numbers at home and abroad.

3. Studies of *Huainanzi* Translation

The author used "*Huainanzi*" and "*Huainanzi* translation" as "theme", "keywords" and "titles" to search literatures before March of 2021 in CNKI and Google Scholar. What's more, the author deleted unrelated and other foreign languages' literatures and searched the citing literatures in the selected ones. Finally, 18 literatures are used in this article, including 10 English ones and 8 Chinese ones. The earliest English translation study of *Huainanzi* abroad started in 1994 but domestic researches increased sharply since 2015, which is related to the publication of full translations in 2010.

According to the data, the paratexts arouse common concern at home and abroad. Scholars abroad attach great importance to the translation strategies of terms while domestic to translation research, especially translation strategy studies.

3.1. The English Translation Studies of *Huainanzi* Abroad

3.1.1. The Studies for Paratexts

Some scholars explored the paratexts of Major's work *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four and Five of the Huainanzi*. Wallacker [9] thought that translators divided sections and added explanations according to logics, which was helpful for readers to understand the meaning of the original texts. Tessenow [10] pointed out that Major's explanations for translations were very valuable and praised that these explanations added materials for studying the philosophy of nature in early Han dynasty because Major not only illustrated the ideology but also systematically organized the contents. Field [11] thought the work made great contribution to explaining complicated cosmology in early China. What's more, he suggested important literatures about Huang-Lao thought should be added to the translation because the related literatures were helpful to understand the Huang-Lao thought. Lewis [12] believed tables and figures in Major's work could clearly explain the models of astronomy, geography and calendar at that time. In addition, his work also illustrated the origin of world, the nature of Yin and Yang and evolution of animals and plants.

What's more, some scholars analyzed the paratexts of Major's full translation. Sivin [13] and Wallacker [14] pointed out translators not only introduce the history of *Huainanzi* but also wrote the prefaces for every chapter, concluding the function of every chapter in the translation. They thought the full translation provided resources for the experts and advocated the action that translators explained the thoughts of the original text according to the historical background. Nylan [15] insisted the involved

references in the full translation could help scholars to study thoughts of Western Han dynasty. However, the full translation still needs improving because translators ignore the creation background of *Huainanzi*, which makes readers not understand the thoughts that are expressed in the original text. Sellmann [16] concluded the layout of Major's paperback and hardback editions and praised the logic arrangements of two full translations.

In a word, the studies of paratexts abroad mainly focus on Major's work *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four and Five of the Huainanzi* and his full translation and rarely pay attention to the verse and full translations of other scholars. The reason why Major's full translation is popular abroad is that it has reasonable designs of paratexts. Therefore, we should deeply compare paratexts of two full translations to learn about their differences and provide experience and methods for the successful translation of Chinese classics.

3.1.2. The Studies for Term Translation

Some scholars studied the term translation of Major's work and full translation. Roetz [17] thought that Major explained the difficult terms of cosmology and astronomy in detail, which was conducive to combining the contents with related knowledge. In addition, he pointed out inaccurate term translations that could be avoided easily, such as “阴阳相薄” should be translated into “yin and yang beat” rather than “gather”, and “雨露” into “rain and dew” rather than “dew”. What's more, Roberts [18] analyzed the historical background and the origin of thoughts and spoke highly of clear translation. However, he pointed out some inaccurate term translations such as, he doubted if “神明” should be translated into “spirit illumination” and that translating “齐俗” into “integrating customs” couldn't convey its deep meanings.

3.2. Domestic English Translation Studies of *Huainanzi*

3.2.1. Translation Studies

In translation studies, scholars analyzed the translation strategies of Major's full translation and compared different translations.

Some scholars analyzed the translation strategies of Major's full translation and discussed the right ways of translation. Ding Lifu [19] took the Major's full translation as the example of classics translation and concluded its translation methods, that is, “faithfulness” and “fluency”. What's more, he analyzed the characteristics of translation, that is, accurate, easy and native language. What's more, others analyzed the translation strategies of Major's full translation from different aspects. Yang Kai [20] thought that “thick translation” could help readers understand the original text better. “Thick translation” is a kind of important strategy for classics translation, which is conducive to embodying different cultures.

In addition, some scholars compared and studied the Major's work, full translation and Zhai's full translation. Meng Qingbo and Gao Xu [21] introduced the Major's work and full translation. They pointed out that Major's work focused on naturalism in early Han thought and he first translated the *Celestial Patterns, Terrestrial Forms* and *Seasonal Rules* in English that constituted the epitome of correlative thinking of early Han dynasty. What's more, they believed that the best characteristic of Major's full translation was that it kept the rhetoric of parallel prose and verse and represented

the writing structure of the original text. Besides, the brief notes before every chapter, the introduction and three appendices could help readers understand the contents and made scholars carry out researches easily. Ding Lifu [22, 23] compared the two full translations from the perspectives of publication and reception. He pointed out that sales quantities of Major's full translation were more than Zhai's one and it received more and better evaluation. He also introduced in detail the working process of parallel corpus of two full translations and pointed out that corpus could enhance the science of translation studies.

From all the research above, the studies of translation strategies focus on Major's full translation and rarely pay attention to Zhai's full translation and other verse translations. What's more, we should increase the comparison studies among different translations and deeply compare the Major's and Zhai's full translations.

3.2.2. The Paratexts Studies

The studies mainly compared paratexts of Major's paperback edition, hardback edition and Zhai's full translation. Ding Lifu [24] introduced the characteristics and differences of Major's paperback edition and hardback edition and concluded that there were five differences in structure and contents, that is, acknowledgement, introduction, main body, appendix and signature. The paperback edition has layouts of aesthetics of reception, which can help experts and scholars study deeply. However, the hardback edition is easy to buy and read for readers, which can speed up its dissemination in English world. In addition, Ding Lifu [25] compared Major's and Zhai's full translations and found out that the former had detailed paratexts but the latter only had introduction and notes. The classics translations need to learn from others to provide appropriate paratexts, constructing social and historical contexts and improving the effects of dissemination. As Bodde [26] said, the westerners know little about Chinese philosophy so using right paratexts is a good way to translate classics into English.

A small number of scholars studied the English translation of *Huainanzi* from the perspective of exegetics. Li Zhiqiang [27] evaluated and explored the characteristics of word translations in the *Huainanzi* in the way of semantic and form glosses. The article found that semantic gloss was necessary before translating the words so both exegetics and translation were needed in the process of classics translations. For cultural and difficult works, exegetics is a good way to illustrate them.

By reviewing the English translation studies of *Huainanzi* at home and abroad, the following three differences are found. Firstly, foreign scholars pay attention to the choice of materials. They usually take one chapter rather than the whole book as the research objects, combing other knowledge to study the core concepts. However, domestic scholars prefer studying the whole book and analyze the structure and contents. Secondly, foreign and domestic scholars attach great importance to paratexts studies. The translations with detailed annotations can resonate with readers, which is the main reason that Major's translation is popular abroad. Thirdly, foreign scholars prefer translation studies of terms but domestic scholars place emphasis on the studies of translation strategies.

4. The Problems and Suggestions for Translation Studies of *Huainanzi*

In conclusion, the translation studies of *Huainanzi* still need developing from different subjects and perspectives because of its importance in the world. It can be enhanced and improved in the following aspects.

4.1. Inadequate Translated Versions

The translation studies of *Huainanzi* focus on foreign verse translations and full translations and rarely pay attention to domestic full translation. The studies about the oversea reception of Zhai's translation are scarce and there aren't concrete problems and practical solutions. Therefore, we should learn about the differences of foreign and domestic translations to find the real reason that foreign translation is more popular, and come up with reasonable measures to make it famous in the world.

4.2. Partial Angles of Translation

The foreign translations and studies focus on philosophy, politics and military and pay little attention to other themes. Domestic academic researches are fruitful but the translation studies about concrete themes are lacking.

4.3. Simple Research Methods

The studies mostly use the way of qualitative analysis and the process are easy to be influenced by subjective factors. What's more, the research methods are simple and the objectivity and comprehensiveness of single text analysis need to be considered. Simple comparison analysis of translations and subjective single analysis should be avoided.

The English translation studies of *Huainanzi* can be explored in the following three aspects.

Firstly, to avoid the one-sidedness of translation choice, we should know about the interests of target readers by deep, long-time and comprehensive trace in the way of interview and questionnaire. On this basis, study the image of China in the translation of *Huainanzi* to objectively learn about the westerners' thoughts.

Secondly, to make the perspectives of studies and translations more comprehensive, develop interdisciplinary studies for other themes of *Huainanzi* translation, such as geography, history and technology, which can make the classics play a valuable role in many aspects.

Thirdly, to enrich the research methods, combine the translation studies of *Huainanzi* with corpus research to enhance its science. The development of corpus research provides objective and effective research methods and materials for translation studies, which is conducive to getting objective and testable conclusions. In addition, actively try applying the theories and methods of historiography to promote the studies of translation history, which can develop and enrich the perspectives and methods of studies.

5. Conclusions

The English translation studies of *Huainanzi* are useful to improve the quality of classics translation and promote the dissemination of Chinese traditional culture. Foreign and domestic scholars pay much attention to paratexts studies. The former prefer the studies of term translation strategies while the latter translation studies,

especially studies of translation strategies. Although the translation studies of *Huainanzi* make some achievements, there are still some limitations. Therefore, the author suggests that further studies should be promoted by taking surveys of target readers, innovating research methods from interdisciplinary perspectives, which can promote the development of classics translation and effective dissemination of traditional Chinese cultures.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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