

A Contrastive Study on the English Translation of Analects of Confucius from the Perspective of Lin Yutang's Translation Standard

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Abstract: The *Analects of Confucius* as the essence of Chinese traditional culture has a great influence on our country even on the whole world. Amid peaceful development, Confucius institutes serve as a remarkable platform in spreading Chinese traditional culture. Then a constructive study on the English translation of *Analects of Confucius* contributes to the promotion of Chinese culture. The paper compares and analyzes three English versions from the perspective of Lin Yutang's Translation Standard, based on which some suggestions will be put forth as a way to promote the translation and achieve far-reaching effects on the world.

1. Introduction to Lin Yutang and His Philosophy on Translation

Lin Yutang, the researcher of great insight in translation and the pioneer of Chinese culture dissemination, has notably injected new vitality to the translation of Chinese classics, providing a significant platform for cultural exchange. He once said that the hinder in translation can be technically fell onto three regards, the standard for faithfulness, expressiveness, and then the aesthetics, which appeals to the three difficulties in translation raised by Yan Fu, presented Lin Yutang in his book *On Translation*.

As for the faithfulness standard, Lin Yutang advocates that word-to-word translation shouldn't happen, but in favor of being faithful to the original charm and connotations.

As for the expressiveness standard, Lin suggests that the translation should be organized by the grammar and logic of target language, which is considered as the responsibility for readers.

As for the aesthetic standard, Lin says the original style should be exhibited in light of its contents. The aesthetic elements remained in the original text shall be delivered by translation in order to reach the integration of connotations and style, which means the translator should transfer the aesthetic value inside.

2. A Contrastive Study on the English Translation of *Analects of Confucius* under Lin Yutang's Translation Standard

At present, *Analects of Confucius* remains significant for solving social problems. As China's overall economy strengthens, the translation of *Analects of Confucius* plays a significant role in

spreading Chinese culture. However, there are many translation versions with uneven qualities. Under such circumstances, it's really necessary to evaluate and analyze the different versions so as to proactively disseminating traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, it's of great importance to conduct a contrastive study on the English translation of *Analects of Confucius* under Lin Yutang's Translation Standard as it seeks to spread the essence of our culture and promote the national image.

2.1. On faithfulness standard

Lin Yutang believes that the translator should give priority to faithfulness. Word-to-word translation isn't permitted. The Chinese character “仁” is the core ideology with the most frequency in the *Analects*. Based on the Chapter Yan Yuan, Fan Chi asked about “仁”, and Confucius answered with “爱人” which means being kind or benevolent.

“孝弟也者，其为仁之本也。”

James Legge: Filial piety and fraternal submission! —are they not the root of all benevolent actions?

Waley: Surely proper behavior towards parents and elder brothers is the truck of Goodness.

Gu Hongming: Now, to be a good son and a good citizen—do not these form the foundation of a moral life?

Based on three versions, the translations of “仁” can be presented as follows:

Table 1: Three versions, the translations of “仁”

Translator	“仁”
James Legge	Benevolent actions
Waley	Goodness
Gu Hongming	Moral life

It's obvious that James Legge and Waley translate “仁” into benevolent actions and goodness. And based on the original text, both can be regarded as word-to-word translation. But the truth is that benevolence and goodness are just a part of “仁”, which indicates that the translation shall convey the essence other than the literal meaning, in another words, it shall be sublimed into the moral aspect where morality is of great importance in Confucianism. Therefore it's evident that moral life translated by Gu Hongming is a better way to deliver the essence of “仁”.

As for “孝弟”, there are three versions of translation as follows:

Table 2: “孝弟”, there are three versions of translation

Translator	“孝弟”
James Legge	Filial piety and fraternal submission
Waley	Surely proper behavior towards parents and elder brothers
Gu Hongming	Now, to be a good son and a good citizen

“孝” is commonly regarded as the children's correct attitude towards their parents in the slave society. And “弟” pronounces the same as “悌”, which demonstrates the correct attitude towards brothers. “孝” and “悌” are advocated as two basic moral standards. Then it's apparent that the translation “a good citizen” fail to fully convey the original meaning. Meanwhile, what Gu Hongming interpreted makes it hard for the target readers to correctly or fully comprehend the original text.

James Legge's takes the Chinese character “弟” as “fraternal submission”, however, the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* depicts “submission” as the situation of unwilling compliance or

compromise, and in *Wikipedia English Dictionary* as the conduct of surrendering; especially refers to the power or authority..

Waley translates it into proper behavior towards elder brothers, which means treating brothers with politeness. As we can tell this is close to the original meaning and best suits the faithfulness standard proposed by Lin Yutang.

Therefore, based on the faithfulness standard, the best translation of “孝弟也者，其为仁之本也” can be “surely proper behavior towards parents and elder brothers is the foundation of moral life.”

2.2. On expressiveness standard

Table 3: Lin Yutang recommends that the translation should be in accordance with the code of target language.

Translator	“克己复礼为仁。”
James Legge	To subdue one’s self and return to propriety is perfect virtue.
Waley	He who can submit himself to ritual is Good.
Gu Hongming	Renounce yourself and conform to the ideal of decency and good sense.

Based on the three translation versions, it’s obvious that the translators have their own acknowledgement on the original meaning.

It’s presented in *Si Shu Ji Zhu* (Four Books compiled by Zhu Xi) that “仁者，本心之全德。克，胜也。己，谓身之私欲也，” which means a person should restrain his selfish desire. Influenced by Zhu Xi, James Legge translates the “克己” into “subdue one’s self”. As we can discern that James Legge does not translate the whole meaning presented in the original, which demonstrates that he fails to meet the faithfulness standard. And in his translation, “复礼” is “returning to propriety”, that’s sort of word-to-word translation due to his not understanding the connotations. And the readers tend to be confused by what’s returning to propriety which will not be accepted. Meanwhile, there is a logic between “克己” and “复礼”, a person is expected to “复礼” by “克己”, and that means “克己” serves as a way to achieve “复礼”, however, the translators ignore its logical aspect and fail to satisfy the expressiveness standard.

With regard to Waley’s translation, “克己复礼” is briefly translated into “He who can submit himself to ritual”, the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* specifies “submit” as “yield to the control of another”, *Wikipedia English Dictionary* indicates “submit” is “subject oneself to a process or condition”, which is close to the meaning of surrender and giving up, apparently it’s beyond the original context. And then this translation fails to uncover the logic structure hidden in the original text either, it’s far from expressiveness.

As for Gu Hongming’s translation, “Renounce” means “give up, such as power, duties and obligations” that betrays the original meaning. And his interpretation of “复礼” is much longer at length than the original text, so it needs to be improved. What’s more, the translation not conveying the logical relationship inside fail to follow the expressiveness standard.

James Legge and Waley translate “仁” into “perfect virtue” and “good” respectively, however, “perfect virtue” is more specific and closer to the original implications while “good” is a extensive word for readers to grasp. However the Chinese word “仁” is completely ignored by Gu Hongming, which apparently breaches the faithfulness at first.

In conclusion, the above-mentioned translations need to be improved. Another better translation can be suggested as “to observe propriety by self-restraint is perfect virtue,” in which the writer use the preposition “by” to imply the logic inside as a way to meet the expressiveness standard.

2.3. On aesthetic standard

Table 4: Lin Yutang claims that core of aesthetic standard bears responsibility for art. And also the original style shall be in accordance with its contents, reaching an integration between connotations and form.

Translator	“如切如磋， 如琢如磨”
James Legge	“As you cut a piece of ivory and then file it, as you carve a piece of jade and then polish it.”
Waley	“As firing cut,as thing filed. As thing chiselled, as thing polished.”
Gu Hongming	“We must cut,we must file” “Must chisel and must grind.”

The original text full of aesthetic perception applies parallelism with each part featuring four characters, which makes it easy to pronounce. Based on the translation, James Legge’s version seems redundant and lengthy, lacking the aesthetic sense to some extent. Instead, Gu Hongming and Waley handle it in a concise manner. In the original text, four Chinese characters “如” is equivalent to “as” in English, which conveys the metaphor of the original text that a person can only reach excellence by going through trails and tribulations. The Chinese character “切” is equivalent to “cut” while the character “磋” is as same as “file” or “polish” in western culture. Meanwhile, the definition of “琢” can be identified as “carve”, “chisel” or “grind”. So it’s plain that Waley’s translation is closet to the original meaning, style and aesthetics, which fully projects the charm and beauty of the original.

3. Conclusion

James Legge, Waley and Gu Hongming’s translation has made the *Analects of Confucius* popular across the world. Unfortunately, there are also plenty of mistakes remained, such as casual translation, omission and adaption. The author tries to correct some mistakes and modify the related translation. The above-mentioned examples embodies the common and serious problems in the translation of *Analects of Confucius*, which is tailored to evoke all the translators’ professional quality and provides a feasible formula to analyze the translation of *Analects of Confucius*. The writer studies three different English translations of *Analects of Confucius* from the perspective of Lin Yutang’s Translation Standard, serving as the translation quality supervisor and also the contributor to the translation cause, expects to drive the popularization of ancient Chinese culture.

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