

## **A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRANSLATIONS OF CULTURALLY SPECIFIC WORDS FROM THE ANALECTS USING CHESTERMAN'S TRANSLATION ETHICS**

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DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2023.v08i07.018 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2023.v08i07.018>

Received: 3 July 2023 / Accepted: 20 July 2023 / Published: 28 July 2023

### **ABSTRACT**

*The Analects*, one of the masterpieces of ancient Chinese philosophy, consists of twenty chapters, recording the words of Confucius and his students. As an important part of ancient Chinese philosophy, the foreign translation of *the Analects* has been of positive significance to the dissemination of China's excellent traditional culture. So far, there have been several English translations of *the Analects* and this study focuses on the translations of the famous English sinologist James Legge and the well-known Chinese master Ku Hung-ming. Under the guidance of Chesterman's translation ethics, a detailed comparison is made on the translation of their culturally specific words. Although James Legge translated *the Analects* for missionary purposes, culturally specific words were mostly adopted by literal translation and his translation rarely contained religious words in the interests of fairness, which also tended to follow Chesterman's ethics of representation. Instead, Ku Hung-ming's translation was to enhance Westerners' understanding of Chinese civilization, so he mostly used domestication and tended to follow ethics of service and communication. Therefore, we can make use of translation ethics to analyze the translation strategies of culturally specific words in order to effectively promote the international dissemination of English translations of traditional Chinese texts.

**Keywords:** Chinese civilization, The Analects, Translation ethics

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1. Research Background and Purposes**

The Analects was written in the early Warring States period, recording the words and actions of Confucius and his students, and later became the supreme classic of the Confucian school. Although the entire text consists of just 20 chapters, its simple text and profound content had a

huge impact on ancient Chinese thought and culture. At the same time, it provided important guidance for future generations in the areas of state administration, education and learning. Its profound and lasting influence stems from the long history of Confucianism, which has been beneficial in politics, history, economics, education, culture and many aspects of our daily lives. *The Analects* has thus been gradually spread to the Western world as a classic Chinese philosophical work through the hands of translators at home and abroad. This study also compares the two English translations of *the Analects* by Ku Hung-ming and James Legge in order to enhance the overseas dissemination of Chinese classics.

The research has two main purposes. Firstly, using Chesterman's translation ethics as a guide, this study focuses on the differences in culturally specific words in the English translations of *the Analects*; to a certain extent, it can contribute to the in-depth study of translation theory and thus better provide academic references for the English translations of classic Chinese works. Secondly, this paper hopes that through a more systematic study of the translators' use of culturally specific words in the translations of Chinese classics, the excellent Chinese traditional culture can thus be presented to Western readers.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

This study primarily answers two questions:

**Q1:** How can the model of translation ethics followed by translators be reflected in culturally specific words?

**Q2:** How does the model of translation ethics followed by translators contribute to the dissemination of Chinese classics abroad?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Current Status of Overseas Research**

The study of translation ethics in Western translation studies began in the 1980s. The famous French translator Berman first proposed the concept of "translation ethics" in 1984 so as to oppose the idea of translation dominated by "meaning conveyance", and his ideology advocated respect for the original work, especially language and cultural differences (Wang, 2005). This "ethnocentric translation" and "hypertextual translation" is a denial of the exotic character of the original translation, contrary to his own understanding of the nature of translation. In short, Berman's translation ethics is the realization of the exotic character of the original one in the target language text. His formulation and construction of translation theory has had a profound

impact on Western translation studies, and many domestic and foreign scholars have absorbed and applied this theory in their own research fields.

Berman's reflections on translation ethics have also prompted the well-known American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti to think deeply about the nature of translation. He argued that translation itself was subject to both political and cultural aspects, and that "Any language use is thus a site of power relationships"(Venuti, 1998:10). Therefore, with this in mind, Venuti called for the use of foreignization to reflect the language and culture from texts in order to counter the cultural hegemony of developed capitalist countries. However, the well-known translator Anthony Pym expressed his disagreement with Berman's advocacy of the translation ethics. Instead, Pym proposed an "ethics of the translator" with "interculturality" as the starting point and his ethical approach to translation has also reflected the significance of translators' intercultural identity during the process of translation

The established Finnish scholar Chesterman, who is expertise in translation ethics, has advanced five major ethical models based on his previous research, namely: ethics of representation, ethics of service, ethics of communication, norm-based ethics and ethics of commitment. Unlike several other scholars, Chesterman's theoretical model focuses not only on the micro-relationships between texts, but also on the macro-level of ethics between people which has lifted translation ethics to a new level and expanded the horizons of the theory.

### **2.1. Current status of domestic research**

Many Chinese translation strategies have in fact embodied the idea of translation ethics to a greater or lesser extent, such as Yan Fu's "Faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" and Xuan Zang's principle of "Five Categories of Untranslated Terms". However, the systematic study of translation ethics in China has started relatively late and has been more inspired by the Western translation community, but there is no lack of scholars in the domestic translation community who have unique insights into this field. In *On the Three Dimensions of Translation Activities*, Xu Jun(1998) proposed that translation activities need to consider three dimensions, namely: will, reality and ethics. Although Xu Jun did not mention the term "translation ethics" directly, his research is in fact very relevant to ethical issues. Scholars such as Shen Yingli, Tong Yahui and Liu Yameng (2005) have also brought translation ethics of the Western translation community into China and called for the return of the focus on translation studies to the translation activity itself through translation ethics. Liu Yunhong (2013), on the other hand, explored the ethical approach to translation criticism research based on an exploration of the translation ethics claims of Berman, Venuti and Pym.

### **3. Chesterman's Models of Translation Ethics**

### **3.1. Ethics of Representation**

“An ‘ethics of representation’ emphasizes the values of ‘fidelity’ and ‘truth’, that is, a translator is considered to act ethically if s/he represents the source text, the source writer’s intention, or the source culture faithfully; without any addition or deletion”(Chesterman, 2001).The ethics of representation gives expression to the theory of “fidelity” in translation standards, but in practice, owing to the interference of different factors in the external world, it is often complicated for translators to translate with complete fidelity to the original text, so the translation can only be as close as possible to the original work, rather than completely “representing” it.

### **3.2. Ethics of Service**

It is primarily aimed at business-oriented translations, with an emphasis on translators being accountable to their clients and providing them with a high quality service. In order to satisfy the clients, the translator should adopt a translation strategy which is suitable for the purpose of the translation and target audience. The ethics of service emphasizes, as its name suggests, the relationship between users and translators. Translators are then freed from the constraints of the original text and its author and is given full initiative, so that he or she can create the translation from the viewpoint of the users(including readers, employers, etc.) and always keep in mind the duty and purpose.

### **3.3. Ethics of Communication**

Chesterman argued that ethics stress the importance of the communicative function of language as opposed to the description of the culture of the other. That is, it emphasizes interpersonal relationships instead of connections between texts. In this regard, he cited Pym’s opinion to further illustrate that the aim of intercultural communication is to bring mutual benefit to both parties through cooperation. Translation is the exchange of two languages and the collision of two cultures. Therefore, the translation or translator, must not only represent the content of the original one and authors’ intentions, but also serve the users of the target text so as to reflect the dialogue between the two languages and cultures, thus fulfilling the task of transmitting information across languages, cultures and societies.

### **3.4. Norm-based Ethics**

Norms in norm-based ethics can be divided into expectancy norms and professional norms. Expectancy norms refer to the fact that the process of translation should be in line with the expectations of the audience from target-language countries. While professional normsemphasize the norms of behaviour to be observed by professional translators in their translation activities. As translators, they should make great efforts to conform to the norms. In norm-based ethics, the

meaning of “norms” varies slightly from culture to culture, meaning that the definition of a good translation is different among various types of culture, but is not inherently right or wrong.

### **3.5. Ethics of Commitment**

Based on these mentioned ethics, the linguistics Chesterman then put forward an “ethics of commitment”. It means that translators, like doctors and lawyers, are expected to fulfil the norms and oaths of professional ethics. As a profession, translators have a code of ethics for the translation industry so they should abide by professional ethics and be responsible for the translation. The ethics of commitment embodies the professionalism of the translator and is an internalization and enhancement of professional standards, regulatory requirements and professional ethics. Furthermore, it is a transcendence of traditional translation ethics which also bridges the gaps.

## **4. Analysis of the Two English Translations of the Analects under Chesterman's Translation Ethics**

*The Analects* has had a very profound influence on ancient Chinese people's lives. In recent years, China has established Confucius Institutes in many overseas countries, and has successfully spread Confucianism abroad through English translations of *the Analects*. This chapter therefore uses the English translations by the great master Ku Hung-ming and the sinologist James Legge as examples to explore the embodiment of Chesterman's translation ethics and its role in the overseas dissemination of Chinese texts in English translations.

### **4.1. The Definition and Classification of Culturally Specific Words**

The culturally specific word is a term that reflects the unique culture of a country or cultural community. As each culture has a unique geographical location, historical background, religious belief, and social institution, people living in different countries have developed various cultural traditions and their languages and ways of thinking are unique in many ways. Cultural gaps can occur in any language with culturally specific words, meaning that the cultural information contained in the words of the original language does not have a counterpart in the language of the target text, so a study of culturally specific words is necessary. There are many definitions of culturally specific words in translation, but this study mainly adopts Yao Ximing's (2010) definition, which is “words that can reflect a specific cultural phenomenon, give expression to an exact cultural understanding, or reflect a distinct way of life”. And the classification of culturally specific words can be done at the linguistic level, i.e. by exploring the semantics of the cultural context of words, or at the cultural level, i.e. by considering the culturally specific word as an additional product of culture. This study focuses on the latter and adopts the four classifications

of culturally specific words (physical, institutional, behavioural and mental cultural words) as proposed by Zhang Gaoxiang (2003) in his “four levels of cultural structure”.

## **4.2. A Study of Two English Translations of Culturally Specific Words under Chesterman’s Translation Ethics**

### **4.2.1 Specific Words of Physical Culture**

The specific words of physical culture refer to the various tools formed by human beings for the natural creation of the objective world, which can be divided into architecture, food, utensils, clothing and geography, as natural phenomena and objects can still be counted as objects of human transformation.

Example 1:

子曰：“凤鸟不至，河不出图，吾已矣夫！”《论语子罕第九》

Ku’s translation: Confucius was once heard to exclaim, “Ah, woe is me. I do not see any signs either in heaven or on earth that we are near the end of the present period of disorder and anarchy and that we are about to inaugurate a new order of things in the world.”

Legge’s translation : For want of auspicious omens, Confucius gives up the hope of the triumph of his doctrines. The Master said, “The Fang bird does not come; the river sends forth no map:-- it is all over with me!”

“凤鸟, was regarded in ancient times as a symbol of good fortune, while“河图”foreshadowed a bright ruler. Although Ku’s translation does not directly use the “phoenix” or the “river map”, it surely expresses the true intent of the original text by means of foreignization, reflecting Chesterman’s ethic of ‘faithful’ reproduction of the original text. This also reflects Chesterman’s ethics of representation of the original text. In contrast, the translation by Legge expresses the “phoenix” and the “river map” phonetically, but without specifying the true intent of the original text.

Example 2:

子曰：“天下之无道也久矣，天将以夫子为木铎。”《论语》八佾第二十四

Ku's translation: The world has long been without the order and justice of good government; now God is going to make use of your Teacher as a tocsin to awaken the world.

Legge's translation: The kingdom has long been without the principles of truth and right; Heaven is going to use your master as a bell with its wooden tongue.

The original meaning of "木铎" refers to a large bronze bell with a tongue made of wood, which was originated in the Xia and Shang dynasties, and was rung by the emperor in ancient times to summon the people to proclaim and promulgate the government. While in the original text, "木铎" refers to the heaven to use Confucius to teach the people. Although Ku's translation weakens the specific imagery of the word, it is more friendly to the target group and reflects ethics of service advocated by Chesterman than Legge's translation, which focuses only on figurative translation without adding the real meaning of "木铎".

#### **4.2.2. Specific Words of Institutional Culture**

This term features a series of codes of conduct and norms established by human beings in the course of social practice, which can be divided into specific words of political and legal system, economic system, and socio-cultural system.

Example 3:

颜渊问为邦。子曰：“行夏之时，乘殷之辂，服周之冕，乐则韶舞。”《论语》卫灵公篇第十

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Ku's translation: A disciple of Confucius enquired what institutions he would adopt for the government of an Empire. Confucius answered, "I would use the calendar of the Hsia dynasty; introduce the form of carriage used in the Yin dynasty; and adopt the uniform of the present dynasty. For State music I would use the most ancient music.

Legge's translation: Certain rules, exemplified in the ancient dynasties, to be followed in governing:--a reply to Yen Yuan. Yen Yuan asked how the government of a country should be administered. The Master said, "Follow the seasons of Hsia. Ride in the state carriage of Yin. Wear the ceremonial cap of Chau. Let the music be the Shao with its pantomimes."

The word "时" in the original text does not refer to time, but to the calendar. The word "calendar" used in Ku's translation can also mean "Chinese calendar" which is a method of calculating time based on sky. While the word "season" in the Chinese translation can be interpreted as

“时令”or“季节”, without the meaning of “calendar”. The Ku’s translation is therefore more “faithful” to the original text and follows ethics of representation.

#### **4.2.3 Specific Words of Behavioral Culture**

Specific words of behavioral culture are words that reflect agreed customs and practices, such as rituals, customs and festivals.

Example 4: 子曰：“谛自既灌而注者，吾不欲观之矣。”《论语》八佾第十

Ku’s translation: Confucius remarked, “At the service of the great Ti sacrifice(the ‘Mass’ in ancient China), I always make it a point to leave as soon as the pouring of the libation on the ground is over.”

Legge’s translation: The sage’s dissatisfaction at the want of propriety in ceremonies. The Master said, “At the great sacrifice, after the pouring out of libation, I have no wish to look on.”

“谛礼 is a solemn ceremony for the ancient Chinese emperors to worship their ancestors, which Ku translates phonetically and then adds the word “The Mass” to enhance the understanding of the target audience. This is a way of reflecting ethics of service proposed by Chesterman, but “The Mass” emphasizes the religious ritual of commemorating the sacrifice of Jesus, which is not yet identical to 谛礼”. Therefore, Legge’s translations’ pre-sentence addition better reflects the true intent of the original one and is more consistent with ethics of representation.

Example 5:

子曰：“自行束脩以上，吾未尝无诲焉。”《论语》述而篇第七

Ku’s translation: 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.”

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

The word“束脩”means a bundle of dried meat and is one of the cheapest greeting gifts in ancient times. Ku’s translation adopts free translation to help readers better understand the original work and to highlight the role of ethics of communication. The Legge’s translation chooses literal



translation by delivering the information of the original work, which can be considered as ethics of representation. However, both translations are slightly inadequate. A literal translation of the word “束脩” followed by a meaningful addition would show the true intention of the original text and facilitate the readers’ understanding, i.e. following both the ethics of representation and communication.

#### **4.2.4. Specific Words of Mental Culture**

Specific words of mental cultural refer to words that can reflect people’s values, aesthetic interests, ways of thinking, religious feelings, national characters, etc. They belong to the category of social psychology and ideology, and are the core part of culture. (Zhang Gaoxiang, 2003)

Example 6:

“弟子入则孝，出则弟，谨而信，泛爱众，而亲仁，行有余力，则以学文。”《论语》学而篇第六

Ku’s translation: Confucius remarked, “A young man, when at home, should be a good son; when out in the world, a good citizen. He should be circumspect and truthful. He should be in sympathy with all men, but intimate with men of moral character. If he has time and opportunity to spare, after the performance of those duties, he should then employ them in literary pursuits.

Legge’s translation: Rules for the training of the young:—duty first and then accomplishments. The Master said, “A youth, when at home, should be filial, and abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies.”

The word“孝”means “filial obedience to one’s parents”, while the word“弟”means “love and respect brothers and sisters”. The translation of “a good son, a good citizen” is quite simple and helps Western readers better understand the traditional Chinese virtues, following Chesterman’s ethics of communication. However, his understanding of the word“悌”is biased and therefore unfair compared to the “filial, respectful to his elders” in Legge’s translation, which better shows the true intention of the original text and thus follows ethics of representation.

Example 7:

有子曰：“信近于义，言可复也；恭近于礼，远耻辱也；因不失其亲，亦可宗也。”《论语》  
学而篇第十三

Ku's translation: A disciple of Confucius remarked, "If you make promises within the bounds of what is right, you will be able to keep your word. If you confine earnestness within the bounds of judgment and good taste, you will keep out of discomfiture and insult. If you make friends of those with whom you ought to, you will be able to depend upon them."

Legge's translation: To save from future repentance, we must be careful in our first steps. The philosopher Yu said, "When agreements are made according to what is right, what is spoken can be made good. When respect is shown according to what is proper, one keeps far from shame and disgrace. When the parties upon whom a man leans are proper persons to be intimate with, he can make them his guides and masters.

"义" is a Confucian ethical category, while the standard for "恭" is the "Rites of Zhou". "Rites" and "义" run through the entire *Analects*. Because of cultural differences, it is difficult to identify a certain translation in another language, both Legge and Ku do not adopt literal translation, but rather convey the information of the original work to the target audience through interpretation, demonstrating Chesterman's ethics of service and communication.

## **5. Conclusion**

### **5.1 Key Findings**

This paper examines the two English translations of *the Analects* from the viewpoint of Chesterman's translation ethics. On the basis of the comparative study of two English translations, the main findings of this paper are shown below:

Firstly, the two translations demonstrate different norms of Chesterman's translation ethics that the translators follow through their different translation strategies for culturally specific words. As a missionary, Legge James translated *the Analects* in the service of a flexible missionary strategy. In order to ensure the fairness of the translation, his translation of culturally specific words mostly adopt literal translation and tend to follow Chesterman's ethics of representation. On the other hand, Ku's translation of *the Analects* is intended to remove Westerners' prejudice against Chinese people and Chinese civilization and to improve relationship between Chinese and Western people.

Secondly, translators of both versions have tried to adhere to the norms of expectation and professionalism of their times during the translation process. However, many factors influence translation, such as economic or ideological factors and the translators' own expectations, and as translation norms are not set in stone or permanent, different translators adopt various strategies according to the translation norms of their own time. In order to maximize the target readers' understanding of the original text, Ku mainly adopted a strategy that comply with the expectations of the reader and the norms of the target language, while Legge's translation strove more to be fair and to present the maximum possible results of scholars in Qing Dynasty of *the Analects* in the same period.

Finally, the bestselling overseas translations of these two English translations of *the Analects* can also serve as a guidance to the overseas dissemination of Chinese texts. In an era of increasingly frequent international exchanges, translators should pay more attention to following Chesterman's translation ethics in the process of translation in order to achieve effective promotion of the international dissemination of English translations of Chinese texts.

## **5.2 Limitations**

Due to the limited materials available, this study has the following shortcomings. The main problem is that the current sample size is insufficient and there are few statements about the translators' background. Should there be further research, the author will continue to gather sufficient information on the background of translators and all parties involved during the translation process to allow for a fuller study of Chesterman's translation ethics in the English translation of *the Analects*. So the reception of its two versions in overseas markets can then be studied to further explore the extent of the differences.

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