

# The Influence of the Translator's Cultural Identity on Translation: The Case of Gu Hongming's English Translation of *The Analects of Confucius*

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**Abstract**—Gu Hongming was the first Chinese to independently and completely translate and introduce the Confucian scriptures to the West, and his English translation of *The Analects of Confucius* is one of his masterpieces. His values and approach to the translation of *The Analects of Confucius* were unique and closely related to his own mixed cultural identity. Taking Gu Hongming's English translation of *The Analects of Confucius* as an example, it is important to explore the influence of the translator's cultural identity on the translation.

**Index Terms**—Gu Hongming, *The Analects of Confucius*, cultural identity

## I. INTRODUCTION

Gu Hongming, the eccentric and ardent scholar of the late Qing Dynasty, was a master of culture who spared no effort to spread Chinese culture to the West. His translations of *The Analects of Confucius* [1] have received a great social response in the West, and his work occupies an important place in the historical process of translating the Confucian scriptures into Western languages. While Gu was deeply influenced by Western culture from an early age, his Chinese identity, which was rooted in the traditional Confucian ideology of the Chinese “religion of the good people”, had a direct impact on his thinking and behaviour in translation [2]. Thus, Gu's translation of *The Analects of Confucius* is a collision and fusion of two cultures, and has been described as “a book that directly reflects Gu's unique thinking and uses the Confucian classics as a vehicle” [3]. Based on this, this article intends to analyse Gu's translation from the perspective of cultural identity and explore the relationship between the act of translation and cultural identity.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. The Current Situation of the Study of *The Analects of Confucius*

#### 1) The origin of *The Analects of Confucius*

*The Confucian Dictionary* edited by Zhang [4] and *The Introduction to the Analects* by Cai [5] provide informative discussions on the naming, origin, changes and transmission of *The Analects of Confucius* respectively.

#### 2) The annotated version of *The Analects of Confucius*

There are numerous editions of the *Analects* that have been

annotated by scholars, and some researchers began to examine them at the beginning of the last century. Some have studied the Han dynasty commentaries, such as and others from the Six Dynasties. The study of the commentaries of the Song dynasty includes Pei Chuanyong's *Zhu Xi's Commentary on The Analects of Confucius* [6] and others; the study of the commentaries of the Qing dynasty includes Tang Minggui [7] and others.

#### 3) The historical influence of *The Analects of Confucius* and the value of the times

Many scholars have studied its historical influence and modern value. The study of its historical influence includes Wang Limin's *The Influence of The Analects of Confucius on the Tang Laws* [8]; the study of its modern value includes Shi Hexing's *The Source of the Chinese Way of Preaching: A Modern Interpretation of the Political Management Ideas in the Analects* [9] etc .

### B. An Overview of the Study of the English Translation of *The Analects of Confucius*

The study of the English translation of *The Analects of Confucius* has a long history, but domestic research began mainly in the 1990s, and the distribution of disciplines is mainly focused on translation studies, while other philosophical and historical fields have also been discussed sporadically. The classification by research object can be divided into the following three categories:

The first category focuses on translation studies, which include single-translation studies and comparative studies of multiple translations, for example, Mei [10] provides a detailed introduction to the first translation of *The Analects of Confucius* in the west; Zhang and Liu [11] analyse the translation of Liu Dianjue's version of *The Analects of Confucius*; and Qin and Kong *et al.* [12] conducted multidimensional data analysis on the acceptance of multiple versions of *The Analects of Confucius*; Zhu [13] analyzes the English translation of Roger T. Ames' [14] translation version *The Analects of Confucius*, and attempts to summarize the classics and documents referenced by Western sinologists. Some other scholars have studied the translation of *The Analects of Confucius* over time, for example, Wang [15] discusses the origins of the English translation of *The Analects of Confucius* and examines the history of its translation; Li *et al.* [16] provide a systematic and objective analysis and summary of the results of research on the English translation of *The Analects of Confucius* in China and abroad, and suggest areas for expansion in their research.

The second category focuses on translators' studies, such as Yang [17], who studied the choice of translators' subjectivity in the English translation of *The Analects of*

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*Confucius*, and Lv and Chen [18], who compared the translation styles of Gu Hongming's and Arthur Wiley's English translations.

The last category is a study of translations that address specific words or expressions in the *Analects*, such as Jiang [19] and Han *et al.* [20].

### *C. Studies on the English translation of Gu Hongming's edition of The Analects of Confucius*

The first one is the comparative study of the translations, in which Wang [21] compare and contrast James Legge's [22] edition and Gu Hongming's edition of *The Analects of Confucius* in terms of their backgrounds, translation characteristics and other aspects; Zang and Wang [23] take Gu Hongming's and James Legge's English translations as a reference model, explore the dilemmas and propose the advantages of different translation strategies, and propose a more accurate translation of *The Analects of Confucius*; the second is the study of translation strategies, Liu [24] shows that Gu's translation is based on naturalisation; thirdly, the study of the culturally loaded words in Gu's English translation of *The Analects of Confucius*, Li [25] examines the different translation strategies adopted by the two translations in terms of the core words and the culturally distinctive words “仁”, “礼” to explore the role of effective strategies in promoting the dissemination of Chinese culture. Yang [26] studied the names of disciples and ancient famous scholars in *The Analects of Confucius*, and Hou and Lu [27] studied the cultural load words from the perspective of cultural vacancy, which has important implications for the foreign translation of the canonical text.

## III. THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE TRANSLATOR

“Cultural identity is the self-image of an individual, a collective, and a nation as perceived in comparison with others, other groups, and other peoples; at the core of cultural identity are values or value systems” [28]. And the translator's cultural identity is a multidimensional and complex concept, and the dialectical relationship between the individual and society is created through the construction of cultural identity [29]. Political, economic, religious, ideological and other complex factors influence the translator's cultural identity and directly affect the translator's translation purpose, translation strategies and methods. Therefore, cultural identity provides a new perspective for the study of translators, which is conducive to deepening our understanding of the translator's choice of translated texts, the use of translation strategies, and translation intentions.

## IV. INTERPRETING THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF TRANSLATOR GU

### *A. Educational Background*

Born in the South Seas at the end of the Qing dynasty, the scholar and translator Gu Hongming was fluent in several languages from an early age and studied in Europe at the age of 14. In 1877, after receiving a master's degree in literature, Gu Hongming went to famous universities such as the

University of Leipzig in Germany to study science and philosophy. He was the first person in China to be proficient in Western science, languages and Oriental Chinese studies during the Manchu era, and was known as the “eccentric of the late Qing Dynasty”. His knowledge and language skills provided a solid foundation for his translations of ancient Chinese texts.

### *B. Ideology*

Gu always believed that the “religion of the good people” formed the cornerstone of Chinese culture, and that only by remaining faithful to traditional culture and the monarchy could Chinese civilisation be sustained and social stability maintained. During his Western education, Gu was influenced by the emergence in Europe of a critical capitalist mindset, the birth of anti-modernist thinkers such as Herder, and the admiration of Chinese culture by his mentor Carlyle, who believed that traditional Chinese culture was the cure for Western problems. There are two reasons for translating *The Analects of Confucius*: First, he is dissatisfied with the translation of *The Analects of Confucius* by his predecessors. He believes that the previous version distorts the original meaning of Confucian culture, spoils Chinese culture, and leads to Western prejudice against China; Second, based on this dissatisfaction, he wants to retranslate and spread the true Chinese culture to the West, hoping to change the West's impression of China. It was for this reason that, as a translator, he gave full play to his subjectivity in translating *The Analects of Confucius*, adding many of his own ideas in an effort to reshape the world's view of China.

### *C. Nationality*

Despite his years of wandering in the world and his extensive exposure to Western culture, Gu never forgot his Chinese identity. In the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, against the background of the spread of western learning to the east, Chinese people repeatedly sought effective remedies from western countries to save the country and the people. This scholar, Gu Hongming, who had lived in Western countries since childhood, resolutely chose a different path. He deeply understood the pain of the country, and did not follow a group of scholars blindly changing China's fate with the development model of Western countries. With his own academic achievements, he dared to open up a model of “spreading eastern learning to the west”, Let western countries truly understand the classic ideological connotation of Chinese Confucianism. His translation of *The Analects of Confucius* was based on his own nation's perspective of cultural transmission. For the western world, he allowed foreign audiences to truly understand the 5,000-year civilisation of the great Chinese nation and to transmit Chinese ideas; for China, Gu's politically charged translation was also an attempt to build cultural confidence for the Chinese people and to find salvation in ancient texts. It is also for this reason that he used the strategy of domesticating translation to allow Confucian culture to survive and spread in the western world, as he presented Chinese culture to the west.

In short, as an individual translator, Gu is caught in the tangle of Chinese and Western cultures, and the practice of translating Chinese culture and literary classics shows the construction of Gu's multiple and mixed cultural identities,

the influence of education and ideology on translation, and the reflection of his ultimate ideal of seeking the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures through the promotion of Chinese culture.

## V. TRANSLATION BEHAVIOUR UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF GU HONGMING'S CULTURAL IDENTITY

*The Analects of Confucius* is a book that records the words and deeds of Confucius and his disciples. It is edited by Confucius' disciples and re-disciples. The ideological system and integrity conveyed by it were the refinement and distillation of the ideological, moral, cultural, and political spirit of the time, and also had a significant impact on the psychological quality and moral behavior of the Chinese nation. Gu Hongming's translation of this book aims to spread authentic Chinese culture to the West. In dealing with cultural loaded words in *The Analects of Confucius*, we can see the impact of translators' cultural identity on translation.

### A. Translation methods

#### 1) Additional translation

In order to make Chinese culture clear to Western readers, Gu used the method of "additional translation" when dealing with some representative characters, ancient books and some characteristic words, supplementing them with similar western culture to enhance the understanding of the original text by readers of the translated language.

The first one is name, he translated some name of officials such as "昭公", "陈司败", "晏平仲" into "the reigning prince in Confucius' native State" "a minister of justice in a certain State" and "another famous statesman (the Sir William Temple of the time)". In the translation of these characters with special identities, he did not directly translate their names, but chose to label them and present them to Western audiences;

Second, his additional translation of ancient books. He translated the two ancient Chinese books "雅" and "颂" into "the Songs and Psalms in the Book of Ballads, Songs and Psalms", showing people the core content of these two works directly.

Finally, the translation of cultural loaded words. For example, he translated "夏礼" and "殷礼" into the state of the arts and civilisation during the Hsia dynasty (say modern Greek civilisation) and the state of the arts and civilisation during the Yin dynasty (say modern Roman civilisation), using similar Western civilizations to compare the Chinese "夏礼" and "殷礼" helps foreign readers understand Chinese culture.

#### 2) Omitted translation

Gu Hongming has deleted a large number of names of people and places from the *The Analects of Confucius*, with the exception of Confucius' disciples Yan Hui and Zhong Yu, which are translated as "a disciple of Confucius" and translated some place names such as "互乡", "匡", "陈" into "a certain place".

In these cases, Gu chose to omit the transliteration of the names of people and places that were not relevant, believing that even if they were translated, it would be difficult for foreigners to understand them if there was no corresponding explanation. For some of the historical figures and chapters he considered irrelevant, he simply skipped them. While his

aim was to make the text easier for Western readers to understand, such a treatment made those characters and events with rich historical connotations disappear from his translation, which was obviously hasty.

### B. Translation strategy

In the translation of *The Analects of Confucius*, there are many words that are specific to the ancient Chinese cultural context, and Gu chose the domesticating strategy to further explain them from a western cultural perspective.

When translating *The Analects of Confucius*, in order to make the translation more acceptable to Westerners, many words from western culture were added. For example, the religious words "神", "菩萨", "天" appearing in *The Analects of Confucius* are translated as "god", which carries a strong Christian culture. "千室之邑", "百乘之家" were translated into "the direction of affairs in a small principality", "the government of a small town", which are typical of western politics. Using similar foreign words to translate Chinese characteristic words is more conducive to foreigners' understanding of the core ideas in *The Analects of Confucius*.

Source Text:

子贡问为仁，子曰：“工欲善其事，必先利其器。居是邦也，事其大夫之贤者，友其士之仁者。”

Translated text:

*A disciple of Confucius enquired how to live a moral life. Confucius answered, "A workman who wants to perfect his work first sharpens his tools. When you are living in a country, you should serve those nobles and ministers in that country who are men of moral worth, and you should cultivate the friendships of the gentlemen of that country who are men of moral worth."*

"仁" are the core vocabulary of *The Analects of Confucius*, Gu cannot deal with the word "仁" without the word "moral" and spread it out, translating it into words such as "moral life", "moral character", "moral worth" according to different contexts. Instead of translating it literally into words such as "virtual" and "kindness", he has raised "仁" to a moral level from the root of Chinese culture. When translating, factors such as western thoughts and values should be taken into account. If translated directly, the meaning of the word will be too one-sided. Translating it into "moral" and related words can accurately convey the different meanings of the word, close to and meet the reading expectations of western readers, and enable their understanding of "仁" to be recognized or play a specific role in the cultural context of the target language. At the same time, "仁" is the word that best reflects cultural heterogeneity in *The Analects of Confucius*. Cultural heterogeneity refers to the unique connotation and temperament of a culture that is different from other cultures. It is the core of embodying the necessity of cultural communication, and is also one of the ethical standards used to measure the communicative effect of the translated text. Translation activities arise from "difference", and without it, translation will lose its "necessity". Gu Hongming translated it into "moral", presenting cultural information that is "similar to but slightly different from the target culture," which is conducive to the export of Chinese "仁" culture and also conducive to western understanding.

Source Text:

子曰：“人而不仁，如礼何？人而不仁，如乐何？”

Translated text:

Confucius remarked, “If a man is without moral character, what good can the use of **the fine arts** do him? If a man is without moral character, what good can the use of music do him?”

Source Text:

子曰：“夏礼，吾能言之，杞不足征也；殷礼，吾能言之，宋不足征也。文献不足故也。足，则吾能征之矣。”

Translated text:

Confucius remarked to a disciple, “I can tell you of the state of **the arts and civilisation** during the Hsia dynasty [say the Greek civilisation]; but the modern State of Ts’i (say modern Greece) cannot furnish sufficient evidence to prove what I say. I can tell you the state of **the arts and civilisation** during the Yin dynasty [say Roman civilisation]; but the modern state of Sung (say Italy) cannot furnish sufficient evidence to prove what I say. The reason is because the literary monuments extant are too meagre, otherwise I could prove to you what I say.”

In his understanding of the word “礼”, Gu translates it as “judgment and good taste”, “art”, “civilisation”, etc. In particular, he treats “礼” as “arts and civilisation”. In traditional Chinese culture, the term “礼” may be narrower in scope, whereas in Western civilisation, art played an important role. For example, in the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment, “art” was not only appreciated, but also carried with it the shimmering freedom and individuality of Western spiritual civilisation. The meaning of “礼” is broader in both eastern and western civilisations, even it seems not to be equivalent to one of the core meanings of “礼” in Confucian culture, but its essential attribution is unquestionably correct. Gu gives different meanings to “礼” in different contexts, enriching its connotations.

Source Text:

孟懿子问孝，子曰：“无违。”樊迟御，子告之曰：“孟孙问孝于我，我对曰‘无违’。”樊迟曰：“何谓也？”子曰：“生，事之以礼；死，葬之以礼，祭之以礼。”

Translated text:

A noble of the Court in Confucius’s native State asked him what constituted **the duty of a good son**. “he should bury them and honor their memory according to the rites prescribed by propriety.”

Apart from that, Gu’s translation of “孝” as “the duty of a good son” highlighted two elements: the first is “duty”, and the second is “good”. There is a certain ethical relationship between the two, in that good sons and daughters should have certain responsibilities, which are understood to be more on the side of metaphysical and material support, whereas western humanism is concerned with tangible constraints and emphasises the importance of law as a means of strengthening ethical relationships. Therefore, the translation of the word “孝”, however, is more colloquial, as Gu focuses

on the understanding of the western audience and makes a certain degree of derivation.

“祭”, as a traditional cultural etiquette in ancient China, embodies the admiration and adoration of the ancient Chinese people towards heaven and earth, as well as the remembrance and remembrance of the deceased ancestors. In ancient China, special emphasis was placed on the importance of etiquette, and Confucian culture regarded “礼” as an important basis for monarchy and social stability. “祭”, as an important carrier of “礼”, was particularly important in ancient China. In this sentence, Gu Hongming translated it as “honor their memory according to the rites”, which concisely and concisely explained the “祭”, including the emotional commemorative significance of “honor”, and the material ceremony of “memory”, to achieve both the form and spirit of translation.

There are also words such as “君子”, “文”, which Gu translates with the utmost care, following the domesticating strategy.

In addition, he respects the hypotactic characteristics of English, mostly using English sentence patterns, using complex sentences dominated by master-slave structures, and using a large number of pronouns, conjunctions, and other connecting devices. His writing is fluent, such as “学而时习之，不亦说乎？有朋自远方来，不亦乐乎？人不知而不愠，不亦君子乎？” The change from the Chinese sentence pattern of the question mark to the English sentence pattern of the full stop is more in line with the language habits of foreigners; At the same time, he also uses more rhetorical devices, such as: “贫而无谄，富而无骄，何如？” The antithesis that embodies the original sentence is more literary and embodies the characteristics and aesthetic feeling of the original language.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Understanding thoroughly and expressing clearly are the two major conditions for translation. For foreigners, Gu Hongming’s version basically achieves these two points, excluding mistranslations. Gu Hongming’s complex cultural identity profoundly influenced his choice of translation methods and strategies. At the same time, the translator’s subjectivity that he demonstrated in the process of translation also revealed the mission of the late Qing literati to save their lives. His translations are not only faithful translations, but also creative ones. In general, Gu’s translations are the activities of a specific individual in a specific context of the times, realising the symbiosis and cooperation between the two languages and cultures, helping to build the translator’s national cultural identity and to promote Chinese culture.

In a word, Gu Hongming is more committed to making westerners truly understand the true meaning of Chinese culture. The Confucian culture embodied in *The Analects of Confucius* represents the most quintessence of Chinese culture, and the “仁” and “礼” embodied in Confucian culture are the most effective cultural counterattacks against Western colonial expansion. Therefore, in Gu Hongming’s case, what we first saw in the translation should be the blood and boldness of traditional literati who used pen as their weapon, demonstrating the era mission of the late Qing literati to save the country and survive. Therefore, due to the

era of his life and the mission he undertakes, his translation reflects the professional responsibility of the translator even more.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Mingyue Li conducted the research, analyzed the data and wrote this paper; Huiying Yang, associate professor at the School of Foreign Studies, Northwestern Polytechnical University and supervisor of Mingyue Li, has contributed a lot to writing and improving this paper; all authors had approved the final version.

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