

Gu Hongming's Translation Thoughts and Appreciation of his Translations

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Abstract: *Gu Hongming has been influenced by Western culture since his childhood, but after middle age, he was addicted to the study of traditional Chinese culture. His personal work has been popular in Europe and has played an important role in the history of Chinese translation, mainly focusing on the translation of Confucian classics and making Westerners face up to Confucius and Mencius. In the era of China's internal troubles and foreign attacks, Gu Hongming with an almost paranoid attitude, with his weak voice to the world, eager for Westerners to no longer be limited by stereotypes, so as to accept China. The author focuses on the study of Gu Hongming's translation motivation, translation standards and translation strategies, and analyzes his great contributions to Chinese translation.*

Keywords: Gu Hongming, Chinese culture, Translation of Confucian classics.

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, it is an irresistible trend to promote Chinese culture to go global, leading countless people with high aspirations to devote their whole lives to the cause of spreading Chinese culture to the outside world. The key to cultural "going out" lies not only in the pure language transformation, but also in the transmission of cross-cultural information connotation in translation practice. Gu Hongming is one of those who have made a great contribution to the cultural promotion in the period of the Republic of China. He has made remarkable achievements in the field of translation, especially his English translation of traditional Chinese classics, which is of pioneering significance.

2. Purpose of Translation

Gu Hongming, known as the "Strange Master of the late Qing Dynasty", knew 9 languages and had 13 doctoral degrees at the same time. In his later years, he always wore a melon shaped cap, a red robe and a jacket, and a "long braid" behind him, which frequently attracted eyebrows. As a former professor of English at Peking University, he was so famous in Europe that even Maugham visited him when he came to China. (Han Changdai, 2014:64)

2.1 Translation Background

In the late Qing Dynasty, numerous Chinese people began to translate Western works in order to learn from their advanced aspects, but in Gu Hongming's view, such a move was in vain and had the order reversed. He strongly praised the Chinese civilization and believed that the Western civilization had its advanced points and was also full of drawbacks. He wanted to use the most advanced Chinese civilization to help Westerners clarify the so-called moral rules and shape a stronger sense of moral responsibility. In the Chinese civilization, the Confucian classics promise righteousness and wealth, including many Chinese wisdom civilization. Therefore, Gu Hongming chose to translate the Confucian classics. His translation was a powerful counterattack to the double colonization of Chinese culture and politics by Western powers at that time.

Gu Hongming embarked on the road of translation also has inextricably connected with several noble people he met. The first was his adoptive father Brown, who had no children and treated Gu as his own son. He strictly requires Gu Hongming study seriously since childhood. Therefore, he was still able to memorize *Faust* at a young age and memorized various classics by heart, which laid a solid literary foundation for him. When the gunboats of the Great powers opened China's door, Mr. Brown hoped that Gu would learn to govern China and the West, and take on the task of "civilizing" Europe and America. In 1867, before Gu Hongming returned to England, his father warned him that no matter where he was, he must remember that he was a descendant of the Chinese people, which was deeply imprinted on his heart. In 1884, inspired by Ma Jianzhong's persuasion, Gu returned to China and devoted himself to the study of traditional Chinese culture. After that, he formed a deep bond with Zhang Zhidong, and he has been tolerant and protected this maverick "grotesque in the late Qing Dynasty", so that Gu can devote himself to studying Confucianism and spreading traditional Chinese culture.

2.2 Purpose of Translation

Gu Hongming's contribution to Chinese translation history is indelible. His major works include *The Analects of Confucius*, *The University*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Song of a Foolish Man on a Horse*. His translation of Confucian classics contributed greatly to the communication between Chinese and Western cultures. In fact, as early as the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, many Western missionaries and Sinologists began to translate the Four Books and the Five Classics. However, most of them only know a little about Chinese and know little about Chinese culture, so it is common for them to translate hard words into sentences. Until modern times, the Sinologist Jacob Li, with the assistance of Wang Tao, translated ten of the Thirteen Classics of China, collectively known as Chinese Classics. However, the translation, however, mainly serves to provide access to Western missionaries for a better understanding of the essence of Chinese thought and behavior, so as to promote missionary activities in China. Despite the fact that James' translations are relatively accurate and detailed, due to the diverse language patterns, cultural settings and mindsets of English and Chinese, it is challenging to avoid mistakes such as dead translation, misinterpretation and

out-of-context.

In 1884, Gu Hongming boldly expounded his views in the *China Studies*. In his view, the amazing output of James's translation only met the needs of the times at that time, and there were many unsatisfactory places.

Example 1: 子贡欲去告朔之饩羊。子曰：“赐也！尔爱其羊，我爱其礼。”（*The Analects of Confucius*）

James' Translation: You love the sheep, I love the ceremony.

Gu's Translation: What you would save is the cost of the sheep; what I would save is the principle of the rite.

Confucius opposed Zi Gong's proposal to remove the need for live sheep for ancestor worship and wanted to preserve the ritual system. Comparing the above two translations, it can be found that James' translation is a direct translation of the literal meaning of the original text, or more accurately, it should be a mistranslation. In his translation, the first "save" means "to keep", while the second means "to preserve". Therefore, Gu Hongming not only conveys the meaning of the original text accurately, but also has a flexible and equal structure with the original text, which can be described as better.

There are still many translation problems of this kind. Therefore, Gu Hongming believed that Chinese culture was misunderstood because those missionaries and sinologists did not fully grasp the essence of Chinese culture on the basis of dead translation or mistranslated. Therefore, Gu resolutely undertook the task of translating Confucian classics, spreading real Chinese culture to the West, and breaking the monopoly of Western learning.

3. Translation Standards

For translation, every translator has a balance in his heart. Translation criteria influence the translator's choice of translation strategies. Gu Hongming believes that the translation should reproduce the stylistic style of the original, which has been distinctly stated in his translation preface of *Doctrine of the Mean*. To reproduce the original style is far from easy. He believes that to reproduce the ancient sage style, we must try to make ourselves have the heart and style of ancient saints. In the process of practicing his own translation standards, it is necessary to mention that he translated poetry with poetry.

Example 2: 凤兮凤兮！何德之衰？往者不可谏，来者犹可追。已而，已而！今之从政者殆而！

Translation:

O phoenix bird! O phoenix bird,
Where is the glory of your prime?
The past, —'t is useless now to change,
Care for the future yet is time;
Renounce! Give up your chase in vain,
For those who serve in Court and State,
Dire peril follows in their train.

This classical Chinese text is translated in the form of poetry

by Gu Hongming. It's widely acknowledged that writing poetry is challenging, let alone translating it. Because translation into poetry should not merely pursue the beauty of rhythm, but also be limited by the meaning of the original text. But here, the traces of translation disappear, he reproduces the style of the original poem, the original translation. The poem has seven lines and three verses, each of which contains eight syllables. Gu uses a double-line rhyme in the verse, which is smooth and catchy to read. (Zhao Bei, 2008:18) Gu uses the strategy of affirmation to express regret for the past glory disappearing into a question, which is worthy of our reference. The word "now" was added to the translation of "往者不可谏" to contrast it with the past, emphasizing that the past is a foregone conclusion, but the future is still within grasp. The phrases "renounce", "in vain" and "dire peril" fully express the Yu's regret that Confucius did not retire from politics.

4. Translation Methods

The Confucian classics all reveal the wisdom of ancient scholars, and their style and syntactic structure are very different from those in the West. Therefore, when translating these works, it is a must for translators to consider their connotations as well as the cultural differences between the target language and the target country. And translators are supposed to flexibly deal with different translation needs and adopt different translation methods. In the process of translation, Gu Hongming takes free translation and domestication as the main method, foreignization as the auxiliary method, and uses a large number of annotations.

4.1 Free translation

Compared with literal translation, Gu Hongming advocated free translation to achieve his goal of spreading Chinese civilization. His translation and the original text are flexible and equal, vivid, so that the ideas expressed in the translation and the original text are equal to each other. As the following example shows:

Example 3: 子曰：“无为而治者，其舜也与！”（《论语·卫灵公》）

Gu's Translation: The ancient Emperor Shun was perhaps the one man who successfully carried out the principle of no-government.

James' Translation: May not Shun be instanced having governed efficiently without exertion?

"无为" comes from Taoist thought, which emphasizes that nature has its own laws, human beings should respect nature, care for nature, follow the laws, and use their own subjective initiative to transform nature. The Confucian "无为" emphasizes the rule of virtue. Yao and Shun carry things with virtue, influence the people with virtue, and nature to rule the world. Clearly, the term "non-government" here is more likely to refer to the state. James' translation coincides with the Taoist idea of doing nothing and misunderstands the Confucian idea. Inspired by Emerson's work, Gu translated it as "non-government". In this context, "government" does not mean those who are in charge of a country or a state, but management and governance. Gu simply explained the

essence of Confucian thought with a "non-government", and this explanation and understanding was more in line with Shun's "ruling by non-action", and the portrayal of Shun's characters and personalities was also more in line with the image expected by Confucian rulers. In addition, when he translated "Shun", he adopted the usual method of additional translation, so that foreign readers could understand the identity and background of the characters more clearly.

Example 4: 子曰: "学而时习之, 不亦说乎? 有朋自远方来, 不亦乐乎? "

Gu's Translation: It is indeed a pleasure to acquire knowledge and, as you go on acquiring, to put into practice what you have acquired. A greater pleasure still it is when friends of congenial minds come from afar to seek you because of your attainments.

The original text is short and concise, but Gu's translation has a longer sentence pattern, adding many elements, such as "greater" and "still", so that the logical relationship between sentences is closer, which accords with the syntactic characteristics of English. Among them, "friends of congenial minds" clarifies that Chinese "friends" are friends with the same goal and ambition, which is unusual. (Wu Xin, 2009:67) There have always been two completely different views on Gu Hongming's translation. Several people, including Lin Yutang, recognized Gu's translation achievements, and he was not stingy in his admiration for Gu's deep understanding of the original work, his translation is faithful and creative, and called Gu a plating maker of Eastern and Western ideas. Some people, represented by Wang Guowei, scoffed at Gu's translation. They think Gu Hongming translates the text in an excessively liberal way, adding a lot of content not in the original. (Yao Xiaoying, 2016:52-55) Wang Guowei has written a book listing the major and minor flaws in Gu's English translation of *The Doctrine of Mean*, which he considers a failed translation attempt. (Wang Hui, 1996:188) The author, however, believes that each translator has his own different views on the matter of translation, which requires readers to view Gu's translation from various angles. In terms of the compatibility with the original text, Gu's translation arbitrarily adds elements that the original text does not have, which is indeed excessive free translation. However, after some study, it can be found that Gu's translation is still faithful to the original meaning. From the perspective of cross-cultural communication, the inner meaning of sentences is conveyed to readers in a dominant way, which makes it easier for foreign readers to bridge the cultural gap to comprehend Chinese culture and is conducive to the spread of Chinese culture. From the perspective of skopos theory, the translation behavior is often restricted by the purpose of translation. Gu expects that Westerners can truly understand the essence of our culture, and his translation just achieves his translation purpose, so he is successful in this respect.

4.2 Domesticating Translation

Another characteristic of Gu Hongming's translation is that it focuses on domestication. In order to make Western readers understand Confucian culture and ideological system, Gu Hongming uses a large number of words with western colors to translate words with Chinese characteristics.

As a translator, he is invisible. He uses authentic English to cover up the differences between Chinese and Western cultures. China has a vast territory, and many Western readers may not really understand these place names directly translated into English. Therefore, when translating, he translated personal names, place names and other proper nouns into the same concepts that have similar characteristics in Western history and are familiar to Westerners. For example, Confucius' disciples Yan Hui and Zi Lu were respectively compared to "St. John" and "St. Peter" in the *Bible*, while other disciples were generally referred to one of Confucius' disciples, and "Yao" was compared to "the Abraham" in order to seek the commonality between Confucian culture and Western culture, and Western religious terms were used extensively in the translation. He corresponded the "temple" used by the ancient emperors to worship their ancestors with "church" and translated "罪" into "sin". However, the "sin" of Christianity and Confucianism are not the same, and his translation reflects the serious imbalance of cultural exchanges behind the translation. He also makes a horizontal comparison between China's historical dynasties and those of the West. This naturalization method eliminates readers' strangeness to traditional Chinese culture, shortens the distance between Chinese and Western cultures, and enables Western readers to resonate.

4.3 Annotation Method

Another important feature of Gu Hongming's translation of Confucian books is the annotation method, but his annotation is different from the previous simple annotation of the vocabulary and background in the article or book, and he uses the words of famous western figures to annotate the scriptures he translated, such as Arnold and Goethe. Gu wanted to awaken the minds of Westerners and attract people who would have known the works of these famous figures to learn about Chinese culture.

Example 5: 诚身有道: 不明乎善, 不诚乎身矣。

Annotation: To thine own self be true,
And it must follow,
As the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Gu not only translated the original meaning, but also quoted Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the golden line, emphasizing that a man must be loyal to himself and not cheat others. The works of Shakespeare, the literary giant, are favored by readers at home and abroad, and many classic sentences in them are already familiar to people. Gu Hongming finds the similar counterparts to the ideas expressed in Chinese culture, and quotes them, which is conducive to spreading the national culture to readers and achieving the effect of concise and comprehensive.

In addition, there are many similar examples in his translations of the Confucian classics. Gu Hongming is quite familiar with Western culture and quotes famous Western thinkers and philosophers with admirable ease. His translation implies that Westerners, those famous Western figures said classic sayings, Confucius and other people in China as early as thousands of years ago said similar words, highlighting China's traditional culture has a long history, can withstand

the verification of time, so that Western readers have to admire Chinese culture while understanding, and discard the original contempt.

5. Conclusion

Gu Hongming learned both Chinese and Western, believed firmly in Confucius and Mencius, and was keen to publicize China's excellent culture all his life, conveying it to the West and even the whole world. His actions were always not recognized by others, and his appeal was so weak in those days that few people could understand his ideas. He had to be paranoid to cause the world to pay attention to the inheritance of the millennium culture! There are mixed reviews of Gu Hongming as a person. Mahatma Gandhi said that he thought he was unmatched in China and very honorable. But Gu Hongming is far less so in China, where his incisive wittiness is so striking that he is even called "Gu Madman", and Wen Yuanning, a professor at Peking University in the last century, once called Gu Hongming a natural rebel.

Of course, he also has many major and minor faults, such as his respect for foot binding and concubine. But just as the saying goes, "men are not saints, no one can be entirely free of faults". It can't be denied that Gu makes remarkable contribution to the translation history of our country and the spread of Chinese culture, which should receive recognition and affirmation in an objective way. As a defender of Eastern culture, he made Westerners begin to appreciate Confucianism and gradually pay more attention to Chinese culture. His translation of *The Analects of Confucius* sold nearly ten thousand in the West and won the favor of readers. His translation of *The Doctrine of Mean* was included in the Oriental Wisdom Series. The historical value of his translation is very far-reaching and worthy of our exploration and study.

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