

AN ANALYSIS OF THE IN-DEPTH TRANSLATION STRATEGY OF THE ENGLISH EDITION OF LECTURES ON CHINA'S TRADITIONAL POLITICAL THOUGHTS

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ABSTRACT

The English edition of *Lectures on China's Traditional Political Thoughts* (2023), published by Peter Lang Group, marks a significant achievement in the Chinese Academic Translation Project. This work, a crucial popularization of Chinese political thought, incorporates extensive references to classical Chinese texts, blending cultural nuances with academic rigor. The translator employs methods such as in-text and footnotes to clarify complex cultural concepts, ensuring accessibility without compromising the depth of the original. A bilingual glossary of key political terms, such as Ren and Li, is included to help readers grasp essential Chinese concepts, while maintaining the uniqueness of the culture. The translation navigates the balance between scholarly precision and popular readability, addressing challenges in conveying traditional Chinese political culture to a global audience. Moreover, the translator applies in-depth translation and rewriting strategies, including pronoun adjustments and expression unification, ensuring the text's clarity and consistency for English-speaking readers. The translation not only enhances cross-cultural understanding but also contributes to China's growing cultural influence by introducing its political thought to the international academic community.

Keywords: Lectures on China's Traditional Political Thoughts; in-depth translation; rewriting strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Lectures on China's Traditional Political Thoughts (Chinese edition, Xv, 2015) (English edition, trans. Yang, 2023), published by Peter Lang Group, an international influential publisher designated by the National Social Science Fund in 2023, is a milestone achievement of the Chinese Academic Translation Project of the National Social Science Fund. The original work is an important and rare popularized text in the field of Chinese political thought in recent years and is one of the results of the philosophy and social science research popularization project of the Ministry of Education.

Its translation has the following distinctive features: Firstly, the original work extensively cites classical texts of traditional Chinese political culture, such as the Way of heaven, Six Arts, Yin and Yang, Kingly Way, Despotic Way, confluence of Confucianism and Legalism, and other Chinese terms with unique cultural connotations. The translator uses common methods in classical text translation, such as adding in-text notes and footnotes. This ensures the readability of the translation while focusing on contextual building and cultural communication. The aim is to avoid obscure concepts from hindering the target language readers' understanding, providing rich cultural information from the source language and deepening readers understanding of Chinese traditional political philosophy. Secondly, the translator explores the translation rules for Chinese

cultural terms such as Ren (benevolence), Li (ritual), De (virtue), Qi (instrument), and Fa (law), by analyzing the etymological meanings of their English counterparts. The translator uses transliteration to enhance international academic discourse, allowing the world to better understand China in philosophy and social sciences. The translation provides practical insights for the appropriate translation of Chinese cultural concepts in mainstream English communication channels. Thirdly, based on an analysis of the characteristics of the original text and motivated by the purpose of spreading Chinese traditional political culture and expanding audience acceptance, the translator adopts certain in-depth translation and rewriting strategies. Fourthly, to assist target language readers, the translator includes a bilingual glossary of important terms in the index section. The translated work accurately reflects and achieves the translator's research outcomes and aspirations, offering a dialectical examination of the core ideas of the original text, innovative adjustments to the text structure, precise positioning of rhetorical styles, and the re-creation of key terms.

2. IN-DEPTH TRANSLATION STRATEGY

In-depth translation (thick translation) is a concept proposed by American translation theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005). It involves adding annotations during the translation process, such as introduction to background knowledge, explanations of proper names, and listing of major research literature on a particular concept. By adding commentary or a preface, this method supplements the rich linguistic and cultural environment of the source language, helping readers better interpret the translation and the translator's intent. Traditional Chinese political culture is rich in cultural connotations. By adding annotations and commentary to recreate the rich cultural context of the source language, readers can better understand the context of the source language and the translator's intent.

A challenge the translator faces when translating the original work is balancing academic rigor with popularization. From a literal standpoint, this is about determining the target audience for the translation. Considering academic rigor, the potential readers would be professionals engaged in the research of political thoughts, while popularization would aim at a general readership. The distinction in the final result lies in the presence and extent of "secondary text" such as annotations, verifications, prefaces, and postscripts. Additionally, there is also difference in language, such as depth versus simplicity, though it is secondary. Academic translations demand a higher level of secondary texts, and the more comprehensive the annotations, the better. In contrast, popularization translations may not emphasize these aspects as much.

From the perspective of reader benefits, academic translations are certainly more valuable, and historically renowned translations tend to fall into this category, standing the test of time. However, popularization also has its value. These two types of translation serve different purposes and audiences and should coexist without conflict. The differences should not be seen as absolute, as the two can indeed be interconnected. The best translation is one that is deep yet simple, where depth forms the foundation and simplicity the expression. If the translation doesn't start with depth, a popularization type translation easily falls into a shallow approach, as seen in many domestic Chinese translations today (Wang Yvhong, Pan Wenguo, 2018).

2.1 In-text and Footnotes

The author of the original work, Xu Datong, is a scholar of deep academic standing. *Lectures on China's Traditional Political Thoughts* is a rare and important popularization work in the field of Chinese political thought in recent years. The original text extensively cites classical texts on traditional Chinese political culture. For certain culturally significant terms, such as rectification of names, Six Arts, and the unity of heaven and man, the project team adopted common methods in classical translation by adding in-text notes and footnotes. The translator's notes are marked to differentiate them from the author's notes. These annotations ensure the readability of the translation while focusing on constructing context and cultural communication, avoiding difficult-to-understand concepts that may hinder the target language readers' acceptance. This provides the readers with rich cultural information from the source language and deepens their understanding of Chinese traditional political philosophy.

2.2 Glossary of Key Political Terms and Index

The "going out" of Chinese classic works is a response to the social demand from Western cultures. When translating traditional cultural texts, it is essential to retain as much of the local cultural character as possible while enhancing audience acceptance. During the translation process, the project team includes a bilingual glossary of key political terms at the end of the text, with a total of 176 entries.

By listing key terms, the English edition compiles common political terms from both ancient and modern times mentioned in the original text, such as Ren (benevolence), Xiao (filial piety), Qi (instrument), Shu (method), and Fa (law). Some concepts that could lead to misunderstanding or changes in meaning. Take “法” for example, it is translated into Fa (law) using a method of domestication supplemented by foreignization. This method highlights Chinese cultural characteristics and spiritual values. China should not simplify or forcefully equate its classical concepts with existing English terms to be understood by the West. While a domesticated translation might gain short-term acceptance, it ultimately does not benefit the global spread of Chinese culture. Therefore, China needs to establish and maintain its own cultural translation system, pushing its culture abroad. As China's national strength grows, this trend of breaking free from cultural weakness in translation is expected to become more prominent.

The Index focuses on the main ideas of ancient schools of thought. For example, the Legalist idea “权势不可以假人” is translated as “Authority and position shouldn't be lent to anybody else.” If readers become interested in exploring this concept further, the index helps them correlate the translation with the correct original text, satisfying those with research interests who wish to explore the deeper meanings of Chinese culture. The index includes 170 entries.

As the representative figure of cultural translation theory, Bassnett (2001) notes, “Translation does not take place in a vacuum. The seemingly calm text is actually the result of intense conflicts between two cultures. The seemingly static act of translation is, in fact, a dynamic process under the manipulation of multiple forces in the target language's cultural context.” The translator is constrained by both textual and external factors. These constraints or manipulations in the translation process have become the main focus of research on how Chinese culture can better “go out into the world”.

2.3 Translator's Postscript

The translator expresses doubt about her adequacy to translate *Lectures on China's Traditional Political Thoughts*, as she is not a specialist in political ideology, ethics, sociology, or anthropology. Over the past decade, she has focused on China's traditional culture and its English translation. Despite her concerns, she feels a responsibility to address the lack of comprehensive works in English or other Western languages on this subject. Having grown up in a society deeply influenced by political thought, the translator is familiar with the viewpoints in the original text, which helps guide her translation.

The translator also discusses the translation of the Chinese term Ren, which has various English renderings such as virtue, benevolence, morality, humanity, good, kindness, love, and compassion. These translations, while capturing different facets of the term, do not fully convey the Confucian concept of Ren. Each English term emphasizes different aspects, such as generosity, moral character, or charity, but none accurately reflect the original meaning from the Confucian perspective. The translator believes that using these translations can help avoid conflicts between English and Chinese but also weakens the unique cultural characteristics of Ren.

The translator proposes that transliterating Ren into English is a better solution, as it would allow the term to be recognized as an independent Chinese concept. Once widely accepted, this transliteration could enhance understanding of Chinese culture from its own perspective. The translator emphasizes the importance of national pride and confidence in promoting Chinese culture to English-speaking audiences.

Finally, the translator addresses the transliteration of Chinese names, titles, and terms. With the increasing adoption of Pinyin in Western publications, the translator opts to use Pinyin for names and terms where possible. However, she acknowledges that some well-established transliterations, such as *The Analects* for *Lunyu* and Confucius for Kongzi, should be retained, as readers are more familiar with these forms.

3. REWRITING STRATEGY

The selection and application of rewriting strategies are the result of the translator's initiative. Based on an analysis of the characteristics of the original Chinese edition of *Lectures on China's Traditional Political Thoughts*, and driven by the goal of spreading Chinese traditional political culture and expanding the audience's acceptance, the project team decided to adopt specific rewriting strategies. These strategies are not only a means to enhance cultural exchange but also a necessary choice to balance academic rigor with popularization. The translator's control over the extent of rewriting determines whether a culture is actively or passively presented in the process of international dissemination. Over-accommodating the target language audience may lead to a loss of the original cultural characteristics, making the cultural exchange less effective.

3.1 Adjustment of Pronouns

From a pragmatic perspective, adjustments were made to pronouns to soften the subjective viewpoint, adapting to the needs of cross-cultural communication. In the original text, the first-person pronoun "I" was rewritten as "the author", and the more forceful "we" was rendered as "one" or "people", transforming explicit, strong calls to action into more implicit and mild ones. This change guides readers of the translation to reflect on the relevance of Chinese traditional

political culture from the universal perspective of human societal development, aiming to present Chinese culture in a more objective manner, enhancing the acceptability of the translation and meeting the demands of cross-cultural communication.

3.2 Conciseness of Expressions

The original text, based on the author's lecture notes, inevitably contained some repetitive phrases meant to emphasize certain points. The translation condensed some adjacent repetitive sentences and removed redundant secondary information to improve the reading flow.

For example, in the original text on p.8: “这就是民族的政治文化史、政治思想史、政治学说史，等等，如中国政治文化史、政治思想史、政治学说史。” The translation reads: “That is the history of political culture, political thoughts, and political doctrine etc. of a nation, such as that of China's.” The repeated phrase “history of political culture, political thought, and political doctrines” is replaced by “that” to avoid redundancy.

Another example is from pp. 11-12: “我们考察研究中西两种政治思想史，首先会发现各自突出的重心不同，也即其所研究的具体着重点有所差异。” This sentence is similar to the one on p.25. The translation reads: “When examining the history of Chinese and Western political thoughts, we will first find they differ from one another in their specific focuses.” Instead of translating as “focus” and “emphasis” separately, which would sound redundant, the translator condensed and merged the expressions.

3.3 Unification of Expressions

The author mentions in the postscript that the various sections are works created at different periods. The project team found some errors in the original text besides content repetition, such as a typo on p.75: “Shushu Tong” should be “Shusun Tong”, and on p.73, the quote from *The Analects* “Without learning the rites, one cannot stand” should actually come from *The Analects: Ji Shi*, rather than from the chapter Yao Yue.

Additionally, there were instances of referring to the same thing by different names. For example, “The Songs of the Five Sons” appear for three times in the source text (on pp.27, 51, 71), or references to “Yin Dynasty” (pp.30, 49) or simply “Yin” (p.49).

Such subtle differences in expressions could confuse Western readers unfamiliar with Chinese culture. If left unadjusted in pursuit of faithfulness, they may hinder effective cultural exchange. To ensure a smoother reading experience for the audience, the translator corrected factual errors and standardized the translation. For example, “The Songs of the Five Sons” was unified as *The Book of Documents: The Songs of the Five Sons*, and the term “Yin Dynasty” was rendered consistently as “the Shang Dynasty”. Footnotes were added where “Yin” was mentioned, explaining that “Yin” refers to the capital of the Shang Dynasty, from which the term “Yin people” is derived.

4. CONCLUSION

The translation of classical citations plays a crucial role in the study of traditional Chinese political thoughts. The choice of translation method clearly reflects the translator's goal of conducting a deeper study of this thought. As Prof. Yurui stated, "When you try to truly delve into a text, translation is the best way. It helps you understand the complexity of the text... translation is an indispensable part of research." (Dai Yongjun, Yurui Pines, 2022)

Lectures on China's Traditional Political Thoughts is an invaluable popular work in the field of Chinese political thoughts in recent years. The translation of this work has significant academic value and far-reaching practical significance in promoting the Chinese academic discourse system to the world, attracting widespread attention from Western academia to traditional Chinese political thought, and facilitating the exchange and dialogue of Chinese theory in the global field of philosophy and social sciences. In the process of translating texts related to Chinese traditional political culture, the translator engages in dialectical thinking about the core ideas of the original text, innovatively adjusts the structure of the text, accurately locates the rhetorical style, and reconstructs key terms. The translator's research achievements and ideal pursuits are accurately reflected and realized in the translation. Cultural communication work has a long way to go, and as builders of cross-cultural exchange, translators should resolutely uphold the dignity of national culture and contribute to enhancing the country's cultural soft power.

Note:

1. Professor Xv D.'s (1928-2019) *Lectures on Traditional China's Political Thoughts* was published in 2015. It is an important work of the project "Popularized Readers of Humanities and Social Science" Sponsored by the Ministry of Education. Mr. Xv, D. introduced the thoughts in plain language in a simple way. His theoretical insights of fundamental issues on traditional China's political thoughts are elucidated from 10 angles. In particular, the interpretation of the political thoughts of Confucianism, Mohism, Taoism, and Legalism in the pre-Qin period fully demonstrates the author's strict and standardized academic training and profound academic skills.

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Notes on Contributor

Dan Yang, professor in Yancheng Teachers University, has published five publications on English translation (*China under Empress Dowager Cixi*, *Dusk of Idols*, *Research on the Reform and Innovation of English Translation Teaching in Universities*, *Lectures on China's Traditional Political Thoughts*, *Up to the North*). She's presently hosting the project "*Lectures on China's Traditional Political Thoughts*" (English version) funded by "Chinese Fund for the Humanities and Social Sciences", and the project "*Up to the North*" (English version) funded by International Classic Translation Project.

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