



Research Paper

A Study on the Translation of the Analects from the Perspective of Communication Theory

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Abstract: It has been about 400 years since *The Analects*, one of the most influential classics of the Confucian school, was translated into other languages, and there have been lots of comments and studies on the translation of *The Analects*. However, the previous studies focus mostly on the text itself, few on its translators and readers. With descriptive paradigm, the study analyzes the translators and potential readers of *The Analects* from the perspective of communication theory as translator can be analogous to disseminator and reader to receptor. The study finds that “goalkeeper” controls translator’s choice of source text and translation strategy and translator’s credibility will influence the acceptance of *The Analects*. The diversity of reader’s reading psychology is a key factor to influence the propagation of *The Analects*.

Key words: translation of *The Analects*; sender; receiver

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I. Introduction

The Analects, which is one of the most influential classics of the Confucian school and embodies deeply traditional Chinese thoughts, plays an important role in the history of cultural exchange between China and the West. Since Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), an Italian Jesuit missionary, translated the *Four Books* into Latin in 1593, Jesuit missionaries in the 17th century, Protestant missionaries in the early 19th century, western sinologists and Chinese culture lovers in the middle of the 20th century, and overseas Chinese and local Chinese scholars in the 1990s have successively joined the field of translating *The Analects* into other languages such as English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and others. Data shows that there have been nearly 60 English versions of *the Analects* in various translated forms. The evaluation and research on these versions have also aroused extensive attention in the academic circles at home and abroad, and the achievements are fruitful. Domestic research began in the 1990s, and the initial research perspective concentrated mainly on language level. Liu Chongde(2001), He Gangqiang(2007) conducted their impressive appreciation of the translated versions of *The Analects*; Ni Jihua(2007) compared the translation techniques and strategies adopted by different translations in his master’s thesis; Wang Hui (2001) studied the translation of core concept words in *The Analects*. Along with the cultural shift in translation studies, factors outside the text itself began to enter the research field. Wang Hui(2007) discussed the influence of translator’s identity and translation purpose on the translation; Wei Wangdong(2005) and Yang Ping(2008) compared and summarized the multiple translations from different perspectives synchronically and diachronically. The above achievements have enriched theoretical studies on the foreign translation of *The Analects* and other Confucian classics, taking the translated versions as their research points. Actually, translator, text and target reader form a communication chain, and these three elements influence each other. However, there are few domestic studies on the translators and readers of *The Analects*. In order to make up for this deficiency, this paper tries to analyze the translators and readers in the foreign translation of *The Analects* from the perspective of communication theory.

II. The communication nature of translation

Some scholars define communication as “Communication refers to the activities of human exchanging information through symbols and media in the hope of producing corresponding changes.”^[1] People are the subject of communication, playing the role of message sender and receiver. In the process of communication, the sender should not simply output information, but also carry out complex two-way communication. The receiver should not accept passively information, but also actively feedback information, and the purpose of communication is to make corresponding changes. Mr. Sun Zhili, a famous translator, pointed out: “Translation is to convey the meaning expressed in one language to another language, so as to achieve the purpose of communicating thoughts and feelings, spreading cultural knowledge, promoting social civilization, especially promoting the prosperity of the target language culture.”^[2] Just in terms of their definition, we can find out that communication and translation have great convergence points. As Mr. Lv Jun said, “Translation is a kind of cross-cultural information exchange and exchange activity, and its essence is communication.”^[3]

The basic elements of communication include sender, message, media and receiver. The process of communication is a process in which the sender selects and processes information, transmits it to the receiver through some channel and causes reactions. As a complex communication activity, translators in translation activities are senders who select and process information, while the translated version and the source language cultural factors embodies in it are the messages to disseminate, and the target language readers are receivers who select and feedback information in a certain communication environment.

III. The brief history of the translation and dissemination of *The Analects*

The disseminator lies at the first link of the message transmission chain, who is the initiator of the communication activity and the sender of the communication content. However, the disseminator cannot take action freely but is restricted by the “gatekeeper”, who determines what kind of message the disseminator could send. Gatekeeper refers to the person or institution in communication who is entitled to decide what kind of information can be transmitted, how much and how. The manipulative school of translation studies believes that “what image translation establishes for literary works depends mainly on two factors. The first is the translator’s ideology — this ideology is sometimes identified by the translator himself or herself, and sometimes imposed by the sponsor. The second is the dominant literature in target language at that time.”^[4] Translation, in short, is subject to patronage, ideology and poetics. The constraints of these factors on translators are reflected in the “what to translate” and “how to translate”, namely the selection of translation materials and translation strategies. In addition, translators’ activities are influenced by the communication environment, that is, the institutional environment, economic and technological environment, etc.

The earliest translator of *The Analects* was Matteo Ricci. In 1582, as an Italian Jesuit missionary, he accepted the overseas mission of the Jesuit Society of Rome and arrived in Macao, China. The next year, he managed to live in the city of Zhaoqing, Guangdong Province and began to carry on his mission. After meeting Chinese culture, he realized Gradually that there were 3 major religions in China — Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, among which Confucianism was the most important religious system favored by upper class scholars. In line with his missionary work, Matteo Ricci began in 1591 to read *The Four Books* of Confucian classics taught in schools (*The Analects*, *Mencius*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, and *The Great Learning*) and translate them into Latin. In order to guide Chinese people to accept Catholicism, Matteo Ricci adopted the way of worshipping Confucianism and respecting Confucius, wearing Confucian clothes and offering sacrifices to Confucius, so as to expand the influence of Catholicism in China. However, Matteo Ricci’s missionary methods caused the dissatisfaction of the Catholic Church, and then broke out the famous “etiquette dispute” between the Qing government and the Catholic Church. Consequently, the Qing government issued a proscription and most of the missionaries were expelled to Macao. Influenced by the institutional environment at that time, this large-scale cultural exchange between China and the West came to an end.

In the early 19th century, as the advance party of European and American colonial empires, a large number of missionaries came to China and India. In 1809, Joshua Marshman (1768-1837), a British Protestant missionary, translated and published *The Works of Confucius* in Serampore, India. This book was an excerpt of *The Analects* from chapter 1 to chapter 9. In 1822, the British missionary Rev. David Collie (?? -1828) came to Malacca and began to learn Chinese, and then became professor of Chinese at the Anglo-Chinese College. In 1827, he published *The Chinese Classical Works Commonly Called the Four Books*, which was regarded as the first complete English translated version of *The Four Books*. In addition, English missionaries translating *The Analects* into English in the 19th century include Sir T. F. Wade (1818-1895), James Legge (1815-1897) and other English missionaries. In 1903, Richard Wilhelm (1873-1930), a German missionary, translated *The Analects* and *Mencius* into German with the help of his colleagues and Chinese scholars.

Objectively, through these missionaries, many important Chinese classics were translated to the West. However, the fundamental task of western missionaries into China is to spread the Gospel and naturalize China. In order to successfully preach, they generally first learned Chinese, understood Chinese culture, realized the

importance of Confucianism in China, and then chose to translate *The Analects* and other Confucian classics into languages of which they would make use. Marshman said in his translation that the purpose of translating *The Analects* was “to show the English the nature of the Chinese language to uncover its mysterious veil, open a way for an in-depth study of Chinese literature and classics, and for an eventual introduction to the Chinese people of the powerful scientific discoveries and eventually introduce perfect Bible to them.”^[5] Through the translation of *The Analects*, Marshman greatly improved his Chinese language skills and accumulated some experience in translating scripture. With the help of his Chinese teacher, Marshman began to translate Bible into Chinese and published it in Serampore in 1822.

Therefore, it can be seen that these missionaries did not choose to translate *The Analects* arbitrarily, but were the result of their own Christian consciousness, the religious institutions they served and the mainstream ideology at that time.

On the other hand, translators are consciously or unconsciously controlled by individual or social ideology in the adoption of translation strategies. For example, the missionary translation directly naturalized the concept of Confucianism into Christian terms, which has been analyzed in detail in the studies of Wang Hui(2008) and Yang Ping(2008), and will not be discussed here.

IV. The analysis of translators of *The Analects*

The Analects says: “Those who have virtues must utter good words, those who utter good words would not necessarily have virtues”, which emphasizes the communicator’s personality cultivation. The purpose of communication is to make the audience’s attitude, behavior, emotion and other aspects to produce the kind of change that the communicator expects, therefore, the communicator should have certain qualities to produce the communication effect. Through experiments, Carl Hovland, one of the founders of American communication studies, proved that “the credibility of information sources (communicators) is closely related to the persuasive effect, and the persuasive effect of high credibility information sources is far better than that of low credibility information sources.”^[6] In short, the higher the credibility of the communicator, the greater the effect of the communicated message. Credibility refers to the degree of acceptance, recognition and trust received by the communicator among the receivers.

Translators of *The Analects* include missionaries sent to China, western sinologists, overseas Chinese, Chinese scholars and so on. Matteo Ricci was well-educated and graduated from the Jesuit Seminary. During his stay in China, he systematically and comprehensively studied Chinese culture and translated and introduced them to the West. In Italy, Matteo Ricci is known as “the first person to communicate Chinese and Western culture”. James Legge translated five volumes of *Chinese Classics*, including *The Analects*, which was very popular in the West. After returning from China, James Legge became the first professor of Sinology at Oxford University, where he spent 22 years training many sinologists. Richard Wilhelm was awarded “Honorary Doctor of Sinology” by Frankfurt University, and founded the first German “Chinese Study Society” in Frankfurt, and he also founded several journals on Sinology. It can be seen that these missionaries sent to China have high reputation in their own countries. In addition, missionaries generally have a good moral and cultural level, and have certain credibility and authority in their own countries. Besides, they are close to their domestic potential readers (most of them were missionaries at that time) in terms of ideology, cultural background and religious belief. Objectively, these factors promoted the spreading of *The Analects* and Confucian thoughts in the West.

There are also many Chinese translators of *The Analects*, among whom Mr. Gu Hongming (1857-1928) and Mr. Lin Yutang (1895-1976) are representative ones. Both of them were familiar with western culture and lifestyle. Gu Hongming studied in Britain and Germany for 14 years. With the purpose of rendering westerners understand the philosophy and moral principles of Confucius and Mencius in China, he wrote and published series of articles on Chinese culture in Japan Post, Times and other western newspapers in fluent English. He translated *The Analects* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* into English, which were successively published and printed overseas. Lin Yutang studied at Harvard University for a master’s degree in literature, and later studied for a doctorate in linguistics at the University of Leipzig in Germany. After that, he lived and wrote in the United States for more than 10 years, writing many cultural works and novels in English. He also translated the philosophy of Confucius and Mencius and other traditional literary works into English and promoted them overseas. He was once listed as one of the “wisdom of the twentieth century” in American cultural circle. His book, *The Wisdom of Confucius*, compiled in popular form, has been popular since it was published in 1938, and had been deeply loved by western readers.

V. The analysis of potential readers of *The Analects*

Receiver refers to the person receiving information, who is the “decoder” of the transmitted symbols. Receiver restores or “translates” the information symbol sent by the transmitter before understanding and accepting the meaning of the message. The effect of information transmission is directly affected by the

knowledge structure, degree of education and communication skills of the receiver. In the process of translation, the target reader is exactly the receiver who selects, filters and gives feedback to the translation under certain cultural background. In the process of receiving information, the receiver is not completely in a passive state, rather than passively receiving information, but on the basis of taking advantage of the existing conditions to actively choose the information, so as to make it fully useful to themselves. Therefore, the successful dissemination of a translation largely depends on whether it conforms to the selective psychology of the target language readers. Selective psychology refers to “the thinking phenomenon shown by the receiver in the process of choosing the various information and the transmission mode itself in the communication activities”.^[7] Different social environments and personal experiences lead to different psychological structures and cognitive attitudes of each individual, which determine that readers have different choices and understandings of information. Therefore, in order to achieve good communication effects and meet the reading requirements and aesthetic expectations of target language readers, potential readers’ selective psychology must be considered and properly guided by translators. There are many translated versions of *The Analects*, each with its own strengths, which meet the reading expectations of different level of readers.

5.1 Diversity of readers

The Analects is one of Confucian classics which is interpreted and researched precisely and seriously by scholars, and also a literary work read by the public due to its vivid characters and concise language features.

The readers of the early translated *The Analects* were missionaries and rigorous sinologists. For example, after the publication of the *Chinese Classics* by James Legge, specific funds were raised to sell the versions to missionaries at half the price. As a Confucian classic, *The Analects* is written in ancient Chinese and has the language feature of sublime words with deep meaning. With the intention to reproduce these features, James Legge adopted written English popular in the 19th century and quaint wording along with text structure and sentence order very close to the original. At the same time, he tried to preserve the rhetoric and cultural features. In total, James Legge’s version was regarded as the classic of Sinology in the English-speaking world. However, the classical English style discourages the general reader, and Gu Hongming says in the preface to his English translation of *The Analects* that “...we try to translate the conversation of Confucius and his disciples as an educated Englishman would express the same idea. In addition, to eliminate as much strangeness and oddity as possible for English readers, we try to remove all proper Chinese names whenever possible.”^[8] It can be seen that Gu’s intended readers were those averagely educated Englishmen. The original text arrangement of *The Analects* is incoherent and disorganized, which is not suitable for the common western readers to read and appreciate. In order to make it easy for readers to understand, Gu Hongming rearranged the original text reasonably by adding and deleting appropriately. He translated a large number of Chinese names and place names skillfully, such as:

季氏使闵子骞为费宰。

A minister in power in Confucius’ native State sent for a disciple of Confucius to make him the chief magistrate of an important town. (Translated by Gu Hongming)

The personal names “季氏”, “闵子骞” and the place name “费” in the original text are not directly reflected in the translation. They are only expressed as the people and places associated with Confucius. In addition, Gu Hongming made a pioneering reference to western famous quotes and allusions in his translation, comparing Ji Fa, the first king of Zhou dynasty to “the Moses or Solon of Chinese history”. Although later Gu’s translation has been criticized for its “unfaithfulness”, he played a positive role in spreading *The Analects* and Confucian thoughts under the background that westerners knew almost nothing about Chinese ancient culture at that time. It was in consideration of the acceptability of the translation by the mass readers that Gu’s version was very popular in that period. It can be said that the translated versions by James Legge and Gu Hongming are the representatives of academic version and universal version.

5.2 The diachronic of readers

In different historical environments, readers have different psychological and aesthetic expectations for classical works. When talking about the historicity of understanding activities, Sartre pointed out that as far as the reader is concerned, “the reader is somewhere between complete ignorance and omniscience, and he has certain knowledge, which changes at any time, enough to show his historicity.”^[9] The same is true for translations, which are favored by readers in one era may not be favored by readers in other eras. In order to obtain the recognition of western readers, Gu Hongming replaced some concepts and terms of Confucian culture with relevant words of western culture in the translation of *The Analects*, which played a positive role in the cultural exchange between the East and the West under the historical conditions. However, with the continuous deepening of communication between China and the West, more readers tend to read novel and rare translations with exotic styles. Therefore, how to retranslate cultural words with the essence of Chinese culture is in line with the thinking paradigm and aesthetic requirements of the current Westerners, which is a problem that

contemporary translators must consider. Therefore, the analysis of the translator's selective psychology should not only consider the group differences but also pay attention to the different historical environment.

VI. Conclusion

Since 1593 till now, *The Analects* has gone abroad through a history of more than four hundred years. The number of translators has been increasing and various forms of translations have emerged in an endless stream. Nowadays, the communication between countries around the world is increasingly close, and culture has become an important factor in the comprehensive national strength. To enhance the soft power of Chinese culture, the author believes that the following points should be taken into consideration.

First of all, the Chinese and foreign translators should work together to draw on the strengths of each. Rooted in the profound Chinese culture and English learning background, Chinese translators have undoubtedly the most profound interpretation of *The Analects*, while foreign translators or translation agencies are more likely to grasp the selective psychology of their countrymen and make choices in terms of translation expression and text structure that would meet readers' expectations.

Secondly, diversified and hierarchical versions should be introduced to meet the expectations of readers at different levels and with different purposes for reading traditional Chinese culture. Some lessons can be learned from the spreading of *The Analects* in China. Academic scholars focus on Zhu Xi's commentary while common readers prefer the story-like explanation of *The Analects* by Yu Dan, a professor, who attempts to interpret *The Analects* from the academic altar to the folk, which provides a new way for the external communication of *The Analects*.

Moreover, the publication of the translated versions of *The Analects* should "borrow a ship to go to sea", and co-publish with foreign publishers. As mentioned above, at the end of last century, many translations done by mainland scholars began to spring up. However, most of these translations were published in China and were difficult to be distributed abroad, so their influence in foreign countries was very limited.

A Chinese saying goes "The beauty of nature and people in China must be spread to the outside world". Since the ancient people advocated to spread the beautiful things to the public, in today's increasingly prosperous cultural exchanges between China and the West, we have to carry out a comprehensive and systematic study of various elements of communication, in order to make the wonderful *The Analects* and the thoughts contained in it truly understood by the foreign public, and then gradually understand the real Chinese culture. Finally, we will realize equal exchange of Chinese culture in the world.

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