

The Phenomenon of Chinese Cultural Implications Lost in the English Translation of *The Analects*—Case Study of Legge’s Translation

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ABSTRACT: In the context of accelerated globalization, the international dissemination of Chinese culture has become a task of great strategic importance and received great attention from all walks of life. As a classic work of traditional Chinese culture, the English translation of *The Analects* plays a crucial role in presenting Chinese wisdom and values to the world. James Legge’s English translation of *The Analects* had a great influence on the West. However, some problems deserve careful study. Based on Venuti’s translation theory, this paper analyzes James Legge’s English translation, *The Confucian Analects*, classifies the phenomenon of the loss of cultural implications in the original language, explores its causes, and proposes appropriate translation strategies. The aim is to provide useful information on the practice of translating Chinese classics into English, effectively promote the broad and effective dissemination of Chinese culture, strengthen the soft power and international influence of Chinese culture, and promote in-depth exchange and harmonious coexistence between different cultures. It is shown that the loss of cultural implications is manifested mainly in philosophical concepts, historical allusions, and ritual terminology. The phenomenon is largely caused by language differences, cultural estrangement, the impact of the translator’s identity and considerations for target readers. Given the limited number of translation examples selected for this paper, future research should further broaden its horizons and explore the best opportunities to present China’s unique cultural qualities in traditional classics.

KEY WORDS: The Analects; Venuti’s theory; cultural implications

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2025 government work report underscores the significance of “broadening international humanities exchanges and cooperation, and comprehensively bolstering the efficacy of international communication.” These phrases mirror the swift progress of China’s international communication capabilities, while also imposing stricter standards on the international dissemination of the publishing industry. In this context, the English translation of *The Analects*, a timeless masterpiece of traditional Chinese culture, assumes a pivotal role in showcasing China’s wisdom and values to the global community. Legge’s English translation, *The Confucian Analects*, stands as one of the earliest and most esteemed renditions in the Western world, exerting a profound influence on Western academia and culture since its publication in the mid-19th century. Amidst the growing emphasis on effective international communication, Legge’s translation has offered invaluable lessons and perspectives to subsequent translators and scholars. Furthermore, the widespread circulation of Legge’s translations in the West underscores that exceptional translations can ignite interest in Chinese culture among target language readers, thereby enhancing the global dissemination and interchange of Chinese cultural heritage.

In translating classical works, conveying cultural connotations poses a significant challenge for translators. Most existing studies have concentrated on functional translation theory, translator subjectivity, or ecological translation, with limited specific research on cultural connotations. Systematic exploration from Venuti’s perspective of translation theory remains scant.

This paper examines the cultural implications lost in Legge’s translation, under the guidance of Venuti’s theory, affirming its

applicability in translating canonical works and presenting a novel approach for translation theory application, fostering theoretical diversity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Translation strategies

Many scholars have explored the translation strategies in the English translations of *The Analects*. For example, You Fengyun (2007) compared and analyzed the application of semantic and communicative translation theories in two English translations of *The Analects*. It's found that different translation theory orientations would affect the translator's handling of the text, thereby influencing the style and cultural transmission effect of the translation. Liu Chang (2010) interpreted the English translation of *The Analects* by Lin Yutang from the perspective of functional translation theory, analyzing the characteristics and strategies of the translation in achieving its functions. Such research is helpful for in-depth understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of different translation strategies in the translation of *The Analects* and provides a reference for translators to select appropriate translation strategies.

2.2 Style and subjectivity

As the core subject of translation activities, the translator's style and subjectivity have a crucial impact on the final presentation of the translation. Hardy, G. (1998), contends that, to a certain degree, the literariness of English should be compromised to uphold the word order of the source text, maintaining consistency in translating professional philosophical terms. Zhou Xiaoling (2011) conducted a corpus-based research on translator's stylistic providing a new perspective for analyzing translator's style from a quantitative perspective. He Mingzhu (2015) studied translator's subjectivity from the perspective of hermeneutics, taking Arthur Waley's English translation of *The Analects* as an example. Translators do not mechanically convert languages during the translation process but interpret and recreate the original text based on their own understanding, cultural background, and translation purposes. These studies are helpful for revealing the active role and subjective initiative of translators in cultural transmission.

2.3 The translation of culture-loaded words

Culture-loaded words are the key points in the translation of *The Analects*. Xie Youlian (2017) conducted a comparative study on the translation strategies of culture-loaded words in classic English translations of *The Analects* from a cross-cultural perspective, analyzing how different translators handle words with strong Chinese cultural characteristics and proposing corresponding translation strategies. Chen Wen (2022) compared the English translations of material culture-loaded words in the English translations of *The Analects* by Legge, Ku Hung-ming, and Chin Anping from the perspective of relevance translation theory, exploring how to better convey the connotations of culture-loaded words within the framework of relevance theory. This is of great significance for accurately transmitting the cultural information in *The Analects*. Li Dongwei (2021) compared the different strategies adopted by Legge and Ku Hung-ming in translating the culture of "Li" (rites), revealing the diversity of ways in which different translators dealt with culture-loaded words. Hou Xuechang and Lu Weizhong (2019) started from the perspective of cultural vacancy and analyzed how Ku Hung-ming filled cultural vacancies in his translation to make the translated text more in line with the cultural background and cognitive habits of the target readers. Jiang Yue (2022) conducted a comparative analysis of the translation of culture-loaded words in the translations by Legge, Ku Hung-ming, and Lau, D.C. (1979) using the eco-translatology perspective. She proposed the idea that the translation strategies chosen should adjust to the translation ecological environment, so offering new concepts and techniques for translating culture-loaded words.

2.4 Comparative studies of translations

Comparative analysis of different translations is a common method in the study of the English translations of *The Analects*. Zhang

Yaqiong (2012) explored the relationships between the original text and translations in multiple English translations of *The Analects* from various angles, including tangency, continuation, and complementarity, providing a theoretical basis for a deeper understanding of translation differences. In the comparative analysis of the English translations of *The Analects*, Liu Wenna (2012) thoroughly and methodically examined the parallels and discrepancies in linguistic expressions and cultural transmission across several translations. This is helpful for readers to choose translations that suit their needs and provides useful references for translation practice.

2.5 Studies of translations from specific theoretical perspectives

With the continuous deepening and expansion of translation research, some scholars have begun to conduct more in-depth and detailed studies on the English translations of *The Analects* from specific translation theories or other related theoretical perspectives, injecting new vitality and ideological sources into this field. For example, Zhang Fengrui (2023), from the perspective of Skopos Theory, conducted a comparative analysis of the translation strategies for cultural vocabulary in the English translations of *The Analects* by Legge and Ku Hung-ming, revealing the influence of different translation purposes on the choice of translation strategies. Cong Haiyan (2019) studied the English translation of *Reflections on The Analects by Yu Dan* from the perspective of eco-translatology, analyzing the performance of the translation in ecological environment adaptation, language conversion, and cultural transmission. Fu Xuanxiang (2017) studied the English translation of *The Analects* by Ku Hung-ming based on eco-translation theory, exploring how the translation achieves a balance in language, culture, and communication under the eco-translation concept. These studies have expanded the theoretical horizons of the study of the English translations of *The Analects* and provided new ideas for interpreting and evaluating translations from different perspectives.

Despite the extensive research conducted by many scholars on the English translations of *The Analects* from various perspectives, there is a noticeable lack of specialized research on the cultural connotations from the viewpoint of Venuti's translation theory. Venuti's translation theory, which stresses the importance of maintaining the foreignness of the original text during the translation process, holds great significance in the translation of a culturally rich work like *The Analects*, which is steeped in Chinese cultural nuances. However, there is a dearth of in-depth exploration by scholars on how to effectively implement this theory in translating *The Analects* to prevent the loss of cultural connotations from the source language. This gap in research presents an opportunity for the current study to delve into the practical application of Venuti's translation theory in translating *The Analects*, as well as to analyze its impact on the preservation of cultural meaning.

3. VENUTI'S TRANSLATION THEORY AND ITS APPLICATION IN TRANSLATING CHINESE CLASSIC WORKS

Lawrence Venuti, an American translation theorist, proposed the concepts of foreignization and domestication as two contrasting strategies in translation. Domestication refers to the process of adapting the translated text to the cultural, linguistic, and literary norms of the target language and culture, making the translation easily accessible to the target audience. In contrast, foreignization aims to preserve the linguistic and cultural elements of the source text, emphasizing the differences between the source and target cultures and challenging the target audience to engage with the unfamiliar aspects of the source text. (Pym, A 1995: 98).

Venuti's foreignization and domestication theory offers translators a theoretical basis for selecting between two different translation approaches. When applied to translation practice, this theory enables translators to make well-considered decisions, helping them maintain a balance between staying true to the cultural elements of the source text and ensuring the translated text is understandable for the target audience. In essence, Venuti's theory is vital for guiding translation practice. It helps translators produce works that not only accurately reflect the subtleties of the original text but get accessible to the target audience.

3.1 Venuti's translation theory of foreignization

Venuti criticizes domestication translation for potentially weakening the uniqueness of the source culture, or even assimilating it

into the target culture, thereby obscuring cultural differences. Venuti advocates for foreignization translation to challenge the dominant values of the target culture. The foreignization strategy emphasizes retaining the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the source text, allowing the translation to maintain an “exotic flavor”, enabling readers to feel the uniqueness of the source culture, and promoting cultural diversity. In translation practice, Venuti encourages translators to be flexible.

3.2 The application of Venuti’s theory in translating *The Analects*

Applying Venuti’s translation theory to the translation of *The Analects* aims to retain cultural, linguistic, and philosophical nuances while catering to Western readers. Practical applications involve preserving original flavors and enhancing readability.

3.2.1 Retaining key Chinese terms and concepts

In the process of translation, translators are often faced with a choice: whether to replace the terminology of the source language with the equivalent terminology of the target language or to retain the terminology of the source language. If they choose to replace, they may lose the cultural connotation of the original text; if they choose to retain, they may make it more difficult for readers to understand.

Example 1:

Chinese version: “仁者爱人。”（《论语·颜渊》）

English version: “The essence of *jen* is to love men. It is like the Christian ideal of charity.”（Ku Hung-Ming, 2017）

Ku Hung-Ming’s phonetic translation of “仁” into “*jen*” by using Wade-Giles Romanization preserves cultural uniqueness. The phonetic translation avoids the semantic limitations of English words such as “benevolence” and “humanity” and prevents Western readers from framing the rich connotations of “仁” in terms of inherent concepts. This approach also emphasizes the philosophical nature of the terminology. This approach also emphasizes the philosophical weight of the term. The transliteration “*jen*” unfamiliarizes the core concept of Confucianism, suggesting that it is not directly comparable and stimulating readers’ interest in inquiry.

3.2.2 Maintaining the syntactic structures of the original text

Chinese grammar is often different from English one, and retaining these structures in translation helps to maintain the unique style and rhythm of the original text, as shown in the following example.

Example 2:

Chinese version: “君子坦荡荡，小人长戚戚”（《论语·述而》）

English version: “The gentleman is calm and at ease; the Small Man is fretful and ill at ease.”（Walley, 1998）

In this sentence, the original’s neat counter points — “坦荡荡” and “长戚戚” are reproduced in the translation through the parallel construction of “calm and at ease” and “fretful and ill at ease”. The parallel structure is reproduced in the translation. The contrasts between “calm” and “fretful”, “at ease” and “ill at ease” in English are both preserved in the form of the parallelism. The moral connotation is also conveyed. By retaining the parallel structure, Waley not only conveys the beauty of the antithetical form, but also strengthens the moral antagonism through lexical contrasts, reflecting the translation wisdom of “conveying meaning through form”. This is a typical example of maintaining the syntactic structures of the original text, and Venuti’s principle of translation is well realized.

3.2.3 Emphasizing cultural context

To help readers understand the cultural context of *The Analects*, translators may provide introductions or notes explaining the historical, social and philosophical background of the text.

Example 3:

Chinese version: “巍巍乎唯天为大。”（《论语·泰伯》）

English version: “Only *tian* is truly great.” (Roger T. Ames, 2022)

Roger T. Ames chose to transliterate “天” as “*tian*” instead of directly translating it as “Heaven” or “Nature” to avoid associations with Western religion or naturalism. In his annotations, he elaborates on the multiple meanings of “*tian*” in Confucian thought: it encompasses both the natural laws of operation — natural *tian* — and refers to the ethical order — moral *tian*, while emphasizing its impersonal philosophical characteristics. This translation strategy, retaining the original term and providing cultural annotations, not only avoids cultural misinterpretations but also highlights the uniqueness of the Confucian concept of “*tian*”.

3.2.4 Resisting the imposition of Western values

Translators should avoid interpreting the concepts of *The Analects* from a Western perspective and endeavor to convey the unique Confucian worldview embedded in the text. Considering the different underlying beliefs, moral frameworks, and philosophical assumptions among different cultures, there is a greater likelihood that such a perspective may distort the distinctive cultural conceptual deficiencies of *The Analects*.

The Confucian worldview, with its emphasis on family responsibility, respect for the elderly, love for the young, and social harmony, may be unfamiliar and even challenging to Western readers, but it is these unique cultural perspectives that give *The Analects* its distinctive identity. Legge’s use of the Christian analogy in the commentary is a case in point.

Example 4: “己所不欲，勿施于人。”（《论语·卫灵公》）

English version: “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.” (Legge, 2016)

Notes: “The same lesson is taught in the ‘Golden Rule’ of our Saviour: ‘All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them’ (Matthew 7:12). But the negative form of it here is less comprehensive.” (Legge, 1893)

Legge often draws analogies between Confucius and Jesus in his exegesis, for Example 4, by directly contrasting “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.” in *The Confucian Analects* and the Golden Rule in the Gospel of Matthew, thus downplaying the uniqueness of Confucian ethics. In the translation process, James Legge’s simplistic equation of Confucian thought with Christian doctrine is problematic — representing an imposition of Western values onto Eastern philosophy. In contrast, Arthur Waley’s translation strategy demonstrates a more culturally sensitive approach.

Example 5:

Chinese version : “君子喻于义，小人喻于利。”（《论语·里仁》）

English version: “The superior man understands what is moral; the inferior man understands what is profitable.” (Waley, 1998)

Waley’s translation uses the word “moral” in contrast to “profitable”. This approach preserves the uniqueness of Confucian morality and avoids reducing it to the “self-interest” opposition of personal interests that is common in Western individualism. Western individualism often emphasises the legitimacy of the pursuit of personal interests, whereas Confucianism focuses more on the centrality of morality in interpersonal relationships. This translation strategy effectively prevents the misinterpretation of Confucian morality by values such as the Western assumption of economic man, and highlights the independent value of Confucian moral concepts.

To sum up, there are differences in philosophical concepts between the East and the West. By adopting a foreignization strategy, translators can preserve the cultural and linguistic uniqueness of the original text, bridging the gap between Eastern and Western philosophies. This can be achieved by retaining key Chinese terms and concepts, thereby avoiding the loss of cultural connotations caused by domestication. At the same time, maintaining the original syntactic structure is also important. This helps preserve the

unique style and rhythm of *The Analects*, providing Western readers with a more authentic reading experience. Additionally, by emphasizing cultural context through annotations and resisting the imposition of Western values, the translator can convey the rich cultural and philosophical background of *The Analects*. These methods not only align with Venuti's theory but also enhance cross-cultural understanding, making it easier for Western to comprehend and appreciate the work. Therefore, Venuti's theory provides valuable guidance for the translation of *The Analects*, ensuring that the cultural authenticity and depth are preserved during the translation process.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE PHENOMENON OF DISTORTED CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS IN THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF *THE ANALECTS*

While James Legge prioritized understanding and interpreting the original text of *The Analects*, aiming to convey its moral concepts, social ethics, and political thoughts, his missionary identity and social background influenced his translation. Consequently, his English rendition suffered from cultural omissions, reflecting the complexity of preserving deep-seated Chinese cultural nuances in translation.

4.1 Manifestations of lack of meaning of cultural connotation

Philosophical concepts, historical allusion, and ritual terms with rich cultural connotations in *The Analects* are difficult to deal with in translation, and they are easily affected by the translator's subjectivity, resulting in the distortion of cultural meanings.

They serve as the key "cells" of semantic communication and cultural bearing of *The Analects*, and the quality of their translation directly affects the accuracy and integrity of the whole classic in cross-cultural communication.

4.1.1 Simplification of philosophical concepts

Due to the differences in philosophical concepts between China and the West, there are many Chinese philosophies that cannot be accurately translated into English to be presented to Western readers. Chinese, as a high-context cultural language, and English, as a low-context cultural language, have very different modes of expression and modes of thinking (Edward·T·H, 2010). In high-context cultural languages, since most people have similar historical, educational, and cultural backgrounds, people usually assume that they can understand each other's dialogue context. English, on the other hand, is a typical low-context language, and people need to be more direct and explicit in their speech to avoid misunderstandings due to different background knowledge.

Example 6:

Chinese version: “殷因于夏礼， 所损益可知也； 周因于殷礼， 所损益可知也。”

(《论语·为政》)

English version: “The Yin dynasty followed the regulations of the Hsia: — wherein it took from or added to them may be known. The Chau dynasty has followed the regulations of Yin: — wherein it took from or added to them may be known.” (Legge, 2016)

Example 7:

Chinese version: “礼云礼云， 玉帛云乎哉？” (《论语·阳货》)

English version: “The Master said, ‘It is according to the rules of propriety, they say. — It is according to the rules of propriety, they say. Are gems and silk all that is meant by propriety?’” (Legge, 2016)

Analysed from an academic point of view, “礼” has both the meaning of external norms and regulations and the connotation of an inner spirit of respect. The external normative attributes of “礼” are reflected in its function as a social system and code of conduct, such as the various rituals and systems stipulated in the rites in Zhou dynasty, which are the external manifestations of rites. These external norms provide clear guidance for people's behaviour and maintain social order and stability. In *The Analects*, the importance of rituals is mentioned many times, emphasising the need to follow appropriate etiquette in different social relationships and

occasions. In Example 6, “礼” is translated as “regulations”, highlighting the meaning of “rites” as “rules and regulations”, as the Yin dynasty followed the rituals of the Xia dynasty, and the Zhou dynasty followed the rituals of the Yin dynasty. The word “regulations” expresses the normative and inherited nature of “礼”. This external normativity makes “礼” a mandatory and universally applicable social norm. However, “rites” are more than just external behavioural norms. The words in Example 7 reveal the inner spiritual attributes of “rites”, i.e. the inner feelings and attitudes of respect and honour. The “propriety” in Example 7 is translated as “the rules of propriety”. Confucius emphasised that “propriety” should stem from inner sincerity and respect, not just external forms. This inner spirit is the heart and soul of propriety, which emphasises that people should follow propriety with respect and humility, not just to complete a ritual or observe a rule. This inner spirit gives life and influence to the rites, making them not only an external behavioural constraint, but also an inner moral pursuit.

The analysis of this dual attribute helps us to understand the connotation and value of “rites” more comprehensively. From the perspective of translation, it is a challenge to accurately convey the dual attributes of rites in English. Translators need to try their best to convey the inner spirit of “rites” while retaining its outer normative meaning, so that Western readers can better understand the rich connotation of this concept. This involves not only language conversion but also cultural transmission and value interpretation.

Example 8:

Chinese version: “仁者爱人。” (《论语·颜渊》)

English version: “The virtuous rest in virtue; the wise desire virtue.” (Legge, 2016)

Example 9:

Chinese version: “夫仁者，己欲立而立人，己欲达而达人。” (《论语·雍也》)

English version: “He who is himself established in a position of dignity seeks also to establish others in a position of dignity.” (Legge, 2016)

“Benevolence” is the highest state of human love, and the connotation of “benevolence” has different meanings in different contexts. In Example 8, Legge adopts the strategy of domestication in his translation. He translates “benevolence” as “virtuous” and “love of man” as “virtue”, which makes the translation conform to the meaning of “benevolence” and to make the translation conform to the expression habits of Western readers and be easy to understand. However, this translation may have weakened the unique connotation of “ren”. When Fan Chi asked about “ren”, Confucius replied, “爱人”. Here, “Loving people” signifies the affection and compassion demonstrated within human relationships, emphasizing mutual respect and care between individuals. This represents the concrete manifestation of ren in interpersonal conduct. “Ren” in Confucianism contains a wealth of ethical and social meanings, such as benevolence, tolerance, forgiveness, etc., while “virtuous” focuses more on personal character and the pursuit of virtue, and fail to fully cover the cultural connotation of “benevolence”. From the viewpoint of Venuti’s theory, this kind of translation is easy for readers to understand, but fails to fully show the cultural uniqueness of the original text.

Example 9 embodies another important dimension of benevolence — that of extending oneself to others. Legge used the words “established in a position of dignity” to convey the meaning of “to establish” and “to attain”. This translation enables Western readers to see the meaning of “established” and “attained” in the context of the individual’s dignity. This translation enables Western readers to understand the text from the perspective of personal achievement and social status, but Chinese words “立” and “达” in Confucianism put more emphasis on personal moral cultivation and social responsibility, as well as the spirit of helping others through one’s own efforts. To a certain extent, Legge’s translation has weakened this sense of morality and responsibility, failing to fully convey the idea of self-effacement implied by “ren”. From the perspective of foreignization, this translation fails to fully demonstrate the unique values of Confucianism.

People with the virtue of “benevolence” are not only concerned about their own growth and development, but also want to help

others achieve the same goal. This spirit of putting oneself in the shoes of others and caring for others is one of the core connotations of “ren”, which emphasises the need to consider the interests of others while pursuing one’s own personal interests, and embodies the ethical and moral concepts of Confucianism. The multi-dimensional interpretation of the concept of “ren” reflects the depth and breadth of Confucian thinking. It covers not only personal cultivation and interpersonal relationships, but also emphasises social responsibility and moral practice. This multidimensional nature has made “ren” a central concept in the Confucian ethical system, influencing Chinese culture and social values for thousands of years.

4.1.2 Omission of historical allusions

The historical allusions in *The Analects* have carried the cultural deposits of Chinese civilisation for thousands of years, and their subtleties are often rooted in specific historical contexts and ritual traditions, with many details tied to ancient historical backgrounds and ceremonial systems. These allusions are not just about reasoning, they are more like a condensed version of the Zhou Dynasty hierarchy, the social landscape of the Spring and Autumn period, and even the philosophical thinking of the pre-Qin dynasties. But the problem is that it is difficult to translate these things into English without compromising the cultural connotation.

Example 10:

Chinese version: “泰伯，其可谓至德也已矣。三以天下让，民无得而称焉。”

(《论语·泰伯》)

English version: “The Master said, ‘Tai Bo has indeed attained the supreme level of true virtue. Several times he declined the crown. The people do not know how to praise him enough.’” (Legge, 2016)

In Legge’s translation, “the supreme level of true virtue” conveys the meaning of Tai Bo’s noble character, but the Chinese “至德” has a much deeper connotation in Confucian culture, for it is not only a noble personal character, but also the highest level of morality that conforms to the Way of Heaven and follows the rites and righteousness, which is one of the core concepts in the Confucian system of thought. This translation fails to fully reflect the rich cultural and philosophical connotations of “至德”，which tends to give Western readers a superficial understanding of the concept. The phrase “several times he declined the crown” expresses the meaning of refusing the throne, but it differs from the original in tone and degree. The Chinese word “让” means to give up voluntarily, which emphasises a noble character and selflessness. On the other hand, “declined” in English has the meaning of refusing and politely rejecting, and the tone is relatively bland, which cannot fully reflect Tai Bo’s noble sentiment of giving up the throne for the interests of the country and the people, regardless of personal gains and losses.

Legge’s translation fails to add to the historical background of Tai Bo’s abdication. For Western readers who are not familiar with Chinese culture, it is difficult to understand why Tai Bo has to abdicate, and what great significance his abdication has under the historical conditions at that time. This makes the translation lacking in the historical allusion.

Example 11:

Chinese version: “子贡曰：‘管仲非仁者与？桓公杀公子纠，不能死，又相之。’子曰：‘管仲相桓公，霸诸侯，一匡天下，民至于今受其赐。微管仲，吾其被发左衽矣。岂若匹夫匹妇之为谅也，自经于沟渎而莫之知也。’” (《论语·宪问》)

English version: “Tsze-kung said, ‘Kwan Chung, I apprehend, was wanting in virtue. When the Duke Hwan caused his brother Chiu to be killed, Kwan Chung was not able to die with him. Moreover, he became prime minister to Hwan.’ The Master said, ‘Kwan Chung acted as prime minister to the Duke Hwan, made him leader of all the princes, and united and rectified the whole kingdom. Down to the present day, the people enjoy the gifts which he conferred. But for Kwan Chung, we should now be wearing our hair unbound, and the lappets of our coats buttoning on the left side. Will you require from him the small fidelity of common men and common women, who would commit suicide in a stream or ditch, no one knowing anything about them?’” (Legge, 2016)

In the allusion “管仲相桓公”，the word “相” means “auxiliary” and “acted as prime minister”. Legge translated it as “acted as prime

minister”, which superficially conforms to the original meaning, but the function and status of “prime minister” in different cultural contexts are not the same. On the surface, this is consistent with the original meaning, but the duties and status of “prime minister” vary in different cultural contexts. Western readers may understand “prime minister” according to their own historical and political backgrounds, and this understanding may deviate from the duties and roles of the “prime minister” referred to in *The Analects*. In ancient China, the prime minister was not only the chief executive, but also assumed important duties such as assisting the ruler and governing the country, which are not adequately reflected in Legge’s translation. Secondly, the phrase “一匡天下” means that after Guan Zhong assisted Duke Huan of Qi, the order of the world was rectified, and the politics were clear and the society was stable. Legge translated this as “united and rectified the whole kingdom”. Although “united” embodies the meaning of “unifying the whole kingdom”, and “rectified” focuses on “correcting” and “rectifying”, the version fails to fully convey the rich connotation of “to rectify the order of the world”.

Such a translation may make Western readers understand that Guan Zhong only carried out some partial reforms or corrections to the state, while ignoring his far-reaching influence on the order of the world as a whole. Thirdly, “Obeisance over the hair” is a description of the dress and customs of the barbarians in the ancient Central Plains, and it symbolises the state of being uncivilised and barbaric. This translation explains in detail the outward manifestation of “被发左衽”, but pays insufficient attention to the cultural and symbolic meanings behind it. In Confucian culture, the “overlapping hair” is not only a feature of dress, but also represents the division between civilisation and barbarism, symbolising the degradation of social order and culture. Legge’s translation fails to adequately reflect this historical allusion, which may cause Western readers to understand it only literally and ignore its deeper cultural connotations.

4.1.3 Domestication of ritual terminology

In Confucian culture, great importance is attached to courtesy and etiquette in interpersonal exchanges, which is a social norm and a moral requirement. In *The Analects* of Confucius, a certain balance should be maintained between the giving and receiving of courtesies to reflect respect and politeness. This reciprocity is not only material, but also emotional and ceremonial.

Example 12:

Chinese version: “朋友之馈，虽车马，非祭肉，不拜”（《论语·乡党》）

English version: “When a friend sent him a present, though it might be a carriage and horses, he did not bow. The only present for which he bowed was that of the flesh of sacrifice.” (Legge, 2016)

Example 13:

Chinese version: “阳货欲见孔子，孔子不见，归孔子豚。”（《论语·阳货》）

English version: “Yang Ho wished to see Confucius, but Confucius would not go to see him. On this, he sent a present of a pig to Confucius, who, having chosen a time when Ho was not at home, went to pay his respects for the gift.” (Legge, 2016)

In Example 12, Legge translates “馈” as “present”, choosing the common English concept of “gift” and weakening the ritualistic attributes of “feed”. This weakens the ceremonial nature of the gift. The translation of “flesh of sacrifice” retains the literal meaning of the word, but does not explain its connection with the sacrificial system of

the Zhou Dynasty through the commentary. Legge used the cultural framework of the target language to “domesticate” the cultural concepts of the source language. Although this strategy facilitated the transmission of *The Analects* to the West, it partially dissolved the depth of the ritual system of “馈”, and failed to build a cultural context through multi-dimensional subtexts to achieve the symbiosis of “readability” and “cultural authenticity”.

Furthermore, Legge's translation does not reflect the principle of reciprocity of the source language and culture. In Example 13, “礼” is translated as “gift”. Although “gift” in English also has the concepts of giving and receiving, it mostly points to personal feelings or holiday gifts such as Christmas presents, and its core is voluntariness and emotional expression, rather than the obligations and social norms emphasised by Confucianism. The Confucian “gift” is always tied to the institutional nature of “rites”. The simple translation “presents from friends” only emphasises the material aspect of the gift, ignoring the deep cultural connotation behind it, that is, the gift as a symbol of etiquette and emotional exchange, as well as the moral and social concepts of Confucian culture contained in the gift. It also ignores the deep cultural connotations behind it, i.e. the gift as a symbol of etiquette and emotional exchange, as well as the moral concepts and social norms embedded in Confucian culture.

4.2 Reasons behind the phenomenon of Chinese cultural implications lost in the English translation In the course of translation, translators must engage in nuanced deliberation across multiple dimensions to achieve precise and complete meaning transfer. Even minor oversights may result in distorted representation of the source text's essence and cultural signification. It is suggested that the main reasons behind the phenomenon are language differences, cultural estrangement, impact of the translator's identity and considerations for target audience.

4.2.1 Language differences

The reason why there is a lack of cultural connotation in translation is due to the differences between Chinese and English languages. The logical relationship of sentences in Chinese is mostly hidden in the semantics, and does not need to be reflected by a large number of conjunctions and other explicit means, while English pays attention to “form”, and needs to express logical relationship and grammatical meaning through explicit means, such as conjunctions, prepositional phrases, clauses and so on. In translating *The Analects* of Confucius, Legge sometimes failed to take this difference into full consideration. For example, there are some sentences that imply inherent logical relations in the original Chinese text.

Example 14:

Chinese version: “君子不器。”（《论语·为政》）

English version: “The accomplished scholar is not a utensil.” (Legge, 2016)

The original declarative statement emphasizes the need of exemplary people to transcend specialized limitations. While Legge avoids explicit contrastive markers, his use of the negation “is not” inherently frames the oppositional statement. This syntactic choice risks misleading Western readers into perceiving a categorical rejection of “vessel-like” qualities. The intended meaning, however, highlights versatility and holistic capacity, not absolute negation of utility.

4.2.2 Cultural estrangement

In the 19 centuries, especially after the Opium Wars, the West developed rapidly and continued to expand outwards, and China gradually became a weaker country. The West's view of China changed to one of backwardness and stagnation, whereas the 19th century West generally regarded Christian values as the universal standard, leading Westerners to consider themselves to be advanced and progressive in their culture. This cultural bias makes Western translators, when translating Chinese classics, often start from their own sense of cultural superiority and find it difficult to truly understand and respect the uniqueness of Chinese culture, which leads to the absence or misinterpretation of cultural connotations in translation. When studying China, Western scholars often regard China as the opposite of the West. For example, French ethnologist Levi Breuer suggested that the European way of thinking is logical, analytical and abstract, while the primitive way of thinking is aesthetic, material and figurative (Lévy-Bruhl, L 1986: 22), and this notion affects the West's understanding of Chinese culture, making it difficult for them to truly grasp the essence of Chinese culture. The Chinese way of thinking focuses on wholeness and synthesis, while Westerners are more inclined

to analysis and abstraction. This difference in ways of thinking makes it difficult for Western translators to understand the rich cultural connotations and philosophical ideas contained in *The Analects*. For example, for core Confucian concepts such as “仁”, “义”, “礼”. Legge may simply translate them as “benevolence”, “righteousness”, “propriety”, etc., which could not fully convey their

profound connotations in Chinese culture. Due to the existence of cultural barriers, Western translators in the 19th century often tended to adopt the strategy of domestication when translating Chinese classics, adapting elements of Chinese culture to be more in line with Western cultural norms and habits of expression, in order to reduce the sense of cultural clash and unfamiliarity. Although this strategy makes the translation easier to be accepted by Western readers, it also leads to the loss of cultural connotation and cultural alienation of the original text. On the other hand, if the strategy of foreignization is adopted to retain the cultural characteristics and exotic style of the original text, the uniqueness of Chinese culture may be better conveyed, but this also puts higher demands on the translator’s cross-cultural comprehension and communication skills.

4.2.3 Impact of the translator’s identity

In the 19th century, the West was biased in its perception of Chinese culture as backward and stagnant, while Western culture was advanced and progressive. As a missionary, Legge attempted to find “resonance” between Confucianism and Christianity to facilitate his missionary work, but this inevitably led to cultural misinterpretation. For example, one of the major purposes of Legge’s translation of *The Analects* of Confucius was to gain a better understanding of Chinese culture and mentality in order to pave the way for more effective missionary activities. This motivation may have led him to be more concerned with how to utilise the contents of *The Analects* to facilitate the spread of Christianity in his translation, rather than simply being faithful to the cultural connotations of the original work. For example, he may have selectively translated or interpreted some Confucian concepts to make them more compatible with the Christian system of thought, thus compromising the cultural authenticity of the translation.

In order to maintain the “purity” of Christian culture, Legge tries to avoid using elements of Chinese culture to explain Christian doctrines in his translations, but this practice may also lead him to translate Chinese cultural concepts in a way that fails to adequately convey their distinctive connotations, and he tends to interpret or replace them with Western religious and cultural concepts.

Example 15:

Chinese version: “不怨天，不尤人。”（《论语·宪问》）

English version: “I do not murmur against Heaven. I do not grumble against men.”（Legge, 2016）

In the example, Legge’s choice of the word “Heaven” could easily lead Western readers to associate *tian* with the ‘City of God’ in Christianity and implant the Christian faith in the spiritual context of the Chinese intellectual framework, searching for the connection between Confucian culture and Christianity, and finding suitable equivalents for Biblical terms. However, the Confucian “*tian*” encompasses both natural laws (such as the operation of the four seasons), moral authority, and the master of destiny, rather than a personified deity. Such a translation might reinforce the Western misunderstanding of Confucianism.

4.2.4 Considerations for target readers

The main audience for Legge’s English translation of *The Analects* was the 19th century Western readers, including Western sinologists, some experts and scholars in the fields of political science and history, and a small group of general readers who were interested in *The Analects*. Most of these readers had limited knowledge of Chinese culture and even less knowledge of Confucianism. Therefore, he needs to consider how to enable these readers to understand the basic meaning of the translated text, which leads to the fact that he may simplify some cultural concepts in his translation to cater for the cultural background and cognitive habits of the Western readers, which results in the loss of cultural connotations. When reading foreign literary works, Western readers are more inclined to read translations that conform to the habits of English expression and Western cultural norms.

This makes it possible for Legge to adjust the sentence structure of the original text in translation to make it more in line with the form-fit characteristics of English, while ignoring the meaning-fit style of the original text. Although such adjustments improve the fluency and readability of the translation, they may also lead to a certain degree of weakening of the cultural features and linguistic style of the original text, affecting the target audience's accurate understanding of the cultural connotations of *The Analects*.

4.3 The influence and implications of Venuti's translation theory

Venuti's theory of translation, while advocating foreignization, does not completely reject domestication. He argues that translation cannot be completely free from domestication and therefore needs to compensate for this unavoidable cultural appropriation through foreignization strategies. Based on Venuti's translation theory, this section uses some examples from the translation by Arthur Waley and Roger T. Ames & Rothman (English version 2) as a reference to illustrate the limitations of James Legge's translation (English version 1) and the effectiveness of related translation strategies.

4.3.1 Foreignization

Lawrence Venuti's foreignization strategy refers to the fact that in the process of translation, the translator should retain the original language structure, cultural concepts or expressions as much as possible, so as to highlight the foreignness of the text. The "foreignization translation" he proposes is not a simple literal translation, but a translation strategy with cultural and political awareness. Its core lies in "sending the reader abroad" by deliberately preserving the linguistic heterogeneity of the source text and subverting the reading inertia of the target language culture (Venuti 2004). This strategy contains three theoretical dimensions: impedance at the linguistic level, forcing readers to face the linguistic differences by creating a "translation accent" through unconventional syntax and unfamiliar vocabulary; criticality at the cultural level, retaining concepts specific to the source language culture; and the ability to translate into the target language. The cultural dimension is critical - preserving the conceptual system of the source culture and challenging the cognitive paradigm of the target culture; and the political dimension is resistant - confronting the cultural hegemony of Anglocentrism and highlighting the value subjectivity of the weaker culture (Edward T. H, 2010).

Example 16:

Chinese version: "仁者安仁， 知者利仁。" (《论语·里仁》)

English version 1: "The virtuous rest in virtue; the wise desire virtue." (Legge, 2016)

English version 2: "The benevolent find peace in benevolence; the wise seek profit in benevolence." (Roger & Henry, 1998)

Legge used the word "virtue" for "ren", and partially retains its philosophical connotation by repeating "virtue". But by repeating "virtue" to emphasise its centrality,

the philosophical connotation of the original text is partially preserved. However, "virtue" has a broader meaning in English, which does not fully correspond to the unique cultural connotation of "ren". Based on Venuti's theory of translation, it is suggested that "仁" should be translated as "ren". Venuti emphasises the preservation of the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the original text in translation, showing the differences between the source language and the target language, so that the readers of the translated text can feel the freshness and uniqueness of the foreign culture. This translation strategy, domestication helps to avoid the assimilation of the source text culture into the target culture and maintains the cultural identity and diversity of the original text. According to Venuti's theory, translators should try to avoid over-domestication when translating; they should not over-adapt the original text to the cultural and linguistic habits of the target language. Through foreignized translation, translators can reveal the cultural perspectives and ways of thinking of the source language to readers of the target language and promote cross-cultural communication and understanding.

By not using the word "virtue" in Example 16, the translator can better preserve the uniqueness of Confucianism and prevent it from being restricted by the Western conceptual framework, thus reducing cultural misinterpretation and loss of key information.

Foreignization emphasizes the preservation of the heterogeneity of the original text, so that readers can directly feel the unique charm of Chinese culture, rather than simply incorporating it into the Western value system. This approach is not only applicable to the translation of *ren*, but also to the translation of other core Confucian concepts, helping to build a more authentic and diverse image of Chinese culture.

The translations of Roger and Henry's versions adopt the word "benevolence", which not only retains the core connotation of *ren*, but also emphasises the wise man's pursuit of benevolence through the word "profit", which means "to be benevolent". It retains the core connotation of "benevolence" and emphasises the pursuit of benevolence by the wise through the word "profit", which is a more specific reflection of the Confucian concept of moral interest than Legge's "desire virtue". It better reflects the positive and relevant attributes of benevolence, since benevolence is a quality of goodness and love. The word "profit" here is not a material benefit, but indicates that the wise man recognizes the moral and practical value of practicing *ren*. This translation retains the moral significance of *ren* while highlighting its practical value, which is more in line with Confucianism and reflects the strategy of dissimulation, prompting readers to gain a deeper understanding of the connotation of *ren* in the Confucian framework.

4.3.2 Mixed use of domestication and foreignization

Although Venuti is a strong supporter of domestication, he also emphasizes that the two are not absolutely opposed. He points out that domestication and foreignization are dynamic, and the definitions of contextualized concepts need to be contextualized in specific historical and cultural contexts. For example, the realization of heterogeneous translation still needs to rely on certain dominant values in the target language culture, while certain domestication strategies, such as choosing to marginalize the original text, may also indirectly preserve heterogeneity. Thus, the boundaries between the two are variable and often need to be flexibly combined in translation practice (Pym, A 1995:125).

Example 17:

Chinese version: “君子不重则不威。”（《论语·学而》）

English version: “If the superior man (junzi) be not grave, he will not be revered.” (Legge, 1893)

Notes: “The ‘superior man’ is the ideal of Confucian ethics, combining moral virtue and social dignity.” (Legge, 1893)

Example 18:

Chinese version: “子在齐闻《韶》，三月不知肉味。”（《论语·述而》）

English version: “When the Master was in Qi, he heard the Shao music, and for three months did not know the taste of flesh.” (Legge, 1893)

Notes: “This hyperbolic expression signifies the profound effect of music on Confucius.” (Legge, 1893)

These paradigmatic cases reveal James Legge's strategic negotiation between domestication and foreignization.

In Example 17, rendering “君子” as “superior man” appropriates Victorian class semantics, imposing social hierarchy onto Confucian moral cultivation while permeating Christian ethics. This word choice reinforces elitist meanings through deep-rooted English cultural assumptions. In Example 18, annotating the passage as “hyperbolic expression” reduces Liyue philosophy to a cross-cultural cognition management tool. Within the framework of foreignization, Legge's approach in Example 17 retains *junzi* parenthetically — a diacritical marker of untranslatability — while annotating its Confucian ethical substance.

Example 18 employs mimetic syntax, “for three months did not”, to replicate Chinese temporal structures, with literal translation preserving rhetorical exaggeration—yet deliberately omitting the ritual semiotics of meat as privilege-laden currency in pre-Qin society. This methodological hybridity constitutes the constitutive dialectic in Legge's translational praxis.

4.4 Summary

Venuti's theory of foreignization reveals that there is indeed an unavoidable absence of source language culture in translations of

well-known classics. That is, culture-specific concepts may be simplified, the richness and nuances of the source culture are lost or reduced in the target language, and cultural meanings are distorted. There may be many reasons for these phenomena, but they are mainly reflected in language differences, cultural estrangement, impact of the translator's identity and considerations for target audience. Venuti's translation theory is a good guide for translating traditional classics, especially in terms of translation strategies.

5. CONCLUSION

Legge's translation of *The Analects* is not only fluent and clear in expression but also includes a wealth of annotations and interpretations, helping readers better understand the essence of traditional Chinese culture. However, there are still certain instances of cultural implications lost in the translation. It is found out that the loss of cultural implications mainly manifests in philosophical concepts, historical allusions, and ceremonial terms. This phenomenon is attributed to factors such as language differences, cultural estrangement, the impact of the translator's identity, and considerations for target readers. That highlights the complexity and challenge of translation work. In order to preserve the cultural implications of the original text and accurately convey its meaning, translators should adopt various strategies. First, translators need to be aware of their own cultural assumptions and biases. They should strive to minimize their cultural influence and gain a deep understanding of the cultural context and connotations of the target material. Additionally, understanding the cultural context of the target audience is essential to ensure that the translation is comprehensible and meaningful to readers. In translation, this sensitivity to cultural interactions helps reduce potential cultural distortions and promotes a richer and more authentic representation of the cultural and philosophical essence of the source text. To mitigate the impact of cultural connotation distortion, translators need to be acutely aware of the cultural connotations in the source language. They can provide footnotes for complex concepts, carefully and appropriately choose words to best express the nuances of the source text, and judiciously apply domestication and foreignization methods to ensure that the translation of traditional classics is both acceptable to contemporary Western readers and faithful to their cultural and philosophical meanings, thereby reducing the loss of linguistic and cultural implications during the translation process. In summary, accurately translating *The Analects* requires not only linguistic ability but also cultural sensitivity and understanding. With the advancement of China's "going out" strategy, the issue of semantic fidelity in classical text translation has become an important dimension of national cultural security. Measures such as constructing a translator's competency model of terminology, improving translation compensating mechanisms, and establishing multilingual parallel corpora can effectively enhance the precision of cultural dissemination. However, the examples of translations selected in this article are limited. It's hoped that future research should further expand comparative perspectives. By analyzing multiple translations, we can explore the best ways to present the unique cultural characteristics of China in traditional classical works, providing scholarly support for the construction of an international discourse system for Chinese culture.

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