Comparative Analysis of Two Famous English Versions of

*Analects of Confucius*

HU Weiyi, JIA Xiaoqing
University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

The *Analects of Confucius* is a great Chinese classic with far-reaching influence all over the world. There are many translation versions of it, among which Thomas Cleary’s and Arthur Waley’s translation are the most well-known. Based on careful study, this paper makes a comparative analysis of the translation versions of Cleary and Waley, mainly from two aspects: the translation of key words and the translation of special sentence patterns and rhetoric. After a detailed comparative analysis of some typical examples, it is concluded that: Cleary’s translation is easy for western readers to understand because many culture-specific items are deleted. And Waley’s translation tries to be faithful to the style of the original text, thus building a bridge for western scholars to study Confucius.

*Keywords: Analects of Confucius, Waley’s translation version, Cleary’s translation version*

**Two Overseas Translation Versions**

The *Analects of Confucius* is not only a classic representative of Chinese traditional culture, but also one of the earliest classics for spreading Chinese culture to the world. At present, there are many overseas translation versions of *Analects of Confucius*, which have far-reaching influence in the world. However, there are many difficulties in translating *Analects of Confucius*, which are mainly reflected in two aspects: First, Confucius’ ideological connotation is profound, and the same concept can often express multiple meanings. The second factor is the difficulty of understanding ancient Chinese. In more than 2,000 years, there have been different annotations of *Analects of Confucius*, such as Bo-Jun Yang’s *Translation and Annotation of Analects*, De-Shu Cheng’s *Collected Commentaries of the Analects*. These annotations are misunderstood many times, which makes it more difficult for translators to understand Confucius’ thoughts correctly.

Up to now, according to incomplete statistics, there are more than 30 English versions of *Analects of Confucius*. In 1938, a complete overseas translation of *Analects of Confucius* was published by a famous British oriental scholar Arthur Waley. In 1992, *Essential Confucius* translated by American sinologist Thomas Cleary was published (He, 2007). For a long time, Waley’s and Cleary’s translation versions have enjoyed an obvious authoritative position overseas. In view of the historical status and influence of these two versions, it is necessary to make an in-depth comparison between their translations and explore some suitable translation strategies.

HU Weiyi, Master, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.
JIA Xiaoqing, correspondence author, associate professor, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.
Comparative Analysis of the Two Versions

Both Waley and Cleary have done a great deal of research on Confucius’ thoughts, trying to improve the expressive force of the translation, and striving for faithfulness and fluency while maintaining the original style. The Analects of Confucius is concise, so the two translators have adopted the translation skills of addition and abridgement to make the translation easy to understand. Here are some examples.

Example 1:
The original: 不义而富且貴，于我如浮云。《论语·述而篇》
Waley’s translation: Any thought of accepting wealth and rank by means I know to be wrong is remote from me as the clouds that float above. (Waley, 1998)
Cleary’s translation: Riches and status unjustly obtained are to me like floating clouds. (Cleary, 1992)

Analysis:
The biggest difference between Cleary’s and Waley’s versions lies in their understanding of the word “浮云”. Cleary literally translates it as “floating clouds”, while Waley’s translation is “remote from me as the clouds that float above”, which adopts simile rhetoric. Waley adds the translation of “remote from me” to interpret the image of “浮云” and vividly explains that the practice of “不义而富且貴” is just like the clouds floating in the sky, which is far away from the author and deepens the readers’ understanding and impression of the original text.

Example 2:
The original: 加我数年, 五十以学《易》, 可以无大过矣。《论语·述而篇》
Waley’s translation: Give me a feel more years, so that I may have spent a whole fifth in study, and I believe that after all I should be fair free from error. (Waley, 1998)
Cleary’s translation: Give me a few more years, so that I will have studied the Book of Change for fifty years, and I may eliminate major error. (Cleary, 1992)

Analysis:
The original text literally means, give me a few more years of life so that I can study the Book of Change at the age of 50, and make no big mistake. Cleary’s translation “studied the Book of Change for fifty years” means the period of learning Book of Change is 50 years, which is quite different from the original text, while Waley’s translation “spent a whole fifty in study” means studying the Book of Change in the whole year at the age of 50, which is more in line with the meaning conveyed by the original text.

However, Waley omitted the translation of “易经”, which is a cultural-specific item, and was not faithful to the original text in content. Cleary translated it as “the Book of Change”, which was better than Waley’s translation. For the translation of “无大过矣”, Cleary and Waley’s translations are respectively “eliminate major error” and “be fairly free from error”. The former’s translation is more appropriate, while the latter’s is too absolute. “Be fairly free from error” means “make no mistakes at all”, but the original text “无大过矣” means “make no big mistakes, not absolutely no mistakes”.

Example 3:
The original: 孰谓鄹人之子知礼呼？《论语·八佾》
Waley’s translation: Don’t tell me that this son of a village from Zou is expert in matters of ritual. (Waley, 1998)
Footnote: A village with which Confucius’s family had been connected. (Waley, 1998)

Cleary’s translation: Who says that old man knows the classical rites? (Cleary, 1992)

Analysis:

“鄹” (Zou County) is a small county in Lu State, according to Records of the Historian, where Confucius was born.

The context of this sentence is that every time Confucius entered the Ancestral Temple to participate in the national sacrifice ceremony, he asked carefully about everything he encountered. Someone said, “Who says that man in Zou County knows rites? When he entered the Ancestral Temple, he asked people about everything”. When Confucius heard about it, he replied, “This is just the expression of knowing rites!”

In the original text, “鄹人之子” implies irreverence for Confucius. Cleary’s translation omits the expression of “鄹人之子” and directly translates it into “that old man”, which expresses someone’s disrespect for Confucius incisively and vividly. The purpose of deleting the cultural-specific item “鄹人之子” is to avoid difficulties for foreign readers in understanding the special aspects of Chinese culture.

Waley’s translation does not adopt the same rhetorical question form as the original text, but uses the idiomatic oral English expression of “Don’t tell me”, which reflects someone’s questioning of Confucius. Waley translated “鄹人之子” to “son of a village from Zou”, and made a supplementary explanation to “鄹” by a footnote. Not only translated this cultural-specific item, but also expressed someone’s impiety for Confucius, considering Confucius a country bumpkin and knowing nothing about etiquette.

Example 4:

The original: 子曰: “善人，吾不得而见之矣；得见有恒者，斯可矣。亡而为有，虚而为盈，约而为泰，难乎有恒矣。”《论语·述而篇》

Waley’s translation: A faultless man I can’t hope ever to meet, the most I can hope for is to meet a man of fixed principles. Yet where all around I see Nothing pretending to be Something, Emptiness pretending to be Fullness, Penury pretending to be Affluence, even a man of fixed principles will be none too easy to find. (Waley, 1998)

Cleary’s translation: I haven’t got to meet a good person, but if I get to meet someone who is constant, that will do. Those who pretend to have what they lack, who pretend to fullness when they are empty, can hardly be constant. (Cleary, 1992)

Analysis:

Cleary translated “善人” into “a good person” literally, while Waley translated it into “a faultless man”. “善” usually means perfection in ancient Chinese, so Waley’s translation is better.

For the translation of “亡而为有，虚而为盈，约而为泰”, Cleary directly translated it into two parallel attributive clauses. However, the omission of the translation of “约而为泰” is really wrong. Waley uses three symmetrical object clauses “A pretending to be B”, and adopts six key words “Nothing, Something, Emptiness, Fullness, Penury, Affection” to correspond with “亡，有，虚，盈，约，泰”, which are as symmetrical as the original text.

As for the translation of “有恒”, Cleary translated it into “be constant”, which is literal translation. Waley translated it into “a man of fixed principles”, which extended the connotation of “有恒”, corresponding to the following three principles: “亡而为有，虚而为盈，约而为泰”. In short, Waley’s translation of the whole sentence is closer to the original text in terms of both content and form.
Example 5:
The original: 子曰: 不患无位，患所以立。《论语·里仁篇》

Waley’s translation: The master said, “I do not mind not being in office; all I mind about is whether I have qualities that entitle me to office.” (Waley, 1998)

Cleary’s translation: Confucius said, “Don’t worry about having no position; worry about that whereby you may effectively become established. (Cleary, 1992)

Analysis:
The original sentence means “don’t worry about not having an official position, but about not being competent for it”. Cleary translated “官位” into “position”. In Oxford Advanced English Dictionary, the English definition of “position” means “a job in a company or organization”. It does not mean an official position. Therefore, Cleary’s translation is inaccurate. However, Waley’s translation adopts the first person and translates “官位” into “being in office”, which gives a better understanding of the original text. It is worth noting that Cleary translated “子曰” into “Confucius said”, while Waley translated it as “the master said”. According to the cultural habits of western society, people generally do not add the words in front of the author to indicate his identity, professional title and inferiority, but call them by their first names. Cleary adopts domestication in the process of translation, which is obviously helpful for western readers to understand the original text. While Waley used the word “the master”, which means “先师” in Chinese, keeping the cultural characteristics of Chinese as much as possible, it reflected the relationship between characters, and better conveyed the implied connotation of Chinese. It is beneficial for western readers to understand Chinese traditional culture.

Conclusion
Translation is the process of conversion between source language and target language. On one hand, translators should deeply understand the intention of the original text and faithfully convey it. On the other hand, we should consider the factors acceptable to readers, and adjust the language and culture in many ways. To translate classic works like Analects of Confucius, we need to go through “intra-lingual translation” first and then “inter-lingual translation”, that is, the process of Second Translation (Huang, 2012). Therefore, the translation of classics requires not only the translator’s high bilingual conversion ability, but also the translator’s profound understanding and research of ancient Chinese.

At present, there are more than 30 English versions of the Analects of Confucius, and this paper only makes a comparison between two famous versions. As these two translators have deeply studied Chinese classics and are familiar with Chinese traditional culture, many translations are wonderful. Cleary’s translation is simple and easy to understand, and many culture-specific items are deleted, which makes it easier for western readers to understand Confucius. Waley’s translation tries to be faithful to the style of the original text and pay attention to the details, thus building a bridge for western scholars to study Confucius. Nevertheless, there are some unsatisfactory aspects in these two versions, which can be further improved.

Nowadays, Confucianism continuously injects strength into the progress of social civilization. More and more westerners study Confucian culture. Therefore, a more perfect translation becomes particularly necessary. Chinese and foreign translators should strengthen communication and work together to push Chinese Confucian culture to the world better.
References