

## The Analysis of Different Translations of *The Analects* by James Legge and Ku Hung-Ming From Perspective of Hermeneutics

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### Abstract

*The Analects* has been an important part of cultural communication between China and western countries. There are nearly more than fifty English versions which have been produced in the past 100 years, among which two versions translated by James Legge and Ku Hung-ming are the most classical and representative. This article focuses on different translations of two versions from perspective of hermeneutics, explaining why they take on different translations so as to explore the way of fusion of horizons, hoping to provide references for English translation of ancient Chinese classics.

**Key Words:** *The Analects*; Hermeneutics; Different translations

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### INTRODUCTION

Having been the essence of Confucianism, *The Analects* has far-reaching influence on cultural communication between China and the western countries. There are nearly more than 50 English versions translated by westerners and Chinese scholars in the past 100 years, among which

two versions are most classical and representative: One is translated by Ku Hung-ming (1857-1928), who is a Chinese culture scholar and the other is translated by James Legge (1815-1897), who is a famous British sinologist and missionary. Obvious these two versions have different translations, especially in fundamental words of *The Analects*. This article will analyze from their different translations, seeking for the reasons why they have different translations, so as to contribute some constructive thoughts to English translation of ancient classics.

### 1. DIFFERENCES OF ENGLISH VERSIONS OF *THE ANALECTS* BY JAMES LEGGE AND KU HUNG-MING

There are many differences of English Versions of *The Analects* by James Legge and Ku Hung-ming, especially in translation of fundamental words, such as “*Ren*”, “*Xiao*” and “*Dao*”. Two examples of each word are given as following.

#### 1.1 Example Sentences on *Ren*

Example 1. 仁远乎哉?我欲仁, 斯仁至矣。(《论语·述而》)

James Legge: Is virtue a thing remote? I wish to be virtuous, and lo! Virtue is at hand.

Ku Hung-ming: Is moral life something remote or difficult? If a man will only wish to live a moral life—there and then his life becomes moral.

Example 2. 志士仁人, 无求生以害仁, 有杀身以成仁。(《论语·卫灵公》)

James Legge: The determined scholar and the man of virtue will not seek to live at the expense of injuring their virtue. They will even sacrifice their lives to preserve their virtue complete.

Ku Hung-ming: A gentleman of spirit or a man of moral character will never try to save his life at the expense of his moral character; he prefers to sacrifice his life in order to save his moral character.

## 1.2 Example Sentences on *Xiao*

Example 3. 孟懿子问孝。子曰：“无违。”（《论语·为政》）

James Legge: May asked what filial piety was. The Master said, “It is not being disobedient.”

Ku Hung-ming: A noble of the Court in Confucius’ native State asked him what constituted the duty of a good son. Confucius answered, “Do not fail in what is required of you.”

Example 4. 今之孝者，是谓能养。至于犬马，皆能有养。不敬，何以别乎？”（《论语·为政》）

James Legge: The filial piety of nowadays means the support of one’s parents. But dogs and horses likewise are able to do something in the way of support; —without reverence, what is there to distinguish the one support given from the other?

Ku Hung-ming: The duty of a good son nowadays means only to be able to support his parents. But you also keep your dogs and horses alive. If there is no feeling of love and respect, where is the difference?

## 1.3 Example Sentences on *Dao*

Example 5. 先王之道，斯为美；小大由之。（《论语·学而》）

James Legge: In the ways prescribed by the ancient kings, this is the excellent quality, and in things small and great we follow them.”

Ku Hung-ming: According to the rules of art held by the ancient kings it was this quality in a work of art which constituted its excellence; in great as well as in small things they were guided by this principle.”

Example 6. 天下之无道也久矣，天将以夫子为木铎。（《论语·八佾》）

James Legge: The kingdom has long been without the principles of truth and right; Heaven is going to use your master as a bell with its wooden tongue.

Ku Hung-ming: The world has long been without the order and justice of good government; now God is going to make use of your Teacher as a tocsin to awaken the world.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH VERSIONS OF THE ANALECTS BY JAMES LEGGE AND KU HUNG-MING

The essence of translation is cross-lingual interpretation, “Translation is inevitably a kind of activity where two languages and cultural traditions get involved” (Toury, Gideon, 2001, p.5). Translation of *The Analects* is not only a process of language transformation, but also an interpretation of different cultures and comprehension of the original text. The analysis is conducted from the following aspects, such as two scholars’ comprehension of the original text, interpretation of ancient Chinese traditional culture, translation methods and translation strategies.

## 2.1 Differences of Comprehension of the Original Text

“Comprehension of the original text” is essential to English translation of *The Analects* because different English versions are based on diverse comprehension of the original text. And distinct semantic selection results in specific comprehension of the original text, which gives different cultural connotations to the translation, especially to translation of fundamental words in *The Analects*.

*Ren*, which is rich in connotation, is one of the fundamental words in *The Analects*. According to Cihai Dictionary, “*Ren* is a moral category with wide range of connotations while it originally means beloved relations among people” (Xia, 1999, p.250). It is interpreted respectively on basis of James Legge’s and Ku Hung-ming’s personal historical awareness and cultural awareness. In English, the nearest meaning of *Ren* is “benevolence”. Having used this word once in his English version of *The Analects*., James Legge tends to employ words like “virtue” or “true virtue” from perspective of Western religion and culture. In example sentence 1, *Ren* is translated into “virtue” by James Legge, which means “moral goodness or excellence” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary, 1997, p.1692) He explains that as a diversified vocabulary, “virtue” can better embody multiple meanings of *Ren*.

However, Ku Hung-ming’s comprehension of *Ren* more tends to be ethical spirit and morality. *Ren* has deep relations with other Confucian virtues and the Confucianists emphasize social class distinctions between officials and their ruler, between seniors and juniors, and between husband and wife, hence *Ren* is essentially a kind of ethnical spirit. Ku Hung-ming believes that *Ren* is a purely morality, so he takes “moral” as fundamental word, and uses “moral character” or “moral life” in example sentences 1 and 2, which show humanistic characteristic of *Ren* as traditional virtue and it is more convenient to grasp the essence of Confucian culture. Meanwhile, he deems that his English version should avoid the impression James Legge’ English version impresses upon foreign readers, who could misunderstand Chinese’s wisdom and moral system after reading Legge’s. So he repeatedly stresses that *Ren* is a flawless moral notion so as to reveal Chinese morality to foreign readers and help them open their mind to Chinese culture.

*Xiao* is another fundamental word in *The Analects*. The original meaning of “*Xiao*” is absolute respect and obedience to old people, but in *The Analects* it is more like a family ethnical notion. In example sentences 3 and 4, James Legge translates *Xiao* into “filial piety”, which is a literal translation. Most western people believe in Christianity, resulting in stressing more on social responsibility and less on family *Xiao*, or filial piety, hence they have less profound understanding of *Xiao* during translation. But Ku Hung-ming has an insight into ancient

Chinese traditional culture. For instance, in example sentences 3 and 4, *Xiao* is uniformly translated into “the duty of a good son” by him, which well demonstrates that *Xiao* is of family ethnics in Confucianism. The Confucianists advocate that family ethnical norms should be applied to social hierarchy so that a harmonious and ethnics-oriented society can be established. Because of national and cultural diversities between China and western countries, translators from various cultural groups may have different comprehension of fundamental words.

Another fundamental word in *The Analects* is *Dao*. With regards to *Dao*, Cihai Dictionary defines it as “natural rules and regulations, original matters of everything in the universe.” (Xia, 1999, p.1281). In example sentence 5, Legge uses “way” as a translation. Just as what Marc Andre Matten has mentioned “Legge agrees on ‘way’ as a translation for “*Dao*” and he prefers the plural form. For he thinks that there is not only one rule (of behavior etc.) existing (i.e., the rites (*li*) are consisting of a number of single rules)” (Matten, 2004, p.340), and he puts forward that “James Legge thinks that *Dao* in this chapter is replacing the rites *li* and referring to the so-called ‘courses’ or ‘ways’ that shall be trodden by men. *Li* has the underlying meaning of ‘what is proper.’ and describes how man shall behave and act in his world.” (Matten, 2004, p.340) While Ku Hung-ming here uses the expression “the rules of art”, and not “way”, he is of the opinion that “*Dao*” is supposed to be rules of reigning a country, and it functions as an example for every person in the state how to behave and act.

In example sentence 6, Legge stresses one need to know exactly what his moral obligations are—thus he translates *Dao* as “principles of truth and right.” In contrast to this, Ku Hung-ming chooses a different translation for *Dao*, namely “order and justice of good government”. Confucius lives in the turbulent times and he has been longing for restoration of rules of art held by ancient kings, pursuing order and justice of government. Being well grounded in ancient Chinese prose, Ku Hung-ming offers a richer word for “*Dao*”. As the proverb goes, everyone thinks in his way. “Every translator tries to interpret the original text from his own field of vision and preconceived notions, every interpretation is the result of fusion of horizons between interpreter and the original text.” (Yang, 2012, p.103) It helps people widen their sphere of knowledge and produce more suitable translation from theory of fusion of horizons.

## 2.2 Differences of Comprehension of Chinese Ancient Culture

Chinese ancient codes and records include many Chinese ancient culture and social customs. The lack of understanding may lead to inaccurate translations, or even errors in translation. In example sentence 6, “tocsin” is an ancient Chinese bell which could make a noise with wooden or copper as its tongue and medal as its frame.

A wooden tocsin usually is used by a specially appointed person to get people to pay attention when a new law is made or local government is under inspection. A famous ancient Chinese scholar Kong Anguo interprets “a wooden tocsin is used when political education is carried out by government. This sentence means that heaven is going to let Confucius make regulations so as to educate the whole country” (*He Yan’s Annotation of The Analects of Confucius*). Although James Legge points out that “the kingdom has long been without the principles of truth and right”, but for lack of understanding of “wooden tocsin”, he merely offers literal translations. Ku Hung-ming is familiar with Chinese culture and provides accurate translation “the world has long been without the order and justice of good government; now God is going to make use of your Teacher as a tocsin to awaken the world.”

## 2.3 Differences of Translation Strategies and Translation Methods

*The Analects* is brief and concise, with one word usually having multiple meanings. Concise and comprehensive translation style is employed by James Legge and Ku Hung-ming in their translations. With a solid foundation for sinology and a deep understanding of *The Analects*, James Legge is so strictly loyal to the original text that his version goes beyond particular attention to its literal style. Sometimes deviations occur in understanding some words and sentences. Ku Hung-ming enjoys a more profound understanding of the original text of *The Analects*. In regards to interpretation of English words and expressions, he makes attentive and deliberate choices, expressing precisely and conveying message vividly. Moreover, text coherence is particularly stressed on during his interpretation. Different translation strategies and translation methods are adopted by these two translators based on horizons of their own, and that of the original text, translators and readers. Contrast of translation strategies and methods can be illustrated in terms of sentence patterns and voice.

James Legge’s strict and rigorous writing style is embodied by both translation of words and that of sentence patterns; his translation is conducted in complete compliance with exact sentence patterns of the original text. However, Ku Hung-ming employs more flexible translation strategies, and uses various sentence patterns.

For instance, in example sentence 1, James Legge’s translation is “Is virtue a thing remote? I wish to be virtuous, and lo! Virtue is at hand”, which is thoroughly in line with sentence pattern of the original text. While Ku Hung-ming’s seems more flexible for using “a man” as the subject, and with “only” to emphasize, from which the underlying meaning “Ren is at hand, you can get it whenever you want” could easily be learnt. His is conforming to reading habits of foreign readers better.

In James Legge’s version, passive voice, the indicative mood and the interrogative mood are more widely used,

with a preference of employing words or symbols to stress what is expressed, but for excessive loyalty to the original text, his version seems rigid, and results in inadequate cohesion. When it comes to Ku Hung-ming's version, active voice, the indicative mood and the imperative mood are more widely used, and cohesion of the whole text is well accomplished. Ku Hung-ming's focusing on translating flexibly while being loyal to the original text makes his version readable for his target readers.

In respect to “无违” in Example sentence 3, James Legge chooses “it is not being disobedient” as literal equivalence while Ku Hung-ming employs the imperative mood “Do not fail in what is required of you” so as to emphasize on children's filial piety to their parents.

In example sentence 4, James Legge uses passive voice as well as conditional clause introduced by “without”, “without reverence, what is there to distinguish the one support given from the other”, which can well tell esteem and support one's parents from raising dogs and horses. However, Ku Hung-ming employs conditional clause that “If there is no feeling of love and respect, where is the difference?” With active voice, he presents readers message that feeling of love and respect of a child towards his parents is the major symbol distinguishing from treatment of domestic animals such as dogs and horses.

### 3. THE REASONS WHY TWO ENGLISH VERSIONS HAVE DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS

The reasons of different translations by Ku Hung-ming and James Legge could be seen as “historical interpretation” from perspective of hermeneutics. “During conversation with the author and the original text, due to historical interpretation, translators are inevitably being subjected to prejudice and field of vision it produces, for which interpretation of the original text takes on feature of diversification and dissimilarity.” (Zhu, 2011, p.103) To be more specific, there are different horizons not only between author and translator, but also between translator and reader. So translator should comprehend the original text from his own horizons and preconceptions or preconceived notions; trying his best to reach fusion of horizons with the original text, author and readers. What's more, he has to consider readers' awareness in order to help foreigners who lack of cultural knowledge of ancient Chinese classics and understanding of *The Analects*, overcome language barriers, especially cultural and historical barriers, so as to realize fusion of horizons.

It is worthwhile to note that translator's horizons include historical and cultural background he lives in, his life experience, bilingual competence, cultural identity, comprehension of the original text, translation purpose, reader's awareness and all kinds of Zhu Shu in ancient Chinese history. Translator is unconsciously affected by

his preconceived notions during comprehension of the original text that is why many different English versions are created, and the same applies to versions of these two famous scholars'.

Historical and cultural background the translator lives in, and his life experience are two most important parts of his horizons.

James Legge (1815–1897), who was a Scottish sinologist and a missionary, spent nearly thirty years in China working as a missionary and translator. Having received years of training in religious studies, James Legge entered Aberdeen Royal College for higher education. With time passing by, the willingness to work as missionary in China came into being.

When he was in his thirties, James worked as the dean of Anglo-Chinese College. In his spare time, he went on studying ancient Chinese classics. In 1868, he and his translation assistant, Wang Tao, devoted themselves to completion of translation of *The Chinese classics*. Legge benefited much from his historical and cultural background, as well as his academic background. Just as what Lauren F. Pfister has mentioned, “There is no doubt that Legge's Scottish background—particularly his exposure to the Sabbath Culture in his childhood and his training in the common-sense philosophy in King's College—must have made him a sensitive and sympathetic translator.” (Hon, 2006, p.458)

Ku Hung-ming, who lived in the late Qing Dynasty, was familiar with western and oriental cultures. His ancestral home is Fujian, China. On July 18, 1857, Ku Hung-ming was born at a British owned rubber plantation, his father was general manager of the rubber plantation and his mother was a blond-haired and blue-eyed western woman, who had a good mastery of English and Portugal. He showed remarkable capability in language learning and comprehension. He spent his youth abroad, receiving systematic western education and mastering multiple languages such as English, German, Greek, Latin and so on. After obtaining Master of Arts, Ku Hung-ming went to University Leipzig of Germany and other top colleges for further study in literature and philosophy. This experience enabled him to become a young scholar with a good mastery of western culture. After returning to China, he was deeply engrossed in Chinese culture and got unique insight into traditional Chinese culture, especially Confucianism. He once worked for Zhang Zhidong, a noted senior official in late Qing Dynasty.

It is worthwhile to note that before translating *The Analects*, translators are concerned to choose the suitable text. As one of the most important cultural classics, study on *The Analects* has always received much attention. Studies by famous ancient Chinese scholars like He Yan, Zhu Xi, Liu Baonan represent interpretations and explanations of different times. What have mentioned above compose historical horizons of *The Analects*. James Legge translates *The Analects* from Christian horizons

by reference to *Collections of The Four Books*, while Ku Hung-ming translates it from western readers cultural horizons by reference to He Yan's *Collections of The Analects*. Different selections lead to great diversities in translation.

There are wide linguistic variations caused by different historical and cultural background the translators live in and their life experiences which have an influence on comprehension of *The Analects* to some extent.

Translation of ancient classics demands both thorough profound comprehension of the original text and remarkable language ability. James Legge had a gift in language learning. Before coming to China he had learned Chinese and Chinese culture. Having been in China for a long period, James Legge was learned in sinology. Furthermore, he received aid from Wang Tao, a Chinese scholar and translator in the late Qing Dynasty. All of these laid solid foundation of completion for his English version.

Ku Hung-ming was an intelligent person with a gift in language learning. He was engrossed in studying ancient classics and dedicated himself to great cause of traditional Chinese culture after returning to homeland. Out of profound understanding and ardent love of ancient Chinese classics, especially the Confucian classics, Ku Hung-ming was in high spirits for translating *The Analects*. However, out of pride he held a critical attitude towards other translators. He said brilliant scholars, including James Legge lacked not only acute comprehension in literature but also perspicacity in philosophy, moreover, he thought James Legge's English version was not pretty satisfactory.

Bilingual ability is an indispensable part of translation. The essence of translation is cross-lingual interpretation, Lionel Jensen (1997, p.17) pointed out that all interpretation and translation relate to interpreter's intention, which is also called translation purpose, and it determines what translation methods translators will take.

As a loyal missionary and a noted British sinologist as well, James Legge's translation purpose was to help western missionaries who came to China have a better understanding of *The Analects*, and to promote their great cause. In his words, "If a western missionary in China does not get a mastery of the ancient Chinese classics, nor does he make a personal probe into the ideology fields where the previous Chinese sages and men of virtue ever went, he is incompetent to the duties and preaching work he is supposed to take on" (James Legge, 1893). So his translation is "loyal to the original text", so that they could easily understand. (Wang, 2003, pp.37-41)

When it comes to Ku Hung-ming, two factors or purposes motivated him to compile English version of *The Analects*. The first one is that he was unsatisfied with that of *The Analects* compiled by western scholars. He said at the prologue of his English version of *The Analects*, "Now anyone, even if those who knows nothing about Chinese language, cannot help thinking that his translation is so discontent to common people as long as he or she takes

some time patiently going through Dr. James Legge's works." (Ku, 1996, p.345) The discontentment mainly was caused by complaints that "James Legge's translation text get redundantly engrossed in academic particulars, which is more suitable to those sinologists who are engaged in study of Chinese Confucianism, As for the majority of common western readers, they are less likely to take time and patience to get a good picture of texts of the Chinese culture at the disadvantaged position then." Hence, "A new English version is necessitated to take on the grand mission of transmission of Confucianism to the West".

The second one is that he hoped his readers would "reflect upon those preconceived ideas towards China hopefully, and change their previous prejudices and bias towards both whole China and the Chinese individual during the international connections" (Ku, 1996, pp.346-347). In the late Qing Dynasty, China was faced with domestic strife and foreign aggression, and western culture was holding dominant position in China. With years' experiences of studying abroad at youth as well as years' concentrated research of Confucian culture, Ku Hung-ming deemed that "*The Analects* is the inherent cultural treasure of China, and should be presented to the westerners". (Huang, 1995, p.27) So he attached more importance to translation of *The Analects*.

Translation is a progress of communication and translation purpose has close relationship with target readers. Because translators hope readers could accept their versions so as to realize their translation purpose so they will put themselves in readers' place and choose suitable translation strategies to reach fusion of horizons with readers, so different versions are produced. Nida also states that a translator should bear in mind that his translation is for his readers, so the readers' reception awareness should not be ignored. (Nida, 1964)

James Legge aimed at helping missionaries to have a better understanding of *The Analects* so as to promote their missionary cause, thus he took missionaries as his target readers. With a view of enhancing missionaries' comprehension of the original text, he employed substantially method of annotation. By conscious interpretation, explanation, paraphrase and annotation, he wanted to help western people who lack adequate Chinese cultural knowledge to get a better picture of traditional Chinese classics, hence to a large extent lead target readers into the same situation where readers of source language could experience, and he did better in dealing with complex relationship among translators, readers of the target language and readers of the source language. It is clear that James Legge was much successful in conveying literal message of ancient Chinese classics.

As what has mentioned above, Ku Hung-ming took well-bred British people who lacked Chinese background information as his target readers. To make sure that they could accept his English version, he had to make his version easy to read and satisfy readers' value pursuit.

Accordingly, during translation, consideration must be given to both literal translation and readers' need. On one hand, Ku Hung-ming quoted famous European writers' words in making explanatory notes, which made *The Analects* much appealing to western people with sense of familiarity. His purpose was "to call on the readers to have a thorough understanding of the connotation of the thoughts conveyed in the text..... With the aid of these annotations, the already familiar train of thoughts could arise, attractive to those readers who have know about these writers. "

(Ku, 1996, p.346) On the other hand, flexible translation strategies were employed to comply with idiomatic English expressions and the way westerners think. William Edward Soothill once pointed out, "Ku Hung-ming's English version is created for the sake of those readers unfamiliar with the Chinese language, and his translated text to a large degree are not sole interpretation but paraphrasing....." (Soothill, 1910, II-III)

Translators should not only be familiar with ancient Chinese philosophy, but also has a good command of languages to avoid dissolution of significance during translation. It helps to produce better English version of *The Analects* if people could break through cultural barriers between China and west countries, and accelerate speed of fusion of horizons. Only integration among the original text, author, translator as well as reader in English translation can translator reproduce the beauty of the original text.

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