

# A Study on the Status Quo and Development of Chinese Classics Translation

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**Abstract.** Chinese classics is a bright pearl of traditional Chinese Culture. Under the background of “One belt, one road” and “Chinese culture going out” strategy, translation of Chinese classics will play an important role in promoting the spread of Chinese culture. The researcher mainly discusses the status quo and common translation methods of translation of Chinese classics, aiming to offering more thought to the translation of Chinese Classics.

## 1. Introduction

Chinese culture is broad and profound and China has a long history. With China constantly performing the policy of reform and opening-up towards the outside world deeply under the background of economy globalization and “One belt, one road”, “Chinese Culture Going Out” strategy is becoming more and more imminent.

## 2. Concept of Chinese classics

There isn't a fixed definition about Chinese classics at present, however, different people may have different understanding towards Chinese classics. Classics refers to the important documents of a country, also known as all kinds of books, according to *Cihai*. Chinese classics works are the carrier of the core of Chinese culture, including all the Chinese classics which can embody Chinese culture core value and Chinese cultural essence. Chinese classics works not only embrace literal works, but also include ideological works, technological works and art works. Also Chinese classics works not only embrace ancient works, but also include modern works. Besides, they also cover works of the Han Nationality and other works of minority Nationalities. Therefore, Chinese classics works are various and it is difficult for translators to translate them into English. It not only need translator to have a good command of Chinese, but also need translator to be proficient in English, sometimes it also need translator to have good command of some ethnic language when we translate some ethnic classics work into English.

## 3. Significance of classics translation

### 3.1 Classics translation aids to accelerate the pace of China's reform and opening up and adapt to the development of globalization

The 21st century is an era of communication and integration among all nations in the world. Under such circumstance, we should seize our language-Chinese, to maintain the individuality of our national culture, because language is the instrument which can form our thought, and language plays an important role in expressing our thought and forming our thought. Yuan-chong Xu once said, “The 21st Century is the Century of Globalization, globalization not only refer to economy globalization but also culture Globalization, which means we should absorb we should also absorb advanced elements from various countries and jointly build a more brilliant global culture.”[1]While learning the advanced culture of other countries, we should also learn to actively translate the excellent books and works of our own nation into other countries and spread the

culture of the Chinese nation to the world.

### **3.2 The translation of classics helps western countries to understand China and Chinese traditional works**

Looking back on the process of cultural exchanges between China and the Western countries, Chinese culture is mostly in the position of passive acceptance and we learn, absorb and utilize a large number of western books and cultures. However, it is difficult for us to introduce Chinese classics and documents to Western countries, and it is hard to spread the excellent culture of China to the west, resulting in the imbalance of cultural exchanges. Inter-ethnic cultural exchanges require mutual understanding among different ethnic group. While we understand the western culture, we should also learn to advocate “sending-out doctrine” vigorously. Walter Benjamin pointed out that although the translated works exist in different spaces from the original works, the translated works originate from the original works and are the continuation of the life of the original works.[2] Every work is the product of different historical periods and it can be immortal through succession from generation to generation. In today's globalized world, translating Chinese classics into other languages and spreading them all over the world will give new meaning to their lives.

### **3.3 Translation of classics contributes to the development of translation**

Since China's reform and opening up, we have been strengthening cooperation and exchanges with foreign countries. However, the development of translation in China is not balanced. There are some problems such as the loss of translators, the insufficient number of translators and the low level of professionalism, which lead to the relative lag of the external communication of Chinese classics translation. At present, the state vigorously supports the cause of external communication of classical translation, and can revive the cause of classical translation, attract more excellent talents to engage in the cause of classical translation, and create a high-level team of classical translation. At the same time, it can also promote the level of translation professionals themselves and promote the vigorous development of translation.

## **4. Research status at home and abroad**

Foreign studies on the translation of classics can be traced back to 1590, when the Spanish missionary Juan Cobo first translated *Precious Mirror of the Clear Heart* into English, which was the first time that Chinese classics were translated into European languages.[3] Later, there were hundreds of Chinese classics translated into English. The more famous translators were Morrison, Jacob, Zhailis and Arthur Willi. Compared with the scale of Chinese Classics Translated independently, the number of Chinese Classics Translated by foreign scholars was still less.

At present, the study of Chinese classics translation in the past ten years can be divided into the following five categories. The first is the basic research on the translation of classics into English, the translation of classics and Chinese classics; the second is the translation techniques and theories, including culture-loaded words, eco-translatology and translation strategies; and the third is the study of English translation, including the translation of the *Analects of Confucius*, the *Tao Te Jing* and the *Chu Ci*. The most famous Chinese scholars who engaged in translating Chinese classics into English are Xian-yi Yang, Yuan-chong Xu and Rong-pei Wang. The works they translated are far more numerous than other translators at home and abroad in translating Chinese classics into English. They are also truly the "three giants" in translating Chinese classics into English in terms of quality.[4] The fourth categories are studies on the translator and translator's thought of translating classics into English, such as Chang-jiang Zhao (2018)[5] and Ying-ying Fu (2017) who mainly study Rongpei-Wang 's thought of translating classics into English - “expressing spirit and meaning”. [6] “Expressing spirit” is to convey the expression of the original, including mood, form, rhetoric, image, etc.; “expressing meaning” is to express the meaning of the original. In particular, the deep meaning and the superficial meaning should be taken into account as much as possible, which is Rong-pei Wang 's translation theory and translation criteria for Chinese classics, and it is also a summary of Rong-pei Wang 's experience in translation practice.[7] The fifth

classification is the translation of minority classics. The translators mainly translates minority classics into English and disseminates Chinese minority culture to the outside world.

## **5.The principles and methods of classics translation**

In translating Chinese classics into English,we may adopt some translating principles and methods.

### **5.1Pinciples**

#### *5.1.1 Abiding two language habits and characteristics*

Language difference is a very important factor in the process of translating classics. English is a subject-prominent language, while Chinese is a topic-prominent language; in English native speakers uses the passive voice, while Chinese uses the active voice; English native speakers use many long sentences in English and Chinese usually use many short sentences. When translating Chinese classics, we should pay attention to the different characteristics of Chinese and English, abiding the two language habits and characteristics, otherwise the translated content will not be authentic.

#### *5.1.2. Conforming to the social background*

In the process of translating classics, translators are influenced by two different social ideologies. Ideology refers to a group's knowledge and viewpoints on a certain issue on the basis of facts. In other words, it is a more formal theoretical system, which will be generally accepted by a specific group of people as a social belief and viewpoint (Qin Huang 2006), and this ideology will have a certain impact on the translation of classics, even restricting the translation of classics.[8]

### **5.2 Methods of Chinese classics translation**

In the process of translating classics, there are many translation methods and techniques. Appropriate use of these methods can make the translation vivid and accurate. Generally, there are three links in the translation of classics: first understand the original text, then translate it into English, and finally modify the translation. In the process of revising the translation, we should make a comparison of translation techniques and polish and modify the translation. Common translation methods are as follows:

#### *5.2.1 Transforming dynamic language into static language*

Chinese and English are two different languages. Chinese is a dynamic language. Verbs are often used in Chinese, and they are often used in conjunction or in combination. Verb phrases can act as various components in sentences. English is a static language, and nouns and noun phrases are frequently used. Two different language habits determine that in the process of translating classics, dynamic language should be transformed into static language, namely verb nominalization (Dan Yang 2017) [9]. For example, there are dozens of verbs in the preface to Lanting Collection, such as “arriving”, “narrating”, “having”, “being able to” and “seeing”, which can not be retained in translation. Often only one verb is retained as a predicate in a sentence, while the other verbs are changed into verbs or participles and other elements of a sentence. For example, the word “in” “A.D. 353” is translated into equivalent; the word “Now when people gather together to surmise life itself,” is translated into “in dealing with the interpersonal relationship”.

#### *5.2.2 Transforming the active voice into the passive voice*

Passive voice is often used in English to emphasize results. Passive voice is often used when one does not know who is the originator of the action. There are also passive voices in Chinese, but passive voices are seldom used, which is determined by written Chinese expression and the habit of “Chinese thinking”. When the subject is not clear, personal subject or omitted subject will be added to Chinese. Therefore, in the process of translating classics, when the originator of the sentence’s action is not clear, it is necessary to convert the sentence into passive voice. For example, in “ to watch the immense universe ”,the originator of the action in this sentence is not clear. When it is translated into English, it should be translated into a passive sentence. It can be translated as “If you look up, the boundless universe can be seen.”

### 5.3 Summary

Chinese classics are precious treasures in the long history of the Chinese nation, and they play a very important role in Chinese traditional culture. Under the background of “one belt and one road” and the “going out” strategy of Chinese culture, the translation of Chinese classics is an important move of Chinese culture “going out”. This requires that translators engaged in the translation of Chinese classics should redouble their efforts to translate more Chinese classics into other countries and spread traditional Chinese culture to the world, making people all over the world know about Chinese culture.

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