

A Study on the Possibility of Offering a Course on English Translation of Chinese Classics for English Undergraduates in Colleges and Universities in China*

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Abstract—English translation of Chinese classics is a hot topic in translation studies in recent years, but this subject has not been fully developed and integrated into the teaching system of undergraduate English majors in universities. Nowadays, as the launching of “Chinese Culture Going Abroad” Initiative and the frequent foreign cultural exchanges, it is meaningful and possible to offer a course on English translation of Chinese classics for English undergraduates in colleges and universities in China. This paper discusses the necessity and possibility of offering such a course for English undergraduates in China and analyzes various aspects related to it, e.g. teaching objective, organization, form, and content of it.

Keywords—English translation of Chinese classics; English undergraduates; colleges and universities in China

I. INTRODUCTION

Chinese classics record the long-standing Chinese culture. It is not only the precious cultural heritage of the descendants of the Yellow Emperor, but also has a profound and far-reaching impact on the history and civilization of the world. Foreign translations of Chinese classics are not only an important part of the great development and prosperity of Chinese culture, but also an inevitable requirement for promoting and a more active participation of Chinese culture in world cultural exchanges.

English translation of Chinese classics began in the 18th century. The original translators were mostly British missionaries who came to China. In the 19th century, under the efforts of overseas sinologists, especially British and American sinologists, English translation of Chinese classics had a great development, e.g. "Four Books and Five Classics" were translated into English. After entering the 20th century, English translations of Chinese classics covered more fields of traditional classics. Chinese scholars also began to translate Chinese classics into English. From

the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, English translation of Chinese classics has even attracted the attention of Chinese government. Chinese government has initiated a number of foreign translation and publication projects. For instance, Library of Chinese Classics, the National Publication Project launched in 1994, plans to translate and publish 110 most representative Chinese classics in the fields of literature, history, philosophy, economy, military, science and technology from the pre-Qin Dynasty to the modern times. It is the first major cultural project in China's history to systematically and comprehensively introduce Chinese culture to the world.

Correspondingly, researches on Chinese classic translations also flourished throughout the country. In 2002, China Association for Comparative Studies of English and Chinese added a Disciplinary Committee-the Study of English Translation of Chinese Classics. In mainland China, a number of universities including Suzhou University, Nankai University, Sichuan University, East China Normal University, Hebei Normal University, Henan University, and Dalian University of Technology have begun to enroll master and doctoral students in the field of English translation of Chinese classics. English translation of Chinese classics has also become an advanced course for English language and literature majors and translation majors in colleges and universities. Moreover, it has become an effective means to supplement English majors with knowledge of ancient Chinese civilization and to develop students' abilities to introduce the Chinese culture to the world.

However, in the current upsurge of researches on English translation of Chinese classics, the course of English translation of Chinese Classics and related teaching practices have not received much attention, and there are few studies on these aspects. This paper plans to amend these shortcomings and probes into the necessity and content of the course.

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II. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Though not many, there are some scholars who have published on teaching and learning of English translation of Chinese classics. These scholars include Wang, R. P. & Wang, H. (2009), Wang, D. D. (2009), Liu, L. S. & Liao (2011), Han, Z. M. (2012), Jiang (2013), Cao & Xiao (2014) and Han, M. L. et al. (2018). Most of the researches try to highlight the importance of the course, or to make a tentative discussion on how to offer the course for undergraduate students, master students and doctoral students of English majors. For instance, Wang D. D. (2013) proposes that "the undergraduate stage features on bilingual basic skills which are supplemented by bi-cultural knowledge, thus laying the foundation for further studies". Jiang (2013) points out that "first of all, a translator must have a good foundation in Chinese and Chinese classical culture in order to correctly understand the Chinese classics. Secondly, a translator must have good English language ability. Finally, a translator must be a rigorous person". Wang, R. P. & Wang, H. (2009) point out that the objective of this course is to make the undergraduates who are majored in English translation acquire the basic theories and knowledge of English translation of Chinese classics, understand its characteristics, master the basic strategies as well as standards and laid a solid foundation for further studies and practices.

In a nutshell, existing researches attach great importance to the bilingual abilities and bicultural knowledge of students which are in line with the cultivation objectives of undergraduate English majors in Specialty Catalog and Introduction of Undergraduate Course of Common Colleges and Universities (2012, p.93) and are also vital ways to improve students' abilities of translation. Therefore, it is meaningful to offer such a course for English majors in colleges and universities in China.

III. CONTENT OF THE COURSE ON ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF CHINESE CLASSICS

A. *Strengthening Students' Abilities to Understand Ancient Chinese Classics*

In recent years, with the continuous advancement of teaching reform, emphasis has been paid more and more on the introduction of target language and culture for English majors. As a result, many teaching materials featuring foreign culture have been published. However, fewer textbooks are concerned with the language and culture of China. This lack of cultural awareness and attention of Chinese make it very hard to find appropriate English expressions in textbooks that describe Chinese culture and classics. Therefore, many English majors find it difficult to express Chinese culture in a foreign language. For example, in 2018, the author conducted a questionnaire survey of more than 60 students in the English Department of the college in which the author is teaching. 70% of the students believe that their ability to express Chinese culture in English is just so or poor. In order to accurately understand students' mastery of Chinese culture, the author chose 10 words related to Chinese culture for students to translate into English. Each correct translation accumulates 10 points and the total score

is 100 points. These 10 words are: Four Books and Five Classics, candied fruit, rickshaw, Chinese knot, and shadow play, pipa, Zen, dark-red enameled pottery, cheongsam, and pavilion. Students' average score is only 53.1. The above 10 words are familiar to any Chinese university student. However, even English majors cannot accurately express words which there are quite familiar with in English. Such a phenomenon will undoubtedly make students lose the enthusiasm and motivation to learn foreign languages, and affects their intercultural communication. The reason of this result is probably due to the fact that the curriculum of undergraduate English majors in colleges and universities in China does not include a course that features on the translation of Chinese culture and classics into English.

In addition, the language of some Chinese classics, such as the "Four Books" and "Five Classics", are highly distilled and poetic. The younger generation has difficulties in even reading them without careful studying. Take "The Analects of Confucius" as an example. This book, which records the remarks of Confucius and his disciples, has had a tremendous impact on ancient China and Chinese culture. The "Confucianism" derived from it is also influential in Asia and the world. The language of this book is concise, and often a very complex meaning is expressed in one word. In order to allow students to appreciate the English translations and even translate the classics into English on the basis of correct understanding, it is necessary to strengthen the understanding and input of the native language and culture.

B. *Raising the Awareness of the Cultural Differences Between Chinese and for a Successful Communicative Translation*

On the basis of correct understanding, it is also necessary to faithfully convey the original cultural elements when translating the Chinese classics into English. There are also various factors to be considered, such as the choice of words and phrases, the equivalence of style, and the transmission of the original cultural image, which is the most important and difficult of all. The process of translation is a process in which a translator adjusts and mediates between the source language as well as its culture and the target language as well as its culture. In other words, when translating Chinese classics into English, a translator should adopt various strategies to maximize the reproduction of the source language and culture in the target language and culture. In addition, the translator also needs to consider about the acceptability of target readers. Only in this way can a translation be "communicative". Teachers should start from the perspective of communicative translation to help students analyze and understand the role of cultural factors in the translation of Chinese classics. Importance should also be attached to the methods that can be used in translation and the problems that should be avoided.

For instance, students can make presentations about some allusions and cultural elements in Chinese classics in order to enable others to understand the cultural elements and background. Teachers thus complement based on these presentations and guide the students to further understand the

theoretical and practical significance of these allusions and cultural elements. For example, “they who love it are better than those who know it, and they who delight in it are better than those who love it (知之者不如好之者，好之者不如乐之者)” is a saying from The Analects of Confucius, which means interest is the best teacher. On March 1, 2013, President Xi also mentioned this famous saying in his speech at the opening ceremony of the Central Party School, aiming to encourage government officials to be hardworking and ready to study. When students go over these classic phrases, they will gain a new understanding of the traditional culture.

C. Aesthetic Effect and the Translation of Artistic Conception

Chinese classics often convey ancient Chinese philosophical thoughts and aesthetic thoughts, and thus have distinct and unique Chinese cultural characteristics, which also bring difficulties to the translation. It is worth noticing that in some cases, the artistic conception and form of Chinese classics cannot be completely converted into English. At this time, what should be kept and deleted is also a problem that needs to be emphasized in the course on English translation of Chinese classics. Traditional Chinese classics attach great importance to the beauty of prose and verse, such as meaning and image, spirit and form, style and quality, virtual and real conditions, elegance and vulgarity, artistic conception, style theory, rhetoric theory, and so on (Liu, M. Q., 2005, p.57). While western aesthetics does not dwell much on that of language. Therefore, it is worthwhile to think about the aesthetic factors of language in Chinese classics. This requires teachers to analyze, compare and explain, so that students can understand that in the English translation of Chinese classics, some aesthetic factors such as overlapping sentences and puns in the original texts are untranslatable under certain circumstances. A translation in this case might destroy the meaning of the original text. It is necessary for the translator to express the Chinese culture through the alienation method based on fully understanding and comprehending the original text. Only under this circumstance can a translator express and convey the connotation of the original text.

In classroom teaching, the focus of the course should be the delivery of cultural and cross-cultural factors. Teachers should guide students to examine how the English translations convey the aesthetics and philosophy of ancient China from a macro perspective, and to examine how to translate the allusions, idioms, rituals and other cultural phenomena on a micro perspective. On the basis of understanding, students are required to compare the cultural translation strategies of different translations as different translation strategies reflect translators' varied cultural identity orientations, their various attitudes towards cultural differences and cultural identity awareness. Appreciation of English translation of Chinese classics is also helpful to cultivate students' awareness of their own culture and is beneficial for them to learn and master some of the expression techniques of cultural alienation including literal translation, literal translation plus annotation and interpretation. Applying these kinds of translation skills

enables the Westerners to understand Chinese culture better which will lead to a successful exchange of culture in the era of globalization.

D. Creating a Second Classroom for the Study

In order to improve students' ability of intercultural communication, offering a course on English translation of Chinese classics is far from enough. A website or forum for the studying of English translation of Chinese classics can be built, which provides students with different versions of English translations. Students can share their opinions and experience and discuss with their classmates on it. Besides, they can ask teachers for advice in a timely manner. Moreover, students can translate some Chinese classics in groups outside class. Then each group can present the translations one after another, and teachers guide the students to summarize the advantages and disadvantages of each group and let students propose some ways to improve. This kind of exercise is beneficial for students to use the translation skills learned in class.

IV. CONCLUSION

English translation of Chinese classics is a hot topic in translation studies in recent years, but this subject has not been fully developed and integrated into the teaching system of undergraduate English majors in universities. Nowadays, as the launching of “Chinese Culture Going Abroad” Initiative and the frequent foreign cultural exchanges, more importance should be attached to the English translation of Chinese classics. Therefore, the ability to translate Chinese classics into English should become one of the focuses of English majors. At the same time, such a course is also beneficial for the improvement of students' translation and intercultural communication abilities.

The Chinese classics selected to be the teaching material in class should be the classical literature that best reflects the essence of Chinese culture and is also influential in the world. At the same time, teaching materials should be organized in an incremental degree of difficulty in order to reduce students' fears when they first come into contact with this subject. Secondly, a balance between learning of translation skills and practice is needed. Of course, the learning of translation theories is indispensable. Students can only practice translation well when they are familiar with the different characteristics of Chinese and English and the principles as well as standards that should be grasped in the English translation of Chinese classics. On one hand, students should carry out a large number of English translation exercises on various types of Chinese classics; on the other hand, teachers must analyze different examples for students, pointing out the good points and problems.

Fortunately, English translation of Chinese classics, an important channel for disseminating Chinese culture, is receiving great attention. More and more resources for the course on English translation of Chinese classics in colleges and universities are foreseeable in the near future.

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