

Analysis of the Translation Strategies of Ku Hungming's English Version of *Zhongyong* From the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract

Zhongyong as one of the most important Chinese Confucian classics is gems in the history of Chinese civilization. It has been translated into many foreign languages. There are many kinds of editions just for English translation. With the development of globalization and openness of the continuous improvement, the English version of *Zhongyong* plays an important role in the transmission of Confucianism and Chinese ancient philosophy. This thesis, based on the Skopos theory, analyzes the purposes of Ku Hungming's translation of *Zhongyong* and the translation strategies used to achieve his translation purposes, which contributes to the readers' better understanding of Ku's translation of *Zhongyong* and its practical and instructive meanings in Chinese culture transmission.

Key words: Skopos theory; Ku Hungming; *Zhongyong*; Translation strategies

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INTRODUCTION

Confucian thought has always played a great important role in our Chinese traditional culture. Everyone must

read the Chinese Confucian Classics if he wants to understand our Chinese traditional culture and Chinese traditional philosophical thought. Ku is the first Chinese to translate Confucian Classics into English independently. He adopted unique and distinctive translation methods in his English version. Different people have different points of view of his version. Some influential translators, Hu Shi, for example, held completely negative view to Ku's translation, while Lin Yutang thought highly of his translation. People cannot deny the fact that Ku's translations receive great circulation in the world and indeed contribute a lot for Western people to understand our Chinese traditional culture. With the opening-up and reform policies adopted since 1978, more and more countries tend to carry out international communications to extend influence in the international community. China is an ancient country with rich culture and deposit. Therefore, it's our responsibility to carry the torch of ethnic culture.

Chinese scholars have studied Ku's translation of *Zhongyong* from different perspectives. They put emphasis on the linguistic and cultural perspective. However, very few researches have discussed Ku's translation strategies of *Zhongyong* from the view of Skopos theory. This paper aims to analyze Ku's translating purposes and translation strategies of *Zhongyong* from the perspective of Skopos theory.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this part, the basic knowledge of Skopos theory will be presented in the following.

1.1 An Overview of Skopos Theory

When it comes to this translation approach, people should have a comprehensive understanding of its development and definition. Skopos theory was introduced into Germany in the 1970s by Hans J. Vermeer. It is the

nucleus of German Functional School. In skopos theory, translation is seen as an intentional and interpersonal activity. Vermeer thought the purpose of translation is most important in the process of translating. Therefore, the main idea of Skopos theory is every action has its purpose, that is, translators should choose an appropriate way of translation to achieve anticipated goal. Then people draw the conclusion that the purpose of translation action determines the strategies used to reach the expected target. The “aim” or “purpose” has three different meanings: Translator’s purpose (e.g. making money), communicative purpose of the target-text (e.g. enlightening readers) and the purpose that is reached by using specific methods of translation (e.g. literal translation). Every translation aims at targeted audience.

Skopos is not an English word, but a Greek word which means purpose, aim, intention, and function. We know there will be many different types of purposes in a translating action. Perhaps translators want to instruct readers or earn a living, which determines translators how to make the source-text understood by the target-text readers using translation strategies or procedures. Generally speaking, translation is a process of making source-language and one culture accepted by the target-language and those that come from another culture. The Skopos theory goes through three periods, in which Hans J. Vermeer’s theory and its extensions are the most popular around the world. When it comes to Katharina Reiss, people know his functionalist translation criticism that is published on the book “Possibilities and Limits of Translation Criticism” in the 1971. Reiss holds the view that the ideal translation should be one that the TL (target language) text is equivalent to the SL (source language) text as regards the conceptual content, communicative function and linguistic form. Hans J. Vermeer bridges the gap between translation practice and theory. But how to make a balance between translation theory and translation practice is still a question confusing translators.

1.2 The Rules of Skopos Theory

Hans J. Vermeer was the first to put forward Skopos theory. It consists of three rules: Skopos Rule, Coherence Rule and Fidelity Rule. As the top-ranking rule for translations, Skopos Rule points out translating action is determined by its skopos. Every text is translated for an intended purpose and also should serve the purpose. Skopos Rule aims to settle the eternal dilemmas in translation history, such as free and faithful translation, dynamic and formal equivalence, excellent interpreters and slavish translators and so on (Nord, 2004, p.29). So it means that a translator may choose a “free” or a “faithful” translation or anything between these two extremes according to the translating purpose (Ibid.).

In addition, other two basic rules in the Skopos theory are Coherence Rule and Fidelity Rule. The Coherence

Rule or intra-textual coherence means the target-text must be understood by readers in the target language culture and the translation can be accepted in the specific communicative situation or in the readers’ situation. In other words, the target-culture readers can find it meaningful and helpful when reading the text. Fidelity is also called inter-textual coherence, which means that the target-text should be faithful to the original text as much as possible. However, the aims of the target texts and the translator’s comprehension of the source texts determine the degree and form of the fidelity. The inter-textual coherence should exist between target language text and the corresponding source text, but the form relies on the translator’s interpretation of the source text and the translation Skopos (Ibid., p.32).

1.3 Relationship Between the Rules of Skopos Theory

In Skopos theory, “the Fidelity Rule is subordinated to Coherence Rule, and both of them are subordinated to the Skopos Rule” (Ibid., p.33). If the Skopos requires a change of function, the standard will no longer be of fidelity to the source text but adequacy or appropriateness with regard to the Skopos (Ibid.). And if the Skopos demands intra-textual incoherence, the standard of intra-textual coherence is no longer valid (Ibid.). According to Skopos theory, “Equivalence” and “Adequacy” have different meanings. “Equivalence” focuses on the communicative effect, which exists in words, phrases, syntactic structures. While “Adequacy” refers to the qualities of a target text with regard to the translation brief: The translation should be “adequate to” the requirements of the brief (Ibid., p.35). It is a dynamic concept related to the process of translating action and referring to the “goal-oriented selection of signs that are considered appropriated for the communicative purpose defined in the translation assignment” (Ibid.). The Skopos of the translation determines the form of equivalence required for an adequate translation (Ibid., p.36). Skopos theory doesn’t negate “equivalence” entirely. In Skopos theory, equivalence means adequacy to a Skopos, which requires the target text serve the same communicative function or functions as the source text, thus preserving “invariance of function between the source and target text” (Ibid.).

2. KU HUNG MING’S TRANSLATION VERSION OF ZHONGYONG

Translation plays a significant role in information transferring of their cultures to the target-language readers around the world. Ku Hungming is one of the pioneers in China’s modern translation movement. His translation of the Chinese Confucian Classics movement aims to spread Chinese civilization. Ku Hungming translated

three masterpieces of *the Four Books*, including *Lunyu*, *Zhongyong* that were published. And his translations of Confucian Classics received a great circulation in the western countries because of his unique strategies. Ku's first English translation version was *Lunyu*, which was published by Kelly and Walsh, Ltd. in 1898. English version of *Zhongyong* was published eight years later, in 1906. The Shanghai Mercury, Ltd. first published Ku's second translation named as *The Universal Order or Conduct of Life* at that time. Soon afterwards, the English version was reprinted. In order to make western people understand *Zhongyong*, Ku made many specific notes in translation and changed the name of the book into *The Conduct of Life or The Universal Order of Confucius*. Although the English version of *Zhongyong* had been edited four times, the second translation was the most popular one.

2.1 Ku's Understanding of *Zhongyong*

Different people will have their own understanding of *Zhongyong*. *Zhongyong* is one part of Confucian classics. When it comes to Confucian Classics, it refers to *the Four Books*, *the Analects of Confucius* (*Lunyu*), *the Mencius* (*Mengzi*), *the Great Learning* (*Daxue*), and *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*). People in China who have received the nine-year compulsory education know more or less the content of *the Analects of Confucius* and *the Mencius*, which are records of sayings and teachings as well as disciples of the two great scholars. The last two are important components of *the Classic of Rites* (*Liji*). Although *the Four Books* are not easy to be thoroughly understood, scholars are still willing to devote much time and energy to it. Dating back to the Southern Song Dynasty, a famous scholar, Chu Hsi, declared that *the Four Books* together embodied all the Confucian thoughts and constituted a better introduction to the complicated materials in the Classics, so these four texts were selected from Classics and made up of *the Four Books*. *The Four Books* is an abbreviation for the four great Confucian Philosophers. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, *the Four Books* was endowed the superior status as official curriculum for the imperial examination. From then, *the Four Books* occupied the core position in Chinese ancient education. The *Zhongyong* is also called "*Doctrine of the Mean*" as one chapter of *the Book of Rites* (*Liji*), which have a huge impact on Chinese people. There is no doubt it is the treasure of our Chinese culture. The two Chinese characters, "Zhong" and "Yong", have their respective meanings as the core ideas of Confucianism. "Zhong" means neither too many nor too few; and "Yong" means neither outstanding nor common. Confucian scholars in the Song Dynasty regarded *the Great Learning* and *Doctrine of the Mean* as the gateway to perfect virtue in the world. Therefore, according to the Confucian scholars, people should always adhere to this principle

at any time. It is said that *Zhongyong* was written in the early Han Dynasty by Zisi, a grandson of Confucius. Later, it was handed down to Mencius. It embraced all of human nature, loyalty, filial piety, benevolence and love. If people made nature itself take its own course, everything would be in harmony. However, the fact is far from it. Therefore, people have to receive education and perfect themselves relentlessly. If everyone is always strict with himself/herself, and does everything according to the Confucian ethics, then the relations among the things will eventually be harmonious, and the society will be smooth. This is the "Confucian Way of the character cultivation" that people believe. Unfortunately, it is not an easy thing to be achieved in reality. If people are always sincere, they should try to be sincere by cultivating themselves. Only this can help people to be on the right track, that is, the golden mean (*Zhongyong zhidao*).

Zhongyong as one part of the Confucianism has exerted a profound influence on Chinese people. Ku thought highly of it and considered the Confucian classic works as the Chinese Bible (Ku, 2004, p.26). He holds Confucian classics have the same sense of security and permanence in their existence that religion gives (Ibid., p.23). People learn more Confucian concept words by reading the Four Books. That the key words, ren (Ren), li (Li), tao (Dao), de (De), junzi (Junzi), zhongyong (Zhongyong), shu (Shu), tian (Tian), permeates in Confucian classics. While some Confucian words' meanings are somewhat abstract and obscure which are not easy to be understood in different situation.

Translation is not just about languages, but also about cultures. Therefore, knowledge of our Chinese culture is of great importance to understand the implication of all the Confucian concept words. The key words concentrate on the main idea of Chinese civilization and reflect the essence of Confucianism clearly. The evaluation of one's translation version depends on the translation of the key words. And also the difficulties of translation are how to understand and convey the key words correctly. The meanings of the key Confucian concept words vary in different context with rich and profound implication. How to convey the precise meaning of them and faithfully reproduce their original meaning is not easy. So it has become a great challenge to the translators since people began to try to translate Confucian classics. Maybe one key Confucian concept word will stir a hot discussion in the field of translation. Maybe even though people concentrate on much effort and time to analyze Ku's translation of key words; there are still no consistent answers. Different people have their opinions that support their thoughts. We cannot say some are wrong, while others are correct.

A famous Chinese scholar, Zhu Xi made the definition of *Zhongyong* in Chinese. Ku Hungming gives his

understanding of Zhu's definition of Zhong using different adjectives: central, right, true, fair, and square; yong means common, ordinary, and universal. The two words "zhong" and "yong" have different meanings respectively. Ku's understanding of these two words receives a great circulation and the translation is most accurate and he also conveys its meaning exactly. Ku considers that there is a balance between nature and human being. He gets the moral theme of *Zhongyong* thoroughly.

From what have been talked about, it's not hard to make a conclusion that Ku's understanding of the spirit of *Zhongyong* is great. And the key Confucian concept words were translated as a unity. Thus, Ku's translation achieved the unity spirit between God and Humans successfully. The theme of morality runs through Ku Hungming's translation of *Zhongyong*. Clearly, his translation purposes are presented.

2.2 Ku's Translation Purposes

Before talking to Ku's translation, there is a brief introduction to Ku Hungming. Because there is a close connection between Ku's experience and his translation motivation. Ku Hungming (18, July 1857-30, April 1928) was a Malaysian Chinese man of letters, born in Penang, Malaysia. "Amoy Ku" is his pen name. Ku devoted himself to learning and spreading the Chinese traditional culture. He had a good command of Chinese and Western knowledge that contributed to the spreading of Chinese culture, and explained the value of Chinese traditional culture to Western civilization, especially at that time when Chinese culture was faced with discrimination. In the early of 20th century, the Western people still thought men had braid and women had bounded feet in China. Ku played an epoch-making role to help western people know much about China and Chinese people at that time. Through his works, Chinese people could have a better understanding of traditional culture and its nature. Ku Hungming experienced many significant historical events in his life-long time. In 1928, he died from pneumonia in loneliness and depression.

2.2.1 Dissemination of Chinese Culture

One of Ku's translation purposes is to disseminate the Chinese culture, which is one of the most important reasons and an internal motivation for Ku to do the translation. After The Opium War, China suffered an unprecedented national crisis because of the invasion of foreign powers. It was time for Chinese people to stand up to safeguard Chinese civilization. Fortunately, Ku had a conservative attitude; thus, a deep understanding of Chinese culture was formed in his mind. He realized Chinese nation and culture were threatened by Foreign people. Ku thought highly of Chinese culture and firmly believed that "Chinese civilization is a moral and true one" (Ibid., p.10), so he didn't believe "Old order of things

in China can pass away" (Ku, 1906, p.10). Therefore, Ku devoted himself to translating Confucian classics to help the European and American with a better understanding of the essence and value of Chinese culture, thus to save China and Chinese civilization.

Although Jame Legge, a western sinologist of Ku's time, was well-known for his translation of Chinese classics with the purpose of making Western missionaries understand Chinese culture and dissolve Chinese people's enmity against the Westerns. As a result, their missionary work could be smooth. However, Ku Hungming was not satisfied with Legge's translation in its form and content. Ku said anyone, whether he or she had acquainted with Chinese language, if he or she wanted to spend time reading Legge's translation, he would have the feeling of unsatisfaction to Legge's translation. Ku fiercely criticized Legge for his lack of critical insight, insufficient literary training, literary perception, and inflexible temperament.

2.2.2 The Necessity of the Translation of Confucian Classics Overseas

In the past, especially after the Opium War (1840-1842), more and more western people of all circles in China realized that it was necessary to study Confucius and Confucianism for their capitalistic overseas expansion so as to facilitate their colonial activities. At that time, Ku Hungming believed that mistakes and errors in translation and foreign invasion would spoil Chinese traditional culture. The Western people were not aware of the essence of Chinese civilization, and they showed arrogance and prejudice to Chinese people. So Ku held the view that the missionaries should bear the responsibility to remove the misunderstanding of the western people. Ku remarked in the preface to his translation of Confucian classics:

We will only here express the hope that educated and thinking Englishmen who will take The trouble to read this translation of ours, may, after reading it, be led to reconsider their hitherto foregone conceptions of the Chinese people, and in so doing be enable not only to modify their preconceptions of the Chinese people, but also to change the attitude of their personal and national relations with the Chinese as individuals and as a nation. (Ibid.)

3. TRANSLATION STRATEGIES OF THE ZHONGYONG FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SKOPOS THEORY

According to the Skopos theory, "the prime principle of it determining any translation process is the purpose (Skopos) of the overall translation action" (Nord, 2004, p.27). In order to prevent Chinese civilization from being distorted, Ku Hungming adopted different strategies to introduce Chinese culture to Western people, which

made his translation accepted by Englishmen. And these strategies evoked the sense of familiarity of western readers and helped to reduce their reading obstacles.

3.1 Omission

Omission is one of the common methods in the process of translation. According to the Chinese meaning of omission, we know that proper omission in translation is to make the translated version more concise, brief, and clear. Therefore, translators often delete some indispensable words, such as articles (a, an, the), prepositions (in, on, with, for, etc.), certain pronouns (it, he, she), some complicated names (Zhongni), and so on. Thus, the translated versions can be more expressive and explicit.

Zhongyong as one of the ancient books, inevitably has a great number of ancient names that confuses people. They are peculiar to the ancient time and to Chinese traditional culture. Neither translators nor readers remember them easily. When Ku Hungming translates the Confucian classics, he goes to extremes and omits almost the ancient names of people aiming to reduce readers' difficulty of reading and to promote the readability.

Taking names of Confucius' Disciples in *Zhongyong* for example, they embody various temperaments and distinct degrees of understanding and virtue, and also they are important to Confucian School. In Ku's translation version, except some famous disciples of Confucius, for example, Yan Hui and Zhong You, the rest of Confucius disciples share the same name, that is, a disciple of Confucius. Besides, Chinese statesmen in ancient time have special titles that represent their social status and certain family background. Ku just describes those people by showing the social relationship with other people.

Examples:

Confucius remarked: "The life of the moral man is an exemplification of the universal moral order. The life of the vulgar person, on the other hand, is a contradiction of the universal moral order." (Ku, 1906, p.15)

The reigning prince of his native State asked Confucius what should be done to secure the submission of the people (Ku, 2008, p.11).

In the above two examples, Ku used "Confucius" and "the reigning prince of his native State" to explain "Zhongni" and "Aigong" so as to make the translation more smooth and concise.

3.2 Amplification

Amplification is a translation technique opposite to omission. It is also called addition, meaning supplying necessary or omitted words in the translation on the basis of accurate comprehension of the original. Generally speaking, Ku Hungming added subjects and related words in his translation to ensure the grammatical wholeness and

the complete meaning of the English sentences, and also made his translation acceptable to English readers.

Examples:

Sincerity is the Way of Heaven. To think how to be sincere is the Way of man. He who is sincere is one who hits upon what is right without effort and apprehends without thinking. He is naturally and easily in harmony with the Way. Such a man is a sage. He who tries to be sincere is one who chooses the good and holds fast to it. (Ku, 2008, p.20)

If another man succeed by one efforts, I will use a hundred efforts. If another man succeed by ten efforts, I will use a thousand efforts. If one really follows this course, though stupid, he will surely become intelligent, and though weak, will surely become strong (Ibid.).

Ku's translation: The life of man may be likened to traveling to a distant place; one must start from the nearest stage. It may also be liked to ascend a height; one must begin the lowest step.

The Book of Songs say:

"When wife and children dwell in union,
is like to harp and lute well played in turn;
When brothers live in concord and at peace.
The strain of harmony shall never cease.
Make then your home thus always gay and bright.
Your wife and dear ones shall be your delight."

Confucius, commenting on the above, remarked, "in such a state of things what more satisfaction can parents have?" (Ibid., p.13)

In the examples discussed above, Ku added the subject "he" which was omitted in the original to make the translation complete and accurate. And in order to convey the internal logic relation in the sentences, Ku used the relational words like "if", "though" and "but". And in example 4, Ku added some words "in such a state of things what more satisfaction can parents have?" to make the translation fluent.

3.3 Adaptation

Sometimes literal translation makes readers feel confused because of the cultural differences. While adaptation can make the translation concise and easy for readers to read. Ku Hungming adopted the method of adaptation when translating the Confucian classic words. This method was also called domestication. In Ku's translation, the typical examples of analogy, "Tian" (tian) is translated into God in English; holy man corresponds to the Chinese words, "shengren" (shengren). Because Ku received special education and was exposed to the Western atmosphere, he had broad and profound knowledge to make a comparison of the Chinese and Western culture, consciously and subconsciously. So his translation can make western readers feel at home when reading his translation. There were analogies of

characters, religious culture, customs and philosophy as well as politics.

Some examples in Ku's English version of *Zhongyong* that used analogy will be analyzed. Ku adopted analogy to explain a famous innovator, Guan Zhong (Guanzhong). In Ku's translation, "Bismarck is used as a substitute for the translation of Guan Zhong, which makes the Western people recognize the status of Guan Zhong". Similarly, Ku translated the Chinese character "ji" into "Say grace", a typical custom in western countries. Another Chinese character "tianming" was characterized by Western religion when it was translated into "the Laws of God". Although Ku's translation method of analogy is beneficial for target-culture readers to understand Chinese philosophy, the virtue of our traditional Chinese philosophy is not easy to make all-around explanation.

Examples:

Ku's translation: "Shun had a natural curiosity and he loved to inquire into near facts (literally "near words" meaning here ordinary topics of conversation in everyday life). He looked upon evil merely as something negative; and he recognized only what was good as having a positive existence" (Ku, 2008, p.6).

In this example, "chushanyang" is translated into "He looked upon evil merely as something negative; and he recognized only what was good as having a positive existence". "e" was translated into "negative" and "shan" was translated into "positive" in Ku's translation of *Zhongyong*, which suggests that Ku's translation purpose is to defend the doctrine of good human nature of Confucianism. People cannot deny Ku's translation demonstrates spirit and meaning of Confucianism.

"There is no one who does not eat and drink. But few there are who really know the taste of what they eat and drink." (Ku, 1906, p.17)

In this example, Ku emphasizes the importance of keeping our moral nature, moral being or our true being by quoting from Goethe. Moral being or our true being is also Ku's translation of the Chinese words "zhong" and "xing". In Ku's translation, he points out that "the modern Europe was in chaos and the way to bring them into the order is, in the words of Confucius, to find the central clue in one's moral being" (Huang, 1996, p.529). It is not difficult to find that Ku's intention is not to advocate the morality of Confucianism and persuade people to live a moral life, "live not as angles nor as brutes, but as natural ordinary reasonable human being" (Ibid.).

3.4 Shift of Perspective

We know poetry is characterized by its conciseness, highly figurative and abundant meanings as well as sweet-sounding. And it emphasizes the rhyme and rhythm. Therefore, its characteristics of poetic language cause

great trouble to poetic translation. From Ku's translation, we can find that he tends to pursue the perfect on the form and content by the method of shift of perspective. As he wrote in his preface to *Zhongyong*: "My object, after I have thoroughly mastered the meaning, is not only to reproduce the matter, but also the manner of the original" (Ku, 1906, p.9).

Examples:

Legge: It is said in *the Book of Poetry*, "We should be apprehensive and cautious, as if standing on the brink of a deep gulf, as if treading on thin ice."

Ku: "Walk with fear and with trembling

As on the brink of a gulf,

For the ground you are treading

Is with thin ice covered above." (Ku, 2008, p.60)

Ku Hungming not only reproduced new poems, but reserved the style of the original. Ku indeed did a good job in translating Chinese four words, which deserved to be praised. Compared with Ku's translation, Legge's English version is less attractive to Western people than that of Ku in both matter and manner. It is the point that Ku could fiercely criticize Legge for his translation. Ku bravely shifts the way of expression to successfully translate Chinese poems.

Ku: "The past,—t is useless now to change,

Care for the future yet is time." (Ibid., p.164).

In this example, Ku successfully translated the favor of Chinese ancient poem. His translation was full of beauty in sound and form.

CONCLUSION

Ku has profound knowledge and the keen insight that help him do an excellent job. Because of his proficiency in Chinese and English, Ku is the pioneer of Chinese-modern translation from Chinese into English, whose translation is thought to be one part of Chinese traditional translation theory that lays the foundation for the translation of Chinese classics. As a result, Ku protects the image of Chinese people and defends the position of China. In this thesis, the purposes and strategies in Ku's translation of Classics are analyzed from the perspective of Skopos theory. According to the Skopos theory, translating is an intentional and interpersonal action. Concrete, translation is not just about languages, but also about cultures. This paper fully considers Ku's translation purposes, his target readers and his understanding of Confucianism and his unique experience. In order to realize his purposes, Ku adopts several methods to promote a text of higher readability. To eliminate the sense of strangeness for readers, Ku adopts several methods in his translating, namely, omission, amplification, adaptation, and shift of perspective. His translation of Confucian classics promotes the transmission of Chinese culture and makes

Western people learn much more about the Chinese civilization.

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