



# The Choice of Translation Strategy in the 21th Century — Based on Comparison of Two Translation Versions of Lun Yu

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**Abstract:** From the Ming and Qing Dynasty onward, Lun Yu has been rendered into virtually all the main languages in the world. Of all English versions of the book, this paper will focus on Ku Hungming's version and Legge's version and seek to analyze how can we better coordinate foreignization and domestication to boost the diffusion of the Chinese culture across the world. It is commonly recognized that the two English versions mentioned above are excellent and classical versions of Lun Yu. Yet they adopted totally different translation strategies: Ku Hungming's version tends to employ the strategy of foreignization while Legge's version the strategy of domestication. After delving into the pros and cons of the two versions and bearing in mind China's changing position in the global arena, this paper calls for adjustment of translation strategy so as to help the rest of the world better understand the genuine Chinese culture and increase the recognition of it.

**Keywords:** foreignization, domestication, the rise of China, the Genuine Chinese culture, confidence in culture

## 1. Introduction

In the post-colonial era in the 1990s, the American scholar Lawrence Venuti first coined the terms domestication and foreignization in *The Translator's Invisibility* in 1995. The former refers to the translation strategy in which a transparent and fluent style is adopted in order to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for target language readers. The latter means having the target-language reader travel abroad to see the cultural differences. Venuti believe the theory is closely related to the strategy of a country. According to him, domestication essentially reflects dominant cultures' invasion of less influential cultures. Foreignization, on the contrary, aims to push back against such invasion. [1] As a result, it can boost the cultural influence and national identity of a nation while enriching the culture of the target language. In the past, people have done lots of research on the two translation strategies. Nonetheless, they mainly focus on the quality of the translation versions. This paper aims to take a new approach and discuss the necessity and possibility of employing more foreignization in translation. To this goal, this paper will compare the two classical English versions of Lun Yu and evaluate which version can better express the Chinese culture.

## 2. Comparison of the two versions

Translation of Lun Yu involves many difficulties. This paper will focus on two translator's translation of names of persons, measure units and figures of speech in Lun Yu and decide where and when should we embrace foreignization. Here are examples of how the two translators dealt with different types of information.

### 2.1 Names of persons

There are many people in this book, most of whom are disciples of Confucius or officials in the court. The translation of such names reflects the translators' totally different translation approach.

ST: mèng yì zǐ wèn xiào.

TT(Legge): Mang E asked what filial piety was.

TT(Ku): A noble of the Court in Confucius's native State asked him what constituted the duty of a good son.

Meng Yizi is a noble of the state of Lu. Specifically, he is one of the three Dafus. His family name is Zhongsun and first name is Heji. Yi is his posthumous title. (Yang Baijun, 2006: 3-4) His name is surly new to most people. Indeed, even many Chinese people may fail to tell who he is. Legge adopted the foreignization strategy and translates this name into alphabetic writing. This is of course faithful to the original text. Nonetheless, there are many new names in this book. If one translated all these names like this, the reader would end up finding the book unreadable. Take the translation of Meng Yizi for example, readers may falsely believe he is one of Confucius's disciples. By contrast, Ku Hungming adopted domestication and translated the name as a general word "noble" as he thinks there is no need to introduce so many unimportant and confusing names to the foreign readers. [2]

## 2.2 Figure of speech

Figure of speech is a model of expression in which words are used out of their literal meaning in order to better transfer the author's emotional intensity. (Zhou Yuhong, 2013: 77-78) Figure of speech includes simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole and etc. Legge and Ku use foreignization and domestication respectively to translate them. The sample is as follow.

ST: bú yì ér fù qiè guì, yú wǒ rú fú yún.

TT(Legge): The Master said, "with coarse rice to eat, with water to drink and my bended arm for a pillow; I have still joy in the midst of those things. Riches and honors acquired by unrighteousness are to me as a floating cloud."

TT(Ku): Confucius remarked, "living upon the poorest fare with cold water for drink, and with my bended arms for a pillow, I could yet find pleasure in such a life, whereas riches and honors acquired through the sacrifice of what is right, would be to me as unreal as a mirage."

In the source text, fú yún means floating clouds, its extended meaning is something trivial. The word can be seen in many Chinese classic works or poems. Du Fu, a famous poet in the Tang Dynasty, once wrote "dān qīng bú zhī lǎo jiāng zhì , fù guì yú wǒ rú fú yún." in one of his poems. Even in the 21st century, its figurative meaning is still very popular in China, on the internet in particular. For example, the Chinese netizen are likely to say "shén mǎ dōu shì fú yún" to express their devil-may-care-attitude. Legge managed to keep the original flavor. Unlike him, Ku Hungming translated the word into "a mirage", which is familiar to the English readers. [3]

## 2.3 Measure units

ST: zǐ huá shǐ yú qí, rǎn zǐ wéi qí mǔ qǐng lì. zǐ yuē: "yǔ zhī fū. "qǐng yì. yuē: "yǔ zhī gēng. "rǎn zǐ yǔ zhī sù wǔ bǐng.

TT (Legge): Tsze-hwa being employed on a mission to Ts'e, the disciple Yen requested grain for his mother. The master said, "Give her a foo." Yen requested more. "Give her a yu," said the master. Yen gave her five ping.

(Note: A fu contained 6 tow and 4 shing, or 64 shing. The Yu contained 160 shing, and the ping 16 ho, or 1600 shing. A shing of the present day is about one-fourth less than an English pint.)

TT(Ku): On one occasion when a disciple of Confucius was sent on a public mission to a foreign state, he left his mother at home at home unprovided for. Another disciple then asked Confucius to provide her with grain. "Give her," said Confucius, "so much," naming a certain quality. The disciple asked for more. Confucius named a larger quality. Finally, the disciple gave her a larger quantity than the quantity which Confucius named.

To translate the measure units fū, gēng and bǐng, Legge used transliteration plus annotations, which fully retains the information of the original text. His translation introduced foreigners to Chinese measure units which are strange and new to them. While Ku Hungming employed paraphrasing translation, omitting the exact size of these measure units. To Ku Hungming, it seems that such information is not important and the logic within, however, is what really counts. His translation is concise and fluent. Therefore, readers may find it easy to understand. [4]

## 3. Result analysis

We have detailed how the two translators use totally different translation strategies to translate names of persons, measure units and figures of speech in Lun Yu. The result is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The choice of translation strategies

	Legge	Ku Hungming
names of persons	foreignization	domestication
figures of speech	foreignization	domestication
Measure units	foreignization	domestication

It is obvious that the two translators prefer different translation strategy and they adhered to their preferred strategy in most cases. As I have discussed above. Domestication works better on some occasions. Sometimes, however, foreignization is better. As a result, both translators should have changed their strategy according to the text. It is also worth noting that the translation strategy that works well in the 20th century may fail to meet the demand of the 21st century. When translators began to translate Lun Yu into English, China was in a state of chaos. Back then, the international community was dominated by western powers. English and the western culture, conceivably, was considered to be superior to that of China. Accordingly, westerners were not interested in learning Chinese culture. Translators had to intentionally cater to their preference in introducing the Chinese culture. It was perhaps fair to say domestication was a wiser strategy to spread Chinese

culture 100 years ago or so. Nonetheless, that is not the case for today's China.

By saying that, I don't mean to say that we should single-mindedly choose the translation strategy of foreignization in the future. Instead, I believe the output of culture is a long process. Any attempt to overuse foreignization will only backfire. Suppose one translated version is replete with too many new concepts, one will certainly think the book is too obscure and dull to read. To decide which translation strategy to deploy, one must thoroughly look at how close the word is connected to the Chinese culture and whether the word is still widely used today.

Indeed, I would like to recommend translators to adopt the translation strategy of foreignization in the following cases: 1) well-known historical figure who had played a significant role in shaping the history of China. Yuan Shih-kai, Li Shimin, among others, may well fall into this category. 2) representatives of a particular school of philosophy in ancient China. Lao Tseu, Confucius, to name but a few. 3) words that are closely connected to the Chinese culture. For example, "tiān " and "xiào" in Lun Yu. 4) metaphorical entities that are not only widely used in today's China but also, to a certain degree, shares cognitive similarities with English, like "fú yún" and "shǔ bèi" . Otherwise, foreignization may not be a wise choice. To choose the correct translation strategy, the translator must have a clear understanding of what is important and what is not and what should convey to foreigners and what should not. [5]

#### 4. Conclusion

The possibility and necessity of choosing different translation strategy is closely related to the country's confidence in its culture and its say in the international community. Suppose a country has little influence in the international discourse system, it would be impossible for it to expect other countries to actively learn its culture. Today's China, however, has acquired the ability to have the rest of the world learn from it. That's why I believe it is time for us to shift our preferred translation strategy from domestication to foreignization. Indeed, many scholars in this field share similar opinion with me, they argue we should stop any attempt to tailor the Chinese culture to the need of westerners. The emergence and acceptance of translation take place in a certain context, which is the historical context and the cultural context. In other words, the purpose and effect of translation in different times should be different. [6] Generally speaking, the overall trend of translation is replacing domestication with foreignization. We should gradually replace domestication with foreignization so that the target reader of the translated version could enjoy Chinese literature the way the Chinese readers did. This is how we carry forward our culture.

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