

# A Comparative Study of the Translation of “Xiao” in *The Analects of Confucius* Based on LancsBox

## -- Take the English Translation by Ku Hung-Ming and James Legge as An Example

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**Abstract.** “Xiao” is the foundation of traditional Chinese culture, and *The Analects of Confucius*, as an important part of traditional Chinese classical culture, is an indispensable sample for the study of Chinese “Xiao” culture, and has an irreplaceable position in the history of the foreign dissemination of Chinese classics. The English translation of *The Analects of Confucius* by Chinese and Western translators has its own distinctive features. This paper takes the English translations of *The Analects of Confucius* by Ku Hung-Ming and James Legge as an example, and uses LancsBox, a new corpus analysis tool, to compare the similarities and differences of their translations of the core concept word “Xiao” and the reasons for the differences in translation. The author also proposes some suggestions for the future translation and dissemination of the Chinese classics from the English translation of “Xiao”.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The culture of “Xiao” is unique to China and has a long cultural connotation. Its basic meaning is to serve and support parents well. In the West, due to its different cultural and historical background from the East, there is no cultural equivalent to the Chinese cultural connotation of “Xiao”. The long historical background and unique cultural connotation of Chinese culture have made it difficult to translate *The Analects of Confucius* and other classics into foreign languages, and caused some unique cultural phenomena to be untranslatable, which has hindered the foreign dissemination of Chinese traditional culture.

Studies on the English translation of *The Analects of Confucius* have been developed to a certain extent, and domestic studies on the English translation of it have mainly focused on comparative studies of the translations of *The Analects of Confucius*, studies on translators, studies on core concept words, studies on the history of English translation and dissemination, and other aspects [1]. Foreign studies mainly focus on book reviews, commentaries and essays on the English translation of *The Analects of Confucius*. The current research on the translation of “Xiao” is mainly focused on the translation of *The Classic of Filial Piety* and the comparative study of the English translation of “Xiao” in the English translation of *The Analects of Confucius* [2]. It is worth noting that the existing studies have not made a quantitative study on the English translation of “Xiao” in *The Analects of Confucius*, and most of them

are only comparative studies based on the English translation of “Xiao”.

This paper adopts a corpus analysis tool, LancsBox, and takes the English translations of Ku Hung-Ming and James Legge as the research samples, combines quantitative-oriented corpus analysis with qualitative-oriented textual analysis, and takes into account both quantitative data presentation and qualitative textual interpretation to analyze the English translation of “Xiao” in *The Analects of Confucius* in terms of word frequency, collocation, and the influence of extra-textual factors such as ideology on the translators' translation strategies which are also analyzed.

## 2. DATA COLLECTION BASED ON LANCSBOX

There are 19 words of “Xiao” in *The Analects of Confucius*, and 14 passages in total. The author constructed three monolingual corpora with these 14 passages, and respectively named them *The Analects of Confucius* Corpus (ACC), Ku Hung-Ming Corpus (GHC), and James Legge Corpus (JLC). Based on the preliminary comparative analysis of ACC with GHC and JLC, the author found that the two translations have different preferences for the translation of “Xiao”, and therefore use different keywords as search terms.

In the English translation of Ku Hung-Ming, the search term “a good son” is used, and the KWIC function of #LancsBox6.0 is used to set the number of words in the context to 7 (i.e., 7 words are

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displayed respectively to the left and right of the node word).

After searching, five columns of search results can be obtained, namely "Index", "File", "Left", "Node", and "Right". "Index" is listed as the index of all entries containing "a good son". A total of thirteen results can be obtained, that is, for the translation of the word "Xiao" in these 14 passages, the frequency of occurrence of "a good son" is 13 times. The "File" column is the name of the corpus retrieved, which is "GHC". "Left" and "Right" are listed as the context word of the keyword "a good son". Because "Context" has been set to "7", the number of the words appearing in the "Left" column and "Right" column will be seven. According to the search results, observing the context distribution of keywords, we can see that the above words of "a good son", that is, the results presented in the "Left" column are regular, and the above words next to "a good son" can be roughly divided into two types, they are "(to) be/as" and "the duty(du- ties) of/for", so it can be analyzed that Ku Hung-Ming's understanding of the word "Xiao" basically corresponds to some concepts of "a good son", which are expressed as "(to) be/as a good son" and "the duty(duties) of/for a good son".

In the English translation of James Legge's text, "filial" is used as the search term, and the KWIC function of #LancsBox6.0 is used, and the number of words in the context is set to 7 (i.e., 7 words are displayed to the left and right of the node).

After retrieval, five columns of retrieval results can also be obtained. "Index" is listed as the index of all entries containing "filial". A total of 18 results can be obtained, that is, for the translation of the word "Xiao" in these 14 passages, the word frequency of "filial" is 18 times. The "File" column is the name of the corpus retrieved, which is "JLC". "Left" and "Right" are listed as the context word of the keyword "filial". Because "Context" has been set to "7", the number of the words appearing in the "Left" column and "Right" column will be seven. According to the search results, observing the context distribution of keywords, we can see that the above words of "filial", that is, the results presented in the "Left" column, are regular, and the above words next to "filial" can be roughly divided into two types, they are "be" and "what". Observing the results of the "Right" column, it can be found that "filial" and "piety" mostly appear together and are used together. Therefore, it can be analyzed that James Legge's understanding of "Xiao" is mostly concentrated on its surface meaning, and the treatment of "Xiao" is relatively fixed and single. And the concept of "Xiao" corresponds to "filial" or "filial piety" without corresponding change in word selection according to the contextual meaning. The "filial" or "filial piety" mostly appear as superordinate words in the translated text, and the two are regarded as an existing definition and then explained. That is to regard "filial" or "filial piety" as a macro concept without considering its application in specific contexts.

### 3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF "XIAO"

Throughout the 19 words "Xiao" in *The Analects of Confucius*, Confucius did not give a specific definition of "Xiao", but only gave the meaning of practicing it in different contexts according to different people's questions. Each time Confucius speaks of "Xiao", it is specific to a particular person and applicable to a particular situation. Thus, in *The Analects of Confucius*, Confucius treats "Xiao" as a basic code of conduct and defines its scope in the context of daily life.

In the history of English translations of *The Analects of Confucius*, the English translation by James Legge (1815-1897), an English missionary of the London Society, is regarded as a landmark translation, and he was the first translator to complete the English translation of *The Analects of Confucius* independently, and his translation is of high quality and academic value. Ku Hung-Ming (1857-1928) was the first Chinese to translate the Confucian classics into English, and his translation is highly of western feature, easy to understand, and popular in the West and internationally. Both translators' translations have their own distinctive features, and both are the subject of study by a wide range of domestic and foreign scholars. According to the statistical analysis of the corpus above, the two translators do show different preferences for the translation of "Xiao". This is inseparable from the cultural backgrounds of the two translators and their own translation motivations.

Translation is a transformation between different codes, but also an exchange and dialogue between different cultures, and is therefore inevitably manipulated by poetics, ideology and patrons [3]. Born into a Chinese family, Ku later studied in England under the influence of the famous British Romantic thinker Carlyle. Under the influence of Romantic thought, Ku saw the moral degradation behind the powerful material world of the West. Later, he witnessed the reality of China's humiliation by the Western powers. Under the social trend of the time, some radical scholars believed that Confucianism was no longer applicable to Chinese society, and even advocated the abolition of Chinese characters and *The Analects of Confucius* to learn Latin and the Bible, which not only caused a huge fault line in Chinese culture, but also brought about the destruction of Confucianism [4]. It was against this social background, when everyone criticized Confucianism, that Ku Hung-Ming translated *The Analects of Confucius* into English and tried to spread Chinese Confucianism to the world. He strongly criticized the material culture and moral degradation of the West, while vigorously promoting the superiority of Chinese culture. He argued that James Legge did not really understand the true meaning of the Confucian scriptures, and that his translation appeared to be dull and flawed in its behavior, severing the literature and philosophy of Chinese society. It was out of this Qing martyr's pathos and strong "family-country" sentiments that Ku's translation tended to glorify the East. His translation of

"Xiao" in *The Analects of Confucius* is in fact strongly oriental, as the culture of "Xiao" was given social and individual norms of behavior due to the confinement of feudal ethics, and carried the sense of responsibility of a collectivist group concept, this has also shaped an image of a responsible and family-minded Chinese person to some extent. However, the criteria for determining "good son" in China and the West are different, and the translation of "son" is too feudal, but considering the social background of the time, the possibility of a "daughter" marrying her husband was indeed very slim to show "Xiao" to her parents. Another consideration is that Ku equates the concept of "Xiao" with "a good son", perhaps out of consideration for the readers of the translated language, which is more specific and simpler to understand, allowing the readers of the translated language to immediately grasp the subject of "Xiao", that is to say, the children's respect and support to their parents, in order to eliminate the unfamiliarity and increase the acceptance.

As a missionary, James Legge's motivation for translation is the opposite of Ku's. He carried on the tradition opened up by previous missionaries in China and translated the Confucian scriptures with the aim of making them "available to my own". He believed that the translation and publication of all the writings of Confucius with commentaries would greatly facilitate the missionary work of future missionaries. In this regard, his interpretation of *The Analects of Confucius* was necessarily missionary and utilitarian in nature. This kind of translation is also tinged with a kind of colonialism, and the political and economic inequality in the post-colonial context creates a power difference between the strong and the weak cultures, making it difficult for the translation to achieve the expected equal dialogue and information transformation. In the book in 1992 *Sitting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*, the Indian scholar Tejaswini Niranjana discusses the issue of translation in the context of the colonial context. She addresses the problems of post-colonial translation theory, arguing that the colonizer constructs a rewritten image of the East that represents truth through the use of numerous English translations of works, whereby the colonizer imposes many conscious values on the colonizer, and she is scathing in her criticism of the role translation plays in this power structure: "Translation, as a practice, takes shape in asymmetrical power relations manipulated by colonialism" [5]. The original intention of James Legge's translation of *The Analects of Confucius* was for missionary purposes. He believed that Confucian classics were the key to understanding China, so he was determined to understand Chinese culture to help missionary work. Therefore, the purpose of James Legge's translation of Chinese Confucian classics is not to spread Confucianism, but to criticize or use them after in-depth understanding of Confucian classics and Chinese culture, so as to complete the task of making Chinese people accept the Bible and Christianity and to make Christian culture occupy the position of a spiritual leader with the help of Confucian culture. Thus, the

translation of "Xiao" as "filial" or "filial piety" is a more solidified understanding and treatment in James' translation, although the object of "filial piety" is not designated as a single image of "a good son", the solidification of "filial" or "filial piety" reduces the contextual meaning of "Xiao", which emphasizes the importance of serving one's parents with God-like devotion and obedience, thus giving it a strong colonial meaning showed as a product of colonial attempts.

From the perspective of translation strategies, the different translation preferences of the two translators are the result of different translation strategies they adopted. American comparative literature professor Maria Tymoczko points out two traditions of translated literature: scholarly translation and literary translation. The former takes the original text as the starting point, almost literally translates the foreign words, special words, and glossaries in the original text, and translates the content of the original text from the lexical semantics; the latter takes the target language as the starting point, and interprets the content of the original text according to the characteristics of the target text, which is highly readable. Both of them will be influenced by the ideology, language policy and ethnic policy at that time [6]. Ku Hung-Ming gave "Xiao" an action subject according to the contextual meaning, thus making it more specific. The concept of "Xiao" was naturally brought into the acceptable range of target language readers. He regards *The Analects of Confucius* as a great national literary work, and puts the target language readers in the first place. The purpose is to let the target language readers understand the will of Confucianism and the profound connotation of Confucian culture more deeply. His translation has the characteristics of a typical literary translation, and is a domestication translation strategy that incorporates the behavioral patterns of the source language into the cultural category of the target readers as much as possible. Legge attempts to adopt a cultural adaptation strategy, and strives to combine Chinese and Western cultures in the commonalities of Christianity and Confucian culture to achieve his missionary purpose in China. However, James Legge's Christian background makes it impossible for him to truly understand Confucian culture. His missionary status and translation purpose inevitably determine his one-sided understanding of the concept of Confucian culture, which will inevitably have a non-negligible impact on his translation. He does not consider the contextual meaning of "Xiao" and translates it into "filial" and "filial piety". Legge retains the expression of "Xiao" in the original text without explaining it too much. He tries to keep the original work as much as possible and let the target language readers get close to the original work, which is characterized by a typical scholarly translation, and it is a foreignization translation strategy that attempts to make the target language readers accept foreign cultures.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Taking the English translation of "Xiao" as a starting

point, it is easy to find that it has different meanings in different contexts of *The Analects of Confucius*, and it is difficult to find a unified fixed word or expression in English. Therefore, the translation of "Xiao" in *The Analects of Confucius* must combine the meaning of the context with the purpose of translation. And one of the purposes of the English translation of the Chinese classics is to promote Chinese culture to go out, so cultural equivalence must be the primary criterion for the translation of core Confucian concept words.

Moreover, the interpretation and translation of Chinese cultural classics are closely related to the ideology of the translator, and the translator's motivation has an important influence on the dissemination of cultural classics. Translation is always a purposeful and conscious act, and both Ku and James were inevitably influenced by their ideologies when they translated *The Analects of Confucius* into English, which directly led to their different translation beliefs and translation strategies. While based on the social background of that time, their translation activities were inevitably subject to the great constraints of the political environment. For translators in the new era, the foreign translation of classics is still a heavy but long way to go. Translators should recognize that the classical culture unites the spirit of a nation. And in order to promote the excellent Chinese culture contained in the traditional Chinese classics, they are supposed to have a dynamic perspective and an open-minded attitude of incorporation and inclusion.

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