

# Retranslation of The Analects of Confucius and the Causes for Retranslation

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**Abstract:** *The Analects of Confucius is a representative work of Confucian classics in China, and it has been translated into various languages. However, due to the differences in subjective consciousness, historical culture, translation purposes, life experiences, and other aspects, the interpretations of The Analects in each translation are entirely different. This paper primarily analyzes the retranslation and the causes behind the retranslation of The Analects of Confucius, aiming to further deepen the understanding of The Analects in different countries and expand its circulation range.*

**Keywords:** *The Analects of Confucius; Retranslation; Causes*

The translation, as a realistic existence, is a dynamic generative process, and the original driving force of this generative process is its inherent creativity. The generative process of translation is a creative development evolving dynamically towards novelty. The essence of previous translations and various elements in the current context are incorporated and integrated to generate subsequent translations; the subsequent translations then become the starting point for the generation of translations in the next stage, continuously evolving towards novelty. Therefore, there is no ultimate translation, and retranslation becomes inevitable.

## 1. The Analects of Confucius

Confucius was a renowned Chinese thinker, educator, and politician during the Spring and Autumn Period (551 BC - 479 BC). His ideologies and educational beliefs, known as Confucianism, are universally acknowledged as one of China's belief systems and an important intangible cultural heritage. Not only does it embody the core values of Chinese culture, but it is also a precious spiritual wealth for all humanity. As a representative of Confucianism, The Analects of Confucius is a work that records the sayings of Confucius and his disciples, recording Confucius's political viewpoints, moral concepts, and educational principles, serving as the firsthand material for studying Confucius and Confucianism. The Confucian classic---The Analects of Confucius is one of the outstanding representatives of Chinese classics, and its English translations are an important part of the dissemination of China's outstanding ideological and cultural heritage to the outside world.

With the continuous deepening and integration of cultural exchanges between China and the West, English translations of The Analects of Confucius have increasingly attracted the attention of researchers, and the development status of research on the English translation of The Analects of Confucius has also garnered the interest of some researchers. It not only encapsulates the great thoughts of the Chinese nation, but also has a profound impact on the world civilization. In the development process of human society, people from different eras and different translators have different understandings of The Analects of Confucius, leading to a richer and more diverse interpretation of the text. Therefore, the retranslation of The Analects of Confucius is highly necessary.

## 2. Retranslation of The Analects of Confucius

### 2.1 The Concept of Retranslation

Retranslation mainly refers to a translator retranslating a work that has been translated by someone else, emphasizing different interpretations and explanations of the work by different translators<sup>[1]</sup>. Text retranslation has a very obvious tendency, and its internal characteristics are mainly manifested in the following aspects: Firstly, the cultural level and artistic value of the original work are related to

retranslation. The higher the value of the original work, the higher the attention it receives from translators, and thus the more retranslations will be produced. For example, *The Analects of Confucius*, a classic Confucian work in China, occupies a crucial position in Chinese cultural classics, resulting in a relatively high frequency of retranslation in translation history. Secondly, the maturity of the original work's textual research, interrelation between annotated editions and retranslation. The more mature the textual research of the original work is and the more annotated editions there are, the greater the probability of retranslation. Thirdly, the relationship between the interpretation space of the original work and retranslation. The richer the interpretation space of the original work, the more diverse its interpretation dimensions and explanatory methods. Therefore, there is a significant positive correlation between the richness of the interpretation space of the original work and the frequency of retranslation. Effective retranslation of the original work can not only significantly improve the overall quality of the translation, making it meet the overall trend of the times, but also effectively increase the richness of translation interpretation and understanding, further enhancing the diversity of the translation's internal expression, allowing different translations to learn from each other's strengths and offset weaknesses.

## ***2.2 Retranslation of The Analects of Confucius***

Confucius, a great thinker, educator, and politician of ancient China, is also the founder of Confucianism and is currently ranked as the foremost among the "Top Ten Cultural Figures in the World". His thoughts and ideas have had a profound educational impact on later generations. *The Analects of Confucius* records in detail the words and deeds of Confucius and his disciples, embodying his moral concepts, educational ideas, and political views. Its language expression is concise, and its sentences and passages are highly vivid and figurative. At the same time, the cultural and artistic value of this work is relatively high, making the phenomenon of retranslation of *The Analects of Confucius* very common in the translation community [2].

In the translation history of *The Analects of Confucius*, Matteo Ricci was the first person to translate it, producing a Latin translation in 1597. Today, translations of *The Analects of Confucius* in various languages have been widely circulated worldwide, having a significant impact on the development of world civilization. In the development of translations of *The Analects of Confucius*, in 1861, the English translation by the British missionary James Legge was officially published and is considered the earliest, most complete, and most classic English translation in the world. Currently, the most widely read English translation of *The Analects of Confucius* is Arthur Waley's translation from 1938, while the most popular online version is Charles Muller's translation from 2004. In addition, many outstanding translators and scholars in China have also engaged in the translation of *The Analects of Confucius*, thus forming the phenomenon of retranslation we speak of today.

In the translation process of *The Analects of Confucius*, different translators have varying ideologies, cultural literacy, and historical backgrounds. Their interpretive concepts and translation perspectives also differ significantly, leading to notable differences in their translations.

## **3. The Causes for the Retranslation of The Analects of Confucius**

### ***3.1 Realistic need of translation activities.***

The original text, the translator, the readers, the culture of the target language, and others are all continuously generated processes. By incorporating these factors, a specific translation is realized through integration, which is also a generative process. The cultural classics in reality are constantly evolving rather than fixed and rigid. The spiritual essence of cultural classics is often given new meanings and values through continuous interpretation in different historical periods. The original text is constantly generated through the annotations of translators in different dynasties, and most of the translations that have been handed down are in line with the background of the times and can reflect the spirit of the times. Since the original text, as a realistic existence, is a continuously generated process, it is bound to promote the generation of new translations as the incorporated material.

The spiritual essence of cultural classics is often given new meanings and values through continuous interpretation in different historical periods. When it comes to different translations of *The Analects of Confucius*, various interpreters have their unique interpretations of the text. However, regardless of the specific interpretation, it will not deviate from the fundamental meaning of *The Analects*. The diverse ideas and concepts embedded in *The Analects* are as vast and complex as a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes; similarly, there are a thousand interpretations of *The*

Analects in a thousand people's perspectives. The profoundness and conciseness of The Analects leave ample space for translators, which not only provides them with a broader scope of imagination but also renders the translations of The Analects infinitely derivative, multiply interpretable, and multi-definable [5]. The realization of a text's meaning lies in the interplay between the translator and the text itself. The different fusions of the translator's perspective and the textual horizon are significant reasons for the emergence of diverse translations of a work. In the context of a new era, translators bring new perspectives to the work, posing new possibilities and questions, thus keeping the interpretation of the work in a continuous cycle and leading to the phenomenon of retranslation.

### ***3.2 The needs of readers***

In the process of retranslation, the role of the reader cannot be ignored. As recipients, the ultimate goal of retranslation is to make readers accept and understand them. By reading translated works, readers can understand and absorb the knowledge and wisdom from ancient classics. For example, 54.6% of people have changed their perception of China after reading the English translation of the Analects of Confucius, which shows that readers' perception may change after accepting translated works of classics. As communicators, readers are not only the recipients, but also the communicators. After understanding and accepting the works, readers may recommend them to others through words of mouth, social media, book reviews, and other forms, thus expanding the influence of the works. This communication behavior is of great significance for enhancing the international communication influence of retranslation, and helping to promote Chinese culture to go global. As evaluators, readers can evaluate the quality and value of the works through reading and thinking about them. This evaluation not only reflects on the content and form of the works, but also includes the recognition and negation of the ideas and emotions expressed in the works. Readers' evaluation is of great significance for improving the quality of retranslation and enhancing the dissemination effect of translated works. And readers' expectation horizon is the key point for realizing the significance of original works and translations as artistic creations. Translators need to improve their own acceptance level during the translation process, pursue the integration with the expectation horizon of the original works, and predict the expectation horizon of the translated works, so as to achieve the goal of maximizing the integration with the expectation horizon of the translated works. This integration of expectation horizons plays a positive role in improving the social influence of translated works. Translators need to correctly grasp the aesthetic distance during the translation process, avoid excessive foreignization or domestication, and maintain the style and aesthetic value of the original text. In summary, readers play multiple roles in the translation of classics, including recipients, communicators, and evaluators. Their reading experience, communication behavior, and evaluation feedback are crucial for improving the quality and influence of retranslation and promoting Chinese culture to go global. Therefore, in the process of retranslation, it is necessary to fully consider the needs and expectations of readers to improve the quality and influence of translated works.

Interpretation is in a modern context. As time passes and society evolves, people's understanding and interpretation of the Analects of Confucius also change. Retranslation can incorporate the actual conditions of modern society to provide a more contemporary interpretation of The Analects. This kind of interpretation helps readers apply Confucian thought better to modern life and realize its practical value. As we all know, the target readers constitute a huge group. This group absorbs the modern ideas, poetic theory, communication technology, mainstream ideology, etc. in the daily learning and reading. Under the current linguistic environment and social conditions, readers have ingested diversified information such as the Internet and digital technology, creating new readers with the habit of listening to books, reading images, and fragmented reading. These new readers will inevitably participate in the new translations in the next stage, and retranslation will be more suitable for the habits of new readers, thus promoting the production of new translations. In recent years, the diversified dissemination modes of Chinese cultural classics have adapted to the reading habits of contemporary readers. Popular forms of original texts, including comics, illustrations, animations, and the like, are adopted, coupled with concise bilingual Chinese-English text and illustrations, and even audio and video materials. This innovation of new forms not only enhances the readability and fun of the texts but also explains the original texts in a simple yet profound way, which has been recognized by many readers. The reality of these popular translations is generated through the integration of readers with the habit of listening to books, reading images, and fragmented reading, as well as other Chinese cultural classics. So it is natural to meet the readers' needs for the retranslation.

### 3.3 *The translators' subjective causes*

One of the significant reasons for the phenomenon of retranslation of *The Analects of Confucius* lies in the differences in subjective consciousness among translators, which directly lead to notable variations in the expressions of the translations. Take James Legge as an example, as a missionary sent by the British to Asia, he had a profound understanding of Chinese culture and was an outstanding sinologist. His comprehensive grasp of the expressive style and ideological content of *The Analects of Confucius* enabled him to achieve a thorough understanding in the translation process. His translation of *The Analects of Confucius* is rigorously worded and structured, while also exhibiting the poetic beauty of traditional Chinese culture. However, Legge's translation was not primarily intended to promote the great ideas of Confucius to the world, but rather to guide people away from Confucius in search of a new mentor—Jesus in Western culture<sup>[3]</sup>.

Influenced by this translation philosophy, Legge approached *The Analects of Confucius* with a deep sense of reverence, akin to the reverence Westerners hold for the Bible. Consequently, his translation retained a significant amount of the original linguistic characteristics and sentence structures of *The Analects of Confucius*, which, to a large extent, affected the fluency of the translation. To address this, Legge provided extensive annotations in his translation, which had a positive impact on optimizing the expression of the translation. Legge's identity as a missionary directly shaped the inherent characteristics of his translation of *The Analects of Confucius*. He often used concepts from the Bible to interpret *The Analects of Confucius* in a unique way, resulting in a translation with a distinct Christian color.<sup>[4]</sup>

For Arthur Waley, he is renowned as “a generation of sinology masters” and “an outstanding translation master”. Waley takes into account the differences in cultural backgrounds during his translation process, striving to communicate the full essence of Confucianism to readers. His profound understanding of Confucian thought ensures that his translation not only conveys the meaning of the original text but also captures the essence of Confucian culture. Moreover, Waley's translation is creative and thought-provoking. His understanding of Confucius' ideas in *The Analects* allows his translation to incorporate his own thoughts and insights while conveying the meaning of the original text. This makes his translation influential in academic circles. Therefore, the sentence structure of his translation does not exhibit the distinctive characteristics of *The Analects of Confucius* as Legge's translation does. Additionally, Waley had a profound study of Western literature and possessed solid literary accomplishments, which led to a significant domestication tendency in his translation.

For Charles Muller, his translation of *The Analects of Confucius* has gained widespread popularity on the internet. In 1994, Charles Muller began his translation work on *The Analects of Confucius*, and his translation was officially published in 2004. Charles Muller spent nearly ten years refining and updating his translation, making it both accessible and philosophical. Therefore, this version is relatively well-received by the general public. Charles Muller's translation of *The Analects of Confucius* has effectively sparked the enthusiasm of Westerners to understand Chinese classics and significantly increased their motivation to study them, having a profound impact on the promotion and dissemination of Chinese classics.

Charles Muller's translation may favor fluency and readability rather than overly pursuing literal accuracy. This style makes his translation more accessible to English readers, though it may also sacrifice some of the subtleties of the original text to a certain extent. By employing a domestication translation strategy and lively verb forms, Charles Muller's translation has likely achieved significant success in cultural dissemination. His translation not only enables English readers to comprehend Confucian thought and philosophy more easily, but may also spark their interest in traditional Chinese culture. Compared to the literal translation style of translators like Legge, Charles Muller's domestication strategy gives his translation a distinct expression and linguistic style. This difference may make his translation more popular among certain reader groups, but it may also lead to some controversies in academic research.

In translating the same work, the translations of James Legge, Arthur Waley, and Charles Muller exhibit significant differences, with distinct translation focuses and philosophies. This largely reflects that in the concrete practice of humanistic activities, everyone possesses their own subjective consciousness. Their disparities in cultural literacy, ideological perspectives, and personal experiences lead to the production of diverse translations of the same work. For each translator, they delve deeply into the intrinsic value of *The Analects of Confucius* during their translation practices. However, due to the different eras they inhabit, their understandings and interpretations of the work also vary accordingly.

### ***3.4 Promoting the international dissemination of Chinese culture***

As a core document of Confucian culture, the retranslation of *The Analects of Confucius* provides an important avenue for Chinese culture to go global. Through translation, Confucius's thoughts and wisdom can transcend language and cultural barriers, enabling readers worldwide to understand and accept them. This helps enhance international society's recognition and identification with Chinese culture, thereby elevating its international influence. And it also can enhance cultural self-confidence. The success of the retranslation of *The Analects of Confucius* not only showcases the unique charm and value of Chinese culture, but also strengthens the cultural self-confidence of the Chinese people. This self-confidence facilitates the dissemination and exchange of Chinese culture globally, allowing more people to appreciate its profoundness and extensiveness. At the same time, it promotes cross-cultural communication and dialogue between different cultures. By reading and studying its English version, foreign readers can gain a deeper understanding of Chinese traditional culture, values, and ways of life, fostering mutual understanding and respect. This cross-cultural communication helps eliminate cultural barriers and misunderstandings, promoting the diversity and harmonious coexistence of world cultures. It enriches the global cultural treasure trove. The introduction of the English translation of *The Analects of Confucius* provides global readers with more diverse cultural options. Confucius's thoughts and wisdom, as treasures of human wisdom, add unique brilliance to the global cultural treasure trove. This contributes to the prosperity and development of global culture, making the exchange and integration of different cultures more vibrant and colorful. It promotes the internationalization of education. The retranslation is of significant importance to international Chinese language education and the internationalization of global education. By studying its English version, foreign students can gain a deeper understanding of Chinese traditional culture and language knowledge, enhancing their cross-cultural communication skills. Simultaneously, it provides more teaching resources and textbook options for international Chinese language education, contributing to the internationalization process of global education. It also inspires academic research interest. The retranslation of *The Analects of Confucius* has sparked the interest and enthusiasm of scholars, both domestic and international, in the study of Chinese culture. By comparing different English translations and the original text, scholars can delve deeper into the textual content, ideological system, and historical status of *The Analects of Confucius*, promoting the development and innovation of related disciplines.

In conclusion, the retranslation of *The Analects of Confucius* holds multifaceted significance in cultural dissemination. It not only promotes the international dissemination and cross-cultural communication of Chinese culture, but also enhances the cultural self-confidence of the Chinese people, enriches the global cultural treasure trove, drives the internationalization process of education, and inspires academic research interest. All these contribute to promoting the prosperity and development of global culture, fostering mutual understanding and respect between different cultures.

### **Conclusion**

As the most famous Confucian classic, *The Analects of Confucius* embodies traditional Chinese cultural values. The successful retranslation of *The Analects of Confucius* is conducive to promoting Chinese traditional classic culture and boosting the dissemination of Chinese culture. It is also beneficial to eliminating cultural barriers between China and other countries, promoting cultural integration, and improving China's cultural soft power. By constructing China's cross-cultural communication discourse system through translation, Chinese people can express their voices on the international stage, shape national cultural identity and national image, thus better demonstrating the image of contemporary China in the exchange of world civilizations and cultures. *The Analects of Confucius* embodies rich ideological concepts, and its "textual meaning" possesses inherent pluralistic characteristics. Therefore, there exist considerable differences in the expressions of *The Analects* among translators from different eras. As people's understanding of *The Analects* deepens, their interpretation concepts and methods have also undergone significant changes. Consequently, retranslating *The Analects* has become an inevitable trend of the times.

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