

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION  
Vol. 6, No. 2, 2010, pp. 01-13

ISSN 1712-8358  
[www.cscanada.net](http://www.cscanada.net)  
[www.cscanada.org](http://www.cscanada.org)

## On the Stylistic Characteristics of James Legge's Translation of *Lun Yu*

### SUR LES CARACTÉRISTIQUES STYLISTIQUES DE LA TRADUCTION DE *LUN YU* DE JAMES LEGGE

ZHU Fang<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Closeness in style has always been the highest standard or the supreme goal of translation. A successful translation of *Lun Yu* is inseparable from the preservation of its original style. This paper examines whether James Legge's translation of *Lun Yu* reproduced the original style from the linguistic point of view and the literary point of view respectively. A careful comparative study on the source text and the target text reveals that the stylistic features of *Lun Yu* have been preserved in Legge's version in a considerable degree. This pioneer, and at the same time standard translation by Legge has provided us with so many good and useful translation techniques as well as enlightenment that it will continue to benefit the development of translation theory and practice.

**Key words:** *Lun Yu*; translation; style

**Résumé:** La proximité de style a toujours été le standard le plus élevé ou le but suprême de la traduction. Une traduction réussie de *Lun Yu* est indissociable de la préservation de son style original. Cet article examine si la traduction de *Lun Yu* de James Legge a reproduit le style original du point de vue linguistique et littéraire respectivement. Une étude comparative soignée sur le texte source et le texte cible révèle que les caractéristiques stylistiques de *Lun Yu* ont été conservées dans la version de Legge à un degré considérable. La traduction standard de Legge nous a fourni tant de techniques de traduction de qualité et utiles ainsi que de l'éclaircissement qu'il continuera de bénéficier au développement de la théorie de la traduction et de la pratique.

**Mots-Clés:** *Lun Yu*; traduction; style

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Closeness in style has always been the highest standard or the supreme goal of translation. According to the Revised Edition of *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, style is "the characteristic manner of expression in prose or verse; how a particular writer says things. The analysis and assessment of style involves

---

<sup>1</sup> School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Wuhan University. E-mail: [wsnaomi@126.com](mailto:wsnaomi@126.com), China.

\* Received 5 March 2010; accepted 15 April 2010

examinations of a writer's choice of words, his figures of speech, the devices (rhetorical and otherwise), the shape of his sentences (whether they be loose or periodic), the shape of paragraphs —indeed, of every conceivable aspect of his language and the way in which he uses it.” (J.A.Cuddon, 1979, pp.663) Nida said that “certain mistakes in terminology or grammar can be forgiven, but a failure to reflect the spirit and dynamic of a source document is a ‘mortal sin’.” (Nida, 1993, Ed.2) His words demonstrate how important it is to keep the original style in translation. Therefore “translators today should try their best to make their translations correspond, or at least, steer close to the original in style so that resemblance in spirit may be achieved.” (Liu Zhongde, 1991, pp.123) A successful translation of *Lun Yu* is inseparable from the preservation of its original style. This paper examines whether James Legge's translation of *Lun Yu* reproduced the original style from the linguistic point of view and the literary point of view respectively.

## 2. LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS FROM THE MICROSCOPIC POINT OF VIEW

From the microscopic point of view, namely, the linguistic point of view, style is embodied in “phonological, register, lexical, syntactic, textural and rhetorical markers of a work.” (Yang Zi-jian, Liu Xue-yun, 1994, pp.598) Critical study and evaluation of Legge's translation of the original style is to be made in these six respects.

### 2.1 Phonological Features

From the angle of auditory phonetics, “a meaningful act of speech has another end —the reception end. The sounds produced by the speaker will be received by the hearer.”(Hu Zhuang-lin; Liu Run-qing; Li Yan-fu, 1988, pp.39) Professor Liu Mi-qing further pointed out the relationship between phonetics and style: “Due to the fact that human language should first of all resort to the sense of hearing, the phonological features of the language system become the basic features of the language style, by which the unique beauty of the language can be made up.”(Yang Zi-jian, Liu Xueyun,1994, pp.586) *Lun Yu*, written in classical Chinese, is regarded as “the earliest prose poem”. It is not only a masterpiece of Confucianism, containing the broad and profound ideological content, but also a masterpiece of ancient Chinese literature. The language of it is rhythmic, harmonious and musical, owing to two facts: On the one hand, in classical Chinese, though most words are monosyllables, some proper repetitions can make the lines harmonious; on the other hand, due to the rich rhymes in this classical Chinese work, some lines are very rhythmic and musical. Legge's translation is to be evaluated in the following examples.

子曰、君子坦蕩蕩、小人長戚戚。

The Master said, ‘The superior man is satisfied and composed; the mean man is always full of distress.’(Lun Yu Book 7: Chapter 36)

The literal meaning of “坦蕩蕩” is big-hearted or magnanimous, while Legge rendered it as “satisfied and composed”, which seems not proper enough as far as content is concerned. The key to the translation of this sentence lies in the reduplicated words: “蕩蕩” and “戚戚”, only by a successful rendering of which can the original beauty of harmonious and musical sounds be reproduced. In this respect, Legge failed to preserve the phonological features of the source text. As a result, the original style was lost to some extent in the target text.

詩雲、戰戰兢兢、如臨深淵、如履薄冰。

It is said in The Book of Poetry, “We should be apprehensive and cautious, as if on the brink of a deep gulf, as if treading on thin ice.” (Lun Yu Book 8: Chapter 3)

It is actually a poem: First, the first line is made up of two continuous reduplicated words “戰戰兢

兢”。Second, the rhyme pattern of the source text is “aba” as in “兢” and “冰”。Third, the second and third line form a parallel structure: “履” v.s. “臨” and “深淵” v.s. “薄冰”。These techniques make the whole stanza profound in image, harmonious in sound and vivid in description. Legge kept the rhyme pattern of the original by using consonance for the first and third line in his version: “cautious” v.s. “ice”。However, he failed to reproduce the image of the reduplicated words “戰戰兢兢”。What’s more, in the target text, Legge used a present participle “treading” in the third line while a prepositional phrase “on the rink of” in the second, thus the balanced form of the source text was completely damaged. In fact, if we add a present participle “standing” after the first “as if”, corresponding to the word “treading”, the original flavour can be preserved in a certain degree.

Generally speaking, Legge is not competent in preserving the phonological features of the original. This may be due to the differences between the Chinese and the English language. However, conscious efforts of the translator can bring about translations as close to the original style as possible. In this respect, Legge didn’t make enough efforts.

## 2.2 Registerial Features

Register refers to the scope of language. To study register is to examine language used in particular circumstances or contexts. Upon how pragmatics can be applied to translation, Professor Guo Zhu-zhang pointed out in his article *Word Scope and Translation*, “in the light of the degree of standardization, language can be divided into three general categories, namely, informal language (slang; spoken, informal, familiar languages or regional dialects, etc.), common core and formal language (written, formal, polite or elevated languages, etc.). ... In order to correctly understand the meaning and style of the source text, it is necessary for the translator to carefully analyze the register of it.” (Yang Zi-jian, Liu Xue-yun, 1994, pp.743) *Lun Yu*, as a record of Confucian sayings, was written in refined colloquialism. That is to say, the language of *Lun Yu* is definitely not the original spoken language, but a written one by careful refining and polishing, vivid and elegant. Legge translated it in the Victorian prose style which is formal and canonical. And it is for this reason that Legge was once criticized by W.E.Soothill who commented that Legge’s translation was “in an emasculated form”. (Soothill, 1910, Ed. II) The author of this paper does not agree with such an opinion. Having made a general study of Legge’s version, she considers that Legge had in a considerable degree achieved closeness to the original style in the respect of register. A typical example is selected here as a proof.

顏淵季路侍。子曰、盍各言爾志。子路曰、願車馬衣輕裘、與朋友共、敝之而無憾。顏淵曰、願無伐善、無施勞。子路曰、願聞子之志。子曰、老者安之、朋友信之、少者懷之。

1. Yen Yüan and Ch’i Lû being by his side, the Master said to them, ‘Come, let each of you tell his wishes.’
2. Tsze-lû said, ‘I should like, having chariots and horses, and light fur dresses, to share them with my friends, and though they should spoil them, I would not be displeased.’
3. Yen Yüan said, ‘I should like not to boast of my excellence, nor to make a display of my meritorious deeds.’
4. Tsze-lû then said, ‘I should like, sir, to hear your wishes.’ The Master said, ‘They are, in regard to the aged, to give them rest; in regard to friends, to show them sincerity; in regard to the young, to treat them tenderly.’ (Lun Yu Book 5: Chapter 25)

This chapter is a conversation between Confucius and his disciples Yen Yüan and Tsze-lû, with a concise style and compact structure. The conciseness of this chapter shows that the compiler of *Lun Yu* is very good at refining spoken language into written language. On the one hand, normally the conversation between Confucius and his disciples could not be so simple, neat and graceful. It is quite possible that the original utterance was in some degree wordier and even rougher. On the other hand, as for the present record, it is not difficult to deduce a conclusion from the choice of words、sentence structure、rhythm、literary grace and rhetorical devices that, the language of this piece of writing is not the original spoken language, but a written one after refinement. Legge realized the registerial feature of the source text and successfully preserved the original style by using three parallel sentences “in regard to ... tenderly” and a series of formal words like “chariot”, “dress”, “spoil”, “displeased”, “display”, “meritorious”,

“sincerity”. In English, words originated from French are more formal than native English words, while words from Latin are usually bookish, literary and formal in tone. In the above list, the first five words are all originated from French and the last two are from Latin, the use of which contributes greatly to achieving closeness in style. Besides, as for the translation of “盍各言爾志”, Legge rendered it as “Come, let each of you tell his wishes.” The word “come” is properly used here because it keeps the colloquial style of the source text against the general formal pattern of the written language, thus reproducing the vividness of the original work as the sayings of Confucius.

A general survey of *Lun Yu* reveals that in this classical work, the concise and graceful language like that of the above example can be found easily throughout the whole book. And a study of Legge’s version shows that in general Legge has preserved the original style in the respect of register.

### 2.3 Lexical Features

Lexical features as a matter of fact, are what is called “diction” in literary criticism. Every writer has his or her own preference of diction. In *Lun Yu*, adjectives or descriptive words are frequently used to make vivid descriptions or characterizations and produce distinctive images as well. A general study of Legge’s version shows that he is quite successful in preserving the original lexical features by using the corresponding English adjectives or adverbs to strengthen the effect of description, and his description in English has reproduced the vivid images of the source text in a certain degree.

朝、與下大夫言、侃侃如也、與上大夫言、誾誾如也。君在、蹶蹶如也、與與如也。

1. When he was waiting at court, in speaking with the great officers of the lower grade, he spoke freely, but in a straightforward manner; in speaking with those of the higher grade, he did so blandly, but precisely.
2. When the ruler was present, his manner displayed respectful uneasiness; it was grave, but self-possessed. (*Lun Yu* Book 10: Chapter 2)

In Legge’s translation, the goal of preserving the original preference of diction is achieved by using a series of adjectives and adverbs: freely, straightforward, bland, precise, respectful, grave and self-possessed. By this means, the original imagery of Confucius’ manners on different occasions is vividly represented before the target readers.

樊退問仁。子曰、居處恭、執事敬、與人忠。

Fan chih asked about perfect virtue. The Master said, ‘It is, in retirement, to be sedately grave; in the management of business, to be reverently attentive; in intercourse with others, to be strictly sincere. (*Lun Yu* Book 13: Chapter 19)

In this passage, Legge used three formal and at the same time precise adjectives “grave”, “attentive” and “sincere” to translate “恭”, “敬” and “忠” in the source text. Besides, three adverbs “sedately”, “reverently” and “strictly” were used to modify the adjectives respectively, which not only added the beauty of the target language, but also functioned as an emphasis. All these efforts made by Legge enable the target readers to acquire the same clear concept and deep impression of Ren as what the Chinese readers acquire from the source text. Besides the neat sentence structure of the target text, the closeness to the original lexical feature plays an important role in the success of the translation.

### 2.4 Syntactic Features

The main syntactic features of *Lun Yu* lie in two aspects: one is antithesis and parallelism, such as “君子喻于義，小人喻於利”(Lun Yu 4:16), “質勝文則野，文勝質則史”(Lun Yu 6:16), “古之學者為己，今之學者為人”(Lun Yu 14:25) etc.; the other is rhetorical question, such as “吾誰欺，欺天乎?”(Lun Yu 9:11), “懷其寶而迷其邦，可謂仁乎?”(Lun Yu 17:1), “百姓足，君孰與不足，百姓不足，君孰與足?”(Lun Yu 12:9), “唯求則非邦也與?”(Lun Yu 11:25) etc. “Altogether there are 326 interrogative

sentences in *Lun Yu*, among which there are 183 rhetorical questions”, constituting 56.1% of the total.”(Chen Zhiming,2000, pp.115) The above two sentence patterns both play important roles in building up the unique syntactic style of *Lun Yu*, the former helping to express Confucian ideas much more forcefully, and the latter contributing to the portrayal of Confucius as the Foremost Teacher. Two passages are selected here as typical examples of such a function:

子曰、君子泰而不驕、小人驕而不泰。

The Master said, ‘The superior man has a dignified ease without pride. The mean man has pride without a dignified ease.’ (Lun Yu Book 13: Chapter 26)

The antithesis here is also a contrast, which was skillfully reproduced by Legge. Confucius frequently contrasted Junzi and Xiaoren in this form to show that they are just the opposite. Legge’s version achieves the same effect by using the same form of antithesis. There are so many antithesis and parallelisms in *Lun Yu* that they can not be listed here one by one, but a general survey shows that in most cases Legge translated them in the same syntactic structures in English, and thus met the criterion of closeness to the original style in this respect.

佛肸召、子欲往。子路曰、昔者由也聞諸夫子曰、親於其身爲不善者、君子不入也、佛肸以中牟畔、子之往也、如之何。子曰、然、有是言也。不曰堅乎、磨而不磷、不曰白乎、涅而不緇。吾豈匏瓜也哉、焉能系而不食。

1. Pi Hsi inviting to visit him, the Master was inclined to go.

2. Tsze-lû said, ‘Master, formerly I have heard you say, “When a man in his own person is guilty of doing evil, a superior man will not associate with him.” Pi Hsi is in rebellion, holding possession of Chung-mâu, if you go to him, what shall be said?’

3. The Master said, ‘Yes, I did use these words. But is it not said, that, if a thing be really hard, it may be ground without being made thin? Is it not said, that, if a thing be really white, it may be steeped in a dark fluid without being made black?’

4. ‘Am I a bitter gourd! How can I be hung up out of the way of being eaten?’ (Lun Yu Book 17: Chapter7)

This is a typical example of Confucius’s using rhetorical questions in his utterance to achieve the goal of instruction. In the source text, the rhetorical questions are completed by such interrogative words as “不...乎” “豈...哉” and “焉”. Legge in his translation used the same structure of rhetorical questions “Is it not ... ?” “Am I ... !” and “How can I ... ?” By this means the instructive tone of Confucius was faithfully preserved in the target text. In result, a kind, patient but strict teacher who was good at giving wise guidance was vividly reproduced in Legge’s version. Since antithesis, parallelism and rhetorical questions function the same in Chinese as in English, Legge’s effort to preserve them in his version is highly desirable.

## 2.5 Textural Features

According to Professor Liu Miqing, textural features of a literary work are embodied in the following seven aspects: “the length of sentence, coherence and rhythm between sentences or paragraphs, cohesion, temporal sequence in narration, spatial sequence in narration, direct and indirect speech, explicitness and implicitness.” (Yang Zi-jian, Liu Xueyun,1994, pp.589-590) The main textural feature of *Lun Yu* is its brief, pithy and compact language. It is often the case that one sentence is made up of four or five characters, and that one or two sentences can clearly demonstrate one argument. For example, when talking about teaching methods, Confucius said, “不憤不啓，不悱不發” (“I don’t open up the truth to one who is not eager to get knowledge, nor help out any one who is not anxious to explain himself.” *Lun Yu* 7:8). Every four characters keenly point out one method, from which the conciseness is easily seen.

Brevity is the soul of wit. The conciseness of the language of *Lun Yu* is due to the fact that classical Chinese is characterized by its monosyllabic words. Besides, the economy is achieved through various omissions. Although the translator has to add the missing parts to elucidate the target text, as a competent one, he or she should try to preserve the original conciseness by every possible means. In other words, while accuracy and intelligibility of the translation must be secured, conciseness should by no means be

neglected, otherwise, the original style of *Lun Yu* will be lost in some degree. As for Legge's translation, a number of lengthy or heavy sentences show that he seems to believe that accuracy and intelligibility must be given priority, even at the expense of conciseness. In this respect, many of Legge's translations are not satisfactory.

子曰、不在其位、不謀其政。

He who is not on any particular office, has nothing to do with plans for the administration of its duties. (Lun Yu Book 8: Chapter 14)

The source text only contains 10 characters while the target text contains 20 words, twice as many as the original. Though accurate and smooth, this translation is so long that it loses the flavor of the original. Zhang Qichun's version in *The Art of Translation* is far better than Legge's either in length or in rhyme: Out of position, out of administration. (Zhang Qi-chun, 1949, pp.123)

有教，無類。

In teaching there should be no distinction of classes. (Lun Yu Book 15: Chapter 38)

Here, Legge's version can be regarded as an acceptable one, but never as the best. A shorter version is provided by Zhang Qi-chun: Instruction knows no class distinction. (Zhang Qi-chun, 1949, pp.122) The above two examples show that accuracy, intelligibility and conciseness can be achieved at the same time through conscious efforts. Yet Legge's preoccupation with accuracy leads to his making little efforts in reproducing the textural style of the source text.

## 2.6 Rhetorical Devices

The charm of *Lun Yu* lies not only in its profound ideological content, but also in its refined language. The frequent use of rhetorical devices is another important characteristic of its style, by means of which some abstract philosophical thoughts are expressed more vividly and forcefully. How to preserve the original style is a real challenge to translation.

### 2.6.1 Figures of comparison

Figures of comparison are one of the most commonly used rhetorical devices in *Lun Yu*, helping to convey the message more effectively.

爲政以德、譬如北辰、居其所而眾星共之。

He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it. (Lun Yu Book 2: Chapter 1)

The original similes are faithfully reproduced in the target text, by means of which the target readers can be deeply impressed by the advantages of governing by virtue. "Be compared to" is a good translation for "譬如". Meanwhile, "all the other stars turn towards the north polar star" corresponds with "眾星共之" perfectly, thus preserving the vivid image of the original.

宰予晝寢。子曰、朽木不可雕也、糞土之牆、不可朽也、子予以何誅。

Tsai Yü being asleep during the day time, the Master said, 'Rotten wood cannot be carved; a wall of dirty earth will not receive the trowel. This Yü! — What is the use of my reproving him?' (Lun Yu Book 5: Chapter 9)

The rhetorical device used in this sentence is metaphor. The tenor does not appear, yet it is suggested by the context. Confucius compared Tsai Yü to "rotten wood" and "dirty earth" to indicate that it was useless just reproving him, unless he could help him change in essence. This metaphor was literally rendered, which achieved both intelligibility and closeness to the original style.

子貢曰、有美玉於斯、韞櫝而藏諸、求善賈而沽諸。子曰、沽之哉、沽之哉、我待賈者也。  
Tsze-kung said, 'There is a beautiful gem here. Should I lay it up in a case and keep it? Or should I seek for a good price and sell it?' The Master said, 'Sell it! Sell it! But I would wait for one to offer the price.'  
(Lun Yu Book 9: Chapter 12)

In this passage, one's talent and virtue are compared to a beautiful gem, and the proper opportunity to give full play to them is compared to a good price, indicating that Confucius does not hold the view of escaping from society; what he waits for is just the proper opportunity to put his talent and virtue to good use. The metaphor here is quite hard for Western readers, or even for modern Chinese readers, to understand. Legge translated this passage literally, which achieved faithfulness in content and form. On the other hand, in order to smooth away the obstacles for understanding, Legge accompanied his rendering with detailed notes. He explained that the disciple Tsze-Kung "wanted to elicit from Confucius why he declined office so much, and insinuated his question in this way". He further explained that this passage told people "how the desire for office should be qualified by self-respect." In this way, Legge successfully preserved the original image and ensured a smooth comprehension as well.

### 2.6.2 Hyperbole

子在齊聞韶、三月不知肉味、曰、不圖爲樂之至於斯矣。  
When the Master was in Ch'i, he heard the Shao, and for three months did not know the taste of flesh. 'I did not think,' he said, 'that music could have been made so excellent as this.'  
(Lun Yu Book 7: Chapter 13)

The source text uses a hyperbole "三月不知肉味" to emphasize Confucius' ability to appreciate music. Legge translated this hyperbole literally into English "for three months he did not know the taste of flesh", which functions the same as to show how Confucius was enchanted by the music of Shao.

子曰、朝聞道、夕死可矣。  
The Master said, 'If a man hear the right way in the morning, he may die in the evening without regret.'  
(Lun Yu Book 4: Chapter 8)

The hyperbole in this sentence helps to show the very spirit of Confucius' loving truth. In the target text, Legge also adopted literal translation with a necessary amplification "without regret". In this way, he well preserved the original content and form, and achieved the same effect as the original.

### 2.6.3 Repetition

Repetition is a most effective device used in literature, especially in speeches, to emphasize strong emotions, urgent appeals or the significance of certain actions. At the same time, repetition can create good rhythm and parallelism to make the language musical, emphatic and attractive. In *Lun Yu*, repetition frequently occurs, especially in the remarks of Confucius.

子在陳曰、歸與歸與、吾黨之小子狂簡、斐然成章、不知所以裁之。  
When the Master was in Chan, he said, 'Let me return! Let me return! The little children of my school are ambitious and too hasty. They are accomplished and complete so far, but they do not know how to restrict and shape themselves.'  
(Lun Yu Book 5: Chapter 21)

This passage describes Confucius' frustration at not being able to realize his ideals. At the moment when he decides to return to Lu, it is very natural for him to make such remark as "Let me return! Let me return!". The disappointment of not being able to complete his political mission is clearly shown in the colloquial repetition. In *Lun Yu* there are quite a lot of repetitions, including immediate repetitions and

intermittent repetitions. The following is a brief list of them:

|                    |                |
|--------------------|----------------|
| 人焉廋哉、人焉廋哉。         | (Lun Yu 2:10)  |
| 如其仁、如其仁。           | (Lun Yu 14:17) |
| 天喪予、天喪予。           | (Lun Yu 11:8)  |
| 使乎、使乎。             | (Lun Yu 14:26) |
| 沽之哉、沽之哉。           | (Lun Yu 9:12)  |
| 賢哉回也、……賢哉回也。       | (Lun Yu 6:9)   |
| 斯人也而有斯疾也、斯人也而有斯疾也。 | (Lun Yu 6:8)   |

A general survey shows that all these repetitions are reproduced into corresponding forms of repetition in English in Legge's version. Due to the similarity of repetition in form and function between the Chinese and the English language, Legge has to a large extent preserved the original style in this respect.

#### 2.6.4 Climax and Anticlimax

Climax, the arrangement of phrases or sentences in ascending order of importance, is occasionally used in *Lun Yu* to drive home a point and make the language more persuasive and effective.

子曰、知之者、不如好之者、好之者、不如樂之者。

The Master said, 'They who know the truth are not equal to those who love it, and they who love it are not equal to those who delight in it.' (Lun Yu Book 6: Chapter 18)

There are three types of people in learning i.e. those who know the truth, who love the truth and who delight in the truth. The climax here shows their progressive relationship, resulting in that those who delight in the truth is the highest of them. The key to the translation is the three verbs, “知”, “好” and “乐”, which are progressive in intensity. Legge's translation “know”, “love” and “delight in” makes the progression ascend exactly from weak to strong, and hence ensures that the climax reproduced in his version is just as effective as that in the source text.

Anticlimax, the contrary of climax, is also used in *Lun Yu*:

孔子曰、生而知之者、上也、學而知之者、次也、困而學之者、又其次也、困而不學、民斯為下矣。

Confucius said, 'those who are born with the possession of knowledge are higher class of men. Those who learn, and so, readily, get possession of knowledge, are the next. Those who are dull and stupid, and yet compass the learning, are another class next to these. As to those who are dull and stupid and yet do not learn; — they are the lowest of the people. (Lun Yu Book 16: Chapter 9)

The five kinds of people in learning are arranged in an anticlimax in the source text, from the highest to the lowest, by means of which Confucius sharply criticizes those who do not learn. This anticlimax is faithfully reproduced in Legge's translation, though the language is lengthy and heavy.

#### 2.6.5 Antithesis and Parallelism

Antithesis and parallelism are two of the most prominent rhetorical devices as well as syntactic structures in *Lun Yu*. The balanced structures and the strongly accented rhythms help to reinforce the meanings and affect the readers with artistic appeals. Since antithesis and parallelism as reflected in both the source text and the target text have already been analyzed in the previous part of this paper (see 2.4), they are not to be discussed here once again.

From the above analysis, it is clear that Legge is good at reproducing the rhetorical style of the original. A general survey of Legge's version shows that literal translation is the basic method he adopted to transfer the original devices. And it is proved that he is quite successful in preserving the original



images and meanings provided by these devices.

### 3. LITERARY ANALYSIS FROM THE MACROSCOPIC POINT OF VIEW

Style analysis has two levels —— the basic level of linguistic analysis and the higher level of literary analysis. According to Professor Liu Zhong-de, “the translator should always remember what he is working at is a literary work written by somebody else and try his utmost to turn his translation into a work of art which is in conformity with the thought, feeling and style of the original. Thus, the translation will be as moving and vivid as the original work and the reader may be aesthetically entertained as well.” (Liu Zhong-de, 1991, pp.122) In the words of Theodore Savory, “Style is the essential characteristic of every piece of writing, the outcome of the writer’s personality and his emotions at the moment, and no single paragraph can be put together without revealing in some degree the nature of its author.”(Theodore Savory, 1957:54) And Buffon, a French naturalist, made the well-known statement that style is the man. That’s to say, style varies with authors. Although *Lun Yu* is supposed to be compiled by Confucius’ disciples, as a record of his sayings, the style of it is largely dependent upon Confucius’ own personality and his emotions. For this very reason, a literary analysis from the macroscopic point of view is to be made in two aspects, namely, reflection of the artistry of *Lun Yu* and that of the personality of Confucius.

#### 3.1 Reflection of the Artistry of the Original Work

*Lun Yu* is the earliest prose collection with literary value, representing the early artistic attainments of Chinese prose. The artistry of this work mainly lies in two aspects: one is to use specific and lifelike objects to expound the abstract and profound philosophy; the other is to use sharp contrast to manifest the theme. Besides, the language of it is refined and vivid. All these factors contribute to the unique style of *Lun Yu*, without which its literary influence, together with the charm of Confucius’ thoughts, could not have been so far-reaching as it has been. Therefore, preserving the original artistry is indispensable to a successful translation of *Lun Yu*. In this respect, Legge made great efforts and achieved success in a certain degree. The following two examples may serve to illustrate it:

子路曰、子行三軍則誰與。子曰、暴虎馮河、死而無悔者、吾不與也、必也臨事而懼、好謀而成者也。

Tsze-lû said, ‘if you had the conduct of the armies of a great state, whom would you have to act with you? The Master said, ‘I would not have him to act with me, who will unarmed attack a tiger, or cross a river without a boat, dying without any regret. My associate must be the man who proceeds to action full of solicitude, who is fond of adjusting his plans, and then carries them into execution.’ (Lun Yu Book 7: Chapter 10)

The artistic charm of this passage lies in the fact that Confucius does not use abstract concept to illustrate the two types of people —— those who have excessive boldness without any strategy and those who have both bravery and strategy. Instead, he uses a vivid image of “暴虎馮河死而無悔” to illustrate the character, temper, shortcoming and possible ending of the former one. And it is this negative example that forms a striking contrast with the positive one. By this means a profound philosophy is vividly expressed to the disciples as well as the readers. From the above analysis, it is clear that the key to the translation of this passage is how to reproduce the image of “暴虎馮河” and the sharp contrast of the two types of people as vividly as the source text produces.

Raymond Dawson translated the passage as follows: “Zilu said: ‘If you, Master, were leading the three armies, then who would go with you?’ The Master said: ‘I would not go with anyone who had no regrets if he died tackling a tiger with his bare hands or crossing the Yellow River without a boat. What

would be necessary would be someone who was apprehensive, when approaching a task and liked achieving success through planning.”

In Dawson’s version, he renders “暴虎” as “tackling a tiger with his bare hands”, which, though accurate, is not impressive enough. This is because the word “tackle” literally means “seize, lay hold of, sb., eg. a thief, a player who, in Rugby, has the ball” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English, 1989:1198), which fails to describe the intensity of the fighting with a tiger; the phrase “with his bare hands” will probably remind the Western readers of a man who fights without boxing gloves, which objectively decreases the degree of extreme danger. Upon this, Legge did a better job than Dawson. Legge’s translation for “暴虎” is “unarmed attack a tiger”, which is much more vivid and impressive. In English, “unarmed” means “without weapons or means of defense” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English, 1989:1278); “attack” means “make violent attempt to hurt, overcome, defeat” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English, 1989: 67). Both words have a strong sense of violence and danger, which enables the whole translation to precisely reproduce the original image of “暴虎”. On the other hand, the amplification “my associate” is proper and necessary, which, together with the word “must”, forcefully forms a contrast with those Confucius would not act with. What’s more, compared with Dawson’s neutral words like “approach” “like”, etc., Legge chose commendatory words, such as “proceed” “is fond of” and “adjust”, to manifest Confucius’ positive attitude towards the latter kind of people. In this way, Legge successfully reproduced the artistry of the original.

子曰、譬如爲山、未成一簣、止、吾止也、譬如平地、雖覆一簣、進、吾往也。

The Master said, ‘The prosecution of learning may be compared to what may happen in raising a mound. If there want but one basket of earth to complete the work, and I stop, the stopping is my own work. It may be compared to throwing down the earth on the level ground. Though but one basketful is thrown at a time, the advancing with it is my own going forward.’ (Lun Yu Book 9: Chapter 18)

Legge explained in his notes that “learners should not cease nor intermit their labors” and “the lesson of the chapter is — that repeated acquisitions individually small will ultimately amount to much, and that the learner is never to give over”. Legge’s understanding is correct and exact. To expound his views, Confucius uses specific examples which comes directly from life experience, such as “为山” “平地” and “一簣”. As for the target text, it accurately conveys the meaning of the source text and preserves the original images. Besides, the amplification “the prosecution of learning” “but one” and “own” is especially adequate and necessary, without which the whole translation would not be so vivid, smooth and precise. It is sure that Western readers can acquire the same experience of appreciating the profound Confucian philosophy from Legge’s version as what Chinese readers acquire from the original *Lun Yu*.

### 3.2 Reflection of the Personality of Confucius

*Lun Yu* is a book about Confucius. If we want to get as near as possible to the real Confucius, the best thing we can do is to read *Lun Yu*. It is a collection of sayings and brief anecdotes, with all the chapters related directly or indirectly to Confucius and contributing to the creation of the image of the sage. In fact, the personality of Confucius is so successfully characterized that the characterization forms a most important style of the work in a literary sense. Therefore, a faithful reproduction of the personality of Confucius is crucial to any successful translation. Legge’s translation is to be evaluated in the following examples.

子路宿于石門、晨門曰、奚自。子路曰、自孔氏。曰、是知其不可而爲之者與。

Tsze-lu happening to pass the night in Shih-man, the gatekeeper said to him, ‘Whom do you come from?’ Tsze-lu said, ‘From Mr K’ung’ ‘It is he, — is it not?’ — said the other, ‘Who knows the impracticable nature of the times and yet will be doing in them?’ (Lun Yu Book 14: Chapter 40)

Confucius devoted much attention to education, but he never considered teaching as his first and real calling. Politics was his first and foremost concern. He had a mystical faith in his political mission, and

tried for the most part of his life to bring the society back to order. Therefore, he was a man of action — audacious and heroic — but ultimately he was also a tragic figure. Here “知其不可而爲之” best summarizes Confucius’ determination and persistence in carrying out his mission. Lin Yu-tang translated it as “knows a thing can not be done and still wants to do it”. Yet this translation is not desirable because it does not preserve the spirit or essence of the original. “A thing” is too general, and may only suggest that Confucius was very stubborn and unreasonable. As mentioned before, all Confucius’ efforts were in vain. The problem was not that he was politically ineffectual or impractical — on the contrary. Confucius lived in a period of historical transition. He presented a formidable challenge to the established authorities: dukes and princes felt incapable of performing up to his standards, and their respective ministers knew that, should Confucius and his disciples ever get a foothold at court, they themselves would quickly be without employment. Therefore, Legge’s translation “the impracticable nature of times” exactly conveys the original meaning of “其不可” and thus perfectly reflected the personality of Confucius. From the above analysis, it is clear that Legge’s translation, though much lengthier, is more accurate in content and quite successful in preserving the original image of Confucius.

…… 其爲人也、發憤忘食、樂以忘憂、不知老之將之至雲爾。

…… He is simply a man, who in his eager pursuit (of knowledge) forgets his food, who in the joy of its attainment forgets his sorrows, and who does not perceive that old age is coming on. (Lun Yu Book 7: Chapter 18)

The imagery this passage provides is one of the most important ingredients of Confucius’ personality — his love of learning. Although Confucius was regarded as a man of wisdom and culture, he described himself modestly as an avid student, and as a person who loved learning more than most. Legge’s translation is desirable. The original does not indicate the object of Confucius’ “發憤” and “樂”. Legge, with his scholarly accuracy, made the amplifications “of knowledge” and “of its attainment”, which are both necessary and clear. Another important phrase in the source text is “雲爾”. Legge rendered it in the first sentence as “simply”, which exactly conveys the modesty of Confucius. Moreover, the original parallelism was also properly preserved, which on the one hand helps to portray Confucius more forcefully and vividly, and on the other adds beauty to the language.

子之武城、聞弦歌之聲。夫子莞爾而笑曰、割雞焉用牛刀。子遊對曰、昔者偃也、聞諸夫子曰、君子學道則愛人、小人學道則易使也。子曰、二三子、偃之言是也。前言戲之耳。

1.The Master, having come to Wuchang, heard there the sound of stringed instruments and singing.

2.Well pleased and smiling, he said, “Why use an ox knife to kill a fowl?”

3.Tsze-Yu replied, “Formerly, Master, I heard you say, — when the man of high station is well instructed, he loves men; when the man of low station is well instructed, he is easily ruled.”

4.The Master said, “My disciples, Yen’s words are right. What I said was only in sport.” (Lun Yu Book 17: Chapter 4)

For two thousand years, Confucius has been canonized as China’s “First and Supreme Teacher”, yet he is not a demigod. Over the centuries, the official Confucius cult has created a conventional image of the Master, and as a result, many people have tended to imagine him as a solemn old preacher, always proper, slightly boring — one of these men who “push moderation too far.” In refreshing contrast with these common stereotypes, *Lun Yu* reveals a living Confucius that constantly surprises. That is the charm of this great Chinese classic. Therefore, a successful reproduction of a real Confucius is crucial to any desirable translation.

The above example is a typical one that wonderfully portrays Confucius as an ordinary man, wise, affable, and humorous. The key to the translation lies in the following four points. First, “莞爾而笑” shows the hearty pleasure of Confucius. Legge rendered it as “well pleased and smiling”, which, though amplified, successfully conveys Confucius’ hearty satisfaction. Second, “割雞焉用牛刀” is totally unexpected by the disciples as well as the readers, yet full of humor. Legge’s literal rendering makes the translation perfectly preserve the vivid image and humorous tone of the original. Third, “二三子” is a causal remark showing the close and harmonious relationship between Confucius and his disciples.

Legge rendered it into “my disciples”, which is equally cordial. Fourth, “前言戲之耳” can be regarded as a striking key point for the whole passage, due to which a living Confucius, wise, affable and humorous, is vividly portrayed before the readers. Legge’s translation for this line is wonderful. In English, the idiom “say something in sport” means “say sth. not seriously (for amusement, fun, etc)” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English,1989:1135), which exactly fits the situation in this passage. Meanwhile, the amplification “only” strengthens the effect of humor.

From the above analysis, it can be said that Legge has tried his best to do Confucius, a great man in history, justice. Generally speaking, owing to his scholarly accuracy and profound understanding, Legge has in a considerable degree preserved Confucius’ personality by reproducing the same real and living Confucius as what the source text portrays. In this respect, he meets the criterion of closeness to style from the literary point of view.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

*Lun Yu* is a masterpiece of ancient Chinese prose, with not only profound thoughts but also a high literary value. Although the translation of such a Chinese classic involves great difficulties, the warm reception of Legge’s translation in the Western world proves Legge’s success. Dr Joseph Edkoms wrote that the publication of *The Chinese Classics* “marked an epoch in the history of sinology.” He was deeply impressed by Legge’s “thorough-going fidelity as a translator” and believed that his version has given the “resultant of endless Chinese speculations on Classic enigmas.” (Ride, 1960:20)

A careful comparative study on the source text and the target text in this paper reveals that Legge’s version lives up to its reputation. One of the most remarkable qualities of Legge’s version is its closeness in style. Legge basically adopted the method of literal translation, by means of which most images are vividly reproduced in the target text. As has been studied, the stylistic features of *Lun Yu* have been preserved in a considerable degree. Although the style of Legge’s translation is certainly inferior to that of the original, Western readers can at least appreciate it as a work of art and experience some of the thought, feeling and artistry of the original, and hence be aesthetically entertained. Yet no translation is completely perfect, to say nothing of such a challenging translation of the Chinese classic *Lun Yu*. owing to the obstacles of linguistic and cultural differences, some artistry of the original is also lost in Legge’s translation, as in the case of rhythms, idioms and aphorisms, which has greatly reduced the charm of his version.

Some illuminating enlightenment can be drawn from Legge’s version as far as the translation of Chinese classics is concerned: No matter what techniques a translator uses in translation, he or she should always bear in mind that the source text is a Chinese classic, with a unique style and feature of conciseness, vividness and elegance, and with strong Chinese cultural background. Therefore, the translator should try in every possible way to preserve the original image and flavor in the target text in order to avoid the loss of meaning or style and the failure of cultural introduction. This pioneer, and at the same time standard translation by Legge has provided us with so many good and useful translation techniques as well as enlightenment that it will continue to benefit the development of translation theory and practice.

#### REFERENCES

- CHEN Zhi-ming. (2000.1). *Research on Interrogative Sentences in LunYu*. Journal of Shanxi Normal University (social science edition).
- Cuddon, J.A. (1979). *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Chatham: W.&J. Mackay Limited.

- Hornby, A. S. (1989). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (Fourth Edition)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- HU Zhuang-lin, LIU Run-qing, LIYanfu. (1988). *Linguistics: A Course Book*. Peking: Peking University Press.
- Legge, James. (1893). *Confucian Analects in The Chinese Classics (Vol.One)*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
- LIU Zhong-de. (1991). *Ten Lectures on Literary Translation*. Peking: China Translation and Publishing Corporation.
- Nida, Eugene. (1993). *Language, Culture and Translating*. Shanghai: Shanghai Educational Press.
- Ride, Lindsay. (1960). "Biographical Notes" in *The Chinese Classics (Vol. I)*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Savory, Theodore. (1957). *The Art of Translation*. London: Jonathan Cape, Thirty Bedford Square.
- Soothill, W. E. (1910). *The Analects of Confucius*. Yokohama: The F.H. Revell Company.
- YANG Zi-jian, LIU Xue-yun. (1994). *New Theory of Translation(1983-1992)*. Wuhan: Hubei Education Press.
- ZHANG Qi-chun. (1949). *Art of Translation*. Shanghai: Kaiming Bookstore.