

Original Paper

On the Construction of China's Image in D.C.Lau's Translation of *Tao Te Ching*

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Received: August 13, 2023 Accepted: October 02, 2023 Online Published: October 10, 2023

doi:10.22158/wjer.v10n5p148

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjer.v10n5p148>

Abstract

Imagology is concerned with how identity and image are gradually formed, spread, strengthened and even shaped in a specific social and historical space. Translation is one of the important means and carriers of image construction and shaping. As a classic work of Taoism, Tao Te Ching contains infinite images of China. The English version of Tao Te Ching, translated by Chinese Sinologist D. C. Lau, is among the top 10 best-sellers on Amazon in the United States and has been widely praised by readers. D. C. Lau's English translation of Tao Te Ching introduced Chinese Taoism to the West, and at the same time constructed an objective and true image of ancient China. Taking the English version of Tao Te Ching translated by D. C. Lau as an example, this paper analyzes the construction of China's image in the English translation of Chinese classics from the perspective of Imagology on the level of intrinsic textual analysis. It is found that D.C. Lau's translation constructed objective and true China's image. Through his translation, a relatively serious, solemn and orthodox Chinese image, the ancient Chinese people's wise image, ancient Chinese image of filial piety and fraternal kindness as well as the image of eagerness of peace and pursuit of harmonious and equal relationship between countries were re-presented.

Keywords

Tao Te Ching, China's image, D. C. Lau's translation

1. Introduction

Taoism is one of the earliest and most important school of Chinese ancient thought and philosophy. Through history, it has exerted great influence on Chinese culture, politics, religion, science, etc. It also has helped shape the governance of ancient China, Chinese people's character, and lives of Chinese people. *Tao Te Ching*, as the first complete philosophical masterpiece in Chinese history, is a significant

source of Taoism philosophy. It consists of two parts: “*Tao*” (Chapter 1-37) and “*Te*” (Chapter 38-81). “*Tao*” discusses about the principles of how everything goes on in the universe, the nature of the law, and how a person performs the way in his life. “*Te*” discusses about the view of the world, providing guidelines for people’s behavior, speaking, and life as well as the way of living. According to statistics from UNESCO, *Tao Te Ching* is one of the most translated and published classics in foreign language in the world (Li Shuying & Wang Hongli, 2020). Misha Tadd, an American scholar, has published *the General Catalogue of Lao Tzu Translations*, which indicates that translation of *Tao Te Ching* covers 73 languages and 1,576 translations (Misha Tadd, 2019).

Since its first English translation in 1868, the dissemination of *Tao Te Ching* in the English-speaking world has experienced three translation peaks. (Dong Na, 2014) These three climaxes in the translation of *Tao Te Ching* differ from each other in translation purpose, translation strategy and the selection of original versions. The first translation climax is from 1868 to 1905. During this period, protestant missionaries in China in the late Qing Dynasty started to translate *Tao Te Ching*, aiming to use as a tool for the acceptance of *The Bible*. And the emphasis was on the comparison between Christianity and Taoism. The influential translation text during this period is *The Texts of Taoism* from James Legge which was published in 1891 as the first English version of *Tao Te Ching*. The second translation climax is from 1934 to 1972. In these 20 years, from a new translation was published every year. The comparison between Christianity and Taoism is still ongoing. However, *Tao Te Ching* is considered to be exercising its powers rather than Christianity. In this period, understanding of *Tao Te Ching* has become a key point. One of the representative translation is from Arthur Waley’s *The Way and its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching*. The Third translation climax is from 1973 till present. In 1973, after the discovery of *Tao Te Ching*, a silk book unearthed in the Han tomb of Mawangdui, Changsha, the study of Laozi and Oriental culture became hot overseas. Before 1973, most English translations were based on Wang Bi’s annotated version and several other popular versions (such as the Heshanggong version). However, the discovery of the silk book and the bamboo script greatly stimulated the translation of *Tao Te Ching*. Some translated texts are often the result of the translators’ decades-long pursuit of sinology research. During this period of time, the focus of translation shifted to understanding the text in the context of Chinese culture and history. At the same time, translators managed to eliminate the discrimination that existed in the previous two periods. One of the representative translation during the third translation climax is from D. C. Lau’s *Chinese Classics: Tao Te Ching*. D. C. Lau’s version, published by the Penguin Press, harvests numerous readers and ranks among the top 10 best-selling translations of *Tao Te Ching* on Amazon. Scholars in China have made rich achievements in the study of the English translation of *Tao Te Ching*, involving various fields such as language, culture, philosophy and religion. However there are few studies on the English translation of *Tao Te Ching* from the perspective of imagology. This paper tries to explore ancient China’s image constructed in D. C. Lau’s translation of *Tao Te Ching* from the perspective of Imagology.

2. D.C. Lau's Translation of *Tao Te Ching* and Imagology

2.1 D.C. Lau's translation of *Tao Te Ching*

Translator's own cultural identity and academic expertise are important factors that affect translator's behavior. D.C. Lau was born in a Chinese family with a strong cultural atmosphere. He read Chinese classical literature from a young age and laid a solid foundation for sinology. When he was young, he went to the University of Hong Kong to study Chinese, and then he went to the University of Glasgow in Scotland to study Western philosophy, which laid the foundation for later philosophical research. While teaching at the University of London, he was appointed Chair Professor of Chinese Language at the University of London, and was the first Chinese to be appointed Chair Professor of Chinese language in the UK. It took him several years to translate *Tao Te Ching*, which was published by Penguin Books and became a classic translation of Penguin Books.

The book is a bilingual edition, consisting of two parts. The first part of the book contains minor revisions to D.C. Lau's translation version published in 1963 which was translated based on the circulating version of *Tao Te Ching*—Wang Bi's text. The second part is the revised translation based on silk book of Mawangdui. D.C. Lau tries to maintain the original structure and sound beauty of the original text in translation. Basically, the translation is credible and beautiful. Sometimes in order to avoid the inflexible translation, some changes are made from the structure of the sentence and the tone of the writing. D.C. Lau's translation follows the principle that the target language should be the destination of the translation. Thus the method of "domestication" is adopted in his translation, which aims to be accepted by native English readers. D.C. Lau's translation of *Tao Te Ching* is considered by many scholars to be one of the most expertly translated version in print.

2.2 Imagology in Translation Studies

Imagology, originally developed from the field of comparative literature, came into being in France in the 19th century, with the focus on the fixed cultural or national impressions that formed over time in a specific society and are reflected in various national literary works. Imagology emphasizes ethnicity and nationalities (Wang Hongyun, 2018). Pioneering scholars in the field of imagology include Daniel-Henri Pageaux and Jean-Marc Moura. With the emergence of important works from Pageaux's *From Cultural Image to Collective Imagination, Image, Research in Imagology: From Literary History to Poetics*, and Moha's *On the History and Methodology of Literary Imagology*, comparative literature imagology has finally matured in the 1980s and 1990s. After the 1990s, with the emergence of a large number of Western translations, the intensification of the process of globalization in China and the urgent need to know oneself, comparative literature imagology has further developed rapidly in China. The core concern of imagology is the study of the images shaped or described in literary works. "Image is a reciprocal interpretation of peoples, voyages and imagination among nations" (Meng, 2001, p. 2). Pageaux defines image as a total sum of opinions of a foreign land in the process of literalization and socialization (Pageaux, 1989, p. 135). While constructing images, an author is often building the images felt by himself or herself, instead of building the images in an objective way. Therefore, paying

too much attention during this stage will result in the final images drifting far from what they are seen against certain social background.

Translation is one of the important means and ways of image construction or shaping. Since the end of the 20th century, image and imagology have been introduced into the field of translation, with numerous scholars engaging in the discussion of image building (Meng, 2001, p. 89). Imagology focuses on how identity and image gradually form, spread, strengthen and even form in a specific social and historical space. Accordingly, translation studies can not only describe how subjects in different social and cultural contexts shape, change, spread and strengthen the cultural images and cultural metaphors of foreign nations and their various ethnic groups through translation, but also reveal the construction of identity characteristics of various translation subjects by exploring the interaction between other images and self-images (Flynn, Leerssen & van Doorslaer 2015, p. 8).

The constructed nature of image or identity is the core of image research (Leerssen, 2007, p. 24). The process of image construction is the process of constantly selecting and using various texts and discourses to construct specific fixed impressions in different historical time and space, and translation is one of them (Flynn, Leerssen & van Doorslaer, 2015, p. 4). Reproducing the process of image shaping through translation helps to reveal various normative factors in the process of translation production and dissemination, such as patrons, ideology, cultural strategies, international environment, relations between countries and other social, political, economic and cultural factors.

3. China's Image in D.C. Lau's Translation of *Tao Te Ching*

According to the definition of Pageaux, there are two analytical levels of imagology, respectively intrinsic textual analysis, which includes lexicons, hierarchical relations, and plots, and extrinsic textual analysis, which focuses on factors that reach beyond the text itself, such as the author, the imaginaire social, etc. Taking the English version of *Tao Te Ching* translated by D. C. Lau as an example, this paper analyzes the construction of China's image in the English translation of Chinese classics from the perspective of imagology on the level of intrinsic textual analysis.

As one of the greatest thinkers and philosophers in ancient China, Lao Tzu expressed his profound thought in *Tao Te Ching*. He created a series of core philosophical concepts which contain rich meanings and connotations and has been considered representative concepts of Chinese philosophy. These concepts include: Tao, Te, Tianxia (天下), Tian di (天地), Zi ran(自然), Wu wei (无为), Jing (静), Rou (柔), Ruo (弱), You (有), Wu (无), etc.

Ancient Chinese is very different from modern Chinese. The essence of ancient Chinese itself created many difficulties for understanding and interpreting the meaning of core concepts in *Tao Te Ching*. For example, the word "Tao", an important concept in the text and also the core of Taoism and Chinese culture, is a special term and central category of Lao Tzu's philosophy, which appears 74 times in the book. There are mainly three levels of Tao's concept: the origin of the universe, the laws of movement and the development of everything on the earth as well as the guidance of people's behavior.

Example 1: Lao Tzu: 道，可道也，非恒道也。(Chapter 1)

D.C. Lau's translation: The way can be spoken of, but it will not be the constant way.

Example 2: Lao Tzu: 道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物。(Chapter 4)

D.C. Lau's translation: *The way begets one, one begets two; two begets three; three begets the myriad creatures.*

Example 3: Lao Tzu: 人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然。(Chapter 69)

D. C. Lau's translation: *Man models himself on earth, Earth on heaven, Heaven on the way, and the way on that which is naturally so.*

For Tao with such a rich meaning, there is no equivalent expression in English language. Traditional method since James Legge is to translate Tao as "the way" or "the Way", "Te" as "virtue". These are typical examples of imposing irrelevant cultural assumptions on the Chinese language. (安乐哲, 2002)

In Chapter 1, the first Tao is used as a noun, which means the laws of the universe. The second Tao, is used as a verb, originally means "to speak, describe, express". D.C. Lau translates it as "can be spoken of", which accurately expresses Lao Tzu's inner thoughts and thus presents an objective and true ancient Chinese image through translation.

In Chapter 4, Tao is interpreted as the source of everything in the universe and nurtures every living creatures on the earth. According to the interpretation of Wang Bi, "One", "two", "three" in this chapter do not represent numbers. "One" means "Tao", "two" represents yin and yang, "three" refers to the yin and yang balance, "万物 (wanwu)" represents everything in the world. In Chapter 69, "Fa" means to emulate. "自然 (zi ran)" does not mean nature but means naturally or being oneself. The translation accurately express Lao Tzu's meaning. The translation is also concise and makes reader feel a sense of compactness.

When translating this core concept, D.C. Lau adopts free translation to translate "Tao" as the way. It is not difficult to see the influence of cultural tradition from the understanding of "Tao" by the translator. His Translation follows the principle of turning target language into destination, that is, adopts the method of "domestication", which can be accepted by ordinary native English readers. In this sense, a relatively serious, solemn and orthodox Chinese image is constructed by translation.

Example 4: Lao Tzu: 大邦以下小邦，则取小邦小邦以下大邦，则取于大邦。(Chapter 61)

D.C. Lau's translation: *(Hence) the large state, by taking the lower position, annexes the small state; The small state, by taking the lower station, is annexed by the large state.*

The meaning of this sentence is that if big countries are humble to small countries, they can gather strength from small countries. If small countries are humble to big countries, they can see the great powers from big countries. The implication is that in order to deal with the relationship between large and small countries, both sides should be modest in their attitude to each other, so that they can coexist peacefully and enjoy their respective places. People in Lao Tzu's time were still in the phase of force and war, so he called for modesty and tolerance between countries. The original text also presents ancient Chinese image of eagerness of peace and pursuit of harmonious and equal relationship between

countries. The translator takes the method of literal translation to remain faithful to the original text to the largest extent and thus constructs a true ancient Chinese image presented in the original text.

Example 5: Lao Tzu: 将欲翕之，必固张之，将欲弱之，必固强之，将欲去之，必固与之，将欲夺之，必固予之”。(Chapter 36)

D.C. Lau's translation: If you would have a thing shrink, you must first stretch it; If you would have a thing weakened, you must first strengthen it; If you would desert a thing, you must first be its ally. If you would take from a thing, you must give to it.

The profound philosophical significance and rhetoric device are principle factors when dealing with ancient Chinese classics. The meaning of the original text is what is to be closed must first be opened. That which shall be weakened shall be strengthened first. That which shall be taken must first be given. The original is a compound sentence with four parallel subject clauses, and D.C. Lau transformed the translation into a compound sentence with adverbial clauses. The original text presents Chinese people's wisdom. The translation accurately re-presented the ancient Chinese people's wise image.

Example 6: Lao Tzu:大道废，有仁义。智慧出，有大伪。六亲不和，有孝慈。国家昏乱，有忠臣。(Chapter 18)

D.C. Lau's translation: When the great way falls into disuse, there are benevolence and rectitude; When cleverness emerges, there is great hypocrisy; When the six relations are at variance, there are filial children; When the state is benighted, there are loyal ministers.

The original text means when Tao is abandoned, the righteousness is revealed. The appearance of wisdom will produce hypocrisy and cunning. When father and son, brothers, and husband and wife are at odds, filial piety will be shown. Loyal ministers emerge when the country is in a state of confusion. Here, “仁义 (ren yi)” in Taoism philosophy is different from “仁义 (ren yi)” (usually translated as benevolence and righteousness) in Confucianism. So the translator translated it as benevolence and rectitude, which shows definition and category of “仁义 (ren yi)” in Taoism. When translating “六亲”, the translator added a note to explain the connotation of it: The six relations, according to Wang Pi, are father and son, elder and younger brother, husband and wife. D.C. Lau faithfully expressed the meaning of the original and made the sentences parallel and neat, trying to preserve the original structure and the beauty in original text. Thus the ancient Chinese image of filial piety and fraternal kindness is truly presented by the translation.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The theory of imagology provides a novel perspective to study the image constructions. From the perspective of imagology, this paper analyzed the China's image constructed in D.C. Lau's translation of *Tao Te Ching*. D.C. Lau's translation constructed objective and true China's image. Through his translation, a relatively serious, solemn and orthodox Chinese image, the ancient Chinese people's wise image, ancient Chinese image of filial piety and fraternal kindness as well as the image of eagerness of peace and pursuit of harmonious and equal relationship between countries were re-presented.

By studying the image construction of translation in *Tao Te Ching*, this paper attempts to promote the application of imagology theory in translation studies and enrich the theoretical analysis tools for translation research. This paper just studies the image constructions on the level of intrinsic textual analysis. In addition to intrinsic textual analysis, extrinsic textual analysis is also an important tool to examine image construction in the process of translation, which is also the focus of the further study.

Acknowledgement

This work is supported by Social Science Research Project of Suqian City (23SYC-129) and Jiangsu University Philosophy and Social Science Fund Project (2021SJA2204) in China.

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