

# On C-E Translation Strategies of Classic Quotations in the Informative Text\*

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**Abstract**—The study on the translation strategies of the classic quotations in the informative text from Chinese to English can help to create the discourse system that promotes the communication between China and other countries. Analyzing the features of the classic quotations in the informative text, this paper finds that these classic quotations are diversified and the translators of the quotations are not only faithful to the original text but also regardful of the receptor's understanding. Therefore, the translators perfectly balance the relationship between foreignization and domestication, the two opposite translation strategies.

**Index Terms**—classic quotation, informative text, foreignization, domestication

## I. INTRODUCTION

The German functionalist Katharina Reiss (2000) classifies the diverse texts into three major types which are the informative text, the expressive text and the operative text. She claims the informative text is content-centered, while the rest two are form-centered and behavior-centered respectively (Liu, 2019). According to her classification, political texts are informative ones. Since political texts are pervasive in everyone's daily life, this study focuses on them as a typical type of the informative text. Moreover, in the recent years, it is easy to find the Chinese classic quotations are frequently used in political texts. Many scholars have started to study the classic quotations in political texts. Ling (2015) believes that quoting expressions from Chinese classic works is a unique feature of Chinese political texts. Actually, Chinese scholars have carried out the following studies on the classic quotations in political texts from different perspectives: from the aesthetic perspective, Ling (2015, 2016, 2017) points out that the writers of political texts quote lines from classic works to clarify the current affairs; from the study of political culture, scholars support the contemporary values of classic quotations in political texts because they argue that these quotations are used to explain the new concepts of the governance (Ye, 2014, 2015; Hu & Li, 2016; Zhou, 2016); from the perspective of translation, Li (2017) applies the concept of "recontextualization" to analyze the translation of eight classic quotations adopted in a political text.

From the above analysis, it is clear that there is much room to improve the study of classic quotations used in political texts. Firstly, the recent studies have only analyzed the classic quotations in political speeches, one type of political texts. Due to the limited examples of these quotations, these studies cannot reflect all the features of classic quotations in political texts. Secondly, there are few studies on the English translation of classic quotations in political texts. Moreover, these studies have failed to study Chinese classic quotations through a full analysis of the concrete context of the discourse. Therefore, the above previous studies are not insightful enough to help to build the discourse system which aims at improving the communication between China and other countries.

This study focuses on the different types of political texts including speeches, documents and reports which are delivered online in the recent five years (2017-2021) and the corpus for the study covers 50 political texts. The aim of the study is to observe the process of translating classic works and offer insights for the translation of cited expressions from classic works. Therefore, the current study is expected to facilitate the readers of the world to understand traditional Chinese culture.

## II. FEATURES OF CHINESE CLASSIC QUOTATIONS IN POLITICAL TEXTS

Different scholars have different opinions for the definition of Chinese classic works. Wang (2003) defines the classics of Chinese literature, philosophy, history and art as ancient Chinese classic works. Based on the definition, this paper sorts out the expressions cited from Chinese classic works in the corpus for the study and it finds that the classic quotations in the 50 political texts share the following features: long span of time, high frequency, diverse genres and

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creativity.

#### A. Long Span of Time

The writers or speakers of the political texts quote expressions from Chinese classic works which usually cover a long span of time. The quotations are usually from the classics of the pre-Qin period to modern times. These classic quotations can facilitate readers' understanding of the content of the political texts.

#### B. High Frequency

The frequency of classic quotations in the political texts is very high. It is found that there are altogether 52 classic quotations in the 50 political texts. It means that one text includes at least one classic quotation averagely. The quotations with such a high frequency make the political texts readable and interesting.

#### C. Diverse Genres

The classic quotations in the 50 political texts are from different genres of Chinese classic works like prose works, poems, novels, inscriptions and historical records etc. The diverse genres show political texts often embed traditional Chinese culture in the texts (Ye, 2014). This paper finds that the writers or speakers of the political texts prefer to quote classic expressions from some prose works written by the philosophers of the pre-Qin period who support Confucianism, Taoism and Legalism and so on. Doubtlessly, these classic works, like *The Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu)*, *The Book of Rites (Li Ji)* and *Mencius (Mengzi)*, represent traditional Chinese culture. Since these cited expressions reflect the Chinese tradition and culture, they can raise the receptors' interest and help them to have a further understanding of the texts. The following table shows the distribution of the genres in the corpus.

TABLE 1  
THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE DIVERSE GENRES IN THE 50 POLITICAL TEXTS

Genre	Prose Works			Poem	Novel	Inscription	Historical Record
	Confucianism	Taoism	Legalism				
Amount	15	9	7	9	3	2	5
Percentage	30%	18%	14%	18%	6%	4%	10%

#### D. Creativity

This study finds that the writers or speakers of the political texts often make creative but suitable changes for the quoted classic expressions in accordance with the new contexts. These creative changes will help to achieve the integration of the traditional culture and the modern culture.

Due to the above diverse features of the classic quotations in the 50 political texts, a single translation strategy will not work for these quotations. The translators of the political texts have to consider various factors in the process of translating, make right decisions and adopt suitable translation strategies. Then it is possible for them to offer acceptable translated quotations.

### III. ENGLISH TRANSLATION STRATEGIES OF CLASSIC QUOTATIONS IN POLITICAL TEXTS

The process of translating Chinese classic works into English is like a journey for the translators through which they need to overcome enormous obstacles of time, space, language and culture (Li & Ye, 2016). Jakobson (2000, p.114) classifies translation into "intralingual translation, interlingual translation and intersemiotic translation". Huang (2012) believes that the translation of classic works usually goes through two processes: intralingual translation and interlingual translation. Accordingly, the English translation of the classic quotations should also involve two processes: intralingual and interlingual translation.

The translation of the classic quotations is more complicated than that of the general classic works because the translators should understand not only the original meanings of the quoted expressions from the classic works but also the new interpretations of the quotations in the concrete contexts of the texts. Therefore, the translators of the political texts should meet the high requirement which means they should have a high level of proficiency in English and traditional Chinese culture. Moreover, they should have a full understanding of the original texts.

Based on the features of the classic quotations in the political texts, this paper analyzes the translation strategies of these quotations. It is found that in the process of translating, the translators take into account multiple factors such as the original meanings of the expressions in the classic works, the meanings of the classic quotations in the contexts of the political texts and the receptors' understanding. Based on the above factors, the translators adopt different translation strategies to be faithful to the authors of the classic works, the writers or speakers who quote the expressions from the classic works and the receptors.

Schleiermacher puts forward two options for translators in translation: letting readers approach the author and vice versa. The American translation theorist Venuti develops the two options into two translation strategies which are

foreignization and domestication (Zhao, 2017). It is clear that the English translators of the political texts should be faithful to the authors of the classic works, the writers or speakers who quote these expressions from the classic works and the receptors in the process of translating. Ultimately the translators perfectly balance the tension between foreignization and domestication, so they skillfully adopt the two strategies in their translation.

#### A. Foreignization

The translators' loyalty to the authors of the classic works is realized by foreignization which is represented in the good retention of the original style of the classic quotations, such as metaphors, rhymes and syntactic structures. The strategy of foreignization can help the receptors approach the traditional Chinese culture.

Since people have similar cognitive experience of the world, many metaphoric images of the classic quotations in the studied original texts can be retained in the target text through literal translation. Examples are followed:

Example (1) Source: 不义而富且贵，于我如浮云

Target: Fortune and riches obtained through unjust means are like floating clouds for me.

Example (2) Source: 交得其道，千里同好，固于胶漆，坚于金石

Target: A partnership forged with the right approach defies geographical distance; it is thicker than glue and stronger than metal and stone.

In the first example, the writer of the original text quotes the expression from "*The Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu)*". In this quotation, "浮云" is referred to clouds floating in the sky, which is often used to depict something that is not worthy of concern in Chinese. In "*The Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu)*", Confucius compares the glory and wealth obtained by improper means to the cloud, and he believes that wealth would not be valuable if it is not obtained by morality. "浮云" is translated as "*floating cloud*" and the metaphoric image of the quotation from the classic is kept in the target text. In the second example, "胶漆" and "金石" are used to describe the close friendship in Chinese culture. After reading and understanding the original text, the translator adopts literal translation to deal with "固于胶漆，坚于金石" which is translated as "*thicker than glue and stronger than metal and stone*". This translation helps to maintain the metaphoric image in English.

Due to the literal translation, the metaphoric images of the quotations are perfectly kept in the target texts, while the free translation is adopted to transfer the rhythm of the quotations to the target texts. Examples are analyzed in the following:

Example (3) Source: 奢靡之始，危亡之渐

Target: hedonism and extravagance lead to decline and demise

In the above example, "危亡" carries the feature of alliteration in Chinese and the translator uses free translation to translate this expression as "*decline and demise*" which saves alliteration in English.

In the corpus, it is found that the writers or speakers of the original texts prefer to quote lines from Chinese classical poems. Actually, Chinese scholars have different opinions on the translatability and untranslatability of Chinese poems. Wang (2015) claims that Chinese poems are translatable for the equality of Signified in languages and similarity of cultures. Being faithful to the meaning and style of the quoted lines from Chinese poems, the translators of the 50 political texts keep the original rhyme of the cited poems through free translation and the translated lines are helpful for the receptors to understand Chinese poems and the writer's intentions of his or her quotations. There is an example:

Example (4) Source: 朱门酒肉臭，路有冻死骨

Target: The rich wine and dine, the poor starve and die.

In the target text "*dine*" and "*die*" carry the features of alliteration and vowel rhyme. And it is obvious that the target text is in the form of a poem which is close to the original style. The choice of words in the translation is faithful to the meaning and the writer's intention of the quotation.

The classic quotations in the 50 texts own the feature of brevity of ancient Chinese both in meaning and syntactic structure. Being faithful to the meanings and styles of the classic quotations, the translators do not follow English syntactic structure in the following examples. And moreover, the translated lines reproduce the meaning of emphasis conveyed in Chinese but without making any confusion for the receptors, like the following examples:

Example (5) Source: 博学之，审问之，慎思之，明辨之，笃行之

Target: learn extensively, inquire earnestly, think profoundly, discriminate clearly and practice sincerely

Example (6) Source: 穷则变，变则通，通则久

Target: Limitations lead to change; changes lead to solutions; solutions lead to development.

Example (7) Source: 视而使之明，听而使之聪，思而使之正

Target: Observation fosters clear understanding; listening fosters deeper comprehension; thinking fosters sound judgment.

#### B. Domestication

Yan Fu, a famous Chinese thinker, educator and translator, offers a criterion for a good translation. His criterion can be generalized as "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance". Accordingly, an acceptable translation should be not only faithful to the original content and style, but also smooth for reading. Therefore, translations based on this criterion can

achieve the ultimate goal of communication in the target culture. On the one hand, the translators of the 50 political texts adopt foreignization in their translation to be faithful to the original style and the intentions of quotations. On the other hand, they also use domestication to take account of the receptors' smooth reading and balance the differences between languages and cultures.

English and Chinese are quite different languages. English is a hypotactic language which concerns the logical relations between clauses. Therefore, the syntactic structure of English looks like the "Russian doll", a layer by layer, which means conjunctions and pronouns are used to realize the complicated structures of English. On the contrary, Chinese is a paratactic language which does not usually depend on logical conjunctions to bind clauses together and so the whole picture of the language, Chinese, looks like bamboos with knots (Cao & Tang, 2017). Since meanings in Chinese can be achieved without the constraints of forms, conjunctions and pronouns are allowed to be omitted while the meanings will not be destroyed. Due to the differences between English and Chinese, the translators of the 50 political texts adopt domestication in translation, which is realized by different translation methods, such as amplification and simplification. Examples are followed:

Example (8) Source: 从善如登，从恶如崩

Target: Virtue uplifts, *while* vice debases.

Example (9) Source: 顺木之天，以致其性

Target: *We* should respect a tree's nature, *and* let it grow freely.

In example (8), the translator adds "*while*", a conjunction, to foreground the contradiction between "从善" and "从恶". The added conjunction is the requirement of the rule of English syntactic structure and it promotes the receptors to understand the original meaning effortlessly. In example (9), the translator adds two elements: a conjunction and a pronoun. The added conjunction is "*and*" which links the two clauses together and the added pronoun is "*we*" which makes the agent of the clause clear. The above added conjunction and pronoun meet the need of English syntactic structure and so they help to smooth the reading of the receptors.

Except for rhetoric effect, English readers have low tolerance for repetition. However, repetition is frequently used for emphasis in Chinese. Therefore, the translators of the 50 political texts adopt simplification to avoid repetition and try to satisfy the receptors. An example is cited in Example (10):

Example (10) Source: 分则力散，专则力全

Target: Strength is weakened once divided.

In the above example, the translator only deals with the first clause of the source text and omits the second one which is actually a repetition of the previous. The simplification adopted by the translator makes the target text brief and acceptable.

Compared with the Chinese readers, the intended readers of the target texts are in the low context of culture and they are not familiar with Chinese culture. Hence the translators of the political texts employ amplification and free translation to help the intended readers overcome the obstacles of different cultures. These translation methods are helpful for readers to understand the classic quotations in the texts, such as the following examples:

Example (11) Source: 思皇多士，此生王国。王国克生，维周之桢；济济多士，文王以宁

Target: *As described in the Book of Songs*, King Wen of the Zhou Dynasty respected competent people, who hence flocked to him, so his country became strong and prosperous.

Example (12) Source: 四维不张，国乃灭亡

Target: *propriety, righteousness, honesty and a sense of shame*--- the four anchors of our moral foundation, and a question of life and death for the country

In example (11), the translator adopts amplification (realized by "*as described in the Book of Songs*") to offer the origin of the classic quotation which can promote the intended readers' understanding of the original meaning of the citation and the intention of the quotation. Amplification used for offering the origins of the classic quotations is pervasive in the studied 50 political texts. More examples are like "*in the Book of Lord Shang (Shang Jun Shu) it is written*", "*as described by Zheng Xie*", "*this is what Confucius meant when he said*", "*Wang Fu of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) said*", "*Confucius once said*", "*when Hai Rui said that*", "*as Mencius said*" etc. Some examples are found to offer just general explanations for the origins but without specifying from which classics the quotations are, like "*as an old Chinese saying goes*", "*as a saying goes*", "*an ancient proverb goes*", "*as we often say in China*", "*as our ancestors said*", "*a Chinese adage reads*", "*as a Chinese poem goes*", "*as a Tang verse goes*" etc. Besides amplification, free translation is also adopted in example (11), which simplifies the content of the original expression and helps English readers understand the virtue and dedication of King Wen of the Zhou Dynasty. In example (12), "四维" is from "*Guanzi*", an academic classic of the pre-Qin period and "四" in the expression implies "礼、义、廉、耻" which are impossible for the receptors to access. Therefore, the translator clarifies the meaning of "四维" by adding the specific meaning of "四" as "*propriety, righteousness, honesty, a sense of shame*" and then the meaning of the expression is transparent for the English readers.

The expressions conveying unique Chinese culture are usually embedded in classic quotations. In order to help the English readers approach and understand Chinese culture, the translators of the political texts also employ free

translation. Examples are analyzed in the following:

Example (13) Source: 自古雄才多磨难，从来纨绔少伟男

Target: A hard life breeds great talents, whereas *an easy life* is not the way to cultivate great men.

Example (14) Source: 富者累巨万，贫者食糟糠

Target: ..... and eradicate *the huge gap* between the rich and poor

In the above examples, the two words, “纨绔” and “糟糠”, are two expressions representing unique Chinese culture. The first one is from “*The Book of Han*”, a book mainly on the history of the Western Han Dynasty. And the word (“纨绔”) originally refers to the trousers made of silk and then it evolves to mean the elegant clothes of the children living in the rich families. The translator translates it as “*an easy life*” to describe the life of the rich. So, it is clear the translator uses a free translation to facilitate English readers’ understanding of the classic quotation. The second expression “糟糠” is quoted from “*The Book of Wei*”, a book recording the history of the Northern Wei Dynasty, and the word refers to the coarse food of the poor. The translator also employs a free translation (“*the huge gap*”) to describe the obvious distance between the rich and the poor.

Domestication can also be achieved by borrowing English idioms or sayings which are familiar for the receptors. Therefore, the translators of the political texts studied in this paper borrow some idioms or sayings in their translation. Through this way, the target texts can enhance the receptors’ familiarity with the content of the original texts.

Example (15) Source: 秉纲而目自张，执本而末自从

Target: Once the key link is grasped, everything else falls into place; once *the horse is before the cart*, the cart will follow.

Example (16) Source: 单则易折，众则难摧

Target: United we stand, divided we fall.

In example (15), “本” and “末” are two words to convey the dialectic thought of traditional Chinese philosophy. In the process of translation, the translator loans an English idiom (“*put the cart before the horse*”) and changes it into “*the horse is before the cart*” to meet the context of the original text. The loaned idiom brings familiarity for the English readers. In example (16), the translator borrows a saying from “*Aesop’s Fables*” which is well known for the western readers and so there are no obstacles for English readers to understand the meaning of the quotation.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

As a type of the informative text, political texts usually employ some classic quotations to emphasize or clarify the writers or speakers’ opinions. These quotations are from Chinese classic works. Therefore, the study on the English translation of the classic quotations can promote a deep understanding of the historical and cultural roots of the texts. This paper analyzes the classic quotations in the selected 50 political texts delivered in the recent five years (2017-2021) and finds these quotations share the features of long span of time, high frequency, diverse genres and creativity. These features and the complex of translating classic quotations make it impossible for the translators of the texts to adopt just one single translation strategy to solve the problems of translation. After analyzing the translation of the classic quotations in the corpus, the paper finds that the translators are faithful to the authors of the classic works, the writers or speakers who adopt these classic quotations and the intended readers in the process of translating. It is obvious that the translators perfectly balance the relationship between two opposite translation strategies: foreignization and domestication. The study on English translation strategies of the classic quotations is hoped to inspire the research of translating cited expressions from classic works. And moreover, the study can help to promote the discourse system for the effective communication between China and other countries.

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