A Comparative Study of Two English Versions of *Tao Te Ching* from the Perspective of Toury's Theory of Translation Norms

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Abstract: *Tao Te Ching is a Chinese classic literature about Taoism which is hugely popular with readers and scholars inside and outside. But there are few studies on the translation of Tao Te Ching based on Toury's Theory of Translation Norms. With two English versions of Tao Te Ching as the research texts, this paper has a descriptive study from the prospective of Toury's theory. The paper, with preliminary norms, initial norms and operational norms as its bases, analyzes James Legge and Din Cheuk Lau's translations of Taoist culture and compares the differences of the style of these two versions, thus finding out historical and cultural reasons. It's found that there are several factors that have a impact on the translation of Tao Te Ching, which are targeted readers, translator's ideology, historical background and social development. James emphasizes acceptability while Lau pays attention to the combination of acceptability and adequacy. James is good at dealing with culture-loaded words while Lau is skilled in handling readability.*

Keywords: *Tao Te Ching*, Gideon Toury, Translation Norms.

1. Introduction

Tao Te Ching, the work of Laozi, the founder of Taoism, is the important source of Taoist philosophy. The philosophy in this book has deeply influenced the Chinese people for ages. With the importance in China no less than that of the Western religious classic *the Holy Bible*, it is second only to *the Holy Bible* in the number of translations.

The translation of *Tao Te Ching*, mostly oral translation, was initiated by missionaries in China during the Qing Dynasty. The first English translation was completed in 1968 by John Chalmers. In the following 150 years, the work's English translation entered the climax period, with over 100 English translations published. These English versions have improved the popularity of *Tao Te Ching* abroad, thus promoting the external dissemination of Taoism and spreading traditional Chinese culture to the West.

2. Gideon Toury and His theory of Translation Norms

Gideon Toury, an Israeli translation theorist, is a representative of the descriptive translation school. He was the first to analyze normative issues systematically from the perspective of translation studies. Developed and improved James Holmes' theory of descriptive translation and Evan Zohar's theory of poly-system, he formed his own theory (Translation Norms). In this theory, some methods of distinction and classification are proposed.

In the 1970s, Toury began to study the theory Translation Norms. Based on an collection of both English and German novels translated into Hebrew from 1930 to 1945, he systematically analyzed and studied translation work in an attempt to reconstruct the norms that influenced translators' behavior and translation activities during these 15 years. Later, he defined norms as elements that play a crucial role in translation behavior and events, and play a basic role in the translation process. He defined norms as "the transaltion of general values or ideas by a community to perform instruction appropriate for and applicable to particular situation" (Toury, 1980:51).

In his masterpiece *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, he further divides the translation norms in descriptive translatology into the following three categories: preliminary norms, initial norms and operational norms. These norms play distinctive and vital roles during the translation. Preliminary norms, the first step, occurs in the before-translating preparation and determines translators' choice of translated works. This kind of material selection is of extreme complication, affected by social, political, economic, historical and other external factors. The second step initial norms affects the choice of adequacy and acceptability, and also reflects the choice of translation strategy. Adequate translation means that the translator tends to the source language culture, while acceptable translation shows that the translator prefers the target language culture. Operational norms determine the final form of the translation and affect the structure of the text.

3. Application of Translation Norms to the Comparative Study of Two English Versions of *Tao Te Ching*

Toury's theory of Translation Norms can be used to guide the translation practice and research of *Tao Te Ching*. Through the investigation of relevant literature, the author finds that although many scholars at home and abroad have studied the English version of *Tao Te Ching*, there are few translation studies based on translation norms. Therefore, based on Toury's theory, the paper makes a comparative analysis of the translations of *Tao Te Ching* by James Legge and Din Cheuk Lau, the two most representative translators. Based on the initial norms, the author analyzes the translator's historical background and the differences in handling the difficulties of translation from preliminary norms and operational norms, and explore the reasons.

3.1 Preliminary Norms

According to Toury, preliminary norms are related to the selection of a text in a certain historical period, while translation is determined by the literary poly-system of the TL culture. In other words, the selection and translation of foreign language texts will be affected by external factors. James lived at the end of the 19th century when China was in a period of isolation and suffering from the attack of imperialism and colonialism. The West knew little about China before the Opium War, and even less about Chinese culture. During this period, James came to China to preach religions. In order to better spread *the Bible*, he began to translate *Tao Te Ching* and other Chinese religious classics. At that time, the English-speaking countries were in dominance, which influenced the translator's choice of texts and translation strategies to a certain extent. At the time, the English version of *Tao Te Ching* was read mostly by arrogant missionaries and diplomats. Therefore, although James tried to be faithful to the original text, out of consideration of target readers, he took acceptable translations, incorporating a large number of Christian thoughts and focusing on interpretation with some deletion of the text.

Lau's first draft in 1963 was complted during the rest period after the Second World War and the rise of hippie culture in the West. At that time, China changed its closed state, standing up and constantly developing its social economy and national strength while the West suffered a spiritual crisis. Young people were unsatisfied with the current situation, indulged in their fantasy, drank and took drugs. Rebating against tradition and society, they advocated that people should return to nature, and pursued freedom. The existing religious thought in the West has been unable to satisfy the young people. Therefore, they urgently need new idea, the "Tao Fa Nature" proposed by Chinese Taoist culture, to add vitality and meet yearning. As a result, translators such as Lau tried to convey the religious ideas of the original text while considering the acceptability of readers. The translation was greatly developed into a combination of acceptable translation and adequate translation.

To sum up, the author believes that due to history, politics, culture and other factors, the choice of the work's translation is influenced by the preliminary norms, reflecting the translator's subjectivity. In different periods, translators adopt different initial norms. When the West is in a strong position, translators mostly take acceptable translation. After the increasing influence of Chinese culture, translators pay more attention to convey the connotation of Chinese works, mixing acceptable translation with adequate translation to reproduce the original text to the greatest extent.

3.2 Operational Norms

Operational norms, the last step, determines final translation. They can be divided into matricial norms and textual-linguistic norms. The former is related to the completeness of the material, while the latter is connected with literary and language style of the translation. All operational norms affect the translator's use of strategies and techniques in the process of translation, thus affecting the structure, language style and stylistic features of the text.

Example 1:

道可道,非常道;
James's Translation:
The Tao that can be trodden is no the enduring and unchanging Tao.
Lau's Translation:
The way that can be spoken of
Is not the constant way;

The key is to understand the word "道". It is the core thought of Taoism, which appears frequently in the book. As a Taoist term, "道" is the natural law and norm of all things, including the will of God and Heaven. It is not a physical object, but a pattern of existence. Therefore, it is difficult for us to use a precise and concise English word to explain this oriental cultural term. Without cultural overlap between Chinese and English, it is impossible to find an English word of absolute equivalence. As a result, its translation should consider textual-linguistic norms, which are extremely challenging.

When translating Tao, the best way to deal with it is to explain it, rather than trying to find an English alternative word. Through the transliteration method and detailed annotation in the semantic translation strategy, the translation is faithful to the source text, retains the characteristics of Taoist culture, and conveys the original text more accurately. At the same time, it also spreads an eastern concept to western readers and promotes cultural exchanges between them.

James's translation method of Legjacob is more objective. He adopted the method of transliteration. Although it poses readers a certain reading burden, it retains the original Taoist characteristics and reproduces the style of the original text. In the introduction to *The Texts of Taoism*, he states that Tao is a phenomenon, not a material being, but a mode of being. When translating "道", the best way to deal with it is to explain it, rather than trying to find an English alternative word. Through the transliteration method and detailed annotation, the translation is faithful to the source text, retaining the characteristics of Taoist culture and conveying the original text more accurately. Meanwhile, it spreads an eastern concept to western readers and promotes cultural exchanges between them.

In contrast, Lau's "Way", reflecting his own subjective understanding of "道" and considers the reader's reading feeling, deviates from the original meaning of Taoism. Besides, way is a very Christian word. Its importance in Christian culture to a certain extent matches the status of Taoist culture in "道". In *the Bible*, Jesus said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." It shows that "way", including the meaning of "holy", connects the human world with the Western paradise, the right path that Jesus guides people.

In summary, James follows the adequate translation and embraces the source language culture, while Lau prefers the acceptable translation. In contrast, the author thinks the transliteration adopted by James is more appropriate. When translating such cultural words as "道", translators had better

use transliteration to retain their cultural connotation and add detailed footnotes when necessary, so as to offset cultural deficiencies and realize cultural transplantation.

Example 2:

五色令人目盲;
五音令人耳聋;
五味令人口爽;
驰骋畋猎, 令人心发狂;
难得之货, 令人行妨.
James's Translation:
Color's five hues from th'eyes their sight will take;
Music's five notes the ears as deaf can make;
The flavours five deprive the mouth of taste;
The chariot course, and the wild hunting waste
Make mad the mind; and objects rare and strange,
Sought for, men's conduct will to evil change.
Lau's Translation:
The five colors make man's eyes blind;
The five notes make his ears deaf;
The five tastes injure his palate;
Riding and hunting
Make his mind go wild with excitement;
Goods hard to come by
Serve to hinder his progress.

Rhyming can increase the phonetic beauty and appeal of an essay. Chinese ancient books often use this method to achieve artistic effects, and *Tao Te Ching* is no exception. The words "盲"(mang), "爽"(shuang), "狂" (kuang) and "妨"(fang) at the end of this sentence are all "ang" in rhyme, full of rhyme beauty. His translation shows sufficiency, respecting the phonological beauty of the original text. James uses free rhyming to create the phonetic symbol /ei/ at the end of every sentence with take, make, taste, waste, strange and change. This poetic and catchy translation increases the language beauty and artistic effect.

Lau adopts the form of prose to deal with the difficulty, which helps readers to better understand the original text. His translation is more concise and fluent, Retaining the characteristics of short and neat sentence structure of the original text. his translation is more appropriate to the structure of the original text, and more concise in words. It is basically equivalent in the length of the original text and the number of words. The deficiency lies in the lack of the original rhyme beauty and appeal.

Two versions have their own styles and characteristics, but the author prefers the Lau's version. Lau's translation is more rigorous and appropriate. It conveys the information of the original text and retains the characteristics of the original text to a great extent, with conciseness and smoothness.

4. Conclusion

In the comparative analysis of two translations, the author found that James and Lau used the combination of adequate translation and acceptable translation. However, James mainly adopts the acceptability while Lau emphasizes the balance between adequacy and acceptability. James is good at dealing with culture-loaded words, retaining cultural characteristics, while Lau is skilled at handling the structure of the original text, creating a translation of high readability. On the whole, the two English translations have their own strengths and high completion, both accurately conveying the original text and meeting the expectations of readers in a certain historical period.

Based on translation norms, through the study of the translation of *Tao Te Ching*, this paper finds that the factors affecting translation activities are of the times, complexity and diversity. The translator's choice of the translating process is determined by audiences and readers, the translator's ideology, historical background and social development. By analyzing the operational norms, the author finds out the specific translation techniques in the translation of *Tao Te Ching*. From the perspective of descriptive translation studies, this paper makes a systematic study of intra-textual and extra-textual factors, thus revealing how these factors influence and determine different translation norms and techniques. However, there are some limitations in this paper, which need to be further explored and perfected. When analyzing and comparing the two translations, the author has certain subjectivity, with a few examples. Therefore, the paper lacks authority. In addition, due to the complexity of the theory and the uniqueness of two cultures, the author has not done enough to analyze the cultural phenomena behind the translation and the information intended by the translator. Therefore, the author hopes that more scholars will join in to improve the systematic research in this area.

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