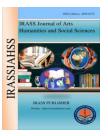
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Cultural Loyalty and Linguistic Innovation: A Study of Gu Hongming's Translation Style

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Article History

Received: 08 / 03 / 2025 Accepted: 27 / 03 / 2025 Published: 31 / 03 /2025 **Abstract:** Amid globalization and intensified cultural exchange, translation has evolved beyond linguistic conversion to serve as a vital intercultural bridge. Translators' agency and stylistic choices critically shape translation quality and cross-cultural impact. This study investigates translator style through the lens of Gu Hongming's English rendition of *The Analects of Confucius*, a groundbreaking 19th-century effort to disseminate Eastern wisdom during an era dominated by Western cultural hegemony.

Gu's translation philosophy and strategies are analyzed using boundary theory, focusing on his negotiation between source-text fidelity and target-reader accessibility. The research comprises five sections: 1) outlining objectives; 2) profiling Gu's life, translation achievements, and stylistic features; 3) synthesizing academic evaluations of his works; 4) applying boundary theory to analyze textual examples from *The Analects*; 5) discussing practical implications of Gu's translational approach.

This interdisciplinary methodology bridges translation studies and cultural theory, revealing how Gu's transcultural mediation balanced Confucian authenticity with Western interpretative frameworks. The findings highlight the enduring relevance of translator style in shaping cross-cultural reception, offering insights for contemporary translation practices in global knowledge exchange.

Keywords: Gu Hongming, Translation Style, Boundary Theory, Translation of "The Analects", Translation Evaluation.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Significance and Purpose of the Study

During the process of transmitting The Analects to the West, the earliest translations were produced by Western missionaries in China. For instance, Matteo Ricci, an Italian Jesuit, translated the Four Books into Latin in 1594, while Joshua Marshman, a British missionary, completed an English version titled The Works of Confucius in 1809. This translation was later published by David Collie in 1828 and independently by James Legge in 1861. However, it was Gu Hongming's 1898 English translation The Four Books that marked the first independent and complete rendering of The Analects by a Chinese scholar in the history of cross-cultural exchange. Among translators of The Analects, Gu Hongming's hybrid cultural identity stands out prominently. Immersed in Western culture due to his formative years abroad, he resided in Europe for 14 years, achieving fluency in nine languages and composing works in English. Witnessing the social issues arising from Western capitalist development, he grew acutely aware of the misinterpretations and distortions of Eastern culture by Western observers. Upon returning to China, he dedicated himself to studying classical Chinese texts, delving deeply into the Four Books and Five Classics for over two decades. His erudition eventually earned him the accolade of a "refined © Copyright IRASS Publisher. All Rights Reserved

Confucian scholar" (Chun Ru) from Luo Zhenyu. Throughout his life, Gu devoted himself to explicating Confucian thought and translating classical Chinese texts into English.

The Analects encapsulates Confucius' seminal philosophies on ethics, governance, and education, which have shaped the trajectory of Chinese civilization and molded its collective character. These traditions cultivated cultural virtues emblematic of Chinese identities, such as ren (benevolence), yi (righteousness), li (propriety), zhi (wisdom), xin (trustworthiness), wen (gentleness), liang (kindness), gong (respect), jian (frugality), and rang (modesty). The study and dissemination of The Analects have emerged as pivotal endeavors in contemporary cultural development, fostering scholarly dialogue and enhancing Sinoforeign cultural collaboration. Gu Hongming's translation of The Analects has significantly contributed to the multifaceted cultural exchanges among nations along the "Belt and Road" initiative, forging new channels for mutual learning between Chinese and Western civilizations. Such global dissemination hinges on cultural self-confidence and self-reliance. While preserving the essence of traditional culture, it necessitates innovation and the assimilation of outstanding elements from other cultures, thereby integrating

Chinese uniqueness into the global tapestry and enriching the universality of world civilizations.

2. Gu Hongming and His Translation Practice

Gu Hongming's life was marked by extraordinary cross-cultural experiences, encapsulated in his self-description as a "man of four oceans"—a phrase denoting his birth in Nanyang (Southeast Asia), education in the West (Xiyang), marriage in Dongyang (East Asia, specifically Japan), and career engagement in Beiyang (Northern China during the late Qing modernization efforts). As a polymathic scholar and cultural mediator, he leveraged his intellectual acumen and linguistic prowess to forge an indelible legacy in facilitating dialogue and dissemination between Chinese and Western civilizations. His multifaceted identity and translational endeavors not only bridged ideological divides but also redefined Confucianism's global relevance during an era of profound cultural transformation.

2.1 Biographical Overview

Gu Hongming, a native of Tong'an, Fujian Province, was born on July 18, 1857, on a rubber plantation in Penang Island, then a British colony. At the age of ten, he was sent to Scotland to study under Brown, the owner of the rubber plantation. He later continued his education in Europe, mastering German, French, Latin, and Greek. In 1877, Gu obtained a Master of Arts degree from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Edinburgh. Following his return to China, he devoted himself to the study of classical Chinese culture. In 1885, he was appointed as the "Foreign Secretary" by Zhang Zhidong, the Viceroy of Huguang. Under Gu's advocacy, the Self-Strengthening School (predecessor of Wuhan University) was formally established on November 29, 1893. On November 11, 1905, he assumed the role of inspector at the Shanghai Huangpu River Dredging Bureau. Sadly, Gu Hongming, this accomplished scholar, passed away on April 30, 1928, at the age of 72, leaving the academic world of his time bereft of a profound thinker and pioneering translator.

While his political achievements may not have been prominent, the core significance and importance of Gu's life lie in his relentless efforts to promote Sino-Western cultural exchange and his unwavering dedication to translation. To foster Western understanding of Confucian and Mencian philosophies, as well as the spiritual and ethical values of China, he tirelessly engaged in literary endeavors. Most of Gu's prolific works were composed in fluent English, with the aim of cultivating Western respect for Chinese culture through intellectual empathy and cross-cultural dialogue. His translations and writings not only bridged linguistic divides but also positioned Chinese thought within a global framework, asserting its relevance amidst the challenges of modernity.

2.2 Translation Works

Gu Hongming is widely revered for his outstanding scholarly achievements. He was among the earliest pioneers to introduce Western poetry to the Chinese populace. Furthermore, Gu pioneered the systematic translation of Chinese classical texts—such as the Confucian canons The Analects and The Doctrine of the Mean—into Western languages, dedicating his life to disseminating Chinese culture and making seminal contributions to global cultural and academic exchange.

During the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, Western missionaries and sinologists first attempted to translate Chinese classics like the Book of Songs, I Ching, Analects, and Tao Te Ching into European languages for dissemination in the West. However, due to linguistic and cultural disparities, these early translations often failed to capture the profound essence of Chinese thought. In the transitional period between the modern and contemporary eras, James Legge, a British scholar, undertook the monumental task of translating ten of the "Thirteen Classics" into English as part of his Chinese Classics series. While this groundbreaking cross-cultural endeavor opened a window for the West to comprehend traditional Chinese civilization, Legge's translations inevitably encountered challenges in rendering culturally specific terms and syntactical structures, leading to occasional misinterpretations or oversimplifications rooted in divergent cultural values and expressive norms.

In contrast, Gu Hongming, as the first Chinese scholar to independently and comprehensively translate The Analects into English, leveraged his linguistic genius and rigorous scholarship to bridge Chinese and Western civilizations. He creatively employed a domestication strategy-adapting Confucian concepts to Western intellectual frameworks—while providing extensive annotations to contextualize the text. Published in 1898 by Kelly & Walsh, a prominent Shanghai-based publisher, Gu's translation was titled The Discourses and Sayings of Confucius, with the subtitle A Special Translation, Illustrated with Quotations from Goethe and Other Writers. This title not only reflects his translational approach but also underscores his unique perspective as a cultural mediator. By integrating references to Western luminaries like Goethe, Gu positioned Confucian philosophy within a global intellectual dialogue, transcending mere linguistic conversion to achieve a synthesis of Eastern and Western thought.

2.3 Translation Philosophy and Style

In nations with less developed cultural industries, literary works often require translators to adopt domestication strategies to gain acceptance in culturally dominant societies. By aligning translations with the aesthetic expectations of target audiences, such strategies enhance readability and accessibility. Gu Hongming, writing primarily for Western readers with a limited understanding of Chinese culture, consciously interpreted Confucian thought through a Western cultural lens. He sought to translate dialogues between Confucius and his disciples in a manner that mirrored the speech patterns of "educated Englishmen." This outsider's perspective distinguished his translations from other renditions of The Analects, imbuing them with a unique hermeneutic character.

Gu's translational practice centered on dynamic equivalence, prioritizing the conveyance of ideological resonance over literal fidelity. As he articulated, his goal was to allow "Confucius and his disciples" to express ideas akin to those of their Chinese counterparts through the linguistic and cognitive habits of Western intellectuals. This approach emphasized the functional alignment of meaning rather than rigid syntactic correspondence.

Faithful to his principles, Gu demonstrated meticulous care in preserving the original tone and style of classical texts. His translations of poetic passages in The Analects and The Doctrine of the Mean retained their lyrical form—a feat made possible by his bilingual mastery. Lin Yutang lauded this achievement, remarking: "Gu's translations endure because they arise from his profound command of both languages and his deep understanding of

meaning, resulting in a harmonious marriage of substance and expression."

Gu's style also reflected his intellectual dualism. While steeped in Western education and influenced by European Romanticism, he critiqued the moral decay of modern industrial society and resented Western condescension toward the East. Returning to China, he discovered in Confucian classics a counterpoint to the "gunboat diplomacy" and materialism of Western modernity. His translations thus became a medium for synthesizing the essence of Eastern and Western civilizations, advocating not for cultural subordination but for mutual enrichment. By rejecting the flaws of Western modernity while celebrating its intellectual rigor, Gu crafted a translational style that transcended mere linguistic transfer, embodying a dialogue between civilizations.

3. Evaluation of the Figure

"His English writings demonstrated extraordinary creativity, exhibiting unparalleled charm over the past two centuries. The linguistic architecture and lexical selections reveal exceptional literary craftsmanship. Ultimately, it was Mr. Gu's transcendent mode of thinking that endowed his prose with distinctive charisma. Gu Hongming is revered as an extraordinary individual, a luminary who stood preeminent among his contemporaries." — Lin Yutang

When observing Gu Hongming—with his traditional queue hairstyle and vociferous advocacy of "royal reverence"—the public readily categorized him as a conservative clinging to outdated institutions. This stereotype, however, diverges markedly from reality. Historically, Gu had been among those who initially rejected this traditional symbol. In his youth, he preferred monastic tranquility, quietly practicing spiritual devotion. His life trajectory underwent transformation following the revolutionary tides sweeping the nation when he resurrected this anachronistic hairstyle. Notably, during the Xinhai Revolution, Gu's queue had not yet reached conventional length, rendering his public appearances particularly farcical—complete with wig adornment while boarding carriages. Such behavioral patterns and psychological dispositions undoubtedly constitute a subject worthy of profound academic inquiry. While proclaiming himself a nonconformist, he regrettably became ensnared in a contradiction between appearance and reality, persistently evading authentic selfconfrontation and rediscovery.—Hu Shih's analysis in The Weekly Review.

People's Daily Online's "The Eccentric Confucian Scholar Gu Hongming": In his scholarly investigations, Gu adopted a distinctive analytical perspective, conducting comparative studies between Chinese people and populations from America, England, Germany, and France. Based on these observations, he characterized the Chinese collective disposition as embodying "gentleness" and "benevolence that defies complete verbal articulation."

Preface to the English Edition of The Analects of Confucius: Professor Gu Hongming's paramount contribution lies in his successful translation of three Confucian classics into English. This achievement manifests not only through his fidelity to original texts but particularly through his creative translation methodology, which effectively bridges profound conceptual and cognitive divergences between Chinese and Western thought paradigms.

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Wen Yuanning, Professor of English at Peking University, in "A Thinking Philistine": Gu Hongming, once a legend that startled the mundane world, may now be mythologized in historical narratives. Yet stripped of aureoles and folklore, he remains essentially undistinguished—merely an ordinary man endowed with innate rebelliousness. What distinguishes Gu from our common acquaintances resides in his maximalist actualization of this contrarian spirit, transforming it into a defining hallmark of his existential trajectory.

Wu Mi's obituary in The Ta Gung Pao: Apart from principal governmental leaders, Mr. Gu Hongming stands as the most recognized Chinese name among Western intellectuals and regular readers of European and American publications. From predominant Western perspectives, Mr. Gu is regarded as the standard-bearer of Chinese culture, representing China's most influential cultural ambassador on the global stage.

4. Translator's Stylistic Approach and Case Study

The Chinese language exhibits continuity whereas English demonstrates discreteness (Lü Shuxiang, 1979:1). This distinction implies that grammatical structures in Chinese lack sharply defined boundaries—for instance, differentiation between words and phrases remains ambiguous—whereas English grammatical components are more readily demarcated. Such linguistic divergence manifests across multiple dimensions: in cognitive paradigms (e.g., Chinese does not rigidly distinguish subject from object, while English enforces such distinctions); aesthetic preferences (Chinese favors ambiguous aesthetics versus English precision-oriented aesthetics); and pragmatic conventions (Chinese emphasizes processual narration versus English focus on outcomes).

This chapter investigates how Gu Hongming operationalized boundary awareness in his translation practice, as exemplified in his rendition of The Analects of Confucius. The analysis will proceed through four analytical lenses: holistic vs. individual consciousness, planar defocusing vs. stereoscopic focusing consciousness, subjective vs. objective consciousness, and expansive vs. compressive consciousness.

4.1 Holistic Consciousness vs. Individual Consciousness

Conventional scholarship posits stronger individual consciousness in Western cultures and predominant holistic consciousness in Eastern traditions. We posit that these concepts exist in relativity. In English, individual consciousness manifests through pronounced categorization, exclusivity, and delimitation awareness—evident in its well-defined grammatical boundaries. Conversely, Chinese demonstrates weaker structural demarcation. Meanwhile, English holistic consciousness prioritizes hierarchical organization and principal-subordinate differentiation, as evidenced by its explicit subordination structures. Thus, Chinese-English translation necessitates acute awareness of hierarchy, boundaries, stratification, and classification.

Case Study:

Original:

子贡曰:"贫而无谄,富而无骄,何如?"子曰:"可也;未若贫而乐,富而好礼者也。"子贡曰:"《诗》云:'如切如磋,如琢如磨',其斯之谓与?"子曰:"赐也,始可与言《诗》已矣,告诸往而知来者。"

Gu's Translation

A disciple of Confucius said to him: "To be poor and yet to be servile; to be rich and yet not to be proud, what do you say to that?"

"It is good," replied Confucius, "but better still it is to be poor and yet contented; to be rich and yet know how to be courteous."

"I understand," answered the disciple, "We must cut, we must file, Must chisel and grind. That is what you mean, is it not?"

"My friend," replied Confucius, "now I can begin to speak of poetry to you. I see you understand how to apply the moral."

Gu's translation employs rhetorical sophistication to achieve textual fluency. By inverting conventional English syntax (placing dialogue before speakers), he achieves naturalistic discourse flow. Insertions like "I understand" and "My friend," alongside the reformulation of "其斯之谓与" as a rhetorical "is it not?" inject vitality into the dialogue. These micro-adjustments dissolve Sino-Western translational boundaries while amplifying individual consciousness in English, thereby enhancing accessibility for Anglophone readers.

4.2 Planar Defocusing Consciousness vs. Stereoscopic Focusing Consciousness

Chinese prioritizes fluid, stream-of-consciousness narration with weakly defined sentential boundaries, resulting in planar textual landscapes where hierarchical relationships remain implicit. Conversely, English enforces stereoscopic structuring through focalized syntax, demanding translators to exercise acute focalization and compositional awareness.

Case Study:

Original:

子曰: "学而时习之,不亦说乎?有朋自远方来,不亦乐乎? 人不知而不愠,不亦君子乎?"

Gu's Translation:

Confucius remarked, "It is indeed a pleasure to acquire knowledge and, as you go on acquiring, to put into practice what you have acquired. A greater pleasure still it is when friends of congenial minds come from afar to seek you because of your attainments. But he is truly a wise and good man who feels no discomposure even when he is not noticed of men."

Gu enhances focal hierarchy through lexical amplifications ("greater," "still," "of congenial minds," "because of your attainments"). By foregrounding consequential information before supplementary details, he mirrors English's stereoscopic prioritization while constructing a unique spatial-textual architecture.

4.3 Subjective Consciousness vs. Objective Consciousness

Chinese cognition centers on xin (心, the metaphysical "heart-mind" in Eastern philosophy), fostering high subjective engagement in narration, whereas Anglo cultures prioritize nao (脑, mind, intellect-oriented cognition), favoring objective factualism (Wang Jianguo, 2019). This dichotomy manifests temporally: English verbs encode precise tense markers, reflecting linear time consciousness, whereas Chinese verbs lack stable tense markers, resulting in temporal ambiguity.

Case Study:

Original:

子曰: "能以礼让为国乎,何有?不能以礼让为国,如礼何,"

Gu's Translation:

Confucius remarked, "He can rule a country by real courtesy and good manners that are in him, will find no difficulty in doing it. But a ruler who has no real courtesy and good manners in him, what are the mere rules of etiquette and formality avail him?"

By inserting explicit subjects ("he," "a ruler"), Gu rectifies the original's agentive ambiguity, aligning with English's demand for objective precision and reinforcing Western-style objectivity consciousness.

4.3 Expansive Consciousness vs. Compressive Consciousness

Redundancy and concision operate relationally. Chinese features like reduplication, lexical repetition, and hyperbolic rhetoric often become "redundant" in English's realism-oriented framework (Pinkham, The Translator's Guide to Chinglish). Conversely, English redundancy (e.g., tense markers) reflects its rule-bound consciousness. Gu negotiates this tension through strategic exegetical expansion or semantic compression.

Case Study:

Original:

"邦有道,则仕;邦无道,则可卷而怀之。"

Gu's Translation:

"When there were justice and order in the government of his country, he entered the public service; but when there were not justice and order, he rolled himself up and led a strictly private life."

Gu's expansive rendering of dao (道) as "justice and order" unpacks the term's polysemy, demonstrating how contextual paraphrasing bridges cross-cultural hermeneutic gaps while preserving textual essence.

5. Conclusion

Amidst the tumultuous historical and cultural landscape of his era, Gu Hongming adopted a distinctive translational strategy: interpreting Chinese civilization through Western frameworks to facilitate its global dissemination. In reinterpreting The Analects, Gu not only deepened the text's philosophical resonance but also pioneered a hermeneutic pathway for explicating Chinese culture to Western audiences. His translational praxis was neither an accommodation to Occidental aesthetics nor a commodification of Sinic traditions; rather, it manifested a profound assertion of mutual parity and complementarity between Chinese and Western intellectual paradigms. By articulating Chinese cultural values through an external vantage point, Gu demonstrated both his unyielding allegiance to Chinese identity and his cosmopolitan vision. He positioned Chinese civilization within a global cultural matrix, unapologetically showcasing his erudite and penetrating comprehension of its essence. Through his translations, Gu not only mediated Confucian classics for Western readers but also introspectively examined Western receptivity to Confucian ethics

and moral philosophy, thereby fostering cross-cultural epistemic dialogue.

This study centers on boundary consciousness in Chinese-English translation, analyzing Gu's rendition of The Analects through four conceptual lenses: holistic-individual consciousness, planar-stereoscopic consciousness, subjective-objective consciousness, and expansive-compressive consciousness. Gu's groundbreaking translational philosophy has indelibly shaped the field of classical Chinese text globalization, leaving an enduring legacy that continues to inform contemporary Sinological scholarship.

During China's national crises, Gu defiantly critiqued Western society's materialistic excesses and spiritual vacuity while extolling the superiority of traditional Chinese values (Kong Qingmao, 1997). His impassioned defense of China's cultural sovereignty reasserted the timeless relevance of Confucian civilization and redefined China's cultural stature in the global arena. Gu's translational methodology—synthesizing cultural preservation with cross-cultural innovation—holds profound contemporary relevance as China navigates its distinctive modernization trajectory. His approach offers critical insights for globalizing Chinese classics, narrating China's story through soft power, cultivating cultural confidence, and shaping a cohesive national identity.

This research acknowledges certain methodological constraints, including limited engagement with deeper theoretical inquiries and a reliance on mono-dimensional analytical frameworks. Future studies should address these gaps by incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives and empirical methodologies. As the global dissemination of Chinese culture emerges as a pivotal task in contemporary academia, scholars must pursue diversified theoretical paradigms and apply boundary consciousness as a practical heuristic to align translation practices with evolving reader expectations and sociocultural realities.

Gu Hongming's legacy endures as both a testament to translational ingenuity and a clarion call for culturally attuned hermeneutics in an increasingly interconnected world. His work exemplifies how translational boundary-negotiation can transcend linguistic mediation to become an act of cultural reimagination.

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I am indebted to the School of Foreign Languages at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology for providing an intellectually stimulating research environment. Special recognition is reserved for the reference providers, whose scholarly contributions to Gu Hongming studies—particularly regarding conceptual frameworks of cultural translation—supplied critical theoretical anchors for this investigation.

My colleagues and peers offered invaluable constructive feedback during the cross-linguistic analysis phase, significantly enhancing the case study interpretation model in Chapter 4.The perspectives shared by international sinology scholars helped recalibrate the hermeneutic boundaries of cultural translation strategies, ensuring balanced interpretative rigor.

While I solely assume academic responsibility for any limitations herein, it is my sincere hope that this work may contribute modestly to innovating paradigms for China's cultural globalization initiatives.

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