

A Study on the Translation Strategies of James Legge's *The Book of Songs*

Honglu Li^{1*}, Yang Li²

¹ Institute of Foreign Language and Literature, Huaihua University, Huaihua, Hunan 418008, China.

² Institute of Foreign Language and Literature, Huaihua University, Huaihua, Hunan 418008, China.

¹E-mail:273337482@qq.com, ²E-mail:1035926984@qq.com

*corresponding author

Keywords: James Legge; English Translation; the Book of Songs; Translation Strategy

Abstract: This paper mainly studies the translation strategies of James Legge's *The Book of Songs* and its influence on Chinese and western cultural communication. It is found that James Legge mainly adopts foreignization as the main translation strategy and domestication as the supplement. His translation strategy of *The Book of Songs* has extensive reference value and significance for the translation of Chinese culture.

1. Introduction

The spread of Chinese culture to foreign countries has started very early. In the late Qing Dynasty, some foreign missionaries came to China and translated lots of Chinese classics, which exerted far-reaching influence upon Chinese and West cultural communication. James Legge was one of them. He is famous for translating Chinese classics. His translation of *The Book of Songs* has produced a huge cultural response in the west. *The Book of Songs* is the earliest collection of Chinese poetry, the originator of Chinese poetry, and a valuable treasure in the history of Chinese and even world literature. The poems in *The Book of Songs* are divided into three categories: folk songs, elegant songs and odes, with a total of 305 pieces. They originate from the early western Zhou Dynasty to the Middle Spring and Autumn Period and last for more than 500 years. This paper focuses on the translation strategy of James Legge's *The Book of Songs*.

2. The Life Story of James Legge and His Achievements in Translation

James Legge was interested in literature in childhood and learned some classical poems. Then he turned into Aberdeen Grammar School, where he learned Latin and English grammar. In the university, he was committed to religious and philosophical research and later was attracted by the British overseas missionary business. He took the path of missionary and went to China from that time on. On his return James began to oppose the British opium exports to China. In 1878, at a conference to ban the opium trade held in London, James Legge made an impish speech, saying that it was an evil trade, which not only harmed thousands of Chinese people, but also, above all, was bad for the development of normal trade between Britain and China (Gu Changsheng, 2005:118). But his persuasion never stopped British traders from exporting opium into China. James Legge, a famous British Sinologist, was the first scholar who systematically studied and translated the ancient Chinese classics. American scholar Norman Girardot introduced the outstanding translator in his book *The Translation of Chinese Ancient Classics in Victorian Era* and described him as: a decoder of Chinese classics, a translator of Confucian classics in ancient China, a translating pioneer of Buddhist scriptures. James Legge translated and published Chinese classics, such as "The Analects", "Great Learning", "The Doctrine of the Mean", "Mencius", "Spring and Autumn", "Rites", "the Book of

History", "The Book of Filial Piety", "The Book of Changes", "The Book of Songs", "Tao Te Ching", "Zhuang Zi" and other classics. He not only finished translating the core of Confucian classics "Four Books" and "Five Classics", and also completed translating Taoist classics such as "Tao Te Ching", "Zhuang Zi".

Most of Legge's translation works are accomplished on the middle and late period of his life, when his Sinologist status is consolidated. In 1870, he was awarded Doctor Degree of laws by the University of Aberdeen. In the 300th anniversary celebration of the University of Edinburgh, James Legge was one of the respected figures. During his visit to Paris, James Legge held a high-level discussion on sinology with the famous French Oriental scholar Julien, and won the first award of the Julien Prize. In 1876, James Legge won the first international prize in Chinese literature for his translation of Chinese classics. Gaudy, professor of Chinese studies at the University of Cambridge, once said, "Although James Legge has accomplished many things, the most outstanding one is his study of the Chinese classics. In 1878, he published his thesis "Confucianism in the China", two small volumes of "The Life and Teachings of Confucius" and "The Life and Teachings of Mencius". In 1879, James Legge translated the third volume of *The Book of Oriental Saints*, including *The Book of Letters*, some parts of *The Book of Songs* and *The Book of Filial Piety*. In 1895, two years before his death, he translated and published Qu Yuan's *Li Sao*. Due to his outstanding contribution to the translation of Chinese cultural classics, James Legge is known as one of the three constellations of British sinology." (Yue Feng, 2004:51)

3. James Legge's Translation Strategies of The Book of Songs

Foreignization, also called alienation, focuses on the translator's respect for the source language and culture. Domestication emphasizes that the target text should adapt to the culture and language habits of the target language. In James Legge's translation of series of Chinese classics, the foreignization strategy is adopted to fully retain the original information in the target language. However, his personal interpretation that deviates from the traditional Chinese annotation makes his foreignization translation with a strong domestication color (Jiang Yan, 2013:51). As a missionary, James Legge received Christian religious theological education. He explained the thoughts with Christian color in the translation of *The Book of Songs*. This, to some extent, will change the idea of the original. In addition, James Legge is mainly subject to his native culture, where he is born and raised. In order to make his translations more comfortable in cultural coordination, he takes into account the culture of the source language. With the complex cultural interference, Legge constructs and deconstructs the ancient Chinese culture, and explores and excavates the charm of ancient Chinese classics.

In the translation of *The Book of Songs*, James Legge dealt with the title, place names and people's names in the way of direct transliteration, which is surely a way of foreignization. Titles are translated directly by Pinyin- a Chinese spelling system in letters, such as Meng, Guan Ju etc. The names of people and places were also translated in the way of direct transliteration such as Hao in "June", and Fuguan in "MANG", Ji-fu and Zhang Zhong in "June". There is no doubt that this translation will give foreign readers a kind of alienation, sense of distance, and even to a certain extent will affect readers' reading. However, such a translation strategy fully shows Legge's respect for the original and the authority of the translator.

James Legge has been pursuing the translation principle of faithfulness, also a typical feature of foreignization. In the first edition of Chinese classics, he pointed out that "the translator should always translate faithfully instead of non-academically paraphrasing at random". In *The Book of Songs*, there are often repeated short sentences. For example, "the sun and the moon are in the sky". James' treatment of such expressions is literally translated into Chinese. The above example sentence is repeated four times, and Legge also repeat it four times. There is no transformation of word or form. Almost every Chinese word is translated into English by Legge. All these fully embody Legge's strategy of foreignization.

James Legge also adopted domestication in his translation, which was largely attributed to the

deep-rooted influence of Christian doctrines on western culture (Wu Haiyan, 2014:29). For example, he prefers to translate into "God" "di" which means "emperor" in the ancient Chinese books. In the translation of the word "di", James Legge's translation could not fully express the original features of the classics in the translation of *The Book of Songs*, but it could promote the readers' understanding to some extent.

English and Chinese have different cultures, languages and ways of thinking. In order to make his translation more consistent with the context and pragmatic habits of the target language, James Legge adopts domestication strategy through adding some words or short sentences to express the meaning of the original text more accurately. However, domestication is not adopted as frequently as foreignization in Legge's translation of *The Book of Songs*.

4. The Cultural Influence of James Legge' Translation of the Book of Songs

James Legge's original translation of *The Book of Songs* is not successful and even attracts criticism from his peers. For example, A. P. Happer (1818-1894), in "A letter to Friedrich Max Müller" (1823—1900), publicly criticized James Legge for his shortcomings in the translation of *The Sacred Books of the East*. In addition, John Shaw Burdon (1826-1907) in Hong Kong and some European missionaries in inland of China also wrote to Müller, pointing out the deficiencies in the translation and introduction of James Legge's *The Sacred Books of the East*. Drawing lessons from their criticism, James Legge had translated *The Book of Songs* three times. Eventually, he succeeded and his translation of *The Book of Songs* had a huge impact on both western academia and the general public. His translation has been regarded as a benchmark for the translation of ancient Chinese classics and has made outstanding contributions to the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture.

James Legge's *Book of Songs* has long attracted the attention of the researcher's overseas sinology, and deepened the westerners' perception of Chinese traditional culture. In Britain's most famous literature periodical *Edinburgh Review*, Charles Henry Butcher (1830-1889) remarks, James Legge's translation is "exquisite and meticulous" and it helps the Europeans to cross the Chinese cultural barriers. As Yue Feng, a Chinese scholar, puts it, "everything he(Legge) did paved the way for his mission, but the end result went far beyond the mission, and the world remembered him as a bridge between east and west." (Yue Feng, 2004:335). American scholar Sinologist Norman J. Girardot (2002) described this outstanding translator who took the lead in systematically translating ancient Chinese classics as "a decoder who found religious sanctity in Chinese classics".

Legge's translation of *The Book of Songs* also influences the other scholars' translation of Chinese poems like Gu Hongming, Ezra Pound and others. In their translation of *The Book of Songs*, these translators referred to or borrowed Legge's translation of more or less. James Legge's translation of *The Book of Songs* has a far-reaching impact.

Conclusion

When he first translated *The Book of Songs*, James Legge had a certain degree of misunderstanding of Confucian culture. As a missionary, he interpreted *The Book of Songs* from Christian perspective and adopted domestication translation strategies at the beginning of translation career. His translation is not faithful to the original to some extent. However, with his further studying of the original, he gradually realizes that *The Book of Songs* has a profound cultural background and profound philosophical thoughts. His attitude towards *The Book of Songs* has changed - from subjectivity to objectivity, and he even considered himself as "a translator, scholar, teacher, orientalist and Sinologist who had been engaged in missionary work by chance" (James Legge, 2001:84). In his later translation, he mainly translates *The Book of Songs* as a Sinologist or scholar. Especially when he gets the help of Wang Tao and other Chinese, he understands the original text more accurately. As he said, "The diversity and completeness of my annotations are mainly attributed to Wang Tao's work. He is very helpful to me. He provides me with a well-stocked library. (Liu Yongliang, 2016:63). Legge's translation of *The Book of Songs* has extensive reference value and reference

significance for the translation of Chinese cultural classics.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Humanity and Social Science Fund of Education Ministry “Studies on the English Translation of Chinese Poems by Missionaries in the Late Qing Dynasty and the Dissemination of Chinese Culture Abroad”(Fund Number: 19YJA740026).

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