

Analyzing Din Cheuk Lau's Translation Philosophy: A Case Study of the "Tao Te Ching"

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the translation philosophy of Din Cheuk Lau, using the "Tao Te Ching" as a case study for analysis. Through an examination of Din Cheuk Lau's translation philosophy, this study emphasizes its application in translating the "Tao Te Ching" and explores the impact and insights of his translation philosophy. It is found that Din Cheuk Lau's translation philosophy advocates for "cultural integration in translation without sacrificing meaning," emphasizing the accuracy of language and the preservation of culture with a core focus on "faithful transmission of the original meaning." In his translation of the "Tao Te Ching," he draws inspiration from Han Dynasty annotations and other classical translation methods while incorporating his own understanding of classical Chinese to strive for an accurate representation of the original text. Additionally, he attempts to interpret difficult-to-translate terms through annotations and explanations, providing readers with a clearer understanding. Din Cheuk Lau's translation philosophy has had a significant impact on the modern Chinese translation community.

Keywords: Din Cheuk Lau, translation philosophy, Tao Te Ching, linguistic accuracy, cultural preservation

1. Introduction

Taoist philosophy is a crucial component of Chinese culture, and the "Tao Te Ching" as one of its classic texts holds significant value for the study of ancient Chinese philosophy. However, the translation of the "Tao Te Ching" has long been a subject of debate in the academic world due to its concise language, profound meaning, and multiple layers of interpretation. Among these translations, Din Cheuk Lau's version has garnered substantial attention. Spending five years on his translation, Din Cheuk Lau produced a high-quality rendition that has become a must-read for Western scholars studying Taoist philosophy and ancient Chinese philosophy. His translation philosophy and its impact are also central areas of concern for scholars. Therefore, this paper takes the "Tao Te Ching" as an example to delve into Din Cheuk Lau's translation philosophy and its application in translation, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of his ideas and their influence on translation studies.

2. Background

Din Cheuk Lau (D. C. Lau, March 8, 1921 – April 26, 2010) was a renowned Hong Kong translator, linguist, and sinologist. Mr. Din Cheuk Lau is one of the outstanding figures in the field of Chinese translation, and his translation theories and ideas have had a profound impact on the prosperity and development of the Chinese translation industry. His translations of works such as the "Tao Te Ching," "Analects," and "Mencius" have been published by the prestigious Penguin Classics and received widespread acclaim in the Western sinology community. Din Cheuk Lau's translations of these three famous Chinese classics are essential readings for Western scholars studying Chinese philosophy. While there are numerous English translations of the "Tao Te Ching," many suffer from issues related to faithfulness to the original text. In contrast, Mr. Din Cheuk Lau's English translation of the "Tao Te Ching" is based on the Ma-wang-tui texts and faithfully preserves the original text's philosophical content. Moreover, it achieves a high level of fluency and readability, making it a reliable source for Western readers seeking a deeper understanding of Laozi's Taoist philosophy. The initial edition of Din Cheuk Lau's "Tao Te Ching" has sold over 800,000 copies worldwide.

3. Analyzing Din Cheuk Lau's Translation Using the "Tao Te Ching" as an Example

3.1. Analyzing Din Cheuk Lau's Translation Philosophy Using the "Tao Te Ching" - Precision and Detail

Din Cheuk Lau's translation philosophy centers on the core principle of "faithful transmission of the original meaning." He advocates for "cultural integration in translation without sacrificing meaning," emphasizing linguistic accuracy and the preservation of culture. Din Cheuk Lau conducted extensive research into ancient Chinese philosophical thought and classics, dedicating himself to translating them into English. His English translations of the "Tao Te Ching," "Analects," and "Mencius" received high praise from the Western sinology community, hailed as exemplary renditions of Chinese classics. Professor Deng Shiliang believes that Professor Lau's remarkable translation achievements can be attributed to two vital factors: first, his excellent command of the English language, and second, his profound understanding of Chinese classics, stemming from his extensive scholarly background. Din Cheuk Lau began his academic journey at the Chinese Department of the University of Hong Kong, where he acquired a strong foundation in classical Chinese. Subsequently, he pursued Western philosophy at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, granting him a solid philosophical base. These educational experiences equipped him with a deep knowledge of both linguistics and Western philosophy, strengthening his academic rigor and establishing a solid foundation for translating classical Chinese philosophical works. Having studied Western philosophy, Din Cheuk Lau also incorporated a comparative approach between Chinese and Western philosophies in the introduction to the "Tao Te Ching."

During his tenure at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Penguin Classics sent him several drafts of translations of the "Tao Te Ching." However, these drafts were originally transcribed in Burmese, riddled with errors and omissions, leading to subpar translation quality. Din Cheuk Lau firmly advised against their publication. Ultimately, he decided to undertake the translation himself. Din Cheuk Lau's comprehensive understanding of both Western and Eastern thought processes, coupled with his non-restrictive and logically sound approach, allowed him to excel in his translations. Ancient Chinese philosophical thought is vast and profound, and Din Cheuk Lau's dedication to providing a rational and accurate interpretation for modern Western readers led him to conduct thorough research, collect diverse resources, and meticulously investigate various angles. He never limited himself to one perspective but steadfastly upheld his own viewpoint based on substantial evidence. This reflects both his meticulous attitude towards translation and his

profound love for Chinese ancient philosophical thought and culture. [1] The following example, from the "Tao Te Ching," illustrates his approach:

In Chapter 2 of the Mawangdui version of the "Tao Te Ching," the line "天下皆知美之为美,恶已" is a classic verse. Din Cheuk Lau's English translation of this line is considered a paradigm of philosophical expression. In the transmitted versions, this line includes an additional "斯" character, becoming "斯恶已." Since the second line of this verse is parallel to the first, many translators follow the same structure for the second line as they do for the first, without offering a separate analysis. However, it should be noted that the Mawangdui version itself reads "皆知善,不善矣," which might have been altered in later versions to emphasize the parallelism between the two lines. Chinese readers typically interpret this verse as "the recognition of beauty and goodness is only possible because of the existence of ugliness and evil." However, Din Cheuk Lau has a different interpretation. He translates the first line as "The whole world recognizes the beautiful as the beautiful, yet this is only the ugly." [2] Google Translate renders this line as "全世界都把美丽视为美丽,但这只是丑陋的". This translation closely aligns with the literal meaning of the Mawangdui text because the original text does not contain the phrase "之为善," which would be necessary for the interpretation of "why beauty is beautiful." Thus, Din Cheuk Lau's translation remains faithful to the literal meaning of the original, refraining from directly interpreting "美之为美" as "why beauty is beautiful." In his translation process, Din Cheuk Lau prioritizes the faithful conveyance of the original meaning.

Moreover, during the translation process, Din Cheuk Lau attempted to transform Laozi's spiritual concepts and profound philosophical ideas into a form that modern readers can understand and accept. In his translations, he didn't just convey the ideas through words but also deconstructed and reconstructed the original text with his own thought system. For instance, he translates "道" in the "Tao Te Ching" as "The Way." This translation not only captures the essence of the original text but also prompts modern readers to contemplate "the path of life" and "the way of the universe." In Chapter 10 of the "Tao Te Ching," the line "专气致柔,能婴儿乎?涤除玄览,能无疵乎?" is translated by Din Cheuk Lau as "Inconcentrating your breath can you become as supple as a babe? Can you polish your mysterious mirror and leave no blemish?" He translates "玄览" as "your mysterious mirror." The term "览" can be read as "鉴," which in ancient times referred to a basin filled with water used as a mirror since mirrors had not been invented yet. Later, copper mirrors were invented, also known as "鉴." Therefore, "鉴" equates to "mirror." Din Cheuk Lau incorporates his own understanding, explaining "your mysterious mirror" as "the mind" in the footnotes, clarifying the expression for Western readers.

3.2. Analyzing Din Cheuk Lau's Translation Strategy Using the "Tao Te Ching" - Domestication and Foreignization

Din Cheuk Lau's translation strategy strikes a balance between domestication and foreignization, carefully managing the relationship between these two approaches. Lawrence Venuti introduced the concepts of domestication and foreignization in his 1995 work, "The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation" (1995). Domestication involves making the translation feel familiar to the target language culture, adapting sentence structure and grammar to align with the conventions of the target language audience, and conveying the content and culture of the original text in a way that resonates with the target language readers. On the other hand, foreignization acknowledges the linguistic and cultural differences of the source text, guiding the readers into a foreign context, and adhering to the language and cultural features of the source language as closely as possible. [3] Din Cheuk Lau's English translation of the "Tao Te Ching" employs a domestication strategy, adapting sentence structure and information to align with English language conventions. For example, in

Chapter 22, the line "夫惟不争,故天下莫能与之争" is translated by Din Cheuk Lau as "It is because he does not contend that no one in the empire is in a position to contend with him." In this translation, Din Cheuk Lau employs an emphasizing sentence structure from English, which aligns with the content's interpretation. Additionally, the title of Din Cheuk Lau's translation is "Lao Tzu: The Tao Te Ching," which uses a modified Wade-Giles romanization system. While it retains some characteristics of English spelling, it doesn't entirely conform to English spelling conventions, showcasing foreignization in his translation process. In Chapter 42 of the "Tao Te Ching," Yin and Yang are represented using the Chinese pinyin "Yin" and "Yang" to preserve the original form and rhythm.

To maintain the original form and lyrical qualities, Din Cheuk Lau's translation transforms English into a classical Chinese literary form. For example, in Chapter 42, "道生一,一生二,二生三,三生万物" is translated as "The way begets one; one begets two; two begets three; three begets the myriad creatures." In Chapter 8: "上善若水。水善利万物而不争,处众人之所恶,故几于道。居善地,心善渊,与善仁,言善信,正善治,事善能,动善时。夫唯不争,故无尤。" Din Cheuk Lau translated this sentence as:

"Highest good is like water. Because water excels in benefiting the myriad creatures without contending with them and settles where none would like to be, it comes close to the way.

In a home it is the site that matters;

In quality of mind it is depth that matters;

In an ally it is benevolence that matters;

In speech it is good faith that matters;

In government it is order that matters;

In affairs it is ability that matters ;

In action it is timeliness that matters.

It is because it does not contend that it is never at fault. "

English is an isolating language, meaning that logical relationships between sentences rely on linguistic forms, including grammatical and lexical connections. It emphasizes coherence in form and often features longer sentences. However, Din Cheuk Lau, in translating this passage, divided it into multiple shorter sentences, mirroring the sentence structure of the original text by Laozi. This translation is concise, with a straightforward sentence structure. The only complex structure in the translated text is found in the second sentence, which contains a subordinate clause nested within an object clause. In English, repetition is discouraged, but Din Cheuk Lau deliberately breaks this rule in the target language, employing seven instances of the structure "In... it is... that matters" to maintain the structural beauty of the original text.

In summary, Din Cheuk Lau's translation philosophy is built upon a deep understanding of the original text's essence and an awareness of the needs of modern readers. His translations not only convey the original philosophical ideas but also provide contemporary readers with new insights. Din Cheuk Lau's translated language is clear and concise, preserving the unique sentence structure of the Tao Te Ching, thus exhibiting a profound linguistic aesthetic. This approach ensures that the Tao Te Ching, a classical Chinese text, retains its distinct cultural characteristics [4]. Din Cheuk Lau infuses his translations with a poetic quality, allowing Western readers to appreciate the literary beauty of ancient Chinese classics.

4. Impact and Insights of Din Cheuk Lau's Translation Philosophy

4.1. The Impact of Din Cheuk Lau's Translation Philosophy

Din Cheuk Lau's translation philosophy is a significant branch within modern Chinese translation theory, with profound implications for both theory and practice. His philosophy emphasizes the inherent connection between language and culture, highlighting the incorporation of culture into translation and stressing the importance of linguistic accuracy and cultural preservation. These ideas have provided valuable reference points and insights for the development of modern Chinese translation. In contemporary Chinese translation practice, translators continue to prioritize the integration of culture into translation, respecting the cultural background and traditions of the source text to prevent misunderstandings and ambiguities arising from linguistic differences. Consequently, Din Cheuk Lau's translation philosophy not only holds great importance for the advancement of Chinese translation but also offers extensive guidance and significance for global translation research and practice.

4.2. Insights from Din Cheuk Lau's Translation Philosophy

The inseparable connection between language and culture is a universally acknowledged fact, and in this regard, Din Cheuk Lau's translation philosophy offers crucial insights. He emphasizes the inherent link between language and culture, asserting that language can only truly convey its meaning on the foundation of culture. Throughout his translation practice, he consistently emphasizes the understanding of the cultural background and intellectual content behind the source language to ensure translation accuracy and precision. This provides essential guidance for translation professionals. Translators should possess a broad cultural background and knowledge to better understand the cultural implications and thought systems within the source text, thus achieving more accurate and precise translations. Therefore, translators should focus on understanding and preserving culture in their translation practice to fully realize the meaning and value of language. Additionally, Din Cheuk Lau's efforts to maintain the sentence structure of the original text in his translations encourage readers to appreciate the stylistic beauty of the Chinese language in another language.

In summary, Din Cheuk Lau's contributions to translation theory and practice have not only impacted the field of Chinese translation but have also introduced new perspectives and methods to the world of translation. His exceptional contributions in translating ancient texts, characterized by a high degree of accuracy and precision, have earned his works a place as classics in the history of Chinese translation.

5. Conclusion

Through an analysis of Din Cheuk Lau's translation philosophy and his English translation of the "Tao Te Ching," it is evident that his profound understanding of the inseparable relationship between language and culture, as well as his emphasis on accurately conveying the original meaning, have had a significant and far-reaching impact on the field of Chinese translation and the global dissemination of classical Chinese literature and philosophical thought. His approach to translating ancient texts, particularly the "Tao Te Ching," reflects a deep respect for the cultural background and intellectual content found in the source texts. This rigorous and scholarly approach helps avoid misunderstandings and ambiguities resulting from linguistic differences. [5] Din Cheuk Lau's comparative analysis of philosophical concepts in the "Tao Te Ching" by drawing parallels between Chinese and Western philosophy, and his provision of annotations to explain linguistic and cultural elements, further exemplify his dedication to the study of Chinese philosophical classics. In the

appendix of his English translation of the "Tao Te Ching," he also shares his insights into the author Laozi and the nature of the text itself. Therefore, when translating traditional Chinese cultural texts, translators should pay greater attention to incorporating the cultural context, respecting the cultural traditions of the source text, conducting extensive research, and approaching the task with a rigorous and scientific attitude, rather than opting for a simplistic literal translation or misinterpretation. Furthermore, translation professionals should strive to learn from and be inspired by Din Cheuk Lau's translation philosophy and experiences. They should have a wide-ranging cultural background and knowledge to better comprehend the cultural nuances and thought systems present in the source text. This approach will lead to more accurate and precise translations. Translators are not bound by the syntax rules of the target language when working on Chinese classical texts and can maintain the sentence structures of the original Chinese, allowing readers to appreciate the stylistic beauty of the Chinese language. In conclusion, Din Cheuk Lau's contributions to translation theory and practice have left a lasting impact on the field of Chinese translation and offer valuable lessons for the global translation community. His translations, marked by their clarity and poetic qualities, emphasize the importance of cultural integration and rigorous scholarship in translation. Translators should continue to build on his insights to enhance the quality of Chinese translation and contribute to the advancement of this field.

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