

# Study on the Translation of the Key Terms of Chinese Culture in *Insights into Chinese Culture*

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**Abstract:** *Insights into Chinese Culture*, a book which systematically and comprehensively introduces the Chinese culture from four aspects, that is, wisdom and beliefs, creativity and exchange, art and aesthetics and folk customs, has played a pivotal role in spreading the brilliant Chinese culture to Western countries since its publication in 2008. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed the “going global” of the Chinese culture gradually developing into a national strategy. Under this overall background, this book has been studied from various perspectives such as Western rhetoric theory, audience awareness, the image of China it presents, the strategy of translating culture-loaded words involved and the complex philosophical thoughts explained within and so on, among which, however, a systematic study on the translation of its key terms of Chinese culture is in dire need currently in translation community since it is a book that aims to deliver the great and profound Chinese culture to Western readers. Therefore, following Susan Bassnett’s Cultural Translation Theory, from the perspective of cultural fidelity and the acceptability of English readers, this thesis discusses and analyzes the translations of the representative terms of Chinese culture, such as “仁(ren)”, “礼(li)”, “自然(zi-ran)”, “无为(wu-wei)”, “天(tian)” and “龙(long)”, to examine whether they accurately convey the cultural connotations or to some extent may lead to cultural misunderstandings. This study suggests that the accurate translation of key terms of Chinese culture, which is of great significance in promoting Chinese culture to go global, requires translators’ full and deep grasp of their philosophical connotations and cultural backgrounds instead of the superficial interpretation of their literal meanings.

**Keywords:** Key terms of Chinese culture; Cultural translation; Philosophical thoughts; *Insights into Chinese Culture*.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past 40 years of reform and opening up, China has been growingly active towards external exchanges with its comprehensive national strength increasing continuously. As an emerging strategy of developing national culture, “going global” of Chinese culture is an important measure for China to establish an international image and enhance the international influence. Translation, as a bridge connecting Chinese and Western cultures, plays an indispensable role in this process. However, due to the deep-rooted differences in cultural connotations between Chinese and English, how to accurately translate key terms of traditional Chinese culture to help English readers understand the “authentic China” is a perennial challenge for translators.

Since its publication in 2008, *Insights into Chinese Culture*, written by Ye Lang and Zhu Liangzhi, two professors of philosophy at Peking University and translated by Zhang Siying and Chen Haiyan, has stood out from the vast sea of cultural reading materials with its comprehensive content, vivid explanations and ingenious writing techniques, receiving high praise from many English readers. By introducing Chinese culture from four aspects, namely wisdom and beliefs, creativity and exchange, art and aesthetics and folk customs respectively, it not only opens a precious window for Western readers to understand and explore Chinese culture, but also provides a useful text for many translation scholars who studied it actively from various perspectives.

Up to now, this book has been analyzed for various specific perspectives in China, such as the audience awareness, the image of China, the translation analysis of culture-loaded words. For example, with the guidance of Western rhetoric theory, Chen Xiaowei (2015), through analyzing and

discussing a large number of translated texts in this book, maintains that translators of this book have strong audience awareness, which makes it a successful model of translating cultural books. Hu Zixin (2017) holds that *Insights into Chinese Culture* presents a “beautiful China” with exquisite antiques and brilliant minds of Chinese people. Concerning the study of culture-loaded words involved in this book, Mao Hongchui (2012) summarizes three methods of translating Chinese culture-loaded words, that is, transliteration with detailed explanation, literal translation with pinyin annotation, and literal translation with transliteration, whereas Zhang Lu and Wang Fuyin (2020) believe that there are roughly five methods, which are transliteration, literal translation, paraphrase, conversion and word-for-word translation. In addition, Xiang Chunyan (2016) also systematically introduces five types of Chinese culture-loaded words and enumerates their corresponding best translation methods on the basis of a large number of case studies.

Instead of studying the book itself, Western scholars incline to research the profound philosophical thoughts involved in this book such as Laozi’s “Tao” and Confucianism, or to judge some specific phenomena about the translation of Chinese classics. First, in terms of the study of “Tao”, Chow Tse-Tsung (1979) specifically analyzes the development process of two traditional Chinese concepts of “Wen(文)” and “Tao(道)” and the changes in their relationship in the developing process of history. Moreover, through analyzing Laozi’s philosophical conception of “Tao”, Ming Dong Gu (2002) points out that a common conceptual basis can be constructed between existing studies of “Tao” and “Logos”. Second, concerning the study of Confucianism, Lee Ming-Huei (2017) devotes himself to the study of the religious nature of Confucianism, which, maintained by him, is a “humanistic religion”, whereas Ogura Kizo (2018), through

analyzing the core concept of “life” in Confucianism, points out that the essential understanding of life in the thought of Confucius is animistic whereas that of Mencius is spiritualistic, the difference of which explains the “two origins” of conceptualizing “life” in the philosophical tradition of East Asian. Third, regarding the translation of *Dao De Jing*, Paul R. Goldin (2017) severely criticizes the phenomenon that some translators who know nothing about Chinese translate *Dao De Jing* into English with the help of its translations from other languages like French, German and Japanese, etc. He believes that this behavior will make the originally profound philosophical thoughts of this book become simple, thus failing to show the real deep connotation of Laozi’s philosophy to English readers.

It can be concluded that Chinese scholars mainly focus on studying the audience awareness reflected in the translation, the image of China presented in the book and the translation methods of culture-loaded words involved within, whereas Western scholars prefer to research the philosophical thoughts explained in this book and to judge some specific translation phenomena of Chinese classics. However, what both of them have ignored is the systematic study on the translation of key terms of Chinese thoughts in *Insights into Chinese Culture*, which is of great significance in achieving the aim of translating this book, that is, to deliver the authentic Chinese culture to English readers.

In her *The Translator as Cross-Cultural Mediator*, Susan Bassnett (2011) suggests that translation is by no means a pure linguistic act, but a behavior rooted deeply in relevant cultures and a communication within and between cultures, with translation equivalence being the equivalence of source language and target language in the navigation of cultural functions. Her cultural translation theory can be illustrated in detail as follows: (1) It is culture, rather than language, that should be the unit of translation; (2) Translation is not only a simple process of “decoding-recombining”, but more importantly a process of communication; (3) Translation should not be limited to the description of the source text, but should focus on the functional equivalence of the source text in the target language culture; (4) In different historical periods, translation has different principles and norms, and meets the cultural needs of different periods and different groups in specific cultures.

Following Susan Bassnett’s cultural translation theory, from the perspective of cultural fidelity and the acceptance of English readers, this thesis discusses and analyzes the translations of representative terms of Chinese culture in *Insights into Chinese Culture*, which are “仁(ren)” and “礼(li)” in Confucianism, “无为(wu-wei)” and “自然(zi-ran)” in Laozi’s philosophy, two core cultural concepts of “天(tian)” and “龙(long)” respectively, aiming to examine whether they accurately convey the cultural connotations or to some extent lead to cultural misunderstandings. I thereby argue that the accurate translation of key terms of Chinese culture, which is of great significance in promoting Chinese culture to go globally, requires translators’ full and deep grasp of their philosophical connotations and cultural backgrounds instead of the superficial interpretation of their literal meanings.

This thesis mainly includes five parts. Part One is a brief introduction, consisting of an overview of the social context, the value and importance of *Insights into Chinese Culture*, literature review, originality, theoretical foundation, methodology and the structure of the study. Part Two is about

the analysis of the translations of “仁(ren)” and “礼(li)”, the essence of Confucianism. The translations of “无为(wu-wei)” and “自然(zi-ran)”, which are two unique concepts of Laozi’s philosophy, are discussed in detail in Part Three. Translations of the other two significant concepts of Chinese culture, which are “天(tian)” and “龙(long)”, are analyzed in Part Four. Part Five is the conclusion, in which major findings are summarized and implications as well as limitations of this study are identified with suggestions for the further research being offered.

## 2. On the Translation of “仁(ren)” and “礼(li)”

### 2.1. Interpretation of Confucius’ “仁” and “礼”

“仁(ren)” is a core concept of Confucius’ ethical thinking as illustrated in the *Analects* (Lunyu). According to the statistics of Mr. Yang Bojun’s *Interpretation of Analects of Confucius* (Lun Yu Yi Zhu), “仁” appears in this book 109 times (1980:16). Compared with “君子” (107times) and “礼” (74 times), it can be said that “仁” is the most important quintessence of Confucianism. Just as Yang once judged: “It is the fundamental connotation of ‘礼(li)’, the basis of ethics and morality, the principle of being a human being and the highest realm that people should pursue.” Analyzed from the perspective of etymology, the left part of “仁” is “亻”, referring to “human beings”, the right part being “二”, which means “two”. Hence, the vary meaning of “仁” can be illustrated as the interrelation and mutual dependence of two people. Then what is Confucius’ definition of “仁”? In fact, Confucius’ disciples, including Zi-gong, Yan Yuan, Zhong-gong, Si-ma Niu and Fan Chi, asked him directly about “仁” nine times, and he gave them specific instructions on how to meet the requirements of “仁” referring to their own shortcomings. Four representative answers are picked up and presented as follows:

1) The answer for Zi-gong:  
“己欲立而立人；己欲达而达人”。

(To help others to take their stand if you want to take yours; to help others succeed if you want to succeed.)

2) The answer for Yan Yuan: “克己复礼”。

(To restrain yourself to behave in obedience to propriety.)

3) The answer for Zhong-gong: “己所不欲，勿施于人”。

(Do unto others as you would be done.)

4) The answer for Fan Chi: “爱人”。

(To love people.)

According to the above answers of Confucius, “仁” includes rich meanings like being kind, generous and virtuous and so on, among which “love people(爱人)” is universally acknowledged by many Confucian scholars as its most important interpretation. In *The Doctrine of the Mean* (Zhongyong), there is a saying quoted from Confucius: “The greatest love for people is the love for one’s parents.” Confucius’ “仁” is a universal love on the basis of loving one’s parents. Mencius, an outstanding scholar of Confucianism, once put forward that “-loving one’s parents, loving the people, loving everything in the world”, which is a great summarization of “仁”。

“礼(li)”, like “仁”, is another core thought of Confucianism.

It is believed to be a significant mark that distinguishes human beings from animals in Confucianism. Also analyzed from the perspective of etymology, the ancient word “礼” was originally written as “禮”, which is a pictograph, meaning that there are sacrifices on an altar and thus referring to the utensils used when offering sacrifices to the deity. In the developing process of history, this word was extended in terms of meaning, from only referring to priestly utensils to represent an important ceremony, and then gradually abstracted into a specific concept. Finally, “礼” became a social ideology to maintain the interpersonal relationship between families and countries. According to *Cihai*, “礼” generally has three interpretations. The first one is “to worship the deity”, which can be proved by Confucius’ saying of “you cherish the sheep (referring to the sacrifice), I cherish the rite”. Its second explanation is a ceremony held to show respect or solemnity. As in *The Analects*, Confucius suggested serving parents in obedience to the prescribed etiquette when they are alive. The last one refers to the social norms and moral rules of the aristocratic hierarchy in slave society or feudal society. For example, Confucius advised guiding the common people with morality and assimilating them with propriety. Moreover, on the basis of analyzing the use of the concept of “礼” in Confucian classics, Zhu Xi, a famous master of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism in Song Dynasty, once put forward three philosophical explanations of “礼”. At his early phase, he interpreted “礼” as the principle of “Tian”. Later, he realized that this interpretation was too abstract to be understood by general people, so he further explained it into “regulations and adornments” in his middle age. Finally, at his old stage, he criticized that neither of these two interpretations was comprehensive enough to represent “礼” and creatively combined them into “regulations and adornments of the principle of Tian”. His three dimensional interpretations of “礼” play an significant role in helping us understand the connotation of “礼” in a deeper and all-round way. Therefore, it can be concluded that “礼”, like “仁”, also contains rich connotations in Confucian classics.

## 2.2. The Translation Analysis of “仁” and “礼”

In *Insights into Chinese Culture*, Confucius’ philosophy is illustrated in detail in the first chapter titled “Confucian Thought on Heaven and Humanity”. In this chapter, “仁” has appeared fourteen times in all. Concerning its translation, in most cases, two translators employed just one word “ren”. For example,

1) SL: 孔子的学生樊迟问什么是“仁”，孔子回答说：“爱人。”(p6)

TL: When his student Fan Chi asked him about ren, Confucius replied, “Love of people.” (p5)

However, different words were used to translate “仁” in the following two examples:

2) SL: 孔子说：“志于道，据于德，依于仁，游于艺。这是孔子教育的总纲”(p9)

TL: Confucius regarded lofty ideals, great virtue, love of people and the “six arts” as the general principles of education. (p7)

3) SL: 一个人对于崇高的道德目标 (“仁”), 仅仅有理论上的认识是不够的.....那才是一种最高境界(p9)

TL: Simply knowing the highest standard of virtue (i.e.,

love of people) is not good as setting it as one’s goal.....enjoying the practice of it. (p8)

In these two examples, “仁” is translated into “love of people”. According to the analysis of the last section, “love people” is indeed the most significant interpretation of “仁” acknowledged by many Confucian scholars. However, the most important concept cannot be taken for granted as the equivalent of “仁”, a complex term involved rich connotations according to Confucius’ different answers. Hence, is “ren” the most appropriate translation? Can we find another better version? To answer this question, it is necessary to research the various translations of “仁” provided by those famous translators.

For more than 300 years, the translators of *The Analects* have made great efforts to study the translation “仁”. However, due to its rich and complex meanings, translators believe that there is no universally-acknowledged equivalent word in English, so they tend to translate it according to their own understandings. Up to now, many famous translators have provided their English versions of “仁”.

According to Lau, “仁” is the most important moral quality of human beings and the core concept of Confucius’ thought. Although the term was not invented by Confucius, it was he who gave it rich connotations and prominent status. Lau believes that “benevolence” can fully convey the meaning of “仁”. However, according to the authoritative *Oxford Dictionary*, “benevolence”, whose Latin root “bene” means “well-wishing”, mainly refers to people’s kindness and generosity, which cannot accurately express the true meaning of “仁”, because Confucius’ “仁” primarily emphasizes loving people rather than doing kind and generous deeds. Moreover, “仁” in Chinese has only one syllable, whereas “benevolence” in English has five. The phonetic imbalance intensifies the inappropriateness of translating “仁” into “benevolence”. In addition, according to the analysis in the last section, Confucius’ “仁” is also an incarnation of various good virtues, which means that this profound concept is beyond the description of any above words such as “virtue”, “good”, “kindness” and “complete”. Translators of “humanity” and “humaneness” conducted an etymological analysis of “仁” and found its close relationship with “人(human beings)”, but just as above discussed, in the developing process of history, “仁” gradually involves richer connotations concerning ethics, sociology, philosophy and aesthetics. The literal meaning can no longer explain “仁” fully, let alone “authoritative conduct”, which is a far cry from the meaning of “仁”. Maybe having realized that there is no English word which can fully convey the connotations of “仁”, Brooks E.B. and Brooks A.T creatively translated it into “rvn”. However, perhaps because it looks like “run” and is very hard to pronounce, it has not been acknowledged widely. Since none of above translations can fully explain “仁”, many scholars (Yang ping, 2008:63; Jin Nailu, 2009:25) have advised just employing its pinyin to translate it, that is, translating “仁” into “ren”, which is also agreed by two translators of *Insights into Chinese Culture*.

However, it is doubted that without any annotation, whether this translation can be understood when English readers first spot it. If we insist on transliterating it into “ren”, a word which belongs not to English and cannot be found in any dictionary, with no explanation given in the book, it seems like a phenomenon of “cultural intrusion” and readers might lose the interest of continuing reading, because the

culture of the target language is often hostile to the culture of the source language. As Victor Hugo said, whenever a country is offered a translation, that country always takes it as an act of violence against itself (Lefevere, 2003:2). Therefore, when “仁” first appeared in the book, it is recommended to employ transliteration with annotation to translate it, which means translating it into “*ren*—a collection of all virtues including benevolence, goodness, kindness, love, humaneness and generosity with loving people as its core” in the form of footnote. Then in the following passage the annotation can be omitted for the sake of convenience. By doing so, we not only help English readers understand the connotations of “仁”, but also retain the characteristics of Chinese Culture.

The advice to the translation of “礼” is the same. In the first chapter of *Insights into Chinese Culture*, “礼” appears 21 times in total. When it represents the specific concept of Confucius, it is invariably translated into “li”. For instance,

1) SL: “礼”是社会生活中的礼仪、制度、规范。(p7)

TL: Li refers to rituals, traditions, and norms in social life. (p6)

When it is combined with other Chinese characters to become a noun, it is translated into “ritual”. For example,

2) SL: “礼”是社会生活中的 礼 仪、制度、规范。其中孔子最重视的是 丧 礼 和 祭 礼。(p7) TL: Li refers to rituals, traditions and norms in social life. Of these, Confucius regarded burial rituals and ancestral worship rituals as the most important. (p6)

Since this section is mainly about the analysis of Confucius’ philosophy, “*li*”, the translation of “礼” when it represents an independent concept like “仁” should be the focus of discussion. Like “仁”, “礼” also has different English versions provided by famous translators, among whom James Legge, Arthur Waley and D. C. Lau are the representative figures. A careful research of their respective translations of *The Analects* was conducted with the statistics indicating that their most employed words to translate “礼” are “rites”, “ritual”, “propriety” and “ceremony” according to the following graph.

Through referring to the Oxford Dictionary, we can find their detailed English explanations:

(1) Rite(s): a ceremony performed by a particular group of people, often for religious purposes.

(2) Ritual: a serious of actions that are always performed in the same way, especially as part of a religious ceremony.

(3) Propriety: moral and social behavior that is considered to be correct and acceptable.

(4) Ceremony: a public or religious occasion that includes a series of formal or traditional actions.

After analyzing the above explanations of four words, we can find that both “rite” and “ritual” have similar meaning with “ceremony”, with the only difference being that the former two words emphasize the religiousness of the ceremony. Only “propriety” refers to the moral and social behavior, which, compared with “ceremony”, is a deeper meaning of “礼”. However, according to the interpretation of “礼” in the last section, it has complex connotations in Confucian classics which cannot be generalized by these four words. When translating Buddhist texts, Xuan Zang, a famous monk in the Tang Dynasty, once established five principles of non-translation, the third one of which being “此无故不翻”. It means that words which cannot be found in the target language should not be freely translated, but transliterated.

According to this principle, “*li*”, a version employed by two translators of this book, is indeed an appropriate choice since there is no perfect equivalent of “礼” in English. However, the same question comes: to what extent English readers can accept and understand this translation without the help of annotation when they first read it? As an important media of external exchange, translation is not only the simple conversion between languages, but also has the responsibility of spreading the authentic culture. Translators of the book, as the important role of disseminating Chinese culture, are responsible for making sure that each translation provided by them can be clearly understood by English readers. Therefore, in order to accurately convey the cultural connotations of “礼”, I venture to advise adding the annotation of “a general term referring to propriety, rituals, norms of social behaviors or various ceremonies in Confucian classics” to the original translation of “*li*”, so that its rich meanings can be fully understood by English readers.

“仁” and “礼”, as two core concepts of Confucianism, have a close relationship. “仁” is the internal principle of “礼” and “礼” is the external manifestation of “仁”. Accurate translations of these two words play a crucial role in spreading the brilliant quintessence of Confucianism accurately to Western readers, which requires translators’ full and deep grasp of their philosophical connotations and cultural backgrounds.

### 3. On the Translation of “自然(*zi-ran*)” and “无为(*wu-wei*)”

#### 3.1. Semantic Origin and Philosophical Implication of “自然” and “无为”

“自然(*zi-ran*)”, as the ultimate principle followed by “Tao”, marks the core value of Laozi’s philosophy. In *Dao De Jing*, Laozi maintains that “道法自然”(dao fa zi ran), which means that “Tao”, as the source of all living things and the highest reality of the world, operates in obedience to “自然”. In other words, “Tao” takes “自然” as its attribute, and “自然” is the highest principle of “Tao”. Therefore, whether it can be interpreted correctly is of great importance to Western readers’ overall understanding of Laozi’s philosophical thoughts in *Dao De Jing*. According to *Principles of Composition of Characters* (Shuowenjiezi), “自(*zi*)” is a pictograph, referring to “nose” at the very beginning. Later, as American scholar W. A. Callahan (1989:173) points out, it gradually evolves to mean “oneself” perhaps as the metaphorical extension of the meaning of nose because Chinese people always point to their noses when they want to say “myself”. In fact, no matter in the classical or modern Chinese, “自” generally has two implications. The first one is a reflexive pronoun which means “self”, and the second one is a preposition used to indicate direction or time, equating the meaning of “from” in English. Then, when it comes to “然(*ran*)”, it acts mainly as a pronoun in ancient Chinese, indicating a state of being “so”. Therefore, based on the above analysis, the literal meaning of “自然”, which consists of “自” and “然”, should be that everything in this world is “self-so”. When it comes to Laozi’s “自然”, it refers to the state of existence of all things as well as human beings in the world. In detail, it means that all living things including people grow and live as they are in a pure state following their own nature without external intervention or stimulation. Just as Jiang Xiangdon (2017:28) once

mentioned: “the essential meaning of “自然” in Laozi’s *Dao De Jing* refers to a ‘mode of thinking’ or ‘realm of life’ without any human intervention.”

When it comes to “无为”, if being interpreted literally, it seems to mean “doing nothing”, which is exactly the deep misunderstanding of most people towards Laozi’s philosophy. Chen Guying, an internationally renowned scholar of Taoist culture, once put forward in *Annotations and Comments on Laozi* that the biggest purpose and motive of *Dao De Jing* lies in giving a full play to the idea of “无为”. Therefore, this concept is the key to understanding Laozi’s thought. According to statistics, “无为” appears 14 times in eleven chapters of *Dao De Jing*. A study of its various versions indicates that many translators incline to translate it into “doing nothing”, “non-action”, “not-doing” and so on, which demonstrate the deep misinterpretation of many people towards this term. For example, James Legge, a famous Sinologist and translator, once translated “无为” into “without doing anything”, “does nothing” and “without acting”, which indicates that he does not delve deeply into this philosophical concept but merely translates it literally.

And just because of this kind of literal translation, the meaning of each sentence is self-contradictory. English readers may ask: “How to manage affairs without doing anything? How to make everything done by doing nothing and how to act without acting?” This paradox renders Laozi’s philosophy mysterious and incomprehensible, which consequently hinders its spread in Western countries. Analyzing in combination with the text, Chen Guying (1988:13) mentioned that “无” in *Dao De Jing* generally has two meanings. First, it refers to “Tao”, because “Tao” is invisible so “无” is employed to describe its characteristic. Second, it refers to empty space. He thinks that this term is by no means negative but conveys a spirit of cultivating and waiting for development. On the one hand, Laozi was concerned about the chaos of the society at that time and hoped to provide the way for human beings to get along with each other peacefully. For example, some concepts like “无为”, “不争” and “歉退” were put forward to appeal people to restrain their possessive impulse so as to eliminate the root of social disputes. On the other hand, Laozi concentrated mainly on the depth of the mental life. For instance, the concept of “虚静(being empty and quiet)” he put forward aimed to persuade people to develop their spiritual space. Therefore, Laozi’s “无为” is actually a highly concise concept, which by no means refers to “doing nothing”. Employing this phrase, Laozi aims to convey a concept of “doing according to the laws and regulations of all things”. Just as stated in Chapter 25 of *Dao De Jing*, “man takes his law from the Earth; the Earth takes its law from Heaven; Heaven takes its law from the Tao; the law of the Tao is its being what it is” (Translated by Legge), the essence of “无为” is that everything in this world behaves according to its own laws instead of acting recklessly or wildly.

### 3.2. The Translation Analysis of “自然” and “无为”

If we are required to translate “自然” into English without any knowledge of Laozi’s philosophy, most if not all of us will unhesitatingly choose “nature”. However, according to *Oxford Dictionary*, “nature” refers to all the plants, animals and things that exist in the universe that are not made by

people. Essentially, the difference between “自然” and “nature” is that the former one refers to a state while the following one refers to some existing entities in the world. If we employ the method of back translation, “nature” is actually the equivalent of “自然界” in Chinese, which has nothing to do with Laozi’s “自然”. Moreover, originally there was no direct equivalent of “nature” in Chinese until in the early 1920s, China introduced the new term “自然界” from Japanese translation and simultaneously superimposed the historical complexity of “nature” in English on our indigenous understanding of “自然” in Chinese (Luo Tao; Wei Lebo, 2014:4). Yang Cuicui and Tang Wei (2020:122) also point out that over the centuries, although the meaning of “自然” has expanded in Chinese, none of them refers to “nature” in English. Hence, “nature” in English and “自然” in Chinese are two words without any relation.

Translators of *Insights into Chinese Culture* must have realized it, so they employed “naturalness”, the derivative word of “nature”, as the translation in this book. In the second chapter of this book which is titled as “Laozi’s Philosophy of Non-action(自然无为的老子哲学)”, “自然” appears 24 times in all with its translation being “naturalness” when it refers to Laozi’s philosophical thought. Some examples are presented:

1) SL:自然是老子哲学最重要的概念之一。(p16)

TL: “Naturalness” is an important concept of Laozi’s philosophy. (p12)

2) SL: .....而是说,人的一切事业都应该在顺应自然的基础上去做.....(p17)

TL: What he meant is that human enterprises should be built on the basis of naturalness.....(p12)

However, in the Oxford Dictionary, there are totally three explanations of “naturalness”, which are

(1) The state or quality of being like real life.

(2) The quality of behaving in a normal, relaxed or innocent way.

(3) The style or quality of happening in a normal way that you would expect.

None of them expresses the true connotation of Laozi’s “自然”, which, according to the analysis in the last section, is essentially an existing state of all living things being “self-so” without external intervention. Therefore, “naturalness”, to some extent, may not be an appropriate English version. Then a question comes: except “nature” and “naturalness”, which words can be employed to translate “自然” in *Dao De Jing* so that Laozi’s profound philosophical thoughts can be fully conveyed? Concerning this question, many famous translators once put forward their own views.

In the early cross-cultural translation of *Dao De Jing*, missionaries were the main force, with James Legge and Arthur Waley being the representative. From data collected, it can be found that both of them have a relatively accurate understanding of “自然” because the words they choose show that “自然” is not the objective existence of the universe but a process and state without being disturbed by external artificial force. However, some scholars (Yang Cuicui; Tang Wei, 2020:124) criticize that except “self-so” and “spontaneous tribute”, other versions are more like explanations rather than translations. Roger T. Ames and David Hall must have realized the importance of conciseness when translating a cultural term, so they employed “self-so-ing”<sup>[2](p110)</sup> and “self-deriving”<sup>[2](p270)</sup>. Nevertheless, “self-

deriving”, according to its literal meaning, only emphasizes the process of “deriving” or “coming into being” but ignores the process of developing and perishing of all living things in the world. Comparatively, “self-so-ing” is a better choice because the addition of “ing” emphasizes the dynamic process of all living things in this world from birth to death, with “self-so” indicating that the process is natural without external intervention. Nevertheless, since “self” refers only to people rather than all living things in the world, it may make Western readers misunderstand that Laozi’s philosophy is anthropocentric, which is totally opposite to the truth. Concerning this problem, Yang and Tang suggest using “spontaneously” as a replacement of “self” so that the non-artificialness of “自然” can be retained without prioritizing the role of human beings. Therefore, it is advised to replace “naturalness” in the book with “spontaneously-so-ing”, so that the philosophical connotation of “自然” can be correctly understood by English readers.

In *Insights into Chinese Culture*, “无为” totally appears ten times. Some representative examples are presented as follows:

1) SL: “无为”作为老子哲学的重要概念，是对“自然”的保护。(p17)

TL: “Non-action” is another important concept of Laozi’s philosophy. It is the guarantee of “naturalness”. (p12)

2) SL: 老子从他的自然无为哲学出发，对于人的行为方式，提出了“以柔弱胜刚强”的观点。(p19)

TL: On the basis of “naturalness” and “non-action”, Laozi proposed the view of “overcoming the strong by being weak.” (p13)

In this chapter, translators employed “non-action” as the translation of “无为”, which, regretfully, has the same meaning as “doing nothing”. According to the analysis in the last section, Laozi’s “无为” means acting following the natural trend, referring to a macro grasp of everything’s law of development in the world. Hence, “non-action”, as the above translations of James Legge which render the originally positive and profound philosophy of Laozi negative and superficial, cannot be its translation in this book lest Western readers misunderstand its true connotation. Besides Legge, other famous translators also once gave their explanations. For example, Arthur Waley translates “无为” into “action without contrivance”, which emphasizes the avoidance of artificial interference that does not accord with “Tao” in managing affairs. However, since “contrivance” in English also refers to “a clever plan” besides “something unnatural”, it may lead to misinterpretation of Western readers that “无为” aims to advise people to manage affairs in an “unwise” way, which makes Laozi’s philosophy sound unreasonable. Comparatively, Gu Zhengkun’s “behave without taking unnatural action” is more appropriate because it conveys the philosophical connotation of the term to the greatest extent through employing simple and unambiguous words. But just as the above mentioned, it is more like an explanation rather than a translation. “无为”, as a term, is in dire need of a concise translation. Considering the enormous difficulty of picking out its equivalent in English, I suggest here to employ directly “wu-wei” as its translation, which had been conducted by Patrick M. Byrne as early as 2002. He translated “损之又损以至于无为” into “To decrease, and again decrease, until ‘wu-wei’ is attained”. Moreover, in order to help Western readers understand this concept clearly, I also

advise adding the footnote of “behave without taking unnatural action” as its explanation when it first appears in this book.

Compared with Confucius’ “ren” and “li”, Laozi’s “自然” and “无为” are more difficult to understand because they represent Laozi’s macro grasp of the operation rule of everything in the world. On the basis of them, Laozi puts forward his unique philosophy of non-contention. Therefore, accurate translations of them are of vital importance in disseminating Laozi’s philosophy to Western readers, which requires translators to deeply research the *Dao De Jing* to fully understand their original connotations.

## 4. On the Translation of “天(tian)” and “龙(long)”

### 4.1. The Translation Analysis of “天”

Representing the national belief of China, “天” is a complicated term which involves many aspects, such as theology, philosophy, religion and ethics etc. Analyzed from the perspective of formation of character, “天” is a self-explanatory character, which means the space on the top of the head represented by a circle, a horizontal bar or other symbols.

Tang Yijie, a famous philosopher and master of Chinese culture, once put forward that the meanings of “天” can generally be summed up into three kinds: the dominant one with personality, the natural one referring to the sky and the one with righteousness which is transcendental and moral. Moreover, “天” in Chinese culture is also a philosophical concept. For example, Confucius’ philosophy is named as “the philosophy of 天(Tian) and 人(ren, referring to people)”, and ancient Chinese people proposed “天人合一(Tianrenheyi)”, advocating the harmonious coexistence between man and nature. In *Insights into Chinese Culture*, “天” is the word which appears most frequently. However, it was translated into “Heaven” throughout the book whenever it appears. Some examples are provided as follows:

Some scholars agree this translation and maintains that there is no need to retranslate “天” through employing other English words. For instance, Liu Yuyu (2019:35) holds that it is unnecessary to worry about misinterpreting Chinese culture by translating “天” as “Heaven”, because in the context of Chinese philosophy, English readers will naturally know that China’s “heaven” is different from that of the Western countries.” However, this translation, to some extent, inputs a Christian flavor into “天”, which may make the uninformed readers assume that Chinese people have similar beliefs to Christianity. Just as Roger Ames (2009:345) proposed: “when ‘heaven’ is capitalized, whether you like it or not, what emerges in the Western readers’ mind is the transcendent image of the Creator as well as the concepts of soul, sin and afterlife.” Hence, if “天” is translated into “Heaven”, Western readers will combine it with the Christian God who created the world. However, the Chinese “天”, although sometimes referring to the heaven with personality such as providence and destiny, is still a natural existence with itself being the world and there is no god of creation outside.

As the core concept of Chinese culture, “天” carries rich cultural connotations. Some translations such as God, Heaven, Theology, Providence and Nature not only convey very

limited meanings, but also induce English readers to associate “天” with western religions as some of them belong to Western theology, so none of them can be taken as the translation of “天”. In the process of translating Chinese classics such as *The Analects* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, Roger Ames employed “Tian” as the translation of “天” and explained it with its Chinese character and annotations. This translation is agreed and advocated by many scholars. For example, Chen Guoxing (2012:25) points out that this translation reflects Ames’ effort to break the long-term hegemony of Western philosophy and to communicate between Chinese and Western cultures in the context of globalization. Zhang Zheng and Hu Wenxiao also suggest that this kind of foreignization defamiliarizes Western readers and constructs different philosophical thinking from Western ones (2015:94). Moreover, some scholars advocate translating “天人合一”, the core concept of Chinese philosophy, as “Tianren Heyi” or “Tianrenheyi”, which further supports the translation of “Tian” (Chai Gaiying, 2010:96; Chen Yuehong, 2019:2). Concerning the translation of “天” in *Insights into Chinese Culture*, I also suggest following Ames’ translation of “Tian”. In terms of the annotations added, considering there are generally three connotations of “天” as the above mentioned, I suggest adding different ones according to its detailed meanings in the specific contexts. Zhang and Hu once put forward their views on the annotations, which could be taken as a reference for future translators. In terms of the relatively simple natural “Tian”, they suggest adding the annotation of “sky” or that “Tian is believed by Chinese the source of all phenomena and the processes of natural change” as Ames and Hall added when they translated “四时行焉，百物生焉，天何言哉？” as “The four seasons change and all things in nature are born and grow within it. What does Tian has to say”. Concerning the dominant “Tian”, they advise adding the annotation of that “Tian is believed by Chinese the nonpersonal supreme dominator” or “Tian is believed by Chinese the determiner of the fate of both nation and people, including their social status and wealth”. Finally, as for “Tian” with righteousness, they provide one annotation of that “Tian is believed by Chinese the supreme morality and justice”. It should be cleared that their annotations are not the regulated standard, and future translators can also give their own annotations, only should on the premise of accurately understanding its specific connotations in different contexts and employing appropriate English words to convey them clearly.

## 4.2. The Translation Analysis of “龙”

Unlike “Tian” or the four words discussed in the above two chapters, “龙” is not a philosophical concept but the most representative cultural image of China. In China, “龙” is mainly regarded as a symbol of dignity, power and auspiciousness. However, “dragon” has been taken for granted as the translation of “龙” for such a long time that we didn’t even bother to think of the difference between “龙” in China and “dragon” in Western countries. In the chapter eleven of *Insights into Chinese Culture* which is titled as “The Forbidden City: Glorious and Awe-inspiring”, “龙” totally appears four times and “dragon” was taken as its translation throughout this chapter. Some examples are provided as follows.

1) SL: 一条看不见的龙脉。(p135)

TL: Concealed Contours of a Dragon. (p79)

2)

SL: 这条中轴线，是北京古城的龙脉，是一条像龙一样起伏的地脉。(p138)

TL: The central axis that runs from the south to the north of Beijing resembles the undulating contours of a dragon. (p83)

According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, dragon is defined as “(1) archaic: a huge serpent; (2) a mythical animal usually represented as a monstrous winged and scaly serpent or saurian with a crested head and enormous claws; (3) a violent, combative, or very strict person; (4) capitalized: DRACO; (5) something or someone formidable or baneful. Hence, the image of “dragon” in English is diametrically opposed on that of “龙” in Chinese, which represents prosperity, peace and strength. According to the conclusion of Huang Ji, there are mainly five differences between “龙” and “dragon”: (1) “龙” is a symbol of auspiciousness, while dragon is a symbol of evil; (2) “龙” generally has no wings but the dragon has huge bat wings; (3) The body of “龙” is long and slender, while that of the dragon is thick and stout; (4) “龙” is golden yellow, but dragon is mainly black; (5) “龙” doesn’t eat humans, whereas the dragon does (2006:162). Since the two images does not match at all, why is “龙” translated as “dragon”? In fact, this mistranslation derived from the early translation of *Bible*. Translators at that time only considered the external resemblance in the form between “龙” and “dragon” but failed to take into account the significant differences between the connotation of “龙” in Chinese culture and that of dragon in Christian culture. Moreover, China was once likened to a “red dragon”. Zhao Qizheng was once the director of the Information Office of The State Council in 2006. According to him, there was a best-selling book in America titled *Red Dragon Rising*, in which China was drawn as a rising red dragon to represent its rapid development. However, in Christian legends, the red dragon refers to the greatest demon--Satan. There is no doubt that this translation has severely damaged China’s international image.

In 2005, “龙” failed to be chosen as the mascot of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games because of its negative connotation in English. Regretfully, three years later, translators of *Insights into Chinese Culture* still didn’t recognize the vast differences between “龙” and “dragon”. Fortunately, as time goes by, a growing number of scholars have realized the emergency of retranslating “龙” into English and “dragon” into Chinese so as to protect the traditional Chinese culture of “龙” and build a positive international image of China. Some scholars suggest employing “long” as its translation because on the one hand, it is the transliteration of “龙” and on the other hand, “long” is in line with its characteristic of external image and the cultural implication accumulated in the long history (Jia Weizhou, 2008:156; Shi Cunxun, 2017:239). However, considering that “long” has abundant meanings in English and is usually used as an adjective or a verb rather than a noun, most scholars criticize that it will make English readers feel confused towards the true meaning of “龙”. Among them, Huang Ji is a representative. He advocates translating “龙” into “loong” (2018:74). According to him, as early as 1814, the British missionary Joshua Marshman had already employed “loong” when he translated *The Analects*. Since then, it has been used continuously. For example, in the 1940s, a cigarette named “龙凤牌香烟” produced in

Shanghai was translated as “Loong Voong Cigarettes”. With the rapid development of China in recent years, Chinese culture is gradually spreading abroad. Western readers have more or less realized that the Chinese “龙” has nothing to do with the “dragon” in English. At this time, the introduction of “loong” as its new translation will be easily accepted by them. Therefore, I suggest replacing “dragon” with “loong” in this book so that its noble image will no longer be defiled by the ugly “dragon”. Moreover, concerning the translation of “dragon” in Chinese, on the basis of referring to the pronunciation of its Japanese translation “ドラゴン”, Huang advises translating it into “毒拉根” or “劫更”(2018:79), whereas Shi Cunxun prefers the translation of “赘狗”(2017:239). In my opinion, the latter one is more appropriate. On the one hand, “dragon” in English has two syllables, the same as “赘狗” in Chinese. On the other hand, “dragon”, which refers to a ferocious monster, has a derogatory sense in English. The same is to “狗(dog)”, which although is a lovely animal in the Western culture, is a pejorative term in Chinese. In addition, “赘” in Chinese is also derogatory, which always means “encumbrance”, “burden” or “redundancy”. “劫更”, although with “劫” being negative in Chinese, does not refer to any entity and Chinese readers may feel alien and strange towards this word. With “赘狗” being the reference, it is hoped that future translators can provide their better Chinese versions of “dragon”, because only when “dragon” is no longer translated as “龙” can there be a clear distinction between the two.

“天” and “龙” belong neither to Confucianism nor to Laozi’s philosophy, but they are the two words which are mistranslated seriously throughout the book as “Heaven” and “dragon”, and these two mistranslations convey English readers the wrong Chinese culture and damage severely the image of China. Therefore, they are picked out and discussed in detail in this chapter and it is believed that with the continuous development of China, their new translations of “Tian” and “loong” will gradually be accepted with pleasure by English readers just as we once accepted their “coffee” and “chocolate”.

## 5. Conclusion

Following Bassnett’s Cultural Translation Theory, this preliminary study discussed and analyzed the translations of six representative terms of Chinese culture in *Insights into Chinese Culture*, which are “仁” and “礼” of Confucianism; “自然” and “无为” in Laozi’s philosophy as well as “天” and “龙”, two words representing respectively the national belief and cultural image of China. Based on the findings presented above, it can be concluded that their translations didn’t accurately convey the true cultural connotations and may result in English readers’ misunderstandings towards China. On the basis of elaborately illustrating their true meanings through researching the original texts such as *The Analects* and *Dao De Jing*, this study suggests (1) adding annotations of “a collection of all virtues including benevolence, goodness, kindness, love, humaneness and generosity with loving people as its core” and “a general term referring to propriety, rituals, norms of social behaviors or various ceremonies in Confucian classics” to the original translations of “ren” and “li” in this book; (2) retranslating “自然” and “无为” into “spontaneously-so-ing” and “wu-wei” with the

annotation of “behave without taking unnatural action”; (3) retranslating “天” and “龙” into “Tian” and “loong”, so that English readers can have an accurate and deep understanding of the true Chinese culture. Through the detailed analysis of six key terms of Chinese culture in this book, the writer argues that the accurate translation of key terms of Chinese culture, which is of great significance in promoting Chinese culture to go globally, requires translators’ full and deep master of their philosophical connotations and cultural backgrounds instead of the superficial interpretation of their literal meanings.

Concerning the implications of the study, at a shallow level, it points out the existing problems of translation in *Insights into Chinese Culture*, which is conducive to helping English readers understand the “true China”; at a deep level, taking this book as an example, this study aims to provide future translators a reference concerning the translation of key terms of Chinese culture, which should be conducted on the basis of a comprehensive and profound grasp of their cultural connotations and philosophical concepts, so as to promote Chinese culture to go globally better and help China build a positive international image.

Some limitations of this study should also be acknowledged. First, more key terms of Chinese culture in this book should be analyzed. This study only discussed translations of six representative terms, which are far from enough for promoting the Chinese culture to go global successfully. Second, translations provided for each term are based on the previous studies and the writer’s own understanding, which are by no means the best versions. It is believed that future translators can provide better translations through taking it as a reference. Finally, apart from *Insights into Chinese Culture*, future researchers can choose other representative books of Chinese culture as the research objects. Since the translation of key terms of Chinese culture plays a crucial role in promoting Chinese culture to go globally, the relative studies should be based on a large number of samples so that Western readers can have a comprehensive understanding of this aspect.

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