

# Study on the Translation of Basic Expressions in Confucius Museum from the Perspective of German Functionalist Approaches

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## Abstract

**The Confucius Museum, which officially opened in 2019, has multiple functions such as tourism exhibition, Confucian culture communication and academic exchange. In recent two years, due to the impact of the epidemic, the establishment of Online Confucius Museum remains inevitable. In order to spread and develop the Confucius culture, the English website of Confucius Museum comes into being. In terms of the German Functional Translation Theory, this paper analyzes the translation methods used in the translation of the basic display of the English website of the Confucius museum, and tries to realize the functional equivalence between the original text and the translation text, so as it seeks to spread traditional culture, and increase the international influence of Confucius culture.**

## Keywords

**Confucius Museum; German Functionalist Approaches; Tourism Materials Translation; Translation Techniques.**

## 1. Introduction

Each museum is a treasure house for inheriting civilization, and each cultural relic is a code carrying civilization. They write human civilization in the precipitation of history (Guo, 2021:72-75). Confucius museum is an important cultural facility, built to inherit and carry forward the excellent Chinese culture represented by Confucianism. As an important place to display, preserve and study nature and human culture, the museum is not only an important civilization display window in a region, but also has an important historical mission to provide public cultural services, promote cultural exchanges and cooperation, spread Chinese civilization, and enhance the soft power of national culture.

With the continuous deepening of cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries and the rapid development of tourism, Chinese culture is spreading with vigorous vitality. As the tourism leader in Jining Province, the focus of Qufu Confucius museum's own development is not only to publicize local tourism resources, but also to accurately convey its cultural information to local and foreign tourists. Therefore, the translation of tourism materials has a direct impact on its own publicity and development. Due to the current epidemic and the sluggish development of tourism across the country, the establishment of Confucius online museum is very necessary. In order to enable foreigners who are interested in Confucius culture to learn about Confucius culture at home, the English website of Confucius online museum also needs to be established and improved.

For accurately translating and conveying the introduction of the basic furnishings of the Confucius Museum, there is a need to understand not only Confucius' life and thoughts, but also the similarities and differences between Confucius culture and world civilization. On this basis,

it can overcome all kinds of misunderstandings caused by cultural differences and complete effective, accurate and clear translation. Taking the English website of Confucius Museum as an example, this thesis analyzes its official translation, and holds that it is necessary to decode the functions and translation methods of the English translation of tourism materials basically displayed in the Confucius Museum, according to the German functionalist translation approaches.

## 2. Related Studies on German Functionalist Translation Theory

In the 1970s, German scholars K. Reiss, H. J. Vermeer and Christiane Nord proposed functionalist translation theory. This theory takes skopos theory as the core, and shifts focus from the relationship between the translation and the original text to the expected effect produced by the translation (Zhong, Zhong: 1999: 47-49). Translation practice is a conclusion of purposeful behavior. The purpose of translation determines the whole process of translation practice, which means that expected result determines the method of translation.

### 2.1. The formation of German Functional Translation Theory

The formation of German functional translation theory can be summarized into four stages: in the first stage, Katharina Reiss introduced the concept of “functional type” into the study of translation theory. This theory believes that the translation should be evaluated from the relationship between the functions expressed by the original text and the translation. Reiss’s translation theory of text function and text type is based on the concept of equivalence, and its importance lies in breaking through the simple words or sentences and highlighting the communicative effect of the text (Hu, 2008: 249-255).

In the second stage, Hans Vermeer founded skopos theory, the core of functionalist translation theory. Starting from the behavior theory, it is recognized that translation behavior is restricted by two major factors, language and non-language. The source text is transformed by intention and purpose, and the intention and function of the target text are the decisive factors of translation methods and strategies. The theory puts forward that “any behavior has a purpose”, so translation is a purposeful behavior. The purpose that translation practice wants to achieve determines that the whole translation process is a text produced for a certain purpose and the intended recipient in the context of target language communication. The translation depends on the purpose of translation, and the translation methods and strategies adopted are also different according to the translation purpose of the text. In the third stage, on the basis of “Skopos Theory”, Manttari further put forward the concept of “translation behavior”, which defines translation as “complex behavior designed to achieve cross-cultural and cross language transformation of information”. “Translation” is a narrow concept, which involves the use of the original text, while “translation behavior” is a broad concept, which involves everything the translator does for translation, including giving cultural or technical references in the process of translation (Hu, 2008: 249-255). Translation behavior theory emphasizes the behavior of the translation process, the role of participants and the environment in which the translation process takes place, which further develops the functionalist translation theory and expands the field of vision for translation research.

In the fourth stage, Nord published the book *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, which introduces the complex theories and terms of functionalism, and puts forward the principle of “function plus loyalty”, and further develops the functional school on the basis of theories. Fidelity rule refers to that there should be inter-textual coherence between the original text and the translation, which is commonly referred to as fidelity to the original text. When the rule of fidelity conflicts with the standard of functionalism, the former belongs to the latter (Zhong, Zhong: 1999: 48-50). “Function” refers to the factors that the translation operates in a predetermined way in the target language environment, and “loyalty” refers to the

interpersonal relationship between the translator, the original text author, the translation recipient as well as the translation initiator. According to the different concerns of translators in translation activities, two translation strategies are created: emphasizing the source language culture in the process of documentary translation, and the target language culture in instrumental translation.

## **2.2. The Main Concepts of German Functional Translation Theory**

Functional translation theory extends translation research to the whole process of translation, which is the development of traditional translation theory. The formation of this theory has a guiding significance for translation practice, especially for practical style translation, and provides a theoretical basis for practical style translation practice. The core of functionalist translation theory is skopos theory, which applies the concept of "purpose" to translation research. It believes that translation practice should first think about the purpose of translation and choose appropriate translation strategies and methods according to the purpose of translation, that is, "The end justifies the means of translation". There are three main purposes of translation: the translator's purpose, the communicative purpose, and the purpose of specific translation strategies or means. The principle of purpose is the core principle of Skopos theory, for which both the principle of coherence and fidelity should serve it. If there are changes, the standard of translation is to fully consider the intention and purpose of translation, rather than the principle of faithfulness (Nord, 2001: 32-33).

The communicative purpose of translation plays a decisive role in the process of translation, and it is determined by the initiator of translation or the person acting as the initiator. One of the most important factors determining the purpose of translation is the intended recipients of the translation, that is, the intended readers of the translation, who have their own specific cultural knowledge, expectations and communication needs. Therefore, translation should be reader oriented. When translating, the translator should selectively translate from the multi-source information provided by the original work combining with the purpose of translation and the special circumstances of the target readers, according to the requirements of the initiator or the client (Chen, 2008: 126-130). So that translation is meaningful in the communication environment and culture of the recipient, and works in the way expected by the recipient. In the process of translation, the most appropriate translation strategies can be adopted according to the different contextual factors. In short, the purpose of translation occupies an important position.

## **2.3. The Guidance Role in Translating Tourism Materials**

Functional translation theory breaks through the traditional thinking mode, and insists that translation is a cross-language and cross-cultural interpersonal activity. It takes the purpose of translation as the general principle, and shifts the focus of translation from the reproduction of the source language text to the creation of the more challenging target language text. On that basis, it takes the purpose of translation as the primary translation principle, and shifts the focus to the creation of the target language text (Li, 2009: 145-146). It provides a favorable theoretical basis for various effective translation methods in translation, especially in the translating practical materials. As a practical material translation, the translation strategies and methods of tourism material text should be determined by the function or purpose of the translation. It is emphasized that on the basis of accurate analysis of the original text, the expected function of the translation should be taken as the goal, as well as combining with the social and cultural background and other factors of foreign tourists. Therefore, choose appropriate translation methods to pass on the scenic spot culture to foreign tourists while conveying the scenic spot information.

### 3. Functional Analysis of the Literal Expression of Confucius Museum

The text of tourism materials belongs to the category of practical writing. As an important bridge of cross-cultural communication and a basic way of external publicity, the forms and categories of tourism material texts are more diverse. Peter Newmark once said that few texts have pure information, expression or vocative functions, and most texts have one or two functions. The function of text is not only a single function of information, expression or vocative function; most texts contain three functions, but only one of them is emphasized. (Newmark, 1998:42) Therefore, the translator must determine the main function of an article, so as to adopt the corresponding translation methods (Lin, 1992:2-4). According to Peter Newmark's division, it can be determined that the basic display in the Confucius Museum belongs to the text of expression function, which has both information function and vocative function. It not only conveys Confucius culture to readers, but also increases the dissemination and influence of Chinese culture. As the communication channel of Chinese traditional culture, the Confucius Museum has abundant text and information resources, covering a wide range, including exhibition information, cultural and creative exhibition areas, educational platforms, academic seminars, etc. When trying to find the most accurate tourism information, the translator should first consider foreign tourists, which means to understand the knowledge reserves of foreign readers and the cultural background of the target language, change the language order, expression or language habits of the source language when necessary to adapt to the target language readers, express accurate information in a timely and effective manner, and facilitate tourists from different countries to understand the tourism text materials.

### 4. The Application of Translation Methods in Literal Expression of Confucius Museum

According to functionalist translation theory, the practical process of translation should be based on the communicative function in the target culture. Because the text of tourism materials is with strong function and clear purpose, and has special information function and vocative function. Functional theory requires that translation should also follow "intra-textual coherence" and "inter-textual coherence". The principle of intra-textual coherence requires the recipient to understand the translation, which should have a certain meaning in the communicative environment and culture. "Inter-textual coherence", also known as "faithfulness", refers to a certain connection between the translation and its corresponding original text. However, inter-textual consistence is subordinate to intra-textual consistence, and both are subordinate to the purpose principle.

From this, it's known that in translation, this thesis first considers whether the translation is meaningful in the target language context and the target language cultural background, and whether it can be accepted by readers in the target language context. Then considers whether the translation is "functional" and "faithful" to the original text. In the case of following the "Skopos Theory", what needs to be done next is to adopt different translation methods or strategies according to the different texts. Translation method is a specific means taken to achieve a certain translation purpose after selecting translation strategies (Xiong, 2014). The translator should provide the target language readers with a coherent information that can be recognized and understood according to the purpose and cultural background of the target readers (Nord, 2001: 140).

#### 4.1. Literal Translation

Literal translation is a very common translation method, in line with the language norms of the translation, which is faithful to the content of the source language without changing the text style and rhetorical characteristics of the original text. By translating tourism texts through

literal translation, we can maximize the consistence between the source language and the target language in form, and better convey the depth of Chinese culture to foreigners without omission according to the literal meaning. "All translation behaviors are determined by the purpose of translation" (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984: 101). Since the exhibition introductions in the Confucius museum are all general expression of Confucian culture, Confucius' life, Chinese civilization and other information, it is necessary to translate the source language into the target language according to the meaning of the original text. In the process of transforming the original language into the target language, there is no need to make changes, just word for word and sentence by sentence, according to the meaning of the original text.

**Example1:** 西周初年，周公旦获封与洙泗之滨的商奄故地，建立鲁国。即使在诸侯争霸、礼崩乐坏的春秋时期，鲁国仍较多地保存了西周的礼乐制度。

**Translation:** In the opening years of the Western Zhou Dynasty, the Duke of Zhou was given title over the ancient lands of Yan **along the Rivers Si and Zhu** and established the **Kingdom of Lu**. Though under the dominion of the feudal lords during the calamitous era of decay and strife known as the Spring and Autumn period, the Kingdom of Lu still managed to preserve many proper **systems of the Rites and Music** from the Western Zhou.

For example, in the original text, "获封与洙泗之滨的商奄故地，建立鲁国", this sentence is translated into "was given title over the ancient lands of Yan along the Rivers Si and Zhu and established the Kingdom of Lu". It introduces the national background of the enfeoffment system and vassal separatism in the Confucius era. When tourists enter the online Confucius English Museum, they are aware of some cultural background knowledge. Therefore, in the process of transforming the source language into the target language, there is no need to make changes in form or meaning. It's only directly translated this sentence word by word into English of historical background and convey it to the readers.

**Example2:**孔子开创的儒家学说植根于中华大地，历经两千多年的风风雨雨，不断发展完善，成为中国传统文化的主流。

**Translation:** The Confucian Doctrine founded by Confucius took root in the great earth of China, passing through the storms and rains of two-thousand years of Chinese history unscathed, unceasingly advancing toward perfection, becoming the mainstream of traditional Chinese culture.

In the original text, "历经两千多年的风风雨雨" is literally translated as "passing through the storms and rains of two-thousand years of Chinese history unscathed", which shows experiences and the history through literal translation. Without more elaboration, it can show that Confucianism can still survive after the baptism of history, reflecting the profound and long-lasting culture of Confucius.

From the above two examples, it's clear that the content of the source language and the target language is the same. According to the principle of "Skopos Theory", from the perspective of the translation recipient, the reader can accurately understand the content of the original text, and the translator can complete the accurate translation of the original text. Through literal translation, even if the translation contains the characteristics of the original text, it will not bring about the information loss and readers' misunderstanding.

#### 4.2. Free Translation

Free translation is a frequently used supplementary translation method. Due to the particularity of tourism materials, the original content often involves Chinese history, geography, ancient Chinese poetry and other cultural knowledge. If literal translation is adopted, the translation may be obscure and difficult to understand. German functionalist translation theory highlights the subjectivity of the translator, allowing the translator to flexibly choose the appropriate translation methods according to specific situations (Gentzler, 2004).

Therefore, as a supplementary method in translation, free translation is also widely used in the translation of various texts. Compared with literal translation, free translation is not to translate the source text word for word, but to make the translation closer to the reader, and better convey the intended meaning of the original text, being more conducive to foreign tourists. On that basis, it emphasizes the relative independence between different languages and cultures.

**Example 3:** 黄海之滨，泰山岩岩，大河汤汤。

Translation: From the shores of the Yellow Sea, Mount Tai rises cracked and craggy, the Yellow River flows roiling and raging.

From the differences between Chinese and English sentences, it can be seen that Chinese is mostly four words, and the juxtaposed components are in the majority. Many sentences have no subject. Therefore, literal translation word by word and sentence by sentence cannot convey the content that the original text wants to express, and literal translation cannot fulfill the principles of "function" and "faithfulness". Therefore, free translation, a supplementary translation method, can be used in translation. In example 3, four characters are juxtaposed, and images such as "the Yellow River", "Mount Tai" and "River" are used to explain the origin of Confucius' culture, the test it has experienced and endured. Therefore, verbs and adjectives can be used to show this process in translation, such as "rises", "cracked", "craggy", "flows", "rolling", "hunting". It not only reflects the depth of its influence, but also shows the far-reaching influence of Confucius culture.

**Example 4:** 孔子“祖述尧舜，宪章文武”

Translation: Confucius upheld the virtuous governance of exemplary rulers and was said to have "followed the examples of the forefathers Yao and Shun, conformed to the decrees and regulations of Kings Wen and Wu of Zhou".

Chinese ancient poetry is also a major problem in Chinese-English translation. First of all, we need to understand the meaning of the original text. "祖述" means following the theory or behavior of predecessors. "宪章" means constitution, promulgation and imitation. The meanings of "文武" are as follows: civil administration and military affairs; civil talents and military strategies; civil ministers and military officials; King Wen and King Wu of Zhou. Therefore, "祖述尧舜，宪章文武" can be understood as "follow ancestor Yao and Shun's principles, and imitate the system of King Wen and King Wu of Zhou. Therefore, adding translation is necessary, "Confucius upheld the virtuous governance of exemplary rulers", explaining the premise of Confucius' saying. Then the free translation method is used to convey Confucius' wise way of governing the country.

**Example 5:** 万古长河

Translation: Generations Pass along the Endless Flow of Time

**Example 6:** 余荫百世

Translation: Developments in Confucian Thought throughout History

**Example 7:** 阙里遗风

Translation: The Voice of a New Era

From the above three examples of original Chinese text and English translation, we can clearly see the language differences between them. Chinese mostly exists in the unit of meaning group, paying attention to parataxis, while English pays more attention to hypotaxis and form. In English translation, it is also an exchange of ideas and information. There are differences between Chinese and English cultures and languages. Being broad and profound, thus we need to respect the accuracy of its content when translate. On the basis of being familiar with the text of tourism materials, it has unique advantages to use free translation to solve the cultural

differences ignored in literal translation. Its purpose is to make the translation easy to understand, and make it more acceptable for readers. According to the German functionalist translation theory, especially the skopos theory, the translation method must be determined by the intended purpose or function of the translation. The process of translation is a complex process involving multiple choices (Fan, Liu: 2002: 44-47).

The purpose of the translation is to reconstruct and reproduce the functions of the original text and the characteristics of the source language, and ensuring the functional equivalence of the different texts of the two languages has become the fundamental standard in translation. This also puts forward higher requirements for translators. In the translation practice of dealing with language translation, translators need to adopt the important principle of German functionalism "Skopos Theory" and apply translation methods and strategies skillfully and flexibly to the translation practice of tourism material texts, so as to make the translation clearer, the text more accurate and more fluent.

## 5. Conclusion

Through the above statement and generalization of German functional translation theory and the analysis of the examples of Chinese-English translation of the basic display in the Confucius Museum, it can be seen that literal translation and free translation based on the analysis of the original text and the principle of "Skopos Theory" are necessary for successful translation communication. The purpose of the translation of the basic exhibition introduction of Confucius museum is to achieve the maximum positive effect of publicity and communication. This thesis believes that using functional translation theory to analyze the translation of the Confucius museum website will help to gradually standardize and improve its English website, and truly let the Chinese traditional culture go to the world, and let the world understand the Chinese traditional culture.

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