



English Translations and Studies of *Zhouyi Cantong Qi* From the Perspective of Medio-Translatology

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Abstract

The paper tries to briefly introduce the translation history of Chinese Taoist classic “*Zhouyi cantong qi*”, hoping to map a clear picture of how *Zhouyi cantong qi* had played the role in the world. Also, by comparison of 4 full translations, it analyses the differences and variations by their linguistic features. It holds that both social norms and translators’ subjectivity are important in the study of translations of ancient classical texts.

Key words: *Zhouyi cantong qi*; Translation; Medio-translatology; History

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INTRODUCTION

Zhouyi cantong qi (周易參同契) [The Seal of the Unity of Three] is a Chinese classical book composed by Boyang Wei (魏伯阳) (ca. 151-221 A. D.) in the mid-second century in Han Dynasty (206 B. C.-220 A. D.) and valued by literati both at home and abroad. It is widely regarded as the earliest text on alchemy in China with totally nearly 40 commentaries by Chinese ancient scholars dating from ca. 700 to Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). “With the exception of the *Daode jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, few Taoist

texts have enjoyed an exegetical tradition as voluminous and diversified as the *Cantong qi*. More than three dozen traditional commentaries are extant.” (Pregadio, 2012, pp.21-76)

Zhouyi cantong qi embodies abundant traditional Chinese culture as it concerned with mainly three major subjects, namely Chinese Cosmology (from the system of the *Book of Changes*), Taoism (“non-doing”) and Alchemy, and it also, within Taoist tradition, exerted great influence on the spreading and interpretation of Taoist Alchemy, especially on Neidan, or Internal Alchemy as well as other aspects, such as Taoist medicine, self-cultivation, and body health. Up to now, it has been fully translated into at least 4 English versions since the early 20th century and introduced abroad by sinologists and researchers at different historical periods. At present, the study of its English translations and international communication is far from enough and systematic in academia.

1. DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN STUDIES AND TRANSLATIONS OF *ZHOUYI CANTONG QI*

1.1 Domestic Study and Translations of *Zhouyi Cantong Qi*

In China, there were several important historical commentaries of *Zhouyi cantong qi*, including one anonymous commentary dating from ca. 700, Changsheng Yin’s in Tang Dynasty (618-907), Xiao Peng’s *True Meaning of the Cantong qi, with a Subdivision into Sections* dating from 947 in Wudai Dynasty, Xi Zhu’s *Investigation of Discrepancies in the Cantong qi* dating from 1197, Huagu Chu’s *Zhouyi cantong qi* dating from ca. 1230 and Xianwei Chen’s *Explication of the Cantong qi* dating from 1234 in Song Dynasty, Yan Yu’s *Elucidation of the Cantong qi* dating from 1284 in Yuan Dynasty, and

an anonymous one *Commentary to the Cantong qi* dating from after 1208. The former ones are all compiled into *The Taoist Cannon (Daozang)* of 1445 in Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Besides, more commentaries could be found since Ming and Qing Dynasties, such as Shen Yang's, Yibiao Jiang's, Xixing Lu's versions in Ming Dynasty, and Zhaoao Qiu's and Yuanyu Zhu's in Qing Dynasty.

However, because of historical and social situations, scholars were in disagreement concerning its authorship(s), date, the "Ancient Text" etc. These commentaries are characterized with historical features. For example, Taoists in Sui Dynasty and Tang Dynasty were keen on Waidan or External Alchemy, a way of keeping immortal by taking some golden elixirs, and some commentaries focused on the substances like minerals, metals, etc. and the compounding methods. While, as several emperors and some Taoists died as a result of elixir poisoning, the doctrine and practices of Waidan gradually declined, and then the schools of Neidan began to grow and thrive, particularly in Ming and Qing Dynasties. Therefore, it is necessary to sort out different schools and their views on this text, then make a comparison with western researches on various topics.

Contemporary Chinese scholars also have been conducting various researches on this ancient text, and since 20th century, there are more than 100 hundred scholarly papers of *Zhouyi cantong qi* in China on different topics, varying from the authorship, dates, composition of the text, its relations to other philosophical ideas before and after Han Dynasty, its influences on Waidan and Neidan in Chinese history, its importance on Chinese ancient technology and medical history, especially self-cultivation, etc. The study of *Zhouyi cantong qi* experienced ups and downs in modern China, but never ceased no matter from the perspective of academic papers or published books. And since the 80s in the 20th Century, due to mainly the Opening-up Policy in Mainland China, the amount of its study increased prominently, for example, the annual papers goes up from 1-2 per year to 4-5.

Besides, there are 2 Chinese doctoral dissertations (2006, 2015) on *Zhouyi cantong qi*, 4 master theses (2011, 2016, 2017, 2018), respectively mainly focusing on the study of its ideas and origins, relation between heaven and human being, self-cultivation, and Neidan, while still not engaged in the study of its translation and worldwide communication.

As for English translations, two Chinese scholars did translate *Zhouyi cantong qi* into English in the 20th century, which contributed to the international promotion of this ancient and mysterious text. Wu Luqiang (吴鲁强) and Tenney. L. Davis (Wu's mentor in MIT) published the first English translation of *Zhouyi cantong qi* in 1913 on the journal *ISIS*, a well-known international journal in history of science. The article "*An Ancient Chinese Treatise on Alchemy Entitled Ts'an T'ung Ch'i*" (1932, pp.210-289) included a short introduction of the text and full English

translation, but not many notes and annotations. In the book, the author, from the background of Chemical science, adopted the strategy of literal translation and emphasized on the rendering of technical content in *Zhouyi cantong qi*. Although criticized as a "rather rough" version (Sivin, 1976, pp.518-519), but it was indeed a valuable try for sailing this important text outward to foreign lands.

Another Chinese scholar Shiyi Zhou (周士一) published his English translation book entitled "*The Kinship of the Three, According to the Book of Changes*", with prefaces written by Joseph Needham and Chinese scientist Xuesen Qian. In his book, from the Neidan approach, there are 91 sections of parallel Chinese-English translations, with also vocabulary list, index table and references. It is an independent translation by Chinese researcher, remaining abundant Chinese symbols and signs in the translation through the strategy of "thick-translation", such as Qian ☰ (乾), Kun ☷ (坤), Kan ☵ (坎), Li ☲ (离).

In short, few researches have been conducted on its translations, particularly in a systematic way, and its cross-cultural dialogue and communication outside China, though actually western scholars had already done a lot of work also regarding its origin, authorship, commentaries, and value, etc..

1.2 Overseas Study and Translations of *Zhouyi Cantong Qi*

Jesuits, missionaries and sinologists actually had done a lot of works for the introduction and translation of Chinese classics in the last 400 years. Cross-cultural dialogue and practices witnessed a history of communication of West-East thoughts. Since the 19th century, Taoist scriptures had been increasingly noticed and introduced to the western world, for example, France, as the center of sinology for quite a long time, had taken Taoist philosophy into Europe and developed this typically Chinese religion and its way of thinking in the 19th to 20th centuries, meanwhile, the philosophy of Taoism also influenced the western community. Besides, Chinese studies later in the United States developed fast and gradually took a leading role in the world, and the study of Taoism attracted a lot of scholars in U.S. who also had some cooperation with Chinese counterparts. *Zhouyi cantong qi* is such an important text in Taoist scriptures, and its introduction to the west could date back to almost 150 years ago.

British sinologist Alexander Wylie (1815-1887) described *Zhouyi cantong qi* as the earliest extant book on alchemy in *Notes on Chinese Literature*, (Wylie, 1867) it also noted that the text generally was discarded by literati. (Wylie, 1901, p.219) In the beginning of 20th century, Obed S. Johnson's 24-page article "*A Study of Chinese Alchemy*" in 1928 was quite informational with a lot of quotations from books on Chinese alchemy, which was later reviewed by Arthur Waley who discussed its title, author and text style and believed that author of the text is no doubt the one named Boyang Wei. (Waley, 1930)

In the middle and late of 20th century, more researches could be found. In *The Science and Civilization of China*, British historian of science and scientist Needham (1976) introduced Chinese technology in Alchemy and translated several sections of *Zhouyi cantong qi* respectively in Vol. 2 (330-4, 441-3), Vol. 4 (Part II, 143) and in particular Vol. 5. (Part II, 57; Part III 50-75; Part IV (16, 248-59, 265-8, 316, 439); Part V (66, 99, 136, 225, 289, 334). Vol. 5 is about Chemistry and other technologies (14 parts in total) and co-authored by Joseph Needham, Guizheng Lu and Hopeng Yoke, which highlighted the function and significance of Chinese alchemy as well as several traditional texts for the development of ancient technology. Scholar Nathan Sivin (1976) from United States briefly reviewed *Zhouyi cantong qi* and pointed out that the text can date back to 140 A.D. and also criticized Luqiang Wu's English translation.

British scholar Richard Bertschinger (1994) published a different version of translation based on the "Ancient Text" of *Zhouyi cantong qi*. The source text is distinct as it includes a preface by Shen Yang in 1546 in Ming Dynasty and it was reprinted in 1839 in Qing Dynasty, whose compilation is different from those in *The Taoist Cannon*. Bertschinger divides the whole text into two main parts, namely Boyang Wei's and Congshi Xu's writings and takes several ancient Chinese commentaries for references, in particular, with the preference of Zhixu Chen's commentary.

Another scholar Eva Wong (1997) published the book *Teachings of the Tao* and rendered *Zhouyi cantong qi* into "*Tsan-tung-chi (The Triplex Unity)*" and translated a small portion of the whole Chinese text by the way of abridged translation.

In the 21st century, sinologist Fabrizio Pregadio has been doing researches on Taoism for over three decades, who published two academic books about *Zhouyi cantong qi* separately in 2011 and 2012. He took Zhixu Chen's *Zhouyi cantong qi zhujie (周易参同契注解)* [Notes and Commentaries to *Zhouyi cantong qi*] for the source Chinese text dating from ca. 1330. In the book, he divided the whole text into 88 minor sections and separated them into 3 parts according to the change of the number of Chinese characters, rhymes and topics. Pregadio (2011) published a full English translation in the first book

related to *Cantong qi*, and he continued to explain in detail various historical Chinese commentaries of *Zhouyi cantong qi* in his second book. (Pregadio, 2012) Besides, in the book of "*The Encyclopedia of Taoism*", Pregadio put emphasis on Chinese alchemy and again introduced briefly *Zhouyi cantong qi*. (2008: 466+1289-1292)

In summary, for better understanding the differences on the studies of *Zhouyi cantong qi*, it is necessary to have a comprehensive and systematic probe into the text itself and translations, meanwhile, much consideration should also be put on historical and social context, cultural background, so as to explain these diversities and furthermore put forward some applicable advice for cross-cultural interaction between West and East.

2. CASE STUDIES OF ZHOUYI CANTONG QI FROM MEDIO-TRANSLATOLOGY

From the theory of Medio-translatology and Variation in comparative literature, during the cross-cultural, cross-national and cross-language communication, variation between the source language and target language will no doubt exist, and exactly the differences in the translated texts will offer chances for another cultural system to introduce some new terms, expression, ideology, and other social forces into their community. Moreover, from the descriptive translation studies, more attention is paid to the translators themselves, as their subjectivity, translation styles, and translation process are also important in the system of translation activities.

The paper adopts comprehensive research methods, balancing on the macro- and micro aspects of the *Zhouyi cantong qi*. In detail, the methods of literature research, comparison research, quantitative analysis, induction and deduction are applied. As for the quantitative analysis, the paper takes a corpus-based research method for comparison of four translated texts. The bilingual database now is established after collection and compilation of the linguistic data of those English translations of *Zhouyi cantong qi*. The database can be used to search for specific sentences and their translations by a comparison of 4 English versions at the same time; furthermore, it can provide evidence for the translation styles, variations, strategies about the target language through database software.

Table 1
Four English Translations of *Zhouyi Cantong Qi* and Linguistic Features

Translators	English title	The number of words	Average sentence length
Wu Luqiang (吴鲁强) & Tenney L. Davis)	<i>An Ancient Chinese Treatise on Alchemy Entitled Ts'an T'ung Ch'i</i> , 1932	10776	15.1
Zhou Shiyi (周一一)	<i>The Kinship of the Three, According to the Book of Changes</i> , 1988	11422	19.7
Richard Bertschinger	<i>The Secret of Everlasting life, The First Translation of the Ancient Chinese Text on Immortality</i> , 1994	9475	25.3
Fabrizio Pregadio	<i>The Seal of the Unity of the Three: A Study and Translation of the Cantong qi, the source of the Taoist Way of the Golden Elixir</i> , 2011	10334	20.3

It should be noted that, in the table above, Richard Bertschinger's English translation is quite different from the other three versions, because it adopts a different original Chinese text – the “Ancient Text” of *Zhouyi cantong qi*. Taking a close look, we may find that the arrangement of the original text differs, i.e. the ancient text basically rearranges the text according to the number of Chinese characters. The sections with four characters gathered and those with three or five characters formed together. From the format, it shows that the original source text might be written in different time and by not only one author.

As for specific Taoist terms, particularly those related with alchemy, different translators prefer to use different vocabularies. For example, the source text “河上姤女” (heshang chanü) is rendered differently by these translators. Shiyi Zhou (1988) uses “The chanü 姤女 (Elegant Girl)① by the riverside”, and its note here explains that “Elegant Girl is the personification of 离 三, mercury”, clearly indicating the use of metaphor in the source text. Yet, in Fabrizio Pregadio's version (2011), “Maid of the River (heshang chanü 河上姤女)” is adopted without note.

Likewise, Chinese term “黄芽” (huangya) is translated into “yellow shoot” for 3 times and “yellow sprout” for 1 time in Richard Bertschinger's (1994), and in Wu & Davis' (1932) translation into “yellow sprouts (*huang-ya*)”, both without note for further explanation of it, which is different from Shiyi Zhou's (1988) rendering and note “Yellow Sprout: lead, 坎 三”. From these minor differences, we could find some clues and dig deeper. It can be found that in Chinese translator Shiyi Zhou's English translation, the strategy of foreignization is used, as it may bring much extra information to the target reader either they are scholars or common readers. Indeed, with helpful information by the way of adding notes, the target language seems more reader-friendly.

Besides, those translations are also the productions of the time. Because of their academic background, as researchers on science, Wu & Davis firstly tried to introduce this text to western community from the perspective of chemistry and technology in the early of the 20th century. Similarly, in the late of the 20th century, people no matter in China or the West are more concerned about inner cultivation or “nourishing life”, and Qigong, etc. Therefore, scholars took another view at this text and rendered it into English from a quite different angle. Social norms are bounded with translation practices.

CONCLUSION

Zhouyi cantong qi is deemed widely as the earliest alchemical text in China, and it exerted such significant

influence on the development of Taoist doctrine on self-cultivation, meditation, and for the continuity of various Taoist lineage. It is important to understand the current research status overseas for references and for future improvement of domestic research and it is necessary and meaningful to deepen the research of the study of *Zhouyi cantong qi*. The paper lists the four English translations and other studies of *Zhouyi cantong qi* in a chronological way. These variations in the translation either in the way of rendering or in linguistic format and other features are closely related to both norms at that time and translators' subjectivity. To study the variations in the process of cross-cultural communication from the perspective of Medio-translatology is of great importance. As Shunqing Cao (2013, p.130) points out that “it is significantly valuable for people to study Variation in translated literature and particularly valuable to find out the deep reasons behind it.”

Therefore, by comparison and corpus-based data analyses, the paper describes the features, translation strategies, and cross-culture interaction, and draws a conclusion on the different cultural image of *Zhouyi cantong qi* from the eyes of both eastern and western communities. Finally, it is suggested that for better understanding the way and rule of international dialogue, it is necessary to strengthen West-East communication and conduct more researches on the translations of Chinese classic works, in order to promote better communication of Chinese classics and culture in the world.

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