

# A Study on the Peritext of Wing-tsit Chan's English Translation of *Chuan Xi Lu* from the Perspective of Thick Translation

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**Abstract:** Wing-tsit Chan's English translation of *Chuan Xi Lu* contains 18 peritexts, including the cover, author's name, title, title page, publication information, introduction, a portrait of Wang Yangming, a foreword by William Theodore de Bary, a preface by Wing-tsit Chan, the translator's notes, a glossary, an index, etc., highlighting its characteristics of thick translation. Based on Genette's theory of paratexts, this article examines the illustrations, prefaces, notes, and appendices of Wing-tsit Chan's English translation of *Chuan Xi Lu*, explores the path of thick translation by interpreting traditional Chinese concepts from a Chinese perspective, and also comments on the historical status and contemporary value of Chan's translation. It is found that Chan's translation adopts the thick translation strategy, reconstructs the image of Wang Yangming, and recreates the historical context of the source language through a large amount of peritexts, thus forming an effective paradigm for the translation and dissemination of Chinese philosophical texts.

**Keywords:** thick translation; Wing-tsit Chan; English translation of *Chuan Xi Lu*; peritext

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*Chuan Xi Lu* is the culmination of Confucious thought since the pre-Qin period in China, which was compiled by Wang Yangming's disciples based on his sayings and dialogues, covering the mature thoughts of Wang Yangming and almost all aspects of his philosophy of mind. It focuses on the core ideas of Wang's philosophy, such as “the mind is the principle”, “the extension of innate knowledge”, and “the unity of



knowledge and action”. To date, there are only two complete English translations of *Chuan Xi Lu*. The first is *The Philosophy of Wang Yangming*<sup>[1]</sup> (1916) by Frederick G. Henke, an American professor of philosophy and psychology, and a missionary, which pioneered the Western dissemination of *Chuan Xi Lu*. The second is *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming* (1963) by Wing-tsit Chan, a Chinese-American scholar known as the “pioneer of Confucian studies in North America”. Other translations by Léon Wiegier (1930), Julia Ching (1972), and Philip J. Ivanhoe (2009) focus on Wang Yangming’s letters and poems but do not include the main content of *Chuan Xi Lu* and are generally not considered complete translations. The current state of English translations and research on *Chuan Xi Lu* is far from prosperous, which is extremely disproportionate to its historical significance and the demand for translation.

At present, research on Wing-tsit Chan’s English translation mainly focuses on three aspects. First, evaluations and discussions of Chan’s translation, such as those by Conrad M. Schirokauer (1964), David S. Nivison (1964), Vincent Yu-chung Shih (1965), Liu Xianghui (2019), Liu Kongxi (2019), and Wu Wennan (2021), who highly praised the strengths of Chan’s translation. Second, the introduction and dissemination of Chan’s translation, as seen in the works of Larry Israel (2015, 2018), Wang Yu (2017), Xin Hongjuan and Fei Zhouying (2017, 2019), Cao Leiyu (2018), Liu Kongxi and Xu Mingwu (2018), Xu Saiying (2020), and Liu Kongxi (2022), who have sorted out the translation and dissemination of Chan’s work in the West. Third, comparative analyses of the two English translations of *Chuan Xi Lu*, such as those by David S. Nivison (1964), Li Chusheng (2012), Wang Yu (2018), Xin Hongjuan (2019), Fang Xian (2021), Yang Limiao and Wen Bing (2023), who have conducted comprehensive comparative studies of the translations by Henke and Chan from different perspectives. It is evident that research on Chan’s translation covers both macro-level studies on translation and dissemination, as well as micro-level studies on linguistic equivalence. These studies not only employ relevant theories for in-depth exploration but also conduct specific discussions from a practical level. However, apart from Zhao Huifang and Shi Chunrang (2023), who studied Chan’s English translation of *Chuan Xi Lu* from the perspective of paratexts, few scholars have conducted related research from this perspective. Based on Genette’s theory of paratexts, this article examines the illustrations, prefaces, notes, and appendices of Chan’s translation, explores the path of thick translation by interpreting traditional Chinese concepts from a Chinese perspective, reconstructs the image of Wang Yangming in the West, emphasizes the otherness of Chinese philosophical discourse, and fully analyzes the historical status and contemporary value of Chan’s translation.

## 1. Peritext: A New Approach to Thick Translation Research

### 1.1 Peritext

The term “peritext” was first introduced by the renowned French literary critic and narratologist Gérard Genette at the end of the 1970s. In his 1982 book *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré*, Genette defined peritext as the material immediately surrounding the text. In 1987, Genette published the French monograph *Seuils*, extending the concept of paratext to cover extratextual material as well. This book was translated into English as *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* in 1997, which detailed the types of paratexts, their positions

in the text, and their functions, proposing the formula  $\text{paratext} = \text{peritext} + \text{epitext}$ <sup>[2]5</sup>. Peritext mainly includes the cover, an author's name, a title, publication information, a preface, notes, appendices, afterword, illustrations, etc. These productions might be regarded as belonging to the text, surrounding and extending the text, precisely in order to present the text or to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world<sup>[2]1</sup>. In 1996, Finnish scholar Urpo Kovala emphasized the role of paratexts as part of the interpretive frame through which the reader approached and in fact comprehended the text, whether they immediately surrounded the text or appeared elsewhere, in the "hors-texte"<sup>[3]142</sup>. This pioneering research on translation paratexts made paratexts "an indispensable organic part of the translation and the main carrier of Sino-Western translation ideas"<sup>[4]106</sup>, offering a new perspective for translation studies.

## 1.2 Thick Translation

Drawing on Clifford Geertz's theory of "thick description", American cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah first proposed the concept of "thick translation", which sought "its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context"<sup>[5]817</sup>. In 2003, British translation theorist Theo Hermans applied thick translation to translation studies, arguing that "thick translation should be able to counter the flatness and reductiveness of the prevailing jargon of translation studies and their structuralist heritage, and foster instead a more diversified and imaginative vocabulary, thus flaunting the translator's subject position, counteracting the illusion of transparency or neutral description, and arming it with an explicit viewpoint"<sup>[6]386-387</sup>. In recent years, research on thick translation has grown, mainly focusing on two aspects: the relationship, types, functions, and significance between thick description and thick translation (Duan Feng, 2006; Zhao Yong, 2010; Wang Xueming & Yang Zi, 2012; Li Yan, 2014; Yin Yanchuan, 2017; Cai Ruizhen, 2022), and the exploration of theoretical models and translation strategies of thick translation (Zhang Peiyao, 2007; Zhang Yan & Hu Weiping, 2011; Wen Jun & Wang Bin, 2016; Xu Mingwu & Wang Yanmeng, 2017; Lin Jiaxin & Xu Kunpei, 2022). These perspectives elaborate on the connotation of thick translation from different angles and clearly point out that thick translation is an effective compensatory translation strategy. Through peritextual information such as illustrations, prefaces, notes, and appendices, thick translation avoids cultural misunderstandings, interprets cultural imagery, compensates for cultural omissions, and negotiates cultural untranslatability, thereby expanding the frontiers of translation studies.

## 2. The Paratextual Surroundings: An Examination of the Peritexts in Wing-tsit Chan's Translation of *Chuan Xi Lu*

Wing-tsit Chan's translation of *Chuan Xi Lu* was published by Columbia University Press in 1963, titled *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*. In addition to conventional elements such as the cover, author's name, title, title page, and publication information, its peritexts include a 23-page introduction, a portrait of Wang Yangming, a foreword by William Theodore de Bary, a preface by the translator, translator's notes, a glossary, an index, and other peritextual materials totaling 18 items and 88 pages, accounting for 21.89% of the entire book's 402 pages, with an additional 987 notes, making it a substantial translation.

### 2.1 Portrait: Reconstructing the Image of Wang Yangming Overseas

In addition to textual peritexts, there are also visual peritexts, which can be referred to as “iconotexts”, mainly including cover illustrations, illustrations, and photographs, whose function is to “supplement what the text cannot fully express”<sup>[7]32</sup>. Images not only directly point to the connotations of the main text but also extend beyond the entire text, effectively participating in the meaning generation and image construction of the main text. The first page of Chan’s translation features a portrait of Wang Yangming, labeled “WANG YANG-MING”, with an accompanying description: “MING DYNASTY PORTRAIT IN THE COLLECTION OF HUANG CHIEH (1874–1935): PHOTOGRAPH BY PROFESSOR KUSUMOTO MASATSUGU”. The attire depicted in the portrait reflects the Ming Dynasty’s dress code, encapsulates complex emotions of reconstruction and reverence, and provides a strong visual impact to the reader. Through delicate lines and brushwork, the portrait interprets and reconstructs the image of Wang Yangming as a sage who “engaged in politics, military affairs, and education, and established virtue, merit, and discourse”. It is a historical reenactment of Confucian sage worship. The boundary between the sacred and the secular becomes blurred with the integration of linguistic and visual symbols<sup>[8]156</sup>. Chan’s translation of *Chuan Xi Lu* sketches an overseas image of Wang Yangming that is constantly being mythologized. The visual presentation of the portrait corroborates the authenticity and historicity of the textual narration. The interplay between text and image stimulates the reader’s interest, guiding them to cross the threshold of Sino-Western cultural differences and forming an effective paradigm for the dissemination of Chinese philosophical texts.



WANG YANG-MING  
MING DYNASTY PORTRAIT IN THE COLLECTION  
OF HUANG CHIEH (1874-1935); PHOTOGRAPH BY  
PROFESSOR KUSUMOTO MASATSUGU

Picture 1 WANG YANG-MING

### 2.2 Preface: The Key to the Translator’s Inner World

Prefaces are generally located before the main text, highlighting the importance and novelty of the text while emphasizing its unity and authenticity<sup>[2]199–206</sup>. The prefaces in Wing-tsit Chan’s translation of *Chuan Xi Lu* are rich in content, including a foreword by William Theodore de Bary, the translator’s preface, translator’s notes, and an introduction, totaling 31 pages. De Bary’s foreword points out that “this volume containing the major

works of Wang Yangming is one of a group of publications, the Translations from the Oriental Classics, through which the Committee on Oriental Studies has sought to transmit to Western readers representative works of the Oriental traditions in thought and literature”<sup>[9]ix</sup>. It also clarifies that the book’s target audience is not only scholars but also general readers, highly praising Wang Yangming’s ideas on human morality, inner motivation, and the unity of knowledge and action in Japan, Korea, and China, and calling on Western readers to understand Wang Yangming through Chan’s faithful translation. As a renowned Western scholar of Chinese thought, especially in the field of Confucian studies, de Bary’s endorsement opens the door for Western readers to enter the mysterious Eastern philosophical hall of *Chuan Xi Lu*. In the translator’s preface, Wing-tsit Chan states that it “has been chosen for translation for the simple reason that no one can adequately understand Chinese thought without having read this work in its entirety”, and considers “this embodiment of Wang Yangming’s philosophy is indisputably the most important Chinese philosophical classic since the early thirteenth century”<sup>[9]xi</sup>. He briefly outlines the differences between the Lu-Wang school and the Cheng-Zhu school of Neo-Confucianism, emphasizing its significant impact on Chinese intellectuals and socio-political leaders. The translator’s notes introduce the Chinese manuscript used for translation, the translation strategy, and its differences from Henke’s translation. The 23-page introduction elaborates on the three stages of Wang Yangming’s philosophical development, the evolution of Neo-Confucianism, and its significance in the history of Chinese philosophical thought. It provides detailed explanations of the core ideas of Wang’s philosophy, such as “the mind is the principle”, “the extension of innate knowledge”, and “the unity of knowledge and action”, guiding readers to uncover the mysteries of Eastern philosophy and enter the culture of the other.

### 2.3 Notes: Reconstructing the Historical Context of the Source Text

In addition to reflecting the unique social realities, customs, institutions, and other aspects of a country, literary works also contain unique modes of expression, such as narrative styles, literary imagery, historical allusions, and aesthetic psychology. These implicit pieces of information shared between the author and readers of the source culture often become barriers to understanding for readers of the translated text when they enter a new cultural environment during cross-cultural dissemination, thus frequently requiring annotations for explanation<sup>[10]4-5</sup>. In Wing-tsit Chan’s translation of *Chuan Xi Lu*, thick translation is mainly presented through footnotes, totaling 987 notes. Currently, the academic community classifies notes based on different research objects and principles. For example, Wang Hui categorizes notes in English translations of the *Analects* into eleven types, such as proper nouns, chapter themes, and citation notes<sup>[11]40</sup>; Wang Xueming and Yang Zi classify notes in the English translation of *Selected Translations of Chinese Translation Discourse* into six types, namely proper nouns, background information, and intertextuality within the text<sup>[12]105</sup>; Zhou Lingshun and Qiang Hui classify notes in the English translation of the *Doctrine of the Mean* into five types, such as interpretative notes, directional notes, and questioning notes<sup>[13]106-107</sup>; Zhang Guangfa and Wen Jun classify notes in the English translation of *Zhuangzi* into six types, namely chapter themes, phonetic and semantic notes, and internal cross-reference<sup>[14]87</sup>; Cai Ruizhen classifies notes in the English translation of *Reflections on Things at Hand* into four types, namely citation sources, internal cross-reference, semantic explanations, and proper noun explanations<sup>[15]65</sup>. Combining research needs and the actual situation of the English translation of *Chuan Xi Lu*, this article categorizes notes into background information, proper nouns, internal cross-reference, and external

citations. Background information introduces relevant historical knowledge and sources to help readers understand the background; proper nouns explain terms such as names of people, places, books, and philosophical terms; internal cross-reference indicates the specific locations of the same content within the text; external citations explain quotations and specify their sources for easy reference by readers. The specific numbers are shown in the table below.

**Statistical Table of Notes in Chan's Translation of *Chuan Xi Lu***

| Types                                                                                         | Background Information | Proper Nouns | Internal Cross-reference | External Citations | Total |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------|-------|
| Introduction                                                                                  | 7                      | 1            | 55                       | 28                 | 91    |
| Part I: Conversations Recorded by Hsü Ai                                                      | 11                     | 9            | 1                        | 41                 | 62    |
| Part I: Conversations Recorded by Lu Ch'eng                                                   | 19                     | 12           | 7                        | 62                 | 100   |
| Part I: Conversations Recorded by Hsüeh K'an                                                  | 10                     | 14           | 14                       | 63                 | 101   |
| Part II: Preface by Ch'ien Te-hung                                                            | 6                      | 3            | 7                        | 0                  | 16    |
| Part II: Letter in Reply to Ku Tung-ch'iao                                                    | 20                     | 5            | 8                        | 66                 | 99    |
| Part II: Letter to Chou Tao-t'ung                                                             | 8                      | 3            | 2                        | 19                 | 32    |
| Part II: Letter in Reply to Lu Yüan-ching                                                     | 14                     | 6            | 6                        | 30                 | 56    |
| Part II: Letter in Reply to Ou-yang Ch'ung-i                                                  | 3                      | 1            | 5                        | 22                 | 31    |
| Part II: Letter in Reply to Vice-Minister Lo Cheng-an                                         | 2                      | 3            | 2                        | 13                 | 20    |
| Part II: Letter in Reply to Nieh Wen-Yü                                                       | 4                      | 3            | 1                        | 21                 | 29    |
| Part II: Another Letter in Reply to Nieh Wen-Yü                                               | 5                      | 1            | 4                        | 14                 | 24    |
| Part II: Instructions for Liu Po-sung and Others on Fundamental Ideas on Elementary Education | 0                      | 0            | 0                        | 1                  | 1     |
| Part III: Conversations Recorded by Ch'en Chiu-ch'uan                                         | 9                      | 6            | 6                        | 16                 | 37    |
| Part III: Conversations Recorded by Huang I-fang                                              | 2                      | 2            | 2                        | 12                 | 18    |
| Part III: Conversations Recorded by Huang Mien-shu                                            | 2                      | 2            | 1                        | 10                 | 15    |
| Part III: Conversations Recorded by Huang Mien-chih                                           | 25                     | 17           | 24                       | 50                 | 116   |
| Part III: Conversations Recorded by Huang I-fang                                              | 18                     | 10           | 14                       | 32                 | 74    |
| Part III: Preface to Chu Hsi's Final Conclusions Arrived at Late in Life                      | 4                      | 6            | 2                        | 1                  | 13    |
| Inquiry on the Great Learning                                                                 | 14                     | 0            | 2                        | 13                 | 29    |
| Some Social and Political Measures                                                            | 9                      | 6            | 1                        | 7                  | 23    |
| Total                                                                                         | 192                    | 110          | 164                      | 521                | 987   |
| Proportion                                                                                    | 19.45%                 | 11.14%       | 16.62%                   | 52.79%             | 100%  |

From the statistical data, it is evident that external citations account for the largest proportion, at 52.79%, indicating that Wing-tsit Chan placed great emphasis on academic norms, fully referenced sources, and indicated



their origins, “showing a tireless spirit of thoroughness: all names mentioned in the original texts are carefully identified as far as is possible; all original quotations are painstakingly checked and documented; expressions and phrases which must have been common in the literary and intellectual world at the time but are not so common now are traced to their source; and cross references with respect to important terms are given to show how they change in their conceptual content when used by different thinkers”<sup>[16]293</sup>. For example, in “Letter in Reply to Ku Tung-ch’iao”, terms such as “pure intelligence and consciousness (虛靈知覺)”, “the test of the mind (心之量)”, and “matters pertaining to the sage (聖人之事)”<sup>[9]95</sup> are mentioned. Chan used three notes to indicate that “pure intelligence and consciousness” is quoted from Chu Hsi’s Preface to the *Chung-yung chang-chü*, while “the test of the mind” and “matters pertaining to the sage” are from *Meng Tzu chi-chu*. Chan translated “父母全而生之, 子全而歸之” as “as parents give the son his body in its completeness and the son returns it in its completeness”, citing the source as the *Book of Rites – The Meaning of Sacrifices*, and provided James Legge’s translation for comparison<sup>[9]96–97</sup>. *Chuan Xi Lu* covers almost the entire theoretical system of the philosophy of mind, with innovative ideas, complex content, and numerous figures, hence the notes include 19.45% background information and 11.14% proper nouns. For example, for the names mentioned in the text, Chan provided detailed notes and information, situating the reader in the historical context. In the preface to Ch’ien Te-hung, nearly an entire page is devoted to introducing Ch’ien Te-hung’s journey from disbelief to firm belief in Wang Yangming, ultimately becoming a leading figure in Confucian philosophy of mind and further elaborating and developing the philosophy of mind. For other figures such as Hsüeh Shang-ch’ien, Ts’ai Hsi-yüan, Po-i, I-yin, Yang Shih-te, Ou-yang Ch’ung-i, Huang Ch’eng-fu, Liang Jih-fu, and Chi Wei-ch’ien, the translator also provided detailed notes on their lives. For historical figures who could not be verified, such as Te-chang and Fu-ying, were also annotated one by one, demonstrating the translator’s rigor.

In his article “*Fifty Years of Chinese Philosophy Abroad*”, Wing-tsit Chan summarized the principles of annotation-based translation into seven guidelines: First, to consult as many commentaries as possible; second, all terms must be explained; third, all sets like the Five Constant Virtues of Humanity, Righteousness, Propriety, Wisdom, and Faithfulness must be itemized; fourthly, all titles of books and articles must be translated; fifth, to identify or account for all places and persons; sixth, to trace all quotations; seventh, to make brief comments on certain significant passages to alert the reader of the significant role the passage has played in the history of Chinese philosophy<sup>[17]2–3</sup>. In his translation practice, Chan consistently adhered to these seven principles, striving to maintain consistency in the translation of all terms, verifying different semantic changes, and widely referring to works by Japanese scholars. For example, in Chan’s note of the phrase “empty, tranquil, and without any sign, and yet all things are luxuriantly present (沖漠無朕, 而萬象森然已具)” in “Conversations Recorded by Lu Ch’eng”, he referred to many Japanese scholars’ research, who asserted that this is of Buddhist origin but none has given any direct reference. Yamazaki Ansai listed all quotations of this saying and discussions on it by Neo-Confucians but did not say a word about its Buddhist origin in his essay. The *Daikanwa jiten*, the fullest dictionary of its kind so far, gives Ch’eng I, rather than any Buddhist, as its author. While Ōta Kinjō has pointed out that the second half of the sentence is virtually the same as that in the *Cheng-tao ko* by Zen Master Chen-chiao of Yung-chia.<sup>[9]27</sup> A similar situation was encountered in the rendering of a subsequent phrase “everyone will become self-contained and everyone will be perfectly realized (人人自有, 個個圓成)”<sup>[9]68</sup> in “Conversations Recorded by Hsüeh K’an”. In Chan’s translation, a note of nearly 300 words



was used to trace its origin in detail, stating Miwa Shissai said that the saying is by Bodhidharma and comes from the *Liu-men chi*. Other Japanese annotators have followed him. But Chan also referred to different opinions from scholars such as Azuma Keiji and D. T. Suzuki, and verified works such as *Denshū roku kōgi*, *Ch'u-shih Fan-ch'i Ch'an-shih yü-lu* and *Zokuzōkyō*. The translator's intellectual rigor is clearly evidenced here. Such a comprehensive annotation-based translation method and seven translation principles fully demonstrate Wing-tsit Chan's thick translation concept, which is steeped in both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions. This study has reconstructed a distinctive image of Wang Yangming and, in doing so, shaped his multifaceted overseas persona.

#### **2.4 Appendices: An Effective Means of Supplementary Information**

The appendices in Chan's translation consist of four parts, effectively supplementing the insufficiencies of the main text and footnotes over 48 pages, facilitating readers' reading and verification, and reflecting the translator's painstaking efforts. Appendix I, "Bibliographical and Historical Notes on *Chuan Xi Lu*", meticulously lists relevant documents on Wang Yangming, such as Wang Chang-chih's *The Moral Philosophy of Wang Yang-ming*, Henke's *The Philosophy of Wang Yang-ming*, and Fung Yu-lan's *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, forming a systematic knowledge network of Yangming studies and providing Western readers with a documentary foundation to approach Wang Yangming. Appendix II, "A Checklist of Chinese and Japanese Works", details 154 works by title, along with cross-references and version information, constructing a three-dimensional and systematic framework for Yangming studies for Western readers from a diachronic perspective. Appendix III, "Glossary", alphabetically arranges the philosophical terms and key vocabulary mentioned in the text, matching the Wade-Giles romanization with Chinese calligraphy, allowing readers to quickly locate key terms while showcasing the unique beauty of Chinese calligraphy. Appendix IV, "Index", systematically organizes important words and phrases in the text, along with their corresponding page numbers in the translation, providing detailed guidance for readers to easily locate information.

### **3. Using Chinese Traditions to Interpret China: The Path to Thick Translation of *Chuan Xi Lu***

#### **3.1 Harmony in Diversity: From "Absence" to "Voice"**

For a long time, the Western philosophical community has "ignored" Chinese philosophy, with the concept of "using Western frameworks to interpret China" deeply rooted in the dissemination of Chinese philosophical texts. This has led to the "absence" of Chinese philosophy, which is not commensurate with the current national strength. The existence of this "absence" is mainly due to the insufficient construction or imperfection of the Chinese philosophical discourse system. For Chinese philosophy to truly "find a voice", an important prerequisite is that ancient Chinese discourse must be communicable and commensurable<sup>[18]22</sup>. The correct English terms should not only express the Chinese concepts in a specific text but also be applicable throughout the history of Chinese thought, although sometimes alternative translations are inevitable<sup>[19]52</sup>. Chinese and Western philosophies belong to different categories, with distinct logics and structures. The unique history and cultural



background of China have given rise to its own philosophy, and the commonly used philosophical terms in Western philosophy cannot accurately express the special connotations of Chinese philosophy<sup>[20]85</sup>. Therefore, Chinese philosophy must sort out its intellectual lineage, philosophical framework, and modes of expression, thereby elucidating its legitimacy, richness, and uniqueness.

To this end, in the translation of *Chuan Xi Lu*, Wing-tsit Chan consciously avoided using Western philosophical concepts to interpret Chinese philosophy. Instead, he persisted in exploring the unique characteristics of Chinese philosophical concepts, situating the translation within the dynamic and diachronic development of Chinese philosophy. He narrated Chinese philosophy using its own discourse, providing an associative description from both theoretical and doctrinal perspectives. Through the thick translation strategy of “paraphrase + transliteration + annotation”, he highlighted the unique charm and contemporary value of Chinese philosophical terms. The following are two examples:

**[Source Text]** 見其牝牡驪黃,而棄其所謂千里者。(From *Conversations Recorded by Hsü Ai* in *Chuan Xi Lu*)

**[Target Text]** Seeing, as it were, only the sex and color of the horse while overlooking its capacity of a thousand li.<sup>9 [9]5</sup>

<sup>9</sup> A *li* is about one third of a mile. The story about the horse is found in the *Huai-nan Tzu*, 12: 9a-b. According to the account there, Duke Mu (r. 659–621 B. C. ) of Ch’in, on the recommendation of his minister, sent an expert in search of a steed. After three months the expert returned, saying that he had found a yellow male. When the horse came, it proved to be a black female. The duke was displeased and asked his minister about it. The minister replied, “What the expert saw was the secret of Nature. He grasped the essential factor and ignored the coarse element.” The horse proved to be a horse of a thousand *li*. See Evan Morgan, trans. , *Tao, the Great Luminant* (Shanghai, Kelly and Walsh, 1934), p. 119.

Here, the allusion to the story of 牝牡驪黃 (Looking Beyond the Horse’s Color and Sex) from the *Liezi – Shuofu* is directly translated in the main text. However, in the footnote, the Chinese unit of measurement “*li*” is separately explained, along with the underlying implication of the story, that is, one should not only look at the surface but also see through the phenomenon to grasp the essence. It also indicates that the reference is from Evan Morgan’s translation of the *Huai-nan Tzu*, enhancing the interactive relationship of mutual construction, supplementation, and amplification between the main text and the notes, guiding readers to obtain more detailed cultural information.

**[Source Text]** 天子之學曰辟雍, 諸侯之學曰泮宮。(From *Letter in Reply to Ku Tung-ch’iao* in *Chuan Xi Lu*)

**[Target Text]** The national university at the national capital was called pi-yung (literally “surrounded jade”).<sup>78</sup> The college of feudal lords was called p’an-kung (literally “half palace”).<sup>79 [9]115</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Alluding to a building surrounded by a moat.

<sup>79</sup> Only one side was surrounded by water.



“Pi-yung” and “p’an-kung” are both ancient Chinese institutions of higher learning with distinct cultural characteristics. Based on transliteration, Wing-tsit Chan added the literal meaning of the characters in parentheses and further explained their connotations in the notes. While enhancing the interaction between the main text and the paratext, he preserved the authenticity of Chinese traditional culture and allowed readers to experience the profound and enduring nature of Chinese culture. Other examples include translating “良知” as “innate knowledge of good (*liang-chih*)”, “格” as “rectify (*ko*)”, “格物” as “investigation of things (*ko-wu*)”, “親民” as “loving the people (*ch’in-min*)”, “新民” as “renovating the people (*hsin-min*)”, “禮” as “meaning propriety, ceremonies (*li*)”, “理” as “meaning principle (*li*)”, “正” as “rectify (*cheng*)”, “事” as “event (*shih*)”, “文” as “literature (*wen*)”, “精” as “refinement (*ching*)”, “一貫” as “one thread (*i-kuan*)”, “敬” as “seriousness (*ching*)”, and so on.

“The White Deer’s torch, a master of our time; in bringing Chinese wisdom West, his feat remains unparalleled.”<sup>[21]138</sup> He neither wanted Chinese philosophical thought to be misunderstood by Western ways of thinking nor did he advocate that Chinese philosophy is superior to Western philosophy. Instead, he relied on the introduction of commonalities to emphasize the differences between the two heterogeneous cultures in comparison, encouraging Western readers to willingly and actively begin to understand and appreciate Chinese culture, laying the foundation for the acceptance and recognition of Chinese culture<sup>[22]168</sup>. In the context of the integration and collision of ancient and modern, Chinese and Western cultures, some translators’ attempts to explain ancient Chinese philosophy through Western learning are not without merit. However, Wing-tsit Chan broke the mold of “using Western frameworks to interpret China” through a wealth of paratextual information. His translation, steeped in Chinese culture, allowed Chinese philosophy to speak with a Chinese voice. He consciously disseminated Chinese philosophical discourse to the Western philosophical community, seeking an effective path of harmony in diversity and integration of Chinese and Western cultures through his voluminous works. The transition of the Chinese philosophical discourse system from “absence” to “voice” is a process of mutual integration between other cultures and philosophical commonalities. Grounded in the wisdom of Chinese philosophy, it situates Chinese philosophical texts within the global historical context, meeting the global demand for the translation and dissemination of Chinese philosophical texts.

### 3.2 *Civilizational Exchange: From “Marginality” to “Integration”*

With the resurgence of classical Chinese studies and growing interest in Confucianism, the sense of identification with Chinese traditional culture has continuously strengthened, and the collision between Chinese and Western heterogeneous thoughts has intensified. Some translators have begun to actively explore using Chinese traditions to interpret China. The thick translation strategy, which carries rich paratextual information, makes the long-invisible textual phenomena visible. It inspires Chinese philosophy to discard the shackles of Western philosophical discourse in the process of going global, to interpret Chinese philosophy using its own discourse system, and to interpret Chinese philosophy from a Chinese standpoint, allowing Chinese philosophy to speak in its own language. Chinese and Western philosophies, as the outcomes of different civilizational traditions, constitute the intellectual resources for contemporary philosophical thinking and are also important intellectual backgrounds for deeply elucidating their respective traditions. The advocacy of “using Chinese traditions to interpret China” reflects a trend in intellectual thinking<sup>[23]37</sup>. Wing-tsit Chan always advocated and

implemented the concept of “using Chinese traditions to interpret China”. In the translation process, he almost entirely remained faithful to the question-and-answer format of *Chuan Xi Lu*. According to the author’s statistics, “the Teacher said” appears 339 times in the text, with 42 instances added by the translator. “I asked” appears 86 times, “I said” appears 84 times, and “your letter says” appears 41 times. The high-frequency words “said” and “asked” appear 797 and 180 times respectively. With his profound philosophical background and unique linguistic advantages, Chan effectively elucidated the connotations of the core concepts of Wang’s philosophy of mind, such as “the mind is the principle”, “the extension of innate knowledge”, and “the unity of knowledge and action”. The Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties’ “心即理(the mind is the principle)” differs from the Cheng-Zhu school’s “性即理(the nature is the principle)”. After Wang Yangming’s enlightenment at Longchang, he realized that all heavenly principles originate from within the mind and do not need to be sought externally. Chan translated “心” as “mind”, emphasizing the rational meaning of the brain, and “理” as “the principles of things”, focusing on the principles and reasons of things. “致良知(the extension of innate knowledge)” is the essence of Wang Yangming’s philosophy of mind and its main theme. “致知” means to realize the innate knowledge within the mind, that is, the moral essence. “致良知” means to apply this innate knowledge to all things and actions, bringing the innate knowledge to its fullest extent and achieving the unity of knowledge and action. Chan translated “良知” as “innate knowledge” and “致良知” as “the extension of innate knowledge”, focusing more on epistemology and lacking an interpretation of ontology. He did not express the concept of the unity of knowledge and action in the dynamic process of “extension”, and translating it as “to realize” might be more appropriate. Wang Yangming’s “知行合一(the unity of knowledge and action)” is not a general relationship between cognition and practice. “知” refers to perception, not knowledge in the sense of information. “知” is the inner knowledge, and “行” is the inner action. Chan translated “知行合一” as “the unity of knowledge and action”, which resonates with “the mind is the principle” and “the extension of innate knowledge”. It is worth noting that for many Chinese classical works mentioned in the book, Chan used transliteration with notes to preserve Chinese cultural elements as much as possible. For example, *Lü-lü hsin-shu* (New book on pitch pipes) is translated with a footnote explaining that the book is an ancient Chinese document on musicology, authored by Ts’ai Yuan-ting, with Chu Hsi offering much praise for Ts’ai Yuan-ting and his *Lü-lü hsin-shu*. However, according to the *Ssu-k’u ch’üan-shu tsung-mu t’i-yao*, Volume 38, Chu Hsi may have been involved in its co-authorship. Other works such as *Lien-shan* (Mountain range), *Kuei-ts’ang* (Reservoir), *Chiu-ch’iu* (Nine mounts), *Pa-su* (Eight inquiries), and *Tso chuan* (Tso’s commentary) are all translated using a thick translation strategy to preserve the cultural characteristics of the source language as much as possible.

The exchange between Chinese and Western civilizations has a long history. However, “the mainstream philosophical tradition in the West stands profoundly unmoved by the prospect of incorporating Chinese philosophy”<sup>[24]12</sup>. Chinese philosophy has long been on the periphery of world philosophy. In her 2001 report, Professor Jiang Xinyan, Chairman of the Asian Committee of the American Philosophical Association, pointed out that although there is still a long way to go for Asian philosophy to be widely accepted and respected in American universities, Asian philosophy is no longer as marginalized as it used to be<sup>[25]108</sup>. More than 20 years have passed, and in the process of modernization, phenomena of seeking profit and avoiding harm, as well as competing for power and profit, have filled society with competition and distrust. In contrast, Chinese philosophical wisdom interprets a new way of dealing with the world, that is, emphasizing the inherent goodness



of human nature and promoting a heart of benevolence, allowing great ideas such as morality and rationality to be coordinated and extended. Represented by *Chuan Xi Lu*, Chinese philosophical wisdom is rich in ideological connotations and life philosophies. It is not only a translation or a knowledge system but also a guide for real life. Through internal shaping and supplementation, it perceives the objective existence of things, senses one's own value, and how to coexist equally with others and the world. Only by being rooted in Chinese traditional culture can we preserve the linguistic characteristics and cultural connotations of the Chinese language as much as possible, "making the Western academic community realize the profound connotations of Chinese philosophy, allowing Chinese philosophical texts to exert a global influence, and promoting mutual dialogue and communication between Chinese and Western civilizations"<sup>[26][87]</sup>. In today's globalized context, dialogue between Chinese and Western civilizations is becoming increasingly close, and Chinese philosophy can provide more Chinese propositions and wisdom for the exchange and cooperation of global culture and philosophy.

#### 4. Conclusion

As an important carrier of Wang Yangming's philosophy of mind, *Chuan Xi Lu* plays a significant role in the dissemination of Chinese philosophy to the West and in the mutual learning between Chinese and Western civilizations. Wing-tsit Chan's humble and profound translation ethics, his comprehensive understanding of both Chinese and Western cultures, his extensive knowledge of ancient and modern times, his annotation-based translation style, and his pursuit of the origins of translation have made significant contributions to the dissemination and popularization of Wang Yangming's philosophy in the West. The power of translation is truly far-reaching. Through the translation and dissemination of Wing-tsit Chan's English version of *Chuan Xi Lu* over the past six decades, Wang Yangming's philosophy has been widely spread worldwide, promoting cultural exchange and integration between different cultures. It has enabled the Western philosophical community to better understand the profound connotations and cultural depth of Chinese philosophy and has provided an opportunity for mutual learning and dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophical cultures. At the same time, the diversified prosperity and development of *Chuan Xi Lu* in the Western academic community have provided strong theoretical support for telling Chinese stories well and gathering Chinese strength. They have also contributed Chinese propositions and wisdom to the development and progress of world philosophy.

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