On the Translation of *Mencius*¹

Hongqin Ji²

School of Foreign Languages, Changsha University of Science & Technology

**Abstract.** *Mencius* is a very important Chinese classic; its translation has come through three stages: the early stage, the rapid development stage and the new era. Each stage has its own features both in translators and translations. The first stage is the enlightenment stage for *Mencius* translation, the second stage and the third stage bring not only rich translated versions of *Mencius* but also great amount of translator both at home and abroad to participate the huge work. A diachronic summary of *Mencius* translations and their translator is important and significant, which will greatly help readers and researchers know *Mencius* translation in history and at present.

**Key Words:** *Mencius*, translation, foreign translators, Chinese translator, stage

1. Introduction

*Mencius* is one of the greatest Confucian classics among “The Four Books”, which collects much essence of Chinese traditional culture. The translation of *Mencius* is relatively late among “The Four Books”, but as a masterpiece of Chinese philosophy and literature, *Mencius* has been translated into various languages, however, its translation hasn’t been systemically summed up by translators and researchers. This thesis aims to give a comprehensive, systemic and critical summary of *Mencius* translations by providing researchers and readers a diachronic clue for *Mencius* translation.⁴

2. The Early Translation of *Mencius*

According to Zhang Xiping(2009), Ma Zuyi & Ren Rongzhen(2003), *Mencius* translation started from the late 16th century, the time from the 16th to the 19th century is usually regarded as the early stage for *Mencius* translation. The earliest translated version of *Mencius* handed down doesn’t come from the 16th but from the 19th century, so the 19th century is regarded as the real enlightenment stage for *Mencius* translation, during which not many translations come out, but there’s no lack of outstanding translations, such as the masterpiece translated by James Legge.


Classic *Mencius* translations in this stage attract scholars and advanced readers a lot, but translations in this stage primarily pursue faithfulness to SLT, so obscure language is widely used by translators in this stage, especially in James Legge’s translation (Nivison, 1980:95), which makes it hard for general readers to understand and for modern readers to accept. But the groundbreaking work done by translators in this stage is creative and meaningful for later *Mencius* translation.

3. Rapid Development of *Mencius* Translation

---

1 This research is supported by the “national social science fund of China” (No. 12CGJ020)
2 JI Hongqin, Tel.: 13687300073, +86-731-88654958.
   E-mail address: jessie7998@126.com
3 Due to limited space, we only discuss English translations of *Mencius* in this paper.

Mencius translation has experienced rapid development in the 20th century (Jiang Xin, 2009: 58), many more translators devote themselves to the work. Foreign translators are no longer the main members of Mencius translation, more and more Chinese translators come to join the team of Mencius translation.

3.1. Mencius Translations by Foreign Translators

During these one hundred years, Mencius translations by foreign translators mainly include:


3.2. Mencius Translations by Chinese Translators at Home and Abroad

Mencius translations by Chinese translators in these one hundred years mainly include:

Confucius and Mencius translated by Wu Tingfang; The Four Books: Confucian Classics translated and edited by Lin Zheng; The Sacred Books of Confucius, and Other Confucian Classics translated by Chu Cai and Winberg Cai; Selections from Four Books Translated translated and edited by Qian Shiwei and William Ho; Mencius translated by Dim Cheuk Lau; The Sayings of Mencius translated and edited by Shi Junchao; Stories from Mencius translated and edited by Li Weixiong etc.; The Sayings of Mencius: Wisdom in a Chaotic Era translated by Mary Ng En Tzu and edited by Tsai Chih Chung; A Collection of Mencius’ Sayings translated by Li Tianchen and Liu Shisheng; Mencius Says translated and edited by D. C. Lau and precluded by Martin Lu; The Life of Mencius translated by Zhang Zengzhi; A Collection of Mottos on Life from Confucius and Mencius with Modern Chinese and English Translations translated by Li Zongjun; Sayings of Confucius and Mencius: A Chinese-English Bilingual Textbook translated and edited by Li Tianchen; Source of the Confucian Tradition: The Five Classics and the Four Books translated by Lao Guangxu and Ding Jun; Mencius translated by He Zuokang and Cai Xiqin.

During the 20th century, translators begin to seek new ways to translate Mencius, and they also begin to translate for readers of different levels, there are even translations for kids. Besides full translation method, variable translation methods are also widely used; some translators start to translate with rearrangement, deletion, etc. some even add their own thoughts, ideas and comments to their translation, so translations of Mencius in this stage become rich and diverse. Besides, some Mencius translators begin to seek cooperation with other translators or researchers, as a result, many translations are the cooperative achievement of two or more translators.

In this stage, Chinese translators begin to join Mencius translation, and they play pioneer roles in Mencius translation for Chinese translators. Among them, translators from Taiwan, Hongkong and abroad have played leading roles in the early years.
4. The New Era of Mencius Translation

When it comes to the 21st century, Mencius translation steps into a new era, during which many new translators, especially Chinese translators, come to engage in Mencius translation, which brings great prosperity to Mencius translation.

4.1. Mencius Translations by Foreign Translators

Mencius translations by foreign translators during these one hundred years mainly include:


4.2. Mencius Translations by Chinese Translators at Home and Abroad

Mencius translations by Chinese translators during these hundred years mainly include:

- Mencius translated by Zhao Zhentao etc.; The Story of Mencius translated and edited by Cao Yaode etc.; Sayings from Confucius, Mencius, Laozi and Zhuangzi translated and edited by Li Zhilin and Pan Lili; The Life and Wisdom of Mencius translated by Yu Ling and edited by Cai Xiqin; Quotations from Mencius translated by He Zuokang and edited by Cai Xiqin; Mencius Speaks: The Cure for Chaos translated by Brian Bruya and edited by Cai Zhizhong; A Selected Collection of Mencius translated by He Zuokang and edited by Cai Xiqin; Mencius Says translated by Yu Ling and He Zuokang, edited by Cai Xiqin; The Quotation by Mencius: a Chinese-English Bilingual Book translated by Li Yasi and edited by Jin Peilin; An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy: from ancient philosophy to Chinese Buddhism translated by JeeLoo Liu; Aphorisms from MENGZI translated by Li Yuliang etc.; Quotations by Mencius translated by Li Yasi and edited by Jin Peilin; Mencius: A Benevolent Saint for the Ages translated by Han Jia and Wang Guozhen, and edited by Xu Yuanxiang; Quotations from Mencius translated and edited by Wang Tianxing and He Dawei; Mencius translated and edited by Wu Wenzhang; Confucian Wisdom for the 21st Century: a selected rendition translated and written by Shiu Loon Kong; Mencius translated by David B. Honey; Wisdom of Mencius translated and edited by Wang Xiaowei etc.; Quotations from Mencius translated by Guan Xiaoxia.

Mencius translations no longer take academic researchers or advanced readers as their main TLR (target language readers), but turn to general readers. Versions for different levels of readers have come largely out. Modern language, pictures, rearrangement, etc are widely used in translations, which makes Mencius translations more readable. Besides, translators’ critical thinking is also put into translations, which would greatly help readers grasp the essence, key ideas, culture and philosophical thoughts implied in Mencius.

5. Conclusion

The TLR of Mencius are dynamic as time goes on, readers’ background, knowledge, aims, etc. are different, and the translation of Mencius shall never be stopped. There is no right or wrong Mencius translation, but better translation to convey ideas in Mencius exactly to TLR with the way readers can accept and easily understand. Mencius translation attracts more people’s attention to Chinese classics, sinology and translation itself, and let more people better understand Chinese Confucian culture.

6. References