

Study on the English Translation of *Yue Jueshu*

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Abstract: *Yue Jueshu* is an important historical book tracing back to the source of *Yue* culture, has been much studied on its title, author, edition, historical value and so on, but less attention has been paid to its English translation. Starting with the significance of *Yue Jueshu* as a historical book to Western scholars, this paper attempts to make a study on the English translation of *Yue Jueshu* from textual research on the edition, the characteristics of translation, and the interpretation of annotation.

Keywords: *Yue Jueshu*; English translation; Textual research on edition; Characteristics of translation; Annotation

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1. Introduction

Yue Jueshu is a historical book reflecting the political, economic, military and cultural aspects of the Yangtze River Delta during the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period^[1]. There is much research on it in China, mainly focusing on its title, author, edition, historical value and so on. Chen Qianyi (1979) pointed out that *Yue Jueshu* is an anthology of ancient documents about *Wu* and *Yue*, which has been compiled and supplemented by the people in the early Eastern Han dynasty^[2]. “*Yue Jueshu* is a valuable historical document of China because of its long history and rich contents,” he said^[3]. Xu Qitang (1991) said that “*Yue Jueshu* is the most abundant and authoritative work in the history of *Wu* and *Yue* recorded in China”^[4]. He Shuangfei (2008) said “*Yue Jueshu* not only reflects the political, economic and social customs of the ancient *Wu* and *Yue* during Qin and Han dynasties, but also is an ancient historical document of China, and creates a model for the emergence of a large number of local records in our country”^[5].

2. Significance of *Yue Jueshu* as a historical book to Western scholars

Western scholars are interested in *Yue Jueshu*, not only because it is one of the oldest documents to study *Yue* culture, but they also believe that the earliest records of *Yue* culture are from the “Han people” in Central Plain, while *Yue Jueshu* can record *Yue* history from the perspective of *Yue* people and embody the voice of *Yue* people. Olivia Milburn, a scholar who translated *Yue Jueshu*, said she had not thought of translating *Yue Jueshu* before, but while studying *Wuyue* culture, she realized that because she did not know enough about the contents

and history of the book, the research process has been hampered. Despite the difficulties in understanding the text, the translation of *Yue Jueshu* promotes the study of ancient *Yue* culture in China, in which many Western scholars are interested, including Eric Brindly (2003, 2015) ^[6,7], Olivia Milburn (2008, 2010) ^[8-10], Heather Peters (1990) ^[11], Eric Henry (2007, 2011) ^[12,13], Peter Bellwood (1995, 2006) ^[14,15], and so on.

The translator thinks that the historical value of the book was constantly devalued because the editors at that time regarded it as a limited compilation of local history and even classified it as a local chronicles, which led to the later scholars not fully aware of the importance of the book. The events described in the course of the *Yue Jueshu* changed the balance of power in late Zhou dynasty China, a matter of some significance for the later history of East Asia.

3. Textual research on the edition

The translator exerts great importance on the time of each chapter in *Yue Jueshu*, but because of the complexity, she uses three tables to classify the text from different angles, ages and types. Through this classification and analysis, the complexity of the origin of this ancient book is demonstrated.

Table 1. Classification according to type of text

	Canonical Texts	Traditions
Inner Chapters	“Young Master of Accountancy” (5), “Nine Methods” (14)	“Ping of Chu” (2), “Men of Wu” (4), “Asking for Food Aid” (6), and “Chen Cheng Heng” (9).
Outer Chapters		“Basic Matters” (1), “Record of the Lands of Wu” (3), “Stratagems for the Age” (7), “Record of Fanbo” (8), “Record of the Lands of Yue” (10), “Outer Traditions of the Young Master of Accountancy” (11), “Record of the Divination of the King of Wu’s Dream” (12), “Record of Precious Swords” (13), “Record of Military Auras” (15), “Pillow Book” (16), “Lord Chunshen” (17), “Narratives of Virtue” (18), “Concluding Remarks” (19).

Table 2. Classification according to the origin of the text

	Wu	Yue
<i>Yuejue shu</i> chapter	“Ping of Chu” (2), “Record of the Lands of Wu” (3), “Men of Wu” (4), “Asking for Food Aid” (6), “Stratagems for the Age” (7), “Record of the Divination of the King of Wu’s Dream” (12), “Lord Chunshen” (17).	“Young Master of Accountancy” (5), “Record of Fanbo” (8), “Record of the Lands of Yue” (10), “Outer Traditions of the Young Master of Accountancy” (11), “Record of Precious Swords” (13), “Nine Methods” (14), “Pillow Book” (16).

Table 3. Classification according to time of text

Chapters of <i>Yue Jueshu</i>	
Warring States	“Men of Wu” (4), “Young Master of Accountancy” (5), “Asking for Food Aid” (6), “Stratagems for the Age” (7), “Record of Fanbo” (8), “Outer Traditions of the Young Master of Accountancy” (11), “Record of Precious Swords” (13), “Nine Methods” (14), “Lord Chunshen” (17), “Narratives of Virtue” (18).
Qin	“Ping of Chu” (2), “Chen Cheng Heng” (9), “Record of the Divination of the King of Wu’s Dream” (12), and “Pillow Book” (16).
Western Han	“Record of Precious Swords” (13), “Record of Military Auras” (15).
Xin	“Chen Cheng Heng” (9).
Eastern Han	“Basic Matters” (1), “Record of the Lands of Wu” (3), “Records of the Lands of Yue” (10), “Narratives of Virtue” (18), and “Concluding Remarks” (19).

4. Characteristics of translation

On the whole, the translation is faithful to the style of the original version, so it has the characteristics of a literal translation. For the sake of grammar or readability, words are added in English indicated by the author in using []. For example:

一说盖是子胥所作也。夫人情，泰而不作，穷则怨恨，怨恨则作，犹诗人失职怨恨，忧嗟作诗也。^[8]

Some say that this book was written by Wu Zixu. In times of peace, people don't write books, that is common sense. In difficult circumstances people get angry, and when they get angry they write about it, in somewhat the same way as the poet [Qu Yuan] was furious when he lost his official position, and channeled his resentment into writing verse.

“犹诗人失职怨恨” has been translated into “in somewhat the same way as the poet [Qu Yuan] was furious when he lost his official position,” “Qu Yuan” has been added, which is easier for Western readers to understand. What's more, it is more vivid and intuitive to understand who the poet refers to, increasing the readability of English.

This kind of translation style is conducive to scholars considering translation as a faithful historical document for textual research and use. But it is difficult for Western people to understand, for the translation contains a lot of historical allusions, that's why the translator inserted a lot of notes, which can be understood as a Western interpretation of the original text by Westerners.

5. Interpretation of annotation

Nearly one-third of the translation is the translator's notes. This is not only the translator's introduction to the background knowledge of the target text but also reflects the interpretation of Western scholars. Still using Qu Yuan's example, a comment is inserted after the sentence.

Although the text leaves this poet anonymous, this must be a reference to Qu Yuan, who according to the *Shiji*, 84: 2485–2490, composed the poem “Huaisha” (Embracing the Sands) expressing his resentment at being dismissed by King Qingxiang of Chu (r. 298–263bce), who had sent Qu Yuan into exile because he had been framed by a letter and then drowned himself in a river, committed suicide. According to this note, readers have a deep understanding of this historical background and understand the reason why the poet must refer to Qu Yuan. This can be said to be one kind of annotation, that is, through the interpretation, the translator explains why she translates in this way.

Another kind of annotation is to introduce the background knowledge. The translator introduces the historical background of *Yue Jueshu*:

The paucity of records for *Yue* after the conquest of *Wu* in 473 bce only serves to emphasize the importance of King Goujian, the greatest monarch of that kingdom, and a man who would prove crucial in creating a *Yue* identity for subsequent generations.

There is an interpretation of King Goujian: King Goujian has continued to play an important role in the creation of a local identity for people from Zhejiang province and as a model for how to overcome adversity to the present day. Modern interpretations of the story of King Goujian are the subject of the most recent work by Paul A. Cohen, *Speaking to History: The Story of King Goujian in Twentieth-century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). His book, however, ignores one of the most interesting aspects of current popular representations of King Goujian, in that he is now consistently depicted in Zhou costume, and hence as a figure from “Chinese” history, rather than as a tattooed, short-haired member of one of the Bai Yue peoples.

Through such a background knowledge introduction, Westerners have a deeper understanding of a very important character of King Goujian of Yue while reading *Yue Jueshu*. The notes also mention other reading materials and further reading will help readers to gain a better understanding of the character.

Another kind of annotation illustrates the translator's views, for example:

问曰：“何谓魂魄？”对曰：“魂者，橐也；魄者，生气之源也。故神生者，出入无门，上下无根，见所而功自存，故名之曰神。”^[8]

[The king of Yue] asked him: “What do you mean by *hun* and *po* souls?” He replied: “The *hun* soul is the container, while the *po* soul is the source that gives rise to life force. The spirit is then born, and it comes and goes without needing a door, it rises and falls without a settled state, it sees everything, and naturally achieves its successes. That is why it is called spirit.”

There's an interpretation of *hun* and *po*: In my view, three characters are missing from this sentence. In the transmitted text, it reads *hun zhe, tuo ye, po zhe, sheng qi zhi yuan ye* (The *hun* soul is the container, while the *po* soul is the source that gives rise to life force). From analogy with the following sentence, the descriptive clause for the *hun* soul is incomplete. Unfortunately, it seems impossible to reconstitute the missing characters, since there is no related passage in any surviving ancient text.

6. Conclusion

The study on the English translation of *Yue Jueshu* is just the beginning, so more scholars interested in it must join in the study in the future, jointly exploring the translation of the classics related to Yue culture and promoting the revival of traditional culture.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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