

Exploring Transculturality in the Paratextual Mediation of *Li* (礼) : A Case Study of *Lunyu* Translation by Chinese Diasporas

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Abstract: Translation is not a simplified activity of transferring meaning from one language or culture to another, but rather a dynamic process and outcome arising from the interaction between two languages and cultures. At its core lies cultural mediation. In the current context of cultural globalization, translators with diasporic experiences often utilize para texts to actively connect two cultures, mediate cultural differences, and reposition the way target-language readers comprehend the source text. Through this process, their translations exhibit transcultural characteristics. Combining theories of transculturality and mediation, this study adopts a mixed-method approach—integrating quantitative analysis (word frequency, semantic network analysis, and contextual analysis) with qualitative methods—to examine how two contemporary diasporic Chinese translators, Annping Chin and Peimin Ni, employ paratexts (prefaces, introductions, and annotations) to reconstruct the Confucian concept of *li* (礼) in their respective translations of *The Analects*. The study reveals that both translators elevate the significance of *li* in their translations. Compared to their Western Sinologist counterparts of the same period, diasporic Chinese translators place greater emphasis on interpreting *li* from an intrinsic perspective, highlighting its inward values. This paratextual mediation underscores a hybrid transcultural translation strategy in which diasporic translators pursue pragmatic objectives while emphasizing the ontological significance of *li*.

Keywords: Transculturality; Paratexts; Mediation; Diaspora; Translation of *li*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since Joshua Marshman published the first direct English translation of *The Analects* (*Lunyu*) from Chinese in 1809, to the release of Australian scholar Victor Petersen's *Lunyu Analysis: The Analects or Sayings of Confucius* by Foreign Language Press in May 2021, the number of English translations of *Lunyu* has steadily increased over the past three centuries. According to incomplete statistics, nearly 110 English translations have been produced to date. The translators represent highly diverse backgrounds, including Jesuits, diplomats, Protestant missionaries, Sinologists, literary figures, writers, philosophers, historians, linguists,

bankers, cartoonists, and educators. These translators also span various cultural identities, such as Western translators, local Chinese translators, and diasporic Chinese translators. In different historical periods and specific social contexts, they reinterpreted the cultural philosophy of *Lunyu* based on their unique cultural experiences, cognitive perspectives, intended readerships, and personal stances. From a cultural development perspective, each new sociocultural context has inspired fresh interpretations of *Lunyu*, and each act of interlingual translation has entailed interaction with the target culture, resulting in a “renewed appearance” of the text that reflects its contemporary era. This dynamic process of cultural exchange and reconstruction, characterized by both tension and creativity, can be explained through George Steiner’s concept of “interanimation” (Steiner, 2013), which emphasizes how the interplay between different cultures mutually enriches and enhances cultural value. However, traditional translation studies, which often focused on cultural homogeneity and fidelity, have largely overlooked the creative role of translation as a form of “mediation” between the source and target cultures (Chin, 2019). In the 21st century, translation studies have undergone significant developments through both the cultural turn and the translator turn, recognizing the complexity of interactions among various factors in translation and the translator’s creative role in the process. Against this backdrop, the concept of “transculturality” has emerged in cultural studies, replacing the earlier notion of “cross-cultural” communication as a new framework for analyzing cultural exchanges. At the heart of transculturality lies not merely the act of crossing cultures but rather their “connectivity”, emphasizing deep integration and mutual permeation of cultural elements, ultimately transcending rigid cultural boundaries to achieve innovation and evolution (Welsch, 1999). In this sense, transculturality is not only a form of cultural interaction but also a new model of cultural “interanimation”. Within this perspective, translation attains a higher value—not merely as a process of linguistic transfer but as a bridge for cultural connection and creation. Transcultural translation emphasizes the complementary nature of cultural differences (Epstein & Berry, 1999), demonstrating how cultures can address each other’s limitations and generate renewed vitality. This process of cultural interaction and transformation not only enables the “rebirth” of culture in new contexts but also expands the boundaries of cultural expression and possibilities for dissemination. Consequently, translation, as a vital form of cultural recreation, surpasses concerns of linguistic equivalence and fidelity, becoming a driving force for cultural innovation and dissemination (Chin, 2014). The core of transcultural

translation lies in the “mediation” of cultural differences, a process often articulated through the paratexts of translated works. However, current research on transculturality in translation has primarily focused on postcolonial contexts, examining “cultural translation” and its “retranslation” dynamics (Hansen, 2018; Li, 2017; Sun, 2014) (Sun, 2014; Pereira-Ares, 2015; Li, 2017; Hansen, 2018). These studies typically explore how diasporic communities use the host language to express their native culture, analyzing the complexities of cultural hybridity in texts while investigating the impact of such “retranslation” on the source culture. Yet, within the traditional language-centered framework of translation studies, the concept of transculturality has been scarcely addressed (Tymoczko, 2014a). This neglect partly stems from the focus of transculturality on cultural innovation and integration, which contrasts with the traditional emphasis on fidelity and equivalence. As a representative text of classical Chinese philosophy, *Lunyu* exemplifies an “interpretatively open” text characterized by its brevity, contextuality, correlational thinking, and dynamic structure (Rosemont & Ames, 1998). Within the Chinese context, intralingual translations of *Lunyu* have given rise to a rich exegetical tradition. Its interlingual translation, however, cannot be achieved through simple word-for-word equivalence but requires the translator to engage in cultural reinterpretation and contextual recreation. Such reinterpretation is not only inevitable in the translation of *Lunyu* but is also often conveyed through paratexts, serving as a crucial medium for the translator’s creative mediation of cultural differences. From a transcultural perspective, investigating the paratextual treatment of *li* in *Lunyu* offers insights into how translators creatively mediate and reconstruct this core cultural concept. Moreover, it sheds light on the processes of cultural collision, integration, and recreation across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

2. WHY FOCUS ON *LI*?

In the Chinese cultural context, *ren* (仁) is often regarded as the core concept of *Lunyu*, while *li* is its external manifestation. Together, *ren* and *li* constitute the internal-external dynamic that defines the spiritual framework of *Lunyu*. In contrast, within the Western tradition, *li* has long been viewed as a form of dehumanizing formalism, far removed from its intrinsic value, which has received little recognition (Fingarette, 2023). This perception began to shift with the publication of Fingarette’s *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (1972), where he argued that Confucian thought uniquely employs the language and imagery of *li* as a medium to explore mores in

their entirety. Fingarette further asserted that the capacity to act according to *li* and the will to restrain oneself in accordance with it (*keji fuli*) constitute the most fundamental virtues or powers of humanity. Subsequently, discussions and debates on the meaning of *li* by scholars such as Schwartz (Schwartz, 2009) and Graham (Graham, 2015) further elevated *li* to prominence, establishing it as a significant area of study in the West since the 1970s. The growing attention to *li* in the West can be traced through various avenues. For instance, Kong and Qin (Kong & Qin, 2021), utilizing their self-developed “English Original Confucian Text Corpus (1690s–2010s)”, analyzed the relative prominence of *ren*, *yi* (义), *li*, *zhi* (知), and *xin* (信) in Western discourse. Their findings indicate a notable rise in attention to *li* in the West after the 1950s (see Figure 1). Following a similar approach, this study conducted a search for “ritual propriety” (*li*) using Google Books Ngram Viewer, which revealed a significant spike in interest in the term after 1980 in the west (see Figure 2).

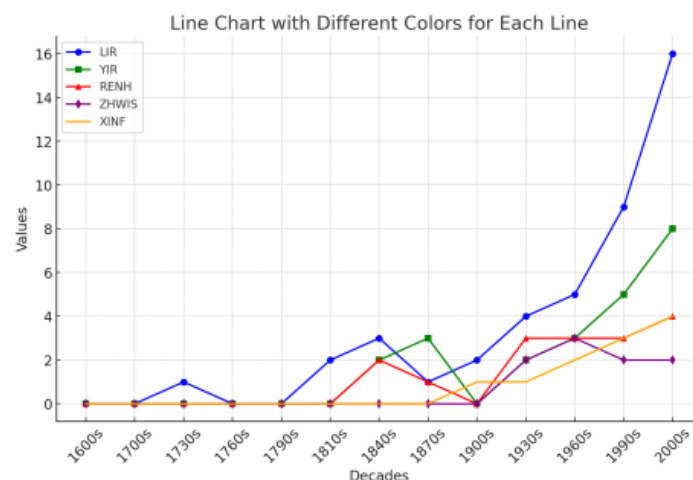


Figure 1: Attention to "*li, yi, ren, zhi, xin*" in the English world

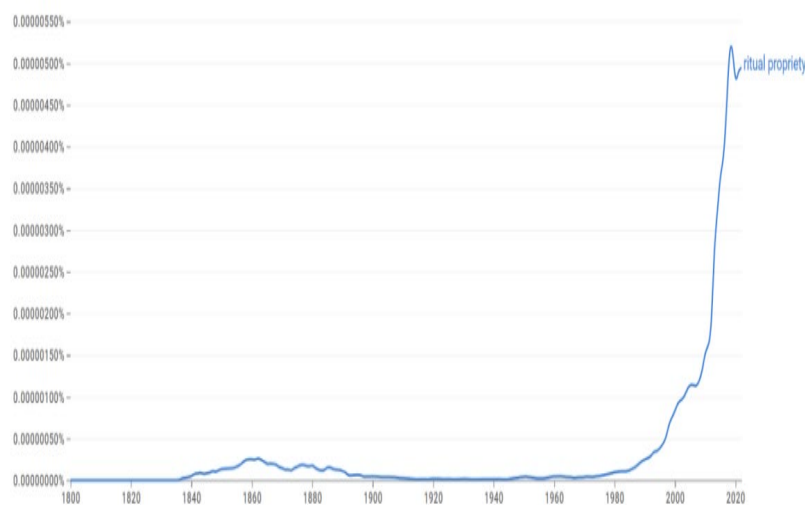


Figure 2: Attention to *li* (ritual propriety) in the West

These findings suggest that contemporary Western society increasingly values the concept of ritual propriety, a trend that is closely tied to the cross-linguistic reinterpretation and dissemination of *li*. Therefore, this study focuses on the transcultural reconstruction of *li* as its central research objective.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Transculturality

From the perspectives of anthropology and cultural studies, “transculturality” belongs to a conceptual genealogy that includes related terms such as “transculture”, “transculturation”, and “transculturalism”. Cuban anthropologist Ortiz (Ortiz, 1947) first introduced the term “transculturation” as a replacement for “acculturation” to describe the diverse cultural evolution resulting from the interaction between Cuban and colonial cultures. His ideas of cultural equality and renewal provided a new perspective for understanding cultural exchanges under unequal power relations (Hermann, 2007). German philosopher Welsch (Welsch, 1999) further developed the concept of “transculturality” by critiquing “multiculturality” and “interculturality”. According to Welsch, the latter two concepts overly emphasize cultural boundaries and static definitions, ignoring the reality that cultural richness and development stem from interaction. Transculturality, therefore, seeks to describe the permeability and dynamic evolution of cultures, aiming to transcend traditional cultural dichotomies. For Welsch, cultural exchange should not stop at mutual understanding but instead serve as a foundation for cultural growth and development. Russian-American scholar Epstein (Epstein, 1995) advanced the theoretical and practical study of “transculture” by defining it as a site of interaction between existing and potential cultures. For Epstein, transculture is not merely a model for intercultural dialogue but a “continuum” that transcends cultural boundaries, encompassing both realized and unrealized cultural elements. This definition encourages individuals to liberate themselves from preconceived cultural frameworks, critically and creatively absorbing elements from diverse cultures to achieve broader cultural understanding and innovation. One of Epstein’s significant contributions to transculture is the notion of “complementary differences”, which posits that, within a holistic cultural framework, every culture is an incomplete entity that requires interaction with others to achieve self-fulfillment. Cultural differences, therefore, are not the basis for

opposition, as seen in some forms of pluralism, but are instead prerequisites for cultural development (Epstein & Berry, 1999). Additionally, Epstein links transculture to cultural identity, encouraging individuals to break away from singular cultural or racial identities within transcultural spaces. Instead, they are free to select elements from diverse cultural resources to redefine themselves (Epstein, 2009). In summary, the genealogy of transculture reflects the fluidity, interaction, and innovation of cultures, emphasizing hybridity, openness, complementarity, and diversity-driven development. This study adopts the term “transculturality” to express these characteristics, emphasizing the transcultural attributes or features of both the process and outcomes of translation practices. Then what is “transcultural translation”? At present, this concept remains open to interpretation. A broad understanding suggests that all translation outcomes are inherently transcultural. From this perspective, all translation variations resulting from cultural interaction can be seen as transcultural. However, Tymoczko (Tymoczko, 2014a) offers a narrower interpretation, defining transcultural translation not only as a form of translation variation but as one that achieves effective dissemination and reception. This understanding highlights the dissemination-oriented nature of translation. This study argues that the value of transculturality in translation research lies not only in acknowledging that translations, as concrete manifestations of transculturality, inevitably deviate from the “objective facts” of the original text but also in emphasizing that such deviations facilitate better communication and cultural exchange. These deviations serve to align and integrate the values of two cultures more effectively. Based on this understanding, this study adopts Tymoczko’s narrower definition of transcultural translation, framing it as a type of translation characterized by three key elements: connectivity, development, and dissemination. These three elements collectively distinguish transcultural translation from traditional translation approaches. At the heart of these three elements is the concept of “mediation”, which underpins the transcultural translation process.

3.2 Paratextual Mediation in Translation

“Mediation” is defined as “the degree to which an individual integrates their current beliefs and goals into the communicative patterns of a given situation” (De Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981). From a translation perspective, “mediation” refers to the repositioning of the source text to align with the reality of the communicative context. As Tymoczko (Tymoczko, 2014b) notes, in translation, the original act of communication

is recontextualized into a different scenario, where new participants act for different purposes. This process involves a mechanism of “mediation”, which defines the entire act at multiple levels. From the perspective of transculturality, mediation is the core process and method for addressing cultural differences. It is grounded in cultural connectivity, aims at cultural development, and is ultimately directed towards cultural dissemination. This process inherently “empowers” the translator, whose role as a mediator has increasingly drawn scholarly attention. However, the idea of translators as mediators is not a new topic. Venuti (Venuti, 1994), for example, highlights the translator’s mediating role through his critique of the invisibility imposed on translators. Yet, most studies on translators as mediators focus on linguistic issues. In contrast, studying translators as cultural mediators from a transcultural perspective appears more valuable, as cultural differences are the essential precondition that necessitates mediation. Several scholars have examined the translator’s role as a cultural mediator, including discussions on the definition and responsibilities of cultural mediators (Taft, 1981), the competencies required of mediators (Hatim & Mason, 2014), and methods for identifying traces of cultural mediation in translations (Hatim & Mason, 2014; Katan, 2004). Among these, Katan (Katan, 2004) provides a detailed analysis of the significance of cultural frameworks and holistic translation strategies for cultural mediation. Cultural frameworks go beyond propositional meanings to include methods such as emphasizing or prioritizing specific content, handling implicit cultural messages, and employing cultural analogies. Similarly, Hatim and Mason (Hatim & Mason, 2014) advocate for a holistic approach to cultural mediation, arguing that aspects such as reconstructing the text as a cohesive whole, interpreting the interaction of textual signs, maintaining textual coherence, and altering thematic progression are all manifestations of cultural mediation in translation. It is evident that mediation highlights the translator’s agency. According to Genette (Genette, 1997), when the text itself cannot be modified, the paratext serves as “a tool of mediation” that is “more flexible, variable”, and “always in a state of transition”. Paratexts, therefore, become a site where the translator’s agency is most visible (Freeth, 2022; Hermann, 2007) and where the process of cultural mediation can be directly observed. Research on paratextual mediation in translation spans various themes, including the translator’s voice and positioning (Hermans, 2014), the translator’s agency and ideological influence as a mediator (Kovala, 1996), the reshaping of the source text’s cultural image (Freeth, 2021; Lee, 2015; Summers, 2017), and the narrative reframing enabled by paratextual interventions (Tan, 2024).

For instance, Tan (Tan, 2024) examines how different publishers adapted Yang Jiang's *Six Chapters from My Life Downunder* through paratexts such as titles, prefaces, promotional materials, annotations, postfaces, and visual imagery. These mediations aligned the narrative with broader sociocultural contexts beyond the text itself, ultimately shaping readers' social perceptions and behaviors. Paratextual mediation, therefore, represents the convergence and interplay of various internal and external factors in translation, serving as the primary means through which translators express their positions and intentions as mediators (Hermans, 2014). It also functions to guide readers' interpretative pathways and enhance the reception of the translation. However, current research on paratextual mediation has focused predominantly on how the source text is modified, often relying on qualitative analysis while neglecting more objective quantitative approaches. Furthermore, few studies have explored how paratextual mediation reflects the connectivity and dissemination between two cultures, or how these mediations relate to the translator's identity. This study aims to address these gaps by combining quantitative analysis with qualitative interpretation to investigate how diasporic Chinese translators employ paratextual mediation to reinterpret the concept of *li* in their translations of *Lunyu*. It further explores how these mediations reveal the transcultural characteristics of such reinterpretations.

4. RESEARCH CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on the English translations of *Lunyu* by two contemporary diasporic Chinese translators, Annping Chin and Peimin Ni, to examine how the concept of *li* is reconstructed through paratextual mediation in their works. The selection of these two translations is based on the following considerations: First, both translations are among the most recent English versions of *Lunyu*, published in 2014 and 2017 respectively, reflecting the characteristics of *Lunyu* translations in the context of contemporary globalization. Second, both translations are marked by their extensive use of annotations and rich paratextual materials. Third, these translations are among the most widely accepted and highly praised versions of *Lunyu* in the English-speaking world, making them ideal sources for exploring the transcultural features of translation. The choice to focus on diasporic Chinese translators is informed by Epstein's (Epstein, 1995) assertion that "individuals must undergo a process of physical, spatial, or imagined deterritorialization and cultural displacement, including

the loss/acquisition of language”, which results in the ability to “negotiate between different cultural identities” (Dagnino, 2015). Thus, the cultural displacement and “in-between” identity of diasporic Chinese translators are likely to foster cultural negotiation in their translation practices, resulting in transcultural outcomes. To further explore the potential advantages of diasporic Chinese translators in producing transcultural translations, this study also includes the paratexts of *Lunyu* translations by two contemporaneous Western translators, Edward Slingerland (Slingerland, 2003) and Moss Roberts (Roberts, 2020), as comparative references. This study adopts Katan’s (Katan, 2004) cultural framework for mediation analysis and focuses on three key criteria to investigate the paratextual reconstruction of *li* in the translations by Annping Chin and Peimin Ni:

- (1) The conceptual weight assigned to *li*.
- (2) The explanatory frameworks used to interpret *li*.
- (3) The intrinsic meanings ascribed to *li*.

The following sections will provide a detailed analysis of how the paratextual mediations of *li* in the translations by Annping Chin and Peimin Ni reflect their transcultural characteristics.

5. CASE ANALYSIS OF TRANSCULTURALITY IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF *LI*

5.1 Adapting to Western Concerns: Elevating the Conceptual Weight of *li*

From a macro perspective, transcultural translation manifests in the transformation of source cultural frameworks within the context of cultural interaction. The transcultural adaptation of such frameworks can be reflected in the shifting weight assigned to their core concepts. Traditional translation studies on *li* in *Lunyu* have primarily focused on the interpretative approaches of individual translators, without examining the overall shifts in the conceptual weight of *li* across the entire text. According to Katan (Katan, 2004), cultural mediation can be expressed through the emphasis or prominence given to specific content within an overarching cultural framework, which includes changes to the relative weight of concepts. Conceptual weight can be understood as the degree to which a particular concept is emphasized, explained, or elaborated upon in a text.

In the original *Lunyu*, the weight of each concept varies, reflecting differences in their centrality. Cai Xinle (Cai, 2022) proposed the use of “cultural keywords” to identify core ideas in the original text, listing *ren*,

zhongyong (中庸), *shu* (恕), *li*, and *xiao* (孝) as the most significant concepts (ibid: 22). These keywords reflect the relative weight, hierarchy, and interrelation of the concepts within the original *Lunyu*. Core concepts represent the most fundamental ideas of the original text, and ideally, the conceptual weight of these ideas should be faithfully conveyed in translations. However, in practice, cultural differences often lead translators to adjust the weight of certain concepts to align more closely with the emotional and intellectual expectations of target readers. This adjustment is particularly evident in paratexts, such as annotations, where translators' positions are explicitly articulated. Quantitative research has shown that word frequency can effectively reflect the importance of specific terms representing key concepts within a text (Baker, 2023; Zanettin, 2014). Drawing on this approach, this study uses KH Coder for word frequency analysis to compare the top five conceptual keywords in terms of weight in the original Analects, and in the annotations accompanying *Lunyu* translations by Annping Chin and Peimin Ni. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The Weight of *li* in *Lunyu* and Its Translations

Original		Chin's Paratext		Ni's Paratext	
Rank (Number)	Concept	Rank (Number)	Concept	Rank (Number)	Concept
1 (110)	仁 (Ren)	1 (166)	Ritual (Li)	1 (245)	Ritual (Li)
2 (107)	君子 (Junzi)	2 (157)	Learn (Xue)	2 (140)	Learn (Xue)
3 (72)	礼 (Li)	3 (145)	Moral (De)	3 (111)	Virtue (De)
4 (65)	学 (Xue)	4 (135)	Gentleman (Junzi)	4 (110)	Exemplary (Junzi)
5 (49)	天 (Tian)	5 (89)	Humaneness (Ren)	5 (70)	Human- Heartedness (Ren)

As shown in Table 1, the conceptual weight of key terms in *Lunyu* varies. In the original text, *ren* holds the highest weight, followed by *li* and *junzi* (君子). As is previously stated, within the Chinese exegetical tradition, *li* is often interpreted as the external manifestation of *ren*, reflecting the relationship between substance (*ti*) and function (*yong*). However, in the annotated translations of *Lunyu* by Chin and Ni, the weight of *li* rises to the top position, demonstrating that both translators emphasize the importance of *li* within *Lunyu*.

To further explore how Western sociocultural factors influenced these translators' choices, this study includes the annotated translations of *Lunyu* by two contemporary Western Sinologists, Edward Slingerland (Slingerland, 2003) and Moss Roberts (Roberts, 2020), as comparative references. Word frequency analysis reveals that the top five conceptual keywords in Slingerland's annotations are Ritual (*li*, 253 mentions), Gentleman (*junzi*, 235), Virtue (*de* 德, 145), Learn (*xue* 学, 118), and Goodness (*ren*, 90). In Roberts's annotations, the top five are Ritual (*li*, 52 mentions), Heaven (*tian* 天, 31), Government (*zheng* 政, 27), Virtue (*de*, 25), and Benevolence (*ren*, 17). Despite differing emphases on other concepts, such as *ren*, *zheng*, and *de*, all four translations prioritize *li*, likely reflecting the growing prominence of *li* in Western discourse. As illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, Western scholarly attention to *li* began to increase after the 1950s and accelerated significantly after the 1980s. Original English-language texts on Confucianism reveal a conscious and authentic effort to engage with Chinese culture in the Anglophone world, often reflecting contemporary social and academic concerns. These texts highlight how Confucian ideas are continuously deconstructed and reconstructed within Western social contexts (Kong & Qin, 2021). Diasporic Chinese translators' elevation of *li* in paratexts aligns with this trend, responding to Western interest, needs, and concerns about *Lunyu*. This mediation demonstrates diasporic translators' awareness of Western sociocultural expectations and their active role in cultural dissemination. These translators strive to reconstruct the intellectual value of *Lunyu* in a way that resonates with contemporary societal realities. As Ni Peimin (2018: 245) states, "The proper logic for reconstructing Confucianism should draw upon Confucian resources to address contemporary issues." However, the strategy of elevating *li*'s conceptual weight to align with the target sociocultural context adopted by Chin and Ni, mirrors the approach of Western translators Slingerland and Roberts. This shift in conceptual priorities essentially alters the original text's hierarchy of ideas, reflecting the selective absorption and transformation of the source text's meaning within Western contexts. Does this suggest that diasporic Chinese translators' reconstruction of *li* represents a form of cultural "assimilation" or "acculturation" (Berry, 1997)? This question touches on the second key characteristic of transcultural translation: connectivity. The following section will delve into the cognitive framework of *li* to further explore this issue.

5.2 East-West Connectivity: Highlighting the Humanistic and Practical Cognitive Frameworks of *Li*

Transcultural translation reflects cultural interaction through “connectivity” (Abu-Er-Rub et al., 2019). While adapting to social demands demonstrates the social connectivity of transculturality, cognitive framework connectivity focuses more on cultural connectivity. The overall cognitive framework of *li* is shaped by its contextual semantics. Thus, this section investigates *li* as a search term across the selected translations to analyze its content composition and semantic emphasis. Using KH Coder’s semantic network co-occurrence function, this study examines the collocational patterns of *li* within a contextual window of five words to the left and right, focusing on content words. The top ten collocates of *li* based on MI (Mutual Information) values were extracted and analyzed, with results manually filtered to assess their contextual and semantic characteristics. To determine whether the diasporic Chinese translators Annping Chin and Peimin Ni exhibit unique patterns in their reconstruction of *li*, this analysis includes the paratexts from the Analects translations by Edward Slingerland and Philip J. Ivanhoe as comparative reference materials. The collocational patterns of *li* within the paratexts of all four translators are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: High-Frequency Content Word Collocates of *li*

Rank	Slingerland		Roberts		Chin		Ni	
	Collocates	MI	Collocates	MI	Collocates	MI	Collocates	MI
1	Violation	13.311	Formality	11.717	Music	14.292	Music	15.052
2	Dictate	12.307	Music	10.114	Practice	13.932	Vessel	14.335
3	Form	11.091	Diplomatic	9.284	Rule	10.661	Traditional	12.585
4	Etiquette	10.841	History	9.284	Violation	10.468	Mourn	12.254
5	Music	10.841	Humaneness	9.284	Civilizing	9.713	Observance	11.804
6	Vessel	10.66	Negotiation	9.284	Overtone	9.713	Prerogative	11.126
7	Behavior	10.487	Ceremonial	8.699	Rely	9.626	Restrain	11.126
8	Paraphernalia	10.215	Mourn	8.699	Cleanse	9.128	Practice	9.406
9	Prerogative	10.204	Observe	8.284	Meaningless	9.128	Rightness	9.353
10	Decorum	10.045	Royal	7.962	Perform	9.128	Proper	8.985

As shown in Table 2, all four translations share a focus on the universal attributes of *li*, including its relevance to social behavior and institutional norms (e.g., dictate, observe, observance, rule, regulation, prerogative), as well as its formal expressions (e.g., form, formality, vessel, music, decorum, behavior). However, when considering the broader cognitive framework of *li*, a notable distinction emerges between the interpretations of Western

translators and diasporic Chinese translators. Specifically, diasporic translators emphasize dimensions of *li* related to civilizing, practice, and music. The following sections analyze these three high-frequency collocates and their corresponding conceptual emphases in greater detail. Among the four translations, “civilizing” appears as a unique high-frequency collocate in Chin’s annotated translation of *li*. To illustrate the relationship between “civilizing” and *li*, a specific example from Chin’s work is discussed to shed light on the cognitive framework she reconstructs for *li*. In translating the passage, “If you guide them with exemplary virtue [*de*] and keep them in line with the practice of the rites [*li*], they will have a sense of shame and will know to reform themselves” (*Lunyu*, Book Two), Chin provides an annotation that references the Zhou dynasty’s ideal mode of governance. She writes, “This government was further reinforced with the civilizing power of rites and music, and so it did not need complex laws and regulations to ‘keep [the people] in line.’” This interpretation highlights the inward dimension of *li*, emphasizing its role in individual moral cultivation and self-improvement. Chin’s translation further reflects this perspective. For example, in rendering the term *ge* (格), Chin translates it as “reform themselves”, in contrast to Ni’s “constrain themselves” (Ni, 2017), Slingerland’s “rectify themselves” (Slingerland, 2003), and Roberts’s “keep conscience and maintain discipline” (Roberts, 2020). Whereas the latter translations imply external regulation or constraint, Chin’s interpretation suggests a deeper, internal moral or spiritual transformation. This emphasis on *li* as part of a broader framework of humanistic understanding is explicitly articulated in Chin’s introduction to her translation. Chin (Chin, 2014) interprets Confucius’s approach as “personalized”, stating that her goal in retranslating *Lunyu* is to challenge traditional interpretations that sanctify or deify Confucius, and instead to restore him as a human thinker embedded in his specific historical and emotional context. Consequently, Chin’s paratexts deliberately focus on the individual motivations, emotional expressions, and social interactions underlying Confucius’s words and actions. This approach seeks to release Confucian ideas from abstract moral principles, rendering them more relatable and “modern” for contemporary readers. Chin’s emphasis on a humanistic cognitive framework aligns with the intellectual trends in Western humanities, particularly in historiography and cultural studies from the mid-20th century onward. During this period, scholars such as Geertz (Geertz, 1973) and White (White, 1973) advocated for a shift in humanistic disciplines—particularly in cultural studies and

historiography—toward an emphasis on subjective human experiences, emotions, values, and cultural creativity. This approach emerged as a critique of traditional positivist methodologies, fostering the development of humanism in the humanities. As a historian, Chin was likely influenced by these intellectual trends. At the same time, however, humanism also serves as a means for Chin to uncover the true value of *Lunyu*. Western interpretations of *Lunyu* often reduce it to a collection of moral precepts, framing Confucius's words as ethical guidelines rather than practical wisdom for individual life. By adopting a humanistic framework, Chin emphasizes the dimensions of *li* that focus on self-cultivation (civilizing) and practical application (practice), thereby constructing a path for conceptual reconstruction that bridges Chinese and Western cognitive models in the transcultural mediation of *Lunyu*. Examining Ni's reconstruction of *li* through a similar lens, and incorporating his explanations of his translation approach in the preface and introduction of his version of *Lunyu*, we can conclude that Ni interprets *li* through a cognitive framework grounded in Gongfu (Kungfu) practice. This approach differs from that of the two Western translators in two key dimensions, as shown in Table 2.

First, Ni, like Chin, emphasizes the practical nature of *li*. Ni (Ni, 2017) explicitly states in the preface that *Lunyu* embodies “practical moral insight,” a form of practical wisdom. This interpretation aligns with the view of *li* as a guide to life practice. However, unlike Chin's historical approach, Ni's interpretation of practice takes a philosophical route, connecting the Chinese tradition of Gongfu practice with Western practical philosophy. For instance, Pierre Hadot, in *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (2006), argues that ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, as the foundation of Western philosophical traditions, was not merely theoretical but constituted a way of life. Similarly, the Western emphasis on “behavioral ethics” and pragmatism reflects a tendency to connect philosophy with practical living. Ni (Ni, 2017) identifies commonalities between the Chinese tradition of Gongfu and Western practical philosophy, proposing Gongfu as a potential bridge to connect Chinese and Western philosophical traditions. However, Ni also highlights a key distinction: while Western practical philosophy often emphasizes behavior itself, Gongfu focuses more on the individual's moral and personal transformation through practice. In this regard, both Ni and Chin converge in their reconstructions of *li*, ultimately grounding it in the inward process of self-cultivation.

Second, appropriateness (proper, rightness) is another unique dimension

in Ni's reconstruction of *li*. Ni (Ni, 2017) explains in his annotations that Confucian *li* (ritual propriety) is a "behavioral pattern established and accepted as appropriate by a community as its tradition." Furthermore, *li* guides individuals in determining "what is right and what is appropriate." This indicates that within the Gongfu framework, *li* is not an externally imposed behavioral constraint but rather the natural moral expression of an individual's inner cultivation. As Ni (ibid.) writes, *li* "provides behavior patterns for expressing *ren* and *yi*" and is therefore often an effective means of "cultivation".

In summary, Chin's humanistic cognitive framework and Ni's Gongfu practice framework both reflect a conscious effort to bridge Chinese and Western modes of understanding. By connecting the perspectives of the source and target cultures, both diasporic Chinese translators emphasize the individual practice inherent in *li*, narrowing the gap between target-language readers and the original cultural context while enhancing the communicative effectiveness. However, this "seeking commonality" is not their ultimate goal but rather a means to an end. The preceding analysis demonstrates that diasporic Chinese translators focus on the inward, self-cultivating dimension of practice, highlighting the ontological value of Confucian thought in *Lunyu*. This contrasts with the interpretations of Slingerland and Roberts, as seen in Table 4, who focus on *li*'s external rational regulations (e.g., violation, dictate, prerogative) and formal aspects (e.g., formality, form, ceremonial), reflecting a more utilitarian reading. This distinction underscores the diasporic translators' cultural awareness in maintaining the distinctiveness of their native culture while mediating it through transcultural connectivity. To further substantiate this point, the next section examines the most frequent collocate of *li*—music—in the paratexts of Chin and Ni's translations, exploring the unique dimensions of their reconstruction of *li* (NI, 2018).

5.3 Highlighting Differences: Interpreting the Aesthetic Realm of *Li*

As shown in Table 2, "music" frequently co-occurs with *li* across all four translations. However, in the paratexts of the two diasporic Chinese translators, "music" ranks as the most frequent collocate of *li*, highlighting its significance in shaping the conceptual framework of *li*. To further explore this relationship, this study examines the occurrences of "music" in the annotations of all four translations. Relevant instances were extracted using "music" as a search term, and entries that reflect the connection between *li* and music were manually selected and categorized thematically. Results that only reference the literal meaning of music were excluded, as

the focus is on understanding how diasporic Chinese translators reconstruct the conceptual content of *li* and how this reconstruction may differ from that of Western translators. The categorized findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3(a): “Music” Search Entries Under the Theme of *li* in the Four Translations

Translator	Theme (Frequency)	Representative Indexed Entry
Slingerland	Social order (5)	... properly regulating music was seen as a crucial part of ordering the state. Music thus serves as a model or metaphor for the process of self-
	Moral cultivation (5)	cultivation: starting in confusion, passing through many places and culminating in a state of wu-wei perfection.
	Joy (3)	... the substance of music is the joy one takes in benevolence and rightness.
	Tradition (1)	The transmission of the great Way began with Yao and Shun and reached the Zhou of Confucius' age, grandly embodied in their ritual and musical institutions.
Roberts	Social order (3)	... the discipline of a stratified social order should be followed by the harmony of the whole community audience, expressed through musical performance (voices, instruments dance). Music, as sublimated emotion, can overcome the resistance of nature to the rigors of externally controlled behavior and by so doing facilitate the internalization of virtue.
	Moral cultivation (2)	... it also relied on rites and music for their civilizing effect.
	Moral cultivation (7)	The archery Confucius refers to was archery in a ritual context (lishe), which was performed to music and meant to enforce the idea of “the middle” (zhong), of finding a center in one’s conduct and demeanor.
Chin	Middle(zhong) (5)	... a ruler should "use music to harmonize the heart and emotions of the people and the rites to check their conduct."
	Harmony (4)	... to give music back its integrity was, in Confucius' view, essential to the restoration of political order.
	Social order (4)	

Table 3(b): “Music” Search Entries Under the Theme of *li* in the Four Translations

Translator	Theme (Frequency)	Representative Indexed Entry
Ni	Self-Cultivation And Transmission (8)	... governing with virtue, ritual and music that transform the people and the society without visible force.
	Moral Cultivation (3)	Although the Three Houses tried to usurp higher political powers by using or actually misusing ritual propriety and music that were not supposed to be used by them, they were devoid of human-heartedness and hence could not enliven the rituals and the music.
	Harmony (5)	These scholars all attribute to ritual propriety the function of separating different social roles, and to music the function of harmonizing their relationships.
	Social order (4)	... this conversation took place after Confucius went back to Lu from Wei; hence, it was about correcting “the music”.

As shown in Table 3, while all four translations affirm the role of music in maintaining social order, they differ fundamentally in their interpretations of how this function is achieved. Compared to the Western translators, Chin and Ni emphasize the notions of civilization, transformation, and harmony. For them, music is not merely a form of entertainment or art but a medium of moral cultivation. Through the aesthetic form of music, an individual’s inner virtue is cultivated almost imperceptibly, which then manifests naturally through external ritual (*li*). This reflects the harmonious unity of inner and outer dimensions, a state of aesthetic freedom symbolized by harmony (*he*). While the Western translators also recognize the moral aspects of ritual, their interpretations tend to focus more on moral constraints rather than the ontological and aesthetic dimensions of *li* as a way of life.

In this context, the four translators’ reconstructions of ritual through music consistently highlight the practical functions of *li* in maintaining social order and fostering moral education, bridging Chinese and Western philosophical thought. This resonance is reminiscent of Plato’s emphasis on the social function of art forms rather than on sensory pleasure. However, the diasporic Chinese translators appear to place greater emphasis on the distinctiveness of *li* relative to Western philosophical

traditions, particularly focusing on the process and method by which *li* is generated. *Li* reflects Confucius's unique practical wisdom, as embodied in the practice of music. As Zhang Guangsheng (Zhang, 2021) notes, the difference between Confucius and Western philosophers like Socrates lies in Confucius's focus on how rather than on "types of being", with an emphasis on realization and application. For instance, in the ritual practice of music, the key lies in the appropriateness of action. "Appropriateness" embodies harmony and beauty, a balance of perfect proportions. This "appropriateness of degree" is a natural expression of internal virtue's joyfulness through external behavior. It represents the seamless fusion of subjective experience and objective reality, where "external norms ultimately transform into internal joy and spiritual satisfaction". This elevates the practice of *li* to an aesthetic philosophy of life, illustrating the most distinctive features of Confucian thought and the unique "unity of inner and outer" that characterizes Chinese philosophy.

In summary, the diasporic Chinese translators' reconstructions of *li* reflect a transcultural perspective that emphasizes differences in complementarity. Through comparison, these translators identify both similarities and differences between the source and target cultures in the translation process. They use similarities to bridge cognitive domains between the two cultures, while simultaneously conveying the unique inner meanings of *li*, specifically its "complementary differences" relative to Western culture. This approach fosters deeper cultural recognition and transmission. As such, the diasporic translators' reconstructions of *li* address the functional needs of the target culture while also offering an ontological interpretation that highlights the distinctiveness of Chinese culture. Overall, their translations exhibit a hybrid transcultural strategy: connectivity as a method of dissemination, with ontological interpretation as the ultimate goal.

5. CONCLUSION

In this globalized and culturally intertwined world, translation serves not just as a linguistic conduit but as a dynamic platform for transcultural interactions, offering new perspectives on cultural exchange and identity. By examining the paratextual mediation of the Confucian concept of *li* (礼) in the English translations of *Lunyu* by diasporic Chinese translators Annping Chin and Peimin Ni, this study reveals innovative ways in which the concept gains renewed vitality through cultural reinterpretation. Unlike

traditional Sinologist approaches, Chin and Ni's translations highlight *li*'s inward moral and aesthetic dimensions, bridging the philosophical distance between Chinese and Western cultural frameworks while resisting the reductive tendencies of cultural assimilation. Through a transcultural lens, this research uncovers how diasporic translators act as cultural mediators, recontextualizing *li* in ways that align with the intellectual concerns of Western audiences, yet preserving its distinct Confucian ontological essence. This dual role positions translation as an instrument for both cultural integration and differentiation. In particular, the study emphasizes how *li*, long misinterpreted in the West as formalistic, is transformed into a living philosophy of humanistic practice, moral cultivation, and social harmony. These mediations not only enhance cross-cultural understanding but also invigorate the global relevance of Confucian thought. Looking forward, this study opens potential avenues for further exploration. Future research could expand on other Confucian concepts like *ren* or *xiao* to examine their transcultural evolution in translation. Additionally, audience reception studies could offer deeper insights into how such reconfigurations influence Western perceptions of Confucianism. Furthermore, exploring the diverse experiences of diasporic translators could reveal nuanced strategies in their cultural negotiation practices.

In conclusion, this research enriches our understanding of transculturality by situating the translation of *li* within broader cultural narratives. It highlights the power of translation to reconstruct cultural meaning, foster dialogue, and facilitate the mutual "rebirth" of ideas across linguistic and cultural boundaries, paving the way for a more inclusive global cultural exchange.

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