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A Relevance-theoretic Exploration of C-E Translation of the Titles in the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*

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Abstract This paper employs Relevance Theory to perform a comparative analysis of the Chinese-English translation of the titles of the seven Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* by [Fung Yu-lan \(\[1931\] 2015\)](#), [Burton Watson \(\[1968\] 2013\)](#), and [Angus Graham \(\[1981\] 2001\)](#). It is found that these three translators have different considerations and trade-offs in presenting the connotations of the titles, thus emphasizing different aspects in their choice of translation strategies. In order to offer readers, the optimal contextual effect with minimal cognitive effort, this paper posits that translators are required to interpret the profound connotations of the titles and flexibly employ translation strategies, striving for a dynamic equilibrium between comprehension and expression.

Keywords the *Zhuangzi*; Relevance Theory; title translation; cognitive context; cognitive effort; dynamic balance

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1. Introduction

Zhuangzi (c. 369-286 BCE) is a foundational Chinese Daoist philosopher of the Warring States period, renowned for the text bearing his name, the *Zhuangzi*. This vibrant and influential work, considered alongside the Daodejing, is a cornerstone of Daoism, championing a life harmoniously aligned with the ever-changing flow of the Dao (the Way), celebrating relativity, transformation, and the liberation found in transcending artificial societal constraints. The *Zhuangzi* remains a profound and enduring masterpiece of philosophical literature and spiritual insight. According to *Hanshu Yiwenzhi* 汉书·艺文志 [‘Treatise on Arts in History of the Han’], the original *Zhuangzi* text contains fifty-two chapters. However, the extant *Zhuangzi* text, selected and annotated by the philosopher Guo Xiang (252 - 312) during the Jin Dynasty (264 - 420), is composed of seven Inner Chapters (1 - 7), fifteen Outer Chapters (8 - 22), and eleven Miscellaneous Chapters (23 - 33). Considering that the Inner Chapters represent a coherent ideological system (Liu, 2001, p.107), a thorough understanding of these chapters is of great significance for comprehensively grasping Zhuangzi’s philosophical thought.

Approximately 140 years have elapsed since Balfour’s initial English translation of the *Zhuangzi* in 1881. Due to the variations in historical periods and among individual translators, diverse English translations of the *Zhuangzi* have appeared (for a most up-to-date list of English translations, see the appendix). Zhu Shuran (2023) divides the English translations of the *Zhuangzi* into three categories: popular-science translation, literary translation, and philosophical translation. Popular-science translations of *Zhuangzi* “are predominantly presented in the form of excerpts or abridged translations of selected chapters from encyclopedias” (Zhu, 2023, p. 53). The literary translations place emphasis on “artistic reproduction” and “emotional resonance”. Among the literary translators, Burton Watson ([1968] 2013), an eminent American literary translator, has established a stable reputation and exerted significant influence (Zhu, 2023, p. 56). The philosophical translation is dedicated to disseminating the ideological system of philosophers. Fung Yu-lan ([1931] 2015) is the pioneer in the philosophical translation of *Zhuangzi*. During the “philosophical turn” in overseas Sinology, Angus Graham ([1981] 2001), an internationally renowned sinologist and philosopher, emphasizes that Zhuangzi’s ideas should not be forcibly incorporated into the existing Western philosophical framework (Coutinho, 2017, p. 7). The contributions of Fung Yu-lan and Graham are of undeniable significance. However, as this paper aims to analyze the English translations of the titles of the Inner Chapters of *Zhuangzi* from a professional research stance, it will not elaborate extensively on this category. More generally, the translations by Fung Yu-lan ([1931] 2015), Burton Watson ([1968] 2013), and Angus Graham ([1981] 2001) have exerted a crucial influence on the dissemination and acceptance of the *Zhuangzi* in the Western world.

The titles of the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* capture the theme of each chapter, while the titles of the Outer Chapters and Miscellaneous Chapters are mostly taken from the first sentence at the beginning of each chapter (Xiang, 2023, p. 4). Furthermore, the titles of the Inner Chapters not only showcase the author’s ingenuity but also offer readers a comprehensive understanding of the work’s essence. Consequently, they exert a substantial influence on readers’ first impression of the text. Therefore, a successful translation of these titles is much desired.

To comprehensively understand the current state of research in the field of English translations of *Zhuangzi*, this paper conducted a comprehensive search of all journals within the academic journal database of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). The search results indicate that as of September 5, 2025, the number of relevant research papers in this field has reached 146, demonstrating a thriving research landscape. Research in this area is predominantly concentrated on two key themes. The first theme is the analysis of translator habitus, exemplified by the analysis of English translations by scholars such as Wang Rongpei, Watson, and James Legge (e.g., Zhou, 2025; Lin & Xu, 2022). The second theme involves the exploration of translation strategies and methodologies, including aspects such as cultural dissemination and poetics - based translation (e.g., Yin, 2024).

Among these 146 papers, nine articles indirectly allude to the role of titles as peritexts actively participating in the construction of textual meaning during discussions of the main text (e.g., Yin & Lei, 2024; Xu Kunpei, 2022). Moreover, only two papers have titles as their central research subject (e.g., Song, 2023; Yu, 2024). Nevertheless, these analyses generally remain at a perceptual and experiential level, lacking a unified theoretical framework to account for the cognitive-pragmatic mechanisms underlying translators’ decision-making processes. Additionally, they fail to conduct a comprehensive and systematic investigation of all the titles of the Inner Chapters of *Zhuangzi*. This situation reveals that while the academic community has delved deeply into the “texture” of the main text of *Zhuangzi*, it has systematically overlooked the translation issues of its “titles”, which serve as crucial “gateways”.

From a theoretical research perspective, 13 articles have utilized cognitive linguistics theories, such as conceptual metaphor and image schema, to conduct in-depth micro-analyses of core philosophical concepts in *Zhuangzi*, such as “Dao” 道 and “Xiaoyao” 逍遥, as well as its allegorical metaphors (e.g., Tang Jiali, 2022). These studies tend to be highly nuanced, exploring the cognitive mechanisms involved in the cross-language transformation of images like “Kunpeng” 鲲鹏 and “Hundun” 混沌, thereby providing methodological references for this paper’s analysis of the metaphorical aspects of the titles.

Furthermore, with the increasing international dissemination of Chinese culture, the academic community has started to focus on the reception of translated works in overseas markets. Some researchers have employed data-mining techniques, such as Python-based sentiment analysis, to analyze the comments of overseas readers. Their findings indicate that readers’ attention is primarily centered on the philosophical connotations, literary value, and translation quality of the works (e.g., Wu & Xiao, 2024; Zhu, 2023). This research perspective extends the focus from “how translators translate” to “how readers perceive and accept translations”, offering valuable insights for this paper to evaluate the contextual effectiveness of different translation strategies.

In view of this, we intend to adopt Sperber and Wilson’s ([1986] 1996) Relevance Theory to explore the English translation of the titles of the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.

2. Relevance Theory and Translation

According to Relevance Theory, language communication is a generalisation about ostensive-inferential communication (Sperber & Wilson, 1996, p.162). Here, “ostensive” refers to the presentation of the speaker’s informative intention, while “inferential” refers to the process by which the receiver interprets the speaker’s informative intention according to the context to obtain the communicative intention. Translation is a kind of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural verbal communication that involves cognitive inference. Consequently, the success of translation depends on the consistency with the principle of relevance (Gutt, 1991, p.189). Considering the particularity of translation, we integrate the verbal communication model proposed by Sperber & Wilson (1996) and Gutt (1991), and construct a Relevance Theory model of the interaction between translation subjects (Figure 1).

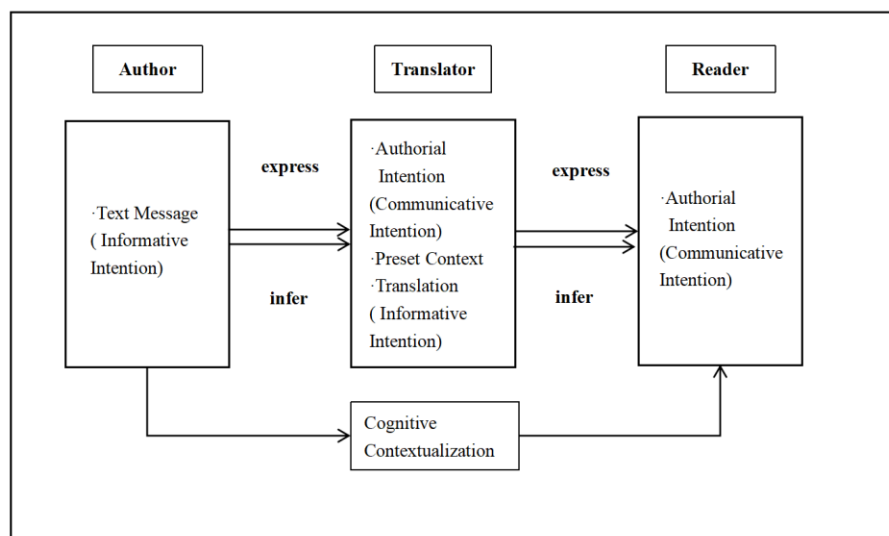


Figure 1: A relevance-theoretic model of the interaction between translation subjects

As shown in the figure above, translation is regarded as a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication process, involving three communicators and two rounds of ostensive-inferential communication. The three communicators are the author, the translator, and the reader. In the first round of ostensive-inferential communication, the translator initially comprehends the text in the capacity of a reader of the source text. Subsequently, based on the presupposition of the cognitive context of the target-language readers, the translator enters the second round of ostensive-inferential communication. Through the adoption of appropriate translation strategies, the translator conveys the author’s communicative intention, thereby achieving the relevance of the target text. Translation is essentially the transformation of the cognitive context. To ensure the success of communication, the translator needs

to pay attention to the extent to which the cognitive context of the original author can be shared by the target reader (Wen & Xiao, 2019, p. 174).

3. On the Relevance Dimension of Translation

From the perspective of Relevance Theory, translators should adopt appropriate translation strategies to mitigate the communication failure caused by cognitive misplacement. The relevance of translation can be explored from the following three dimensions:

The first dimension is cognitive logical relevance. People who use different languages often have different cognitive models and language usage habits. For instance, Chinese exhibits a preference for parataxis and rarely employs conjunctions to convey the logical relationships between syntactic elements. Conversely, English places emphasis on hypotaxis, utilizing more rigorous conjunctions between sentences.

The second dimension is cognitive contextual relevance. China has a profound cultural heritage. Taking the *Zhuangzi* as an example, this renowned Chinese philosophical text is replete with a myriad of images that serve as a rich repository of cultural information. The intricate tapestry of symbols, metaphors, and allegories woven throughout its pages encapsulates the profound wisdom and nuanced perspectives of ancient Chinese thought. However, given the inherent disparities between Chinese and Western cultural paradigms, coupled with the intrinsic uniqueness and specificity of each cultural context, it is inevitable that certain cultural nuances and subtleties will be lost or diluted in the process of translation.

The third dimension is cognitive intention relevance. Translation is a process of language communication. The translator needs to interpret, process, and reconstruct the original text, and then convey the author's intention of the original text to a broader audience. However, the translator's thinking and standpoint will affect the reader's understanding of the text to a great extent.

In the following, we take the English translations of Fung ([1931] 2015), Graham ([1981] 2001), and Watson ([1968] 2013) as an example from the above three relevant dimensions to conduct a comparison and analysis of the English translations of the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* and explore a novel approach to translating classics. Consider:

Chapter Title	Fung's translation	Graham's translation	Watson's translation
逍遥游	The Happy Excursion	Going rambling without a destination	Free and Easy Wandering
齐物论	On the Equality of Things	The sorting that evens things out	Discussing on Making All Things Equal
养生主	The Fundamentals for the Cultivation of Life	What matters in the nurture of life	The Secret of Caring for Life
人间世	The Human World	Worldly business among men	In the World of Men
德充符	The Evidence of Virtue Complete	The Signs of fullness of Power	The Sign of Virtue Complete
大宗师	The Great Teacher	The teacher who is the ultimate ancestor	The Great and Venerable Teacher
应帝王	The Philosopher-King	Responding to the Emperors and Kings	Fit for Emperors and Kings

More generally, the translators share three translation methods: (1) literal translation, which keeps the content and form of the original text; (2) free translation, which gives full play to the translator's subjective initiative to interpret and reconstruct the original text on the premise of retaining the meaning of the original text; (3) the combined use of literal translation and free translation. By comparing the English translations of the titles of the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, we find that the three translators all choose literal translation when they translate the title of Chapter Six "Dazongshi" 大宗师, and the only difference lies in their interpretation of the meanings of 'da' 大 and 'zong' 宗. For

the remaining titles, the translators have their emphasis on the choice of translation methods, so their renditions also show some differences in the three dimensions of cognitive logic, cognitive context, and cognitive intention.

3.1 Cognitive Logical Relevance

During the translation process, translators primarily focus on the cognitive logical relevance. Cognitive logic is an integrated system of language, logic, and cognition. It is based on logic, which studies the thinking mode and reasoning rules based on language (Xing, 2017, p. 33). Considering the cognitive patterns and expression habits of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, translators should pay attention to the differences in cognitive logic between different languages and adopt appropriate translation strategies to open up a window of communication, so that readers can obtain good contextual effects after making effective cognitive efforts.

Generally, the Chinese thinking mode is holistic, and the advantage of this holistic thinking has led the Chinese to gradually evolve into a holistic language with prominent paratactic features. In contrast, the Western way of thinking is typically analytical. Formal logical thinking objectively necessitates that when expressing logical relationships, their language must rely on connectives, thus resulting in the language exhibiting hypotactic characteristics (Zhang, 2001, p. 17). As far as the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* is concerned, the three-character title captures the core idea of each chapter. The highly succinct title gives rise to a multitude of potential interpretations. For instance, the title of Chapter Two, “Qiwulun” 齐物论 logically encompasses the dual connotations of the discourse on ‘qiwu’ and the theory of ‘qiwu’ (Yang, 2015, p. 1). Fung translates the title “Qiwulun” as “On the Equality of Things”, and the use of the preposition “on” corresponds to the meaning of ‘lun’ 论 (Yu, 2024, p. 24), which retains the parataxis of the original text. In the original text, ‘qi’ 齐 is a key concept, whether it is the discussion on “qiwu” or the theory of ‘qiwu’. Hence, Fung chooses ‘qi’ 齐 as the semantic focus, highlighting the theme of Equality. His translation not only preserves the philosophical profundity of the original text but also facilitates comprehension for Western readers. In the choice of semantic emphasis, Graham and Fung chose ‘qi’ 齐, but the use of the gerund “sorting” implies the dynamic relationship and change between things, and conveys the concept that things achieve balance through a specific mechanism through the attributive clause “which evens Things out”. Thus bringing a dynamic, process-oriented understanding to the reader. Watson translated the title “Qiwulun” 齐物论 as “Discussing on Making All Things Equal”, focusing on ‘lun’ 论 and emphasizing the conclusion that “All Things have the same value”.

In the title “Yingdiwang” 应帝王, Zhuangzi subtly conceals the relationship between ‘ying’ 应 and ‘diwang’ 帝王, thereby presenting readers with two potential avenues of interpretation. One is how to be an emperor; the other is passively obeying, responding to, and reflecting the image in front of him (Zhong, 2002, p. 167). How to transform the abstract parataxis of the original text into the rational and analytical expression that Western readers are accustomed to has become a difficult problem for translators to solve urgently. Graham’s translation of “Yingdiwang” 应帝王 as “Responding to the Emperors and Kings” is a passive response and only expresses part of its meaning. Fung translates it as “The Philosopher-King”, which completely deviates from the original meaning. Watson translated it into “Fit for Emperors and Kings”, and he chose to understand ‘ying’ 应 as “should”, believing that “Yingdiwang” means how to govern the world as an emperor, ignoring the possible reading of “passively obeying, responding to, and reflecting”. Although Watson’s translation is more appropriate than the other two translators, his translation compresses the space for the reader to interpret and directly provides the reader with a unique and definite answer. Generally speaking, from the perspective of cognitive logical relevance, the translations of the three translators are deficient.

In the chapter “Renjianshi” 人间世, Zhuangzi centers on the topic of human beings, and conducts investigations and explorations into the modes and values of human existence in the world from diverse perspectives. Therefore, translators should consciously highlight the subject of human beings. When Fung translates the title, he adopts the literal translation method and renders it as “The Human World”, which corresponds to the original in both form and content. In contrast, Graham translates the title as “Worldly business among men”, shifting the focus of attention from men to things. This, however, only pays attention to the objective material form of the world, but ignores the transmission of philosophical concepts of the law of life. Although the latter pays attention to the connection between

men, it has ignored the existence of men themselves. In other words, the readers cannot understand the deep meaning of the original title from the two translators' renditions, which makes it difficult to grasp the original author's communicative intention.

Different from Fung and Graham, Watson's English translation combines the literal translation and free translation. He translates "Renjianshi" as "In the World of Men", which not only accurately grasps the focus of the original text, but also pays attention to the differences in cognitive logic between Chinese and English. In the process of C-E translation, the translator needs to present the underlying logical connections in Chinese in an appropriate way in the target text. In the original text, the author does not use prepositions, and the relationship between man and the world is invisible and connected by parataxis. However, by using the preposition "of" to express the subordination, Watson points out that the essence of the world is a world with human beings as the main body, which is what we often call 'social relations', and also uses the preposition "in" to highlight the reality that everyone was born in the world. Compared with the other two translators, this rendition is more appropriate, fully respecting the cognitive logic habits of the target readers, making it easier for the target readers to understand, and realizing the cognitive logic relevance.

3.2 Cognitive Contextual Relevance

Any text is invariably within the cultural system made up of philosophy, religion, tradition, custom, and legend of the nation (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37). Therefore, there might be images in the source text that are absent in the target text. To solve this problem, the translator needs to build a bridge between the target culture and the source culture. Through the translator's processing, the reader can approach the picture conveyed by the original text. In the process of reading, every sentence of the translator obviously needs the attention of the reader, and the reader needs to pay attention to understand, so in the process of transmission, there is an expectation of cognitive reward, that is, relevance expectation (Wen & Xiao, 2019, p. 171). To reduce contextual understanding errors in the reading process, the translator needs to pay special attention to the use of language in picture construction, so that the reader can make the least effort to understand and obtain the maximum context of the original text.

Zhuangzi regards unrestrained freedom as the highest realm to pursue his outlook on life. He believes that only those who forget reality and transcend things can be truly free. Watson's translation of the title of Chapter One, "Xiaoyaoyou" 逍遥游 as "Free and Easy Wandering" is faithful to the original title in structure. The first edition of Watson's translation was published in 1968, when great changes were taking place in the United States. Young people started to seek freedom and equality, and resisted traditional moral ideas and social rules. The translation "Free and Easy" successfully captures similarities in the Chinese and American culture by accommodating the Zhuangzi's "xiaoyao" spirit and transcendence of utilitarianism alongside the English cultural context's emphasis on freedom and openness, thereby optimally preserving philosophical and cultural connotations.

Compared with Watson, Fung and Graham have failed to retain the cultural connotations. In contrast to Chinese culture, Western culture doesn't stress the ideas of "xiaoyao" and "transcendence" too much, thus a literal translation might cause comprehension difficulties. Therefore, Fung translates "Xiaoyaoyou" as "The Happy Excursion", in which the concept of "xiaoyao" is simplified as "Happy" and the concept of 'you' 游 is rendered as "Excursion". Fung's approach to the concept of "xiaoyao" involved a simplification of the original complexities, with the objective of facilitating a more intuitive comprehension for English-speaking readers. This approach was adopted to enable the initial grasp of the meaning of "Xiaoyaoyou" in the context of Zhuangzi's philosophy. In addition, it should be noted that Graham also opted for a special approach in his engagement with the cultural connotations of philosophy. He translates the title "Xiaoyaoyou" as "Going rambling Without a Destination". When it comes to the construction of cognitive context, Graham chooses the prepositional phrase "without a destination" to supplement the aimlessness of the translation of "xiaoyao", and tries his best to express the profound philosophical and cultural connotations of the original text by making a full supplementary explanation of the meaning of the title. Here we can see Graham's attempt to preserve the cultural characteristics and philosophical depth of the original title.

Regarding the translation of the title "Yangshengzhu" 养生主, which means "the way of health preservation", the key to and method of health preservation. "Yangsheng" is a cultural term with Chinese characteristics, which does not have a correspondence in English, so the translator needs to give his understanding after reading the original text. Fung's translation, "The Fundamentals for the cultivation of life," reflects a Confucian perspective (Yu, 2024, p. 142). Fung translates 'yang' 养 into "cultivation", and his translation focuses on the cultivation of particular qualities or skills. In fact, this belongs to the Confucian theory of self-cultivation, rather than Zhuangzi's theory of health

preservation. The object of the Zhuangzi's health preservation is the natural existence of life itself and the innate characteristics (Yu, 2024, p. 142). Watson translates the title as "The Secret of Caring for life", and 'yang' as "care for", which means "to look after someone who is not able to look after themselves" (Hornby, 2018, p. 308). This, however, is far from Zhuangzi's original meaning. Graham translates "Yangshengzhu" into "What matters in the nurture of life", which is in line with Zhuangzi's theory of health preservation. He creates a reasonable context, conveys the content of the title with emphasis, expresses his reasoning content to the reader, and achieves the relevance of the cognitive context.

3.3 Cognitive-Intentional Association

The thinking and preference of the translator will greatly influence how readers interpret the original text. Hence, during the translation process, the translator must remain faithful to the source material while also striving to uncover the Chinese value system and profound thinking hidden within the text. This way, readers can more effectively grasp the profound implications and core value of the work, ultimately clearing the hurdles between the source and target cultures successfully.

Fung's ([1931] 2015) selected translation is the first translation of the Zhuangzi translated by a Chinese scholar. It is also a rare translation based on the research paradigm of Chinese philosophy (Zhu, 2019, p. 99). According to himself, Fung (2000, p. 68-69) translates the *Zhuangzi* to serve his teaching activities, and the primary purpose was to explain Zhuangzi's philosophy clearly to the students of "Chinese School". Judging from the English translation of the three titles of "Xiaoyaoyou", "Renjianshi", and "Dechongfu", we can draw the conclusion that Fung chooses to respect the original title in structure. In terms of content, he employs the inherent cultural notions of the West to elucidate Chinese culture, which diminishes the hindrances brought by foreign ideas to readers' comprehension of the text. Take "Xiaoyaoyou" as an example, Fung realizes his translation purpose by simplifying and altering philosophical notions. The word "Excursion" means "a short journey made for pleasure, especially one that has been organized for a group of people" (Hornby, 2018, p. 739). Compared with the character 'you' 游 in the original text, it is more goal-oriented. It cannot fully convey the aimless and unrestrained realm of "Xiaoyaoyou" in Zhuangzi's philosophy. The interpretation of "Xiaoyaoyou" as "The Happy Excursion" is likely to be misunderstood as a simple amusement, which undoubtedly weakens the philosophical connotation of the original title to a certain extent. Coincidentally, there is a similar situation in "Renjianshi", which is translated literally as "The Human World". 'De' 德 in "Dechongfu" is a core term of Daoism and Confucianism. The 'de' 德 of Confucius and Mencius points to virtues in the ethical sense, while the 'de' 德 of Laozi and Zhuangzi is more inclined to natural intrinsic attributes (Yu, 2024, p. 144). Yu (2024: 144) holds the view that the term "Virtue" stands for goodness, and it is fitting to render it as "Virtue" in Confucian classics. When Fung translates the *Zhuangzi*, he still uses "Virtue" for 'de' 德, which is the same as the translation of 'de' 德 in the Confucian texts (e.g., "side" 四德 as "four constant virtues") (Feng, 2022, p. 154). This may be due to the consideration of the consistency of English translation of the same Chinese character. More generally, Fung's English version of the titles attempt to retain the intricate significance of Chinese culture since teaching is the ultimate aim of his translation.

Graham tends to use Western concepts to express and interpret Chinese ideology and culture (Liu, 2020, p. 176). For instance, when translating "Xiaoyaoyou", Graham opts for the prepositional phrase "without a destination" to circumvent the Western world's lack of familiarity with the notion of "transcendence" in the concept of "xiaoyao". From Graham, the aimlessness of 'you' 游 is the closest to the core concept conveyed by "xiaoyao" in terms of translation relevance. In addition, Graham's translation of "Renjianshi" as "Worldly business among Men" is not faithful to the original text. However, the most common meaning of "business" is "work that is a part of your job" (Hornby, 2018, p. 279), which is not consistent with the theme of the human world. Zhuangzi does not discuss the general relationship between men, but he emphasizes the importance of the political relationship between them (Li, 2009, p. 1). Zhuangzi lived in an era under the rule of monarchs. The political power symbolized by the monarch was extremely potent, approaching omnipotence. As Graham posits, people's challenges in handling affairs primarily stemmed from political relations rather than economic relations. In the treatment of the title of "Dechongfu", Graham chooses "Power" (Yu, 2024, p. 145), which is closer to Zhuangzi's actual thought, and interprets 'de' 德 as its internal energy. In summary, Graham endeavors to rebuild Zhuangzi within the equilibrium of the Western value framework and Chinese philosophical culture. Though his translation might be more readily embraced and understood by contemporary English readers, it could also deny readers the chance to grasp Zhuangzi's thoughts, even lead to their misinterpretation of the work.

Watson's translation is "aimed at readers seeking an introduction to Chinese literature" (Klein, 2014, p. 58), devoted to its popular reading and dissemination, and introduced the *Zhuangzi* to "ordinary readers, not just experts" (Watson, 2013, p. 5). Unlike the domestication of Fung and Graham, which is closer to the reader's context, Watson advocates foreignization to preserve the cultural characteristics of the source language. He selects wording and images that are as close to the original works as possible, and is against replacing Chinese cultural images with English ones. In Watson's cognitive intention, freedom is the core theme of the *Zhuangzi*. He believes that Zhuangzi's freedom is not political, social and economic freedom, but spiritual freedom, so "xiaoyao" is directly translated as "Free and Easy". In his understanding, the focus of Zhuangzi's discussion in this chapter was on man and life, so he points out the complex relationship between man and the world through the way of hypotaxis, and translates "Renjianshi" as "In the World of Men". There are resemblances between Watson's approach to interpreting "Dechongfu" (The Signs of Complete Virtue) and that of Fung Yu-lan. For instance, both scholars use "virtue" to translate the Chinese character 'de' 德. Moreover, due to the pun between 'de' 德 ('virtue') and 'de' 得 ('obtain'), Watson further elaborates on the disparities in pronunciation and definition via annotations, thereby differentiating the meaning of "Dechongfu" 德充符 from that of "Dechongfu" 得充符 (Lin & Xu, 2022, p. 116). Generally speaking, the English translation of the title of the Chinese version achieves a balance between academic and faithful as far as possible, and uses an easy way to let English readers read, feel, and understand Chinese thought and literature.

4. Conclusion

This paper conducts a comparative analysis of the English translations of the titles of the seven Inner Chapters in the *Zhuangzi* from the three dimensions within Relevance Theory. It reveals that the three translators have distinct focuses in their selection of translation strategies, along with other thoughts and selections regarding the expression of the topic's connotation. Overall, they have adequately taken into account the similarities and differences between the source-language culture and the target-language culture. Nevertheless, Watson's translation is comparatively more successful in preserving cultural features and readability.

The Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, which seamlessly blends philosophical depth with literary elegance, are succinctly titled with just three characters, yet its underlying meaning is profoundly intricate and multi-layered. Given the complexity and richness of its content, translators face the formidable challenge of capturing its essence accurately. To meet this challenge, they must exercise flexibility and discernment in selecting the most appropriate translation strategies. This process is significantly enhanced by adopting a perspective grounded in Relevance Theory, which provides a robust framework for understanding how meaning is conveyed and interpreted in the context of communication. Excessive pursuit of cognitive logic relevance and reduction of readers' cognitive effort costs may lead to the loss of the original charm of the translation and undermine readers' cognitive and aesthetic expectations. Conversely, excessive exploration of cognitive context relevance in an attempt to eliminate cultural deficiencies resulting from translation may render the translation verbose and obscure, thereby increasing readers' reading burden. Moreover, over-exploring cognitive intention relevance and interpreting and reconstructing the original text according to personal preferences can affect the faithfulness of the translation and heighten the likelihood of readers' misunderstanding. In summary, translation facilitates interaction. In order to enable the reader to achieve the optimal contextual effect with minimal cognitive effort, the translator must comprehend the relevance dimensions between the source text and the target text.

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Appendix A: List of English Translations of the *Zhuangzi*

Number	Year	Translator	Title of Translation	Type of Translation
1	1881	Frederic Henry Balfour	The Divine Classic of Nan-hua: Being the Works of Chuang Tsze, Taoist Philosopher	Complete Translation
2	1889	Giles Herbert Allen	Chuang Tzu: Mystic, Moralism, and Social Reformer	Complete Translation
	1926		Chuang Tzu: Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic	Complete Translation
3	1906	Lionel Giles	Musings of a Chinese Mystic: Selections from the Philosophy of Chuang Tzu	Selected Translation
4	1891	James Legge	The Sacred Books of the East: The Texts of Taoism	Complete Translation
5	1931	Fung Yu-lan	Chuang-Tzu: A New Selected Translation with an Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang	Selected Translation
6	1939	Arthur Waley	Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China	Selected Translation
7	1942	Lin Yutang	The Wisdom of China and India	Selected Translation
8	1942	R. Hughes	Chuang Chou, the Poet of Freedom	Selected Translation
9	1960	W. de Bary, I. Bloom, W. -T. Chan, J. Adler, & R. Lufrano	Sources of Chinese Tradition	Selected Translation
10	1962	Hsu Tsao	Chuang-tze Chapter 33: The Outline of Main Schools of Thought Nowadays	Selected Translation
11	1963	James B. Ware	The Sayings of Chuang Chou	Complete Translation
12	1963	Wing-tsit Chan	A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy	Selected Translation

Number	Year	Translator	Title of Translation	Type of Translation
13	1964	Burton Watson	Zhuangzi: Basic Writings	Selected Translation
	1968		The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu	Complete Translation
14	1965	Thomas Merton	The Way of Chuang Tzu	Selected Translation
15	1967	Achilles Fang	Chuang-tzu's Autumn Flood	Selected Translation
16	1974	Gia-Fu Feng & Jane English	Chuang Tzu: Inner Chapters	Selected Translation
17	1981	Angus Charles Graham	Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters	Selected Translation
18	1991	Thomas Cleary	The Taoist Classics	Selected Translation
19	1994	Victor H. Mair	Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu	Complete Translation
20	1996	Martin Palmer	The Book of Chuang Tzu	Complete Translation
21	1997	David Hinton	Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters	Selected Translation
22	1998	Sam Hamill & Jerome P. Seaton	The Essential Chuang Tzu	Selected Translation
23	1999	Wang Rongpei	Zhuangzi	Complete Translation
24	2006	Hyun Hochsmann & Yang Guorong	Zhuangzi (Longman Library of Primary Sources in Philosophy)	Complete Translation
25	2006	Nina Correa	Zhuangzi-“Being Boundless”	Complete Translation
26	2009	Brook Ziporyn	Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries	Selected Translation
	2020		Zhuangzi: The Complete Writings	Selected Translation
27	2010	Solala Towler	The Inner Chapters: The Classic Taoist Text	Selected Translation
28	2017	Cai Zhongyuan	New Paraphrase of Chuang Tzu	Complete Translation
29	2018	Nik Marcel & Leon Wieger	Zhuangzi: The Book of CHUANG TZU	Selected Translation
30	2022	Richard John Lynn	Zhuangzi: A New Translation of the Sayings of Master Zhuang as Interpreted by Guo Xiang (Translations from the Asian Classics)	Selected Translation
31	2023	Noah Sullivan	Zhuangzi: Classic New Translation	Selected Translation
32	2024	Sophia G. You	Zhuangzi: Inner Teachings: Chapters 1-7	Selected Translation
33	2025	Kangman Liu	Zhuangzi: Insights into Taoist Philosophy and Transcendent Living	Complete Translation
34	2025	Chris Fraser	The Complete Writings (Oxford World's Classics)	Complete Translation

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