JRAS, Series 3 (2025), **35**, 181–195
doi:10.1017/S1356186324000373

ARTICLE

Translation as the critique of modernity: a new perspective on Ku Hung-Ming's translation of Confucian classics

Lin Zhang

University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
Email: robinzhanghd@outlook.com

Abstract

The current scholarship on Ku Hung-Ming (1857–1928) as a translator and a historical figure has been constrained by identity politics and has viewed his translations and writings as a passive response to the challenge of the Western powers from a Chinese nationalist, or as a process of Ku's identity-building. This article goes beyond these constraints and recognises Ku as an active critic of Western modernity. By drawing on narrative theory, it investigates Ku's three broad choices regarding his translated Confucian classics—translation directionality, the invocation of Goethe, and the use of language mixing on the title pages and/or in the front matter—to demonstrate that Ku's translation agenda was to critique Western modernity. This article constitutes a paradigm shift in the research on Ku's translation of Confucian classics, and challenges what I call the 'eccentricity thesis' in Ku Hung-Ming studies to raise awareness of Ku as a critic of modernity.

Keywords: Goethe; Ku Hung-Ming (Gu Hongming); language mixing; narrative; the critique of modernity; translation directionality

Ku Hung-Ming[1] (1857–1928) was a Malaysian-born Chinese intellectual who received his education mostly in the West and began to settle in China in his late twenties. Proficient in several Western languages, Ku wrote mostly in languages other than Chinese. To borrow the words of Du, Ku was a 'cultural amphibian', familiar with both Western culture and Chinese culture.[2] Ku was famous for, among other things, the translation of Confucianism into English. The Confucian classics that he translated are the *Lunyu*, the *Zhongyong*, and the *Daxue*, conventionally known in the anglophone world as the *Analects*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, and the *Great Learning*.[3] His translation project

[1] For the romanisation of Ku's Chinese name, I adopt the Wade–Giles spelling rather than the modern pinyin system (Gu Hongming).

[2] C. Du, 'Gu Hongming as a cultural amphibian: a Confucian universalist critique of modern Western civilization', *Journal of World History* 22 (2011), pp. 715–746.

[3] I do not include Ku's translated *Daxue* in this research, as there are many contestable issues concerning it. Ku explicitly mentions in his translated *Zhongyong* that he abandoned the original plan of publishing the translated *Zhongyong* and *Daxue* together because the latter at the time had not satisfied his own standard. H. M. Ku, *The Universal Order or Conduct of Life* (Shanghai, 1906), p. ii. Whether his translated *Daxue* was published during his lifetime has remained uncertain for a long time and there have been few discussions about it. Not until recently was I aware of its publication. What is more puzzling is that Ku, in his correspondence with a foreign friend, seemed to suggest that his translated *Daxue* had not been published; see Siyuan Wu 吳思遠, 'Guhongming yu daxue yingyi chuban zhimi' 辜鴻銘與英譯《大學》出版之謎 [Ku Hung-Ming and the mystery of the

deserves special attention for several reasons. First, he was the first Chinese national to translate Confucianism into English. Second, his choice to translate from Chinese into English went against the tide of the time in China, when Chinese intellectuals were engaged in translating Western books into Chinese. Third, Ku quoted frequently from Western writers and thinkers in his translations, as indicated in the title that he gave his translated *Lunyu*: *The Discourses and Sayings of Confucius: A New Special Translation, Illustrated with Quotations from Goethe and Other Writers*.

The existing literature on Ku's translations mainly follows two lines. One is focused on Ku's translation strategies. Some researchers explore what they consider to be Ku's domesticating strategy, with the aim of providing implications for China in its spreading Chinese culture through translations[4] while others explain the domesticating strategy as Ku's way of fighting against the Western powers.[5] The other strand of research is more biographically focused, and emphasises the influence of Ku's diasporic experience on his translations[6] or takes Ku's translations as contributing to or resulting from his identity-building.[7]

While acknowledging their significance, I take issue with these studies in two ways. One is that their observation on Ku is provincial rather than global. These studies tend to view Ku as a Chinese nationalist, staunch in safeguarding the interests of China, cultural or political, and fearless in fighting against Western hegemony and bullying. The other is that these studies regard Ku as an individual with a crisis of identity rather than a serious thinker who was concerned with the future of mankind. This emphasis on Ku's identity and lack of recognition of Ku as a serious thinker is in line with the mainstream scholarship on Ku.[8] Only recently has this mainstream thinking

publication of Ku's translated *Daxue*], *Zhonghua dushubao* 中華讀書報 [*China Reading Weekly*], September 2015, https://epaper.gmw.cn/zhdsb/html/2015-09/16/nw.D110000zhdsb_20150916_2-18.htm?div=-1 (accessed 16 July 2024).

[4] Lin Yang 楊林 and Lijun Yan 閆麗君, 'Guhongming lunyu guihu fanyi celue' 辜鴻銘《論語》歸化翻譯策略 [Ku Hung-Ming's domesticating strategy in his translated *Lunyu*], *Beijing keji daxue xuebao (shehui kexueban)* 北京科技大學學報（社會科學版） [*Journal of Beijing University of Science and Technology (Social Sciences)*] 30 (2014), pp. 14–18; Zhuoxi Yuan 原卓喜, 'Xiuci quanfu shijiao xia de guhongming rujing fanyi yanjiu' 修辭勸服視角下的辜鴻銘儒經翻譯研究 [A study of Ku Hung-Ming's translation of Confucian classics from the perspective of persuasive rhetoric], *Xi'an waiguoyu daxue xuebao* 西安外國語大學學報 [*Journal of Xi'an Foreign Studies University*] 3 (2013), pp. 108–111.

[5] Hui Wang 王輝, 'Houzhimin shiyu xia de guhongming zhongyong yiben' 後殖民視域下的辜鴻銘《中庸》譯本 [Ku Hung-Ming's English translation of *Zhongyong*: a post-colonial perspective], *Jiefangjun waiguoyu daxue xuebao* 解放軍外國語大學學報 [*Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages*] 30 (2007), pp. 62–68; Zhixin Zhang 張枝新, 'Houzhimin shijiao xia jiedu guhongming yijing de guihua fa' 後殖民視角下解讀辜鴻銘譯經的歸化法 [Exploring the domesticating method in Ku Hung-Ming's translations of Confucian classics from a post-colonial perspective], *Henan ligong daxue xuebao (shehui kexueban)* 河南理工大學學報（社會科學版） [*Journal of Henan University of Technology (Social Sciences)*], 10 (2009), pp. 316–319.

[6] Hongxin Liu 劉紅新, 'Tebie fanyi de beihou—lisan jingli dui guhongming dianji yingyi de yingxiang' 特別翻譯的背後– 離散經歷對辜鴻銘典籍英譯的影響 [Behind the particular translation—on the influence of diasporic experience on Ku Hung-Ming's translations of Confucian classics], *Qiqihar daxue xuebao* 齊齊哈爾大學學報 [*Journal of QiQiHar University*] 1 (2008), pp. 135–137.

[7] Wen-hsin Lin 林文心, '"Zaici biancheng zhongguoren": lun guhongming de shuangyu xiezuo yu guozu xiangxiang' '再次變成中國人'：論辜鴻銘的雙語寫作與国族想象 ['Becoming again a Chinaman: Ku Hung-Ming's bilingual writing and national imagination], *zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* 中國文學研究 [*Chinese Literature Studies*] July (2020), pp. 215–254; Shisheng Lv 呂世生, 'Zhongyong de duoyiben jiedu yu yizhe wenhua shenfen yanjiu' 中庸的多譯本解讀與譯者文化身份研究 [Multiple readings of the translated *Zhongyong* and the cultural identity of translators], *Zhejiang daxue xuebao (renwen shehui kexue ban)* 浙江大學學報 (人文社會科學版) [*Journal of Zhejiang University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*] 52 (2022), pp. 62–70; James St. André, *Translating China as Cross-Identity Performance* (Honolulu, 2018), pp. 161–217.

[8] See, among others, C. Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey* (Pennsylvania, 2019); Xingtao Huang 黃興濤, *Wenhua guaijie guhongming* 文化怪傑辜鴻銘 [*Ku Hung-Ming: An Eccentric Cultural Genius*] (Beijing, 1995); L. Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 168–180.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373 Published online by Cambridge University Press

on Ku been challenged by the philosopher Huaiyu Wang, who called for serious attention on Ku as 'the lost Confucian philosopher'.[9]

My approach is to deprovincialise Ku and locate him in the global context. While going beyond the analyses informed by Venuti's domesticating/foreignising dichotomy and identity politics, which, as Baker points out, are static, streamlining, reductive, and overgeneralised,[10] I intend to initiate a paradigm shift in studying Ku's translations. Specifically, instead of dwelling on Ku's translations as a form of passive resistance to the Western powers or as a process of identity-building, I propose that we take Ku's translations as being a way of actively critiquing Western modernity.

To serve this end, I draw on narrative theory, as developed in the work of Mona Baker, to explore Ku's translations.[11] Narratives are 'public and personal 'stories' that we subscribe to and that guide our behaviour'[12] and can be classified into four types—personal, public, conceptual, and metanarratives, although these categories have porous boundaries. Most relevant to this study are public narratives, which go beyond the individual level and circulate across the wider society, and metanarratives, which are 'particularly potent public narratives that persist over long periods of time and influence the lives of people across a wide range of settings'.[13] In light of narrative theory, translators, like other social actors, construct their own narratives while responding to or resisting other narratives, particularly public and metanarratives, that are circulating in the wider society. This understanding of translation extricates translation studies from textual confines and affords translators agency in resisting the dominant narratives. Narrative theory enables us to see how translators engage in narrative interplay in the real world through their verbal or nonverbal interventions, however micro or seemingly trivial, in their translations.

It is also necessary to adopt the notion of framing, which is a constitutive part of narrative theory. Framing is 'an active strategy that implies agency and by means of which we consciously participate in the construction of reality'.[14] Translators rely on framing devices to undermine, modify, and strengthen certain aspects of the narratives that are encoded in the texts being translated. There are various framing devices that translators can deploy and here I discuss two devices relevant for this study—namely selective appropriation and paratextual (re)framing. Selective appropriation refers to translators' process of selection of certain elements according to their evaluative criteria; it necessarily privileges some aspects while excluding others.[15] By paratextual (re)framing, I refer to the fact that, apart from textual interventions, translators also use paratexts such as title pages, prefaces, and footnotes to (re)frame the source text to serve their narrative purposes. As we shall see below, Ku's selective appropriation is evident in, among other things, his choice to translate from Chinese into English, and paratextual (re)framings are reflected in his various interventions through title pages and the front matter.

[9] H. Y. Wang, 'The lost Confucian philosopher: Gu Hongming and the Chinese religion of good citizenship', *Philosophy East and West* 71 (2021), pp. 217–240.

[10] M. Baker, 'Reframing conflict in translation', *Social Semiotics* 17 (2007), pp. 152–153.

[11] M. Baker, *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* (London, 2006); M. Baker, 'Translation as renarration', in *Translation: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, (ed.) J. House (Basingstoke, 2014), pp. 158–199; M. Baker, 'Narrative analysis and translation', in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies and Linguistics*, (ed.) K. Malmkjaer (London, 2018), pp. 179–193.

[12] Baker, *Translation and Conflict*, p. 19.

[13] M. Baker, 'Narratives of terrorism and security: "accurate" translations, suspicious frames', *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 3 (2010), p. 351.

[14] Baker, *Translation and Conflict*, p. 106.

[15] *Ibid*, p. 71.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Narrative theory serves as a heuristic device, inviting us to take every translational choice, textual or paratextual, linguistic or nonlinguistic, seriously. As Baker points out, every choice that translators make should be taken as 'a kind of index that activates a narrative'.[16] Thus, narrative theory motivates us to account for translators' micro choices with reference to the narratives circulating in the wider society as well as explaining them within the texts. And narrative theory, as Baker points out, emphasises resistance over dominance;[17] it pushes researchers to think of micro translational choices as a potentially powerful strategy of resistance. Indeed, narrative theory encourages researchers to grapple with the question of how translators engage with sociopolitical resistance by adopting a specific translational choice rather than dwelling on the question of how translators are constrained by social conditions. The resistant role of translation, as emphasised by narrative theory, has also been recognised by other 'translation as resistance' theorists, such as Maria Tymoczko.[18] As we shall see later, I will also refer to the work of Tymoczko when I analyse how language mixing can be considered to be a resistant strategy by Ku.

Narrative theory, understood in this way, has driven my analyses of Ku's three broad choices in this study. I argue that Ku's difference from his Chinese contemporaries in terms of translational directionality can be explained as having derived from their different narrative subscriptions with regard to Western modernity. I also consider Ku's highlighting of Goethe and his use of language mixing on the title pages and in the front matter as contributing to Ku's narrative construction and resistance, and informing his readers of his agenda of critiquing Western modernity even before they read the translations proper.

It would be far beyond the scope of this article to analyse in detail how Ku critiques the narratives of Western modernity in his translations, but, through my analyses of these three broad choices, I intend to present a new approach to Ku's translation of Confucian classics—that is, thinking of his translation project as a critique of Western modernity.[19] I propose that we recast Ku as a serious thinker, challenging what I would call the 'eccentricity thesis' in Ku Hung-Ming studies, which refers to the widely held understanding of Ku as an 'eccentric' historical figure.[20] This study also contributes to scholarship on the critique of modernity by drawing attention to a thinker from outside of the West who critiqued Western modernity as it had taken shape in the West and was spreading to non-Western countries and regions.

Ku's translation directionality

Translators' narrative construction starts from their selection of what languages to translate from or into. This section discusses how Ku's translation directionality, which was against the tide of the time in China, shows his agenda of critiquing Western modernity. I will explore this point by contrasting Ku with his contemporary Chinese translators Yan Fu (1853–1921) and Lin Shu (1852–1924). I will also discuss the reasons why most research on Ku and his translations fails to recognise Ku's agenda.

[16] *Ibid*, p. 156.

[17] Baker, 'Reframing conflict in translation', p. 153.

[18] M. Tymoczko, *Translation, Resistance, Activism* (Amherst and Boston, 2010).

[19] For those who are interested in my detailed analysis of how Ku critiques Western modernity through substantial textual and paratextual interventions inside the translations, please see L. Zhang, 'Ku Hung-Ming's Translation of Confucian Classics: Renarrating Confucianism and Critiquing Western Modernity' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Manchester, 2023).

[20] Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey*; Huang, *Wenhua guaijie guhongming*; Guanghui Yan 嚴光輝, *Kuangru guaijie guhongming* 狂儒怪傑辜鴻銘 [*Ku Hung-Ming: An Arrogant Confucian and Eccentric Genius*] (Beijing, 2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Baker first discusses the narrative effect of translation directionality in her critique of the translation programs provided by the Middle East Media Research Institute.[21] She argues that the process of selecting source and target languages is one of narrative construction and 'has implications for the way we understand the relationship between the protagonists represented by these languages'.[22] In her analysis of that particular case, the narrative constructed through this selection is that the societies represented by source languages are to be monitored by those whose languages are deployed as targets. Although my analysis shows a different relationship, Baker's work does demonstrate that directionality in translation is a sign of narrative construction.

In this light, Ku's choice to translate from Chinese into English is worth a narrative analysis, especially given the tide of the time in China as far as translation directionality is concerned. China in Ku's time saw what is often understood as its third climax of translation, the other two being the translation of Buddhism lasting from Eastern Han Dynasty to Song Dynasty (roughly from the second to tenth centuries) and the translation of Western scientific works during the Ming–Qing transition period (around the seventeenth century).[23] In Ku's time, Chinese intellectuals translated books of various genres and topics into Chinese from various languages such as English, French, and German. Although they may have differed in terms of the genres or topics of the books to be translated, they translated from other languages into Chinese rather than the other way around.[24]

The different translation directionality between Ku and his Chinese contemporaries can be explained in terms of how their different narrative subscriptions and their different choices of the source–target pattern contributed to the construction of different narratives. Ku's contemporaries' choice of translating from Western languages into Chinese conveys a narrative that it was China that needed to be informed by the West. In their eyes, the vulnerability of China in its response to Western powers was due to the weakness and even backwardness of the Chinese political system, socio-economic structure, and Chinese culture itself. They seemed to agree that China at the time was in a premodern period while the West had entered the modern era so, for them, the urgent task was to introduce Western modernity into China. Yan Fu and Lin Shu, who were praised by the political reformist Kang Youwei (1858–1927) as the two most outstanding translators of the time, were typical of this kind.[25] Yan Fu translated what can be called social sciences while Lin Shu was engaged in the translation of Western literary works. Both their translations were aimed at modernising China.

As Schwartz argues, the efforts that Yan Fu made in his life were for a wealthy and powerful China.[26] Indeed, Yan's translations were not purely for the sake of knowledge transfer, but rather were intended to strengthen China as a nation. Yan introduced social

[21] Baker, 'Narratives of terrorism and security', pp. 354–356.

[22] *Ibid*, p. 355.

[23] Fukang Chen 陳福康, *Zhongguo yixue lilun shigao* 中國譯學理論史稿 [*The History of Chinese Translation Discourses*] (Shanghai, 1996); Zuyi Ma 馬祖毅, *Zhongguo fanyishi (shangjuan)* 中國翻譯史（上卷） [*The Chinese History of Translation (Volume I)*] (Wuhan, 1999).

[24] Some may argue that Chinese intellectuals such as S. I. Hsiung (1902–1991) and Lin Yutang (1895–1976) also translated from Chinese into other languages. However, I have decided not to engage with them simply because they were at least two generations away from Ku, who published his first translated Confucian classic before S. I. Hsiung was even born and completed the last one when Lin Yutang had reached only 20 years old. This generational difference matters given the fact that both the West and China witnessed a different social, political, and intellectual landscape in the so-called Long Nineteenth Century (1789–1914) from that in the so-called Short Twentieth Century (1914–1991). I am also comparing Ku with Yan Fu (1854–1921) and Lin Shu (1852–1924) because they belonged to the same generation as Ku.

[25] Fukang Chen, *Zhongguo yixue lilun shigao*, p. 131.

[26] B. Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge, 1964).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Darwinism into China through his translation of Huxley's works, raising his Chinese contemporaries' awareness of the danger of the destruction of the Chinese race and calling them to fight for the future of the Chinese nation. He also translated John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, trying to elaborate on a concept of freedom that he believed could enlighten the Chinese people.[27] Yan did not translate in accordance with his own translation principle of 信 (*xin*, faithfulness), but rather manipulated and intervened in his translated texts. All these manipulations and interventions were aimed at serving his own agenda of enlightening the Chinese people and making China powerful.

This emphasis on strengthening China is also true for Lin Shu's translations of Western literary works. Lin's translated works were aimed, as Hill argues, to manufacture a new Chinese culture that promoted the idea of strength.[28] To Lin, 'rejuvenating China' was his mission so that China could become, metaphorically speaking, a juvenile characterised by energy, vigour, and strength.[29] Lin even translated works that were colonialist and racist in order to serve his own agenda of calling for his Chinese contemporaries to become strong and fight for a powerful China.[30]

Although Yan and Lin had very different backgrounds and differed in their selection of books to be translated, they had the same translation agenda—that is, introducing Western modernity into China in order to save China from its national crisis. Modernity and translation were intertwined in China, as argued by Xie: '[M]odernity in China began and evolved with translation … the Chinese discourse of modernity was not only inaugurated, but also enabled by translation. In other words, translation is not merely auxiliary and instrumental to the shaping of Chinese modernity, but an essential part of it.'[31]

Indeed, modernity that arose in China at the turn of the twentieth century was effected by translation. It was through translations of Western books into Chinese that the project of modernity began to be built in China. This has led Lydia Liu to label Chinese modernity as 'translated modernity'.[32] While they may have differed in the extent to which China should be Westernised, translators such as Yan and Lin agreed that the introduction of Western modernity into China was a necessary and, maybe, sufficient condition for China's escape from destruction and the possibility of its rejuvenation.

This choice of translating from foreign languages into Chinese, I would argue, is due to the narratives to which translators such as Yan and Lin subscribed. They believed that it was China rather than the West that needed to be informed because they subscribed to the particular dual metanarratives of 'individual enlightenment and national salvation' that had circulated in China since the late nineteenth century. As the Chinese philosopher Li Zehou argues, modern Chinese history saw '*qimeng yu jiuwang de shuangchong bianzou* 啟蒙與救亡的雙重變奏' (the dual variation of individual enlightenment and national salvation).[33] Specifically, Chinese intellectuals were concerned with enlightening the Chinese people and saving China from its national crisis that was caused by bullying from Western powers. The narratives of 'individual enlightenment and national salvation', in Ku's time, were interdependent in that enlightenment of the Chinese people

[27] K. W. Huang, *The Meaning of Freedom: Yan Fu and the Origins of Chinese Liberalism* (Hong Kong, 2008).

[28] M. Hill, *Lin Shu, Inc.: Translation and the Making of Modern Chinese Culture* (Oxford, 2016).

[29] U. Kwan, 'Rejuvenating China: the translation of Sir Henry Rider Haggard's juvenile literature by Lin Shu in late imperial China', *Translation Studies* 6 (2013), pp. 33–47.

[30] Hill, *Lin Shu, Inc.*; Kwan, 'Rejuvenating China'.

[31] S. Xie, 'Translating modernity towards translating China', in *Translating China*, (ed.) Xuanming Luo and Yuanjie He (Bristol and Toronto, 2009), p. 136.

[32] L. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China (1900–1937)* (California, 1995).

[33] Zehou Li 李澤厚, *Zhongguo xiandai sixiang shilun* 中國現代思想史論 [*Essays on Contemporary Chinese Intellectual History*] (Beijing, 1987), pp. 7–49.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373 Published online by Cambridge University Press

was the task that would save the Chinese nation whilst the prevention of national destruction required the enlightenment of the people, although, in the end, as Li points out, the narrative of 'national salvation' overrode that of 'individual enlightenment'.[34] Indeed, the narratives of 'individual enlightenment and national salvation' reached the level of metanarrativity so that Chinese intellectuals who subscribed to them, such as Yan Fu and Lin Shu, made all kinds of efforts, including the translation of Western books into Chinese, to enlighten the Chinese people so that they would be able to save the country from destruction.

However, Ku's choice to translate Chinese texts into English conveys a narrative that the West had to be informed of the Chinese civilisation, which he believed had something to offer for the West to get out of its crisis. Ku intended to show the Western people 'how the study of the Chinese civilisation can help to solve the problem facing the world to-day, the problem of saving the civilisation of Europe from bankruptcy'.[35] To Ku, the problems with which the modern West was confronted could be solved with the aid of the Chinese civilisation, typically reflected in Confucianism. Ku took the Confucian way of living and governing as an alternative to what prevailed in the modern West.

Ku critiqued, rather than embraced, Western modernity, I would argue, because he subscribed to the public narratives of the crisis of Western modernity, as elaborated on by Western romantic or conservative thinkers such as Goethe, Arnold, Ruskin, Carlyle, and Emerson. As I demonstrate elsewhere, Ku responds to or resists the narratives constitutive of Western modernity such as rationalism, democracy, secularisation, revolution, anarchy, racism, and colonialism, while at the same time making narrative connections with those conservative or romantic Western writers.[36]

Therefore, I view Ku's translations as responding to or resisting the narratives that were circulating in the West rather than in China. Unlike Chinese translators such as Yan Fu and Lin Shu at the time, who worked hard to translate into Chinese, Ku was instead speaking to his Western contemporaries through his translations of Confucian classics. This argument can be intuitively justified if we consider the simple fact that translations are in the first place aimed at the target readers, as indicated in Gideon Toury's thesis that 'translations are facts of target cultures'.[37] Indeed, throughout his translations, Ku responds, explicitly or implicitly, to the narratives in the target world rather than the Chinese context, whether in resisting the narratives of those writers with whom he disagreed or standing in solidarity with those thinkers with whom he agreed.

Moreover, not only his translations, but also many of his writings were not targeted at his Chinese compatriots. Ku produced most of his writings in English at a time when few Chinese people had a command of English. He took issue with his Western contemporaries with regard to various narratives of Western modernity, but he seldom debated with Chinese intellectuals when these narratives were introduced into China. To take an example, social Darwinism was one of the narratives that Ku contested in his translated *Zhongyong*[38] but, as the late Confucianism-sympathetic Chinese philosopher Zhang Xianglong points out, Ku did not debate with his Chinese contemporary Yan Fu, who introduced social Darwinism into China.[39]

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] H. M. Ku, *The Spirit of the Chinese People* (Peking, 1915), p. 5.

[36] Zhang, 'Ku Hung-Ming's Translation of Confucian Classics'.

[37] G. Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam, 1995), p. 29.

[38] Ku, *Universal Order or Conduct of Life*, p. 47.

[39] Xianglong Zhang 張祥龍, *Fujian tiandi xin: rujia zailin de yunyi yu daolu* 復見天地心：儒家再臨的蘊意與道路 [*Showing the Heart of Heaven and Earth by Restoration: The Implications and Ways of Confucian Recurrence*] (Beijing, 2013), p. 104.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373 Published online by Cambridge University Press

It is very important to recognise that Ku was responding to the West more than to China, and failure to recognise this tends to miss important points in exploring Ku as a translator, a writer, and a historical figure. The Achilles' heel of most research on Ku is a lack of this recognition, which is most conspicuously shown in the prevailing practice of labelling Ku as eccentric by both his contemporaries and later generations in China. Some may argue that labelling Ku this way is due to Ku's 'eccentric' behaviours and arguments. For instance, after the collapse of Qing (1644–1912), the last dynasty in China, Ku continued wearing a queue, which has, since the late nineteenth century, been considered in China a symbol of the so-called feudalism or the oppression of the Han Chinese people by the Manchus, the ruling ethnicity in the Qing Dynasty.[40] However, Ku was not at all alone in having these 'eccentric' behaviours and, indeed, a great number of Qing loyalists, including the abovementioned Lin Shu, behaved similarly yet were not labelled in the same way as was Ku.[41] I argue that Ku was considered eccentric not because of his 'eccentric' performances, but due in large part to the fact that he failed to live up to the expectations of his Chinese compatriots. Specifically, they found it inexplicable that Ku, who had a Western educational background, did not embrace Western modernity, as did most of his contemporaries. Ku's enthusiastic advocacy for Confucianism and critique of Western modernity were beyond their expectations or even imagination. This expectation of Ku remains even now, and still has a strong impact on scholarly research on Ku, as shown in the appearance of the word 'eccentric' in the titles of recently published works about him.[42]

The expectation that Ku should have embraced Western modernity is a result of not recognising that Ku's concern was more with civilisation than nation. Ku's critics mistakenly supposed that Ku's defence of China emanated from his love of or his identification with China as a nation. This supposition has motivated a nationalistic reading of Ku. Most research on Ku's translation that is informed by post-colonial theories[43] can be explained by this mistaken supposition. However, I argue that Ku's concern was more with human civilisation than with the Chinese nation. Unlike his Chinese contemporaries who were predominantly concerned with and anxious over the fate of the Chinese nation in the face of challenges from the West, Ku was worried about the fate of humanity as a whole, as he diagnosed modern Western civilisation as ultimately leading to destruction that would spread around the globe.

This expectation reflects what I would call a self-Orientalised mentality of many Chinese intellectuals in both Ku's time and now. The military defeat of China by the West and a Westernised Japan led many Chinese intellectuals to believe that China needed

[40] For many stories about Ku that were told by both his contemporaries and later generations and they considered as testifying to Ku's 'eccentricity', see Xingtao Huang 黃興濤, *Kuangshi guaijie: mingren bixia de guhongming guhongming bixia de mingren* 曠世怪傑：名人筆下的辜鴻銘辜鴻銘筆下的名人 [*A Remarkable Eccentric Genius: Ku Hung-Ming under the Pen of Celebrities, Celebrities under the Pen of Ku Hung-Ming*] (Beijing, 1998).

[41] For a detailed description of many Qing-loyalist intellectuals such as Ku, who refused to endorse the republican China and stuck to Qing practices and conventions in their daily and political lives after the collapse of Qing, see Chih-hung Lin 林志宏, *Minguo nai diguo ye: zhengzhi wenhua zhuanxing xia de qingyimin* 民國乃敵國也：政治文化轉型下的清遺民 [*The Republic of China is the Enemy Country: Qing Loyalists in the Period of Political Cultural Transition*] (Taipei, 2009).

[42] See, for example, Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey*; Yan, *Kuangru guaijie guhongming*.

[43] Yanshi Liu 劉彥仕, 'Houzhimin yujing xia guhongming de yizhe wenhua shenfen jiqi fanyi xingwei' 後殖民語境下辜鴻銘的譯者文化身份及其翻譯行爲 [The cultural identity and translation behaviours of Ku Hung-Ming as a translator in the post-colonial context], *Sheke zongheng* 社科縱橫 [*Social Sciences Review*], 26 (2011), pp. 172–175; Hui Wang, 'Houzhimin shiyu xia de guhongming zhongyong yiben', pp. 62–68; Li Zhang 章莉, 'Guhongming yu rujia dianji yingyi' 辜鴻銘與儒家典籍英譯 [Ku Hung-Ming and the English Translation of Confucian Classics], *Shaoguan xueyuan xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 韶關學院學報 （社會科學版）[*Journal of Shaoguan University (Social Sciences)*], volume 32 (2011), pp. 148–152.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to abandon Confucianism before China could be modernised. The process of the development of modern China, as the historian Yu Ying-shih argues, was one of radicalisation.[44] Intellectuals from different backgrounds and with different political stances reached an agreement that Confucianism no longer worked in modern China. Even the so-called twentieth-century New Confucians, who were sympathetic towards Confucianism, also believed that Confucianism needed to be reformed or that it only functioned in the private sphere. Given the merciless attack on and unhesitant rejection of Confucianism by many Chinese intellectuals, the May Fourth era,[45] roughly from the mid-1910s to the mid-1930s, has been called a '*shifu shidai* 弑父時代' (patricidal era).[46] The metaphorical use of the word '*shifu* 弑父' (patricide) suggests the extent to which the anti-tradition Chinese intellectuals attacked or even demonised Confucianism.[47] As Yu points out, modern China had no real conservatives.[48] This anti-tradition mentality is also a mentality of self-Orientalism, according to which the 'backward' Confucianism should be replaced by the 'advanced' Western civilisation. This self-Orientalised mentality, which began to develop in China from Ku's time, has made it very hard to understand Ku, who was strongly against Orientalist narratives, as shown in his dismissal of Arthur Smith (1845–1932), the author of *Chinese Characteristics*—an Orientalist book that was first published in 1890.[49]

The situation of Ku in the Chinese context, as reflected in the existing literature on Ku, is also due to the influence of identity politics. In this light, Ku as a Chinese man must have been predominantly concerned with the issues of China rather than those outside of it, despite the fact that Ku's Chinese identity was contestable because he was born and raised outside of China. In other words, because Ku identified himself with the Chinese ethnicity, his writings, and even his translations, have been considered a response to the Chinese context rather than that outside of China, despite the conspicuous fact that most of his writings were written in—and most of his translated works were into—languages other than Chinese.

Ku's invocation of Goethe

Ku's agenda of critiquing Western modernity is also reflected in his invocation of Goethe on the title pages and in the front matter in his translations of Confucian classics. This

[44] Ying-shih Yu, 'The radicalization of China in twentieth century', *Daedalus* 122 (1993), pp. 125–150.

[45] This is named after the May Fourth movement, which in a narrow sense refers to the movement of 1919 and in a broad sense covers the time period from the mid-1910s to the mid-1930s.

[46] Yue Meng 孟悅 and Jinhua Dai 戴錦華, *Fuchu lishi dibiao: xiandai funv wenxue yanjiu*浮出歷史地表：現代婦女文學研究 [*Emerging from the Surface of the Earth: Modern Research on Women's Literature*] (Zhenzhou, 1989), p. 24.

[47] The strong anti-tradition current in China has been considered as having led to the tragedy of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976); see Ying-shih Yu 余英時, *Qianmu yu zhongguo wenhua* 錢穆與中國文化 [*Qian Mu and Chinese Culture*] (Shanghai, 1994), 201; Xianglong Zhang, *Fujiantiandixin*, pp. 111–114. It also remained strong after that, as reflected in a Chinese dissident's remark that it would be better if China had been colonised by the British for 300 years and the denial of Zhang Xianglong's proposal that a sculpture of Confucius should be put up in Peking University, which is the most prestigious university in China and started the New Culture movement; see Tongdong Bai, *Against Political Equality: The Confucian Case* (Princeton, 2019), p. 227; Xianglong Zhang, *Fujiantiandixin*, pp. 85–87.

[48] Yu, *Qianmu yu zhongguo wenhua*, p. 199. Interestingly, Yu seems to have made this argument without taking Ku into account, which attests to the extent to which Ku has been forgotten.

[49] Ku, *Universal Order or Conduct of Life*, pp. viii–ix. Arthur Smith's book has exerted a far-reaching influence on modern Chinese intellectuals' mindsets. For an elaborate analysis of how Lu Xun—a radical leftist intellectual in the May Fourth movement—appropriated this book to construct a narrative of Chinese national character as weak, deficient, and sick; see Liu, *Translingual Practice*, pp. 45–76.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373 Published online by Cambridge University Press

section demonstrates how Ku sets his agenda of critiquing Western modernity by titling his translated *Lunyu* with reference to Goethe and citing a poem by Goethe in the front matter of his translated *Zhongyong*.

In his translated *Lunyu*, Ku makes Goethe prominent in the title that he gives it—*The Discourses and Sayings of Confucius: A New Special Translation, Illustrated with Quotations from Goethe and Other Writers*. This is particularly interesting in that Ku privileges Goethe over other Western thinkers and writers, whom he also quotes but who remain anonymous on the title page. This selective appropriation of Goethe among the many Western writers and thinkers whom Ku cites in his translations demonstrates Ku's promotion and priority of the narratives elaborated on by Goethe. Specifically, Ku attempts to lead the target readers to receive his translations with reference to the narratives that Goethe elaborates on in his works.

Moreover, the special space that a title occupies in a book makes Ku's selective appropriation particularly important. Titles are among those few things that readers first approach before they delve into the book proper. Translators choose a certain title with purposes and motivations, since the title can 'condense the theme and message of a text'.[50] Indeed, titles can 'create a space of public anticipation and initiate a debate over texts even by those who have not read them'.[51] Thus, Ku's selective appropriation of Goethe through his intervention on the title page can help to establish a link between Confucian narratives and those of Goethe, even before the reader really goes into the body of his translated *Lunyu*.

Although Goethe's name does not appear in the title of Ku's translated *Zhongyong*, Ku still makes Goethe present in his translated *Zhongyong* by putting in the front matter a poem by Goethe, which is titled 'The Mason Lodge'. This is also a sign of the great extent to which Ku highlights Goethe, since the front matter is also an important paratextual space in which readers can be influenced before they delve into the translation proper.

It is also worth discussing the fact that Ku explicitly attributes this poem to Goethe in the front matter without mentioning the translator, Thomas Carlyle. This is particularly interesting, first contrasted with the fact that Ku accorded himself, as a translator, the status of authorship. On the title pages of both his translated *Lunyu* and *Zhongyong* appears the format 'BY KU HUNG-MING'.[52] In the back matter of his translated *Zhongyong*, the crediting of the translator with authorship is transparent, as shown in the words 'BY THE SAME AUTHOR', under which he lists three books, one of which is his translated *Lunyu*. This inconsistency in the treatment of Ku himself and Thomas Carlyle as translators with regard to the status of authorship suggests that Ku may have intentionally made Carlyle absent in order to cast Goethe into relief.

The other is related to the level of equivalence between Carlyle's English version and the original German version. Carlyle's English version radically diverges from Goethe's original version.[53] As Francke points out, Carlyle's English version 'contains in point of fact no line equivalent to [Goethe's original version]'.[54] A more equivalent English version produced in Ku's time was translated by Edgar Alfred Bowring (1826–1911), who titled the poem as 'A Symbol'. Although I have no evidence that Ku did have access to Bowring's

[50] M. M. Al-Herthani, 'Edward Said in Arabic: Narrativity and Paratextual Framing' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Manchester, 2009), p. 64.

[51] B. Dubbati and H. Abudayeh, 'The translator as an activist: reframing conflict in the Arabic translation of Scco's footnotes in Gaza', *The Translator* 24 (2018), p. 152.

[52] On the title page of Ku's translated *Zhongyong*, his name is not hyphenated.

[53] For a detailed analysis of how almost every one of Carlyle's lines differs from the original German, see Kuno Francke, 'Carlyle and Goethe's Symbolum', *Philological Quarterly* 6 (1927), pp. 100–101.

[54] *Ibid*, p. 97.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373 Published online by Cambridge University Press

version, it is reasonable to guess that Ku had also read Bowring's translation, given Ku's familiarity with British writers and translators, as evidenced in his frequent reference to them in his translations. What is more, Ku could also have produced his own translation of this poem because he had a good command of German and was well versed in Goethe's oeuvre.[55] In this sense, Ku seems to have made a choice between three versions—that is, Carlyle's, Bowring's, and his own. Therefore, Ku's adoption of Carlyle's version can also be a form of selective appropriation, which contributes to a certain narrative construction, as we shall discuss later with regard to the content of the poem.

These connections with Goethe on the title pages and in the front matter in his translated Confucian classics further demonstrate Ku's agenda of critiquing Western modernity through his translations, as the work of Goethe is related to the critique of Western modernity. For example, it is widely recognised that Goethe's *Faust* represents the human conditions that were brought about by Western modernity.[56] The legendary figure, Faust, was considered 'a fundamental icon of Western modernity'[57] and his story 'a myth of modernity'.[58] Simply put, the protagonist in Goethe's works was an archetypical modern person who was fundamentally exemplifying modern life and condition. In the eyes of Goethe, as Eggle points out, the modern West was 'a civilisation at peril'.[59] Through literary productions, Goethe warned the moderns of the danger of modern civilisation and encouraged them to seek a life that was better than that brought about by Western modernity. Given this connection between the works of Goethe and the critique of Western modernity, it makes sense to argue that Ku's highlighting of Goethe in his translations of Confucian classics is also his way of critiquing Western modernity.

Ku's critique of Western modernity is also shown by his quotations from Goethe throughout the translations of both the *Lunyu* and the *Zhongyong*. For example, in his translated *Lunyu*, by citing Goethe, Ku replaces the dominant narrative of progress as materialistic advancement in the modern West with his own narrative of progress as a development of humanity.[60] In his translated *Zhongyong*, Ku dismisses modern education as producing devils, as described in Goethe's *Faust*,[61] but still invests trust in human nature by recalling how Goethe spoke of human nature.[62] Ku also invokes Goethe to stress how to cultivate morality by living one's ordinary life[63] and explains the difficulty in completely understanding the moral law by invoking Goethe's narrative of the 'open secret'.[64]

The content of the poem that Ku puts in the front matter of his translated *Zhongyong* also merits discussion. The poem begins by using the mason's way of living to describe

[55] H. Nelson, one of Ku's German translators, describes Ku as someone 'who knows Goethe just like a German'; Tianhu Hao, 'Ku Hung-Ming, an early Chinese reader of Milton', *Milton Quarterly* 39.2 (2005), p. 93.

[56] See, for example, M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1982); J. Russel, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, 1986); H. Schulte, J. Noyes, and P. Kleber, *Goethe's Faust: Theatre of Modernity* (Cambridge, 2011); J. Tambling, *Histories of the Devil: From Marlowe to Mann and the Manichees* (London, 2016), chapter 6.

[57] Schulte, Noyes, and Kleber, *Goethe's Faust: Theatre of Modernity*, p. 1.

[58] N. Boyle, 'Wagering on modernity: Goethe's eighteenth century Faust', in *Music in Goethe's Faust: Goethe's Faust in Music*, (ed.) L. B. Bodley (Suffolk, 2017), p. 45.

[59] D. Eggle, 'A civilisation at peril: Goethe's representation of Europe during the Sattelzeit', *European Review of History* 21 (2014), pp. 871–888.

[60] H. M. Ku, *The Discourses and Sayings of Confucius* (Shanghai, 1898), p. 174.

[61] Ku, *Universal Order or Conduct of Life*, p. 75.

[62] *Ibid*, p. 9.

[63] *Ibid*, pp. 5–6.

[64] *Ibid*, p. 23.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the way of living of all human beings, then refers to negative feelings such as 'doubt and misgiving', and ends with the following lines:

V.
Here heard are the voices,
Heard are the Sages,
The Worlds and the ages:–
'Choose well, your choice is
'Brief and yet endless.'
VI.
'Here eyes do regard you
'In Eternity's stillness;
'Here is all fullness,
'Ye brave, to reward you;
'Work and despair not.'

Ku's reference to 'choice' here can be read as a reminder for the reader that they should make the *right* choice. This warning sounds particularly true when we take into account the contrast in the poem between 'darkness' and 'perplexity' in the preceding lines, and 'stillness' and 'fullness' in the following lines. It is justifiable to say that Ku believed that the choice of what Western modernity brought about was the wrong choice, and it was right to choose what his translations offered. Through the mouth of the Carlyle-translated Goethe, Ku encouraged the moderns to refrain from despairing. The word 'despair' at the opening of his translated *Zhongyong* in the front matter seems to be echoed in the closing pages of his translated *Zhongyong* by the word 'pessimism', which appears in the first sentence of the Appendix A that immediately follows his translation proper. Ku seems to suggest that the way to dispel despair or pessimism is to read his translations and follow the way, as encoded in them.

Ku's use of language mixing

In addition to the selection of translation directionality and the invocation of Goethe, Ku also adopts language mixing as a way of contesting Western modernity. This section focuses on the ways in which Ku uses multiple languages on the title pages of his translated Confucian classics and discusses its relevance to Ku's agenda of critiquing Western modernity.

Ku uses language mixing in both his translated *Lunyu* and *Zhongyong*. Three languages appear on the title page of his translated *Lunyu*. At the top are four Chinese characters '*siwen zaizi* 斯文在兹' (herein lies the authentic civilisation). Immediately under Ku's name is a quote in German from Goethe, the meaning of which is 'the shining things exist only for a while, but the authentic things will remain relevant forever'. On the title page of Ku's translated *Zhongyong*, there are no German words but, at the top, there are the same four Chinese characters. The meanings of both the Chinese and German words seem to suggest that Confucianism represents the authentic civilisation that will remain relevant forever. This language mixing also appears in the body of Ku's translations. For example, he uses Chinese words or phrases from place to place, sometimes juxtaposing Chinese and English, and even without English equivalents in other places. He also uses a few German, French, Greek, and Latin words in the body of his translations.

However, what interests me more is not the actual meanings of these non-English words, but rather the question of whether they mean anything to the target readers—

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that is, the anglophone population. In the West of the time, the majority of the target readers would not have read Chinese, and at least a certain proportion of them would not have read any languages such as Latin, Greek, French, and German, although it is reasonable to argue that some well-educated people in the anglophone world may have learned some of them. My argument would be that these verbal signs do mean something to the English readers. I believe that Ku's use of multiple languages is meaningful for his translation agenda because, as Baker demonstrates, the use of language mixing creates a space of resistance in which translators reverse the symbolic order and serve their own political agenda.[65] Therefore, the question that I have to ask is: What does Ku intend to resist by mixing languages in his translations? As Tymoczko points out, 'resistance to what?' is a basic question that has to be asked when translation is understood as resistance.[66]

Ku's language mixing may invite multiple interpretations, but the most conspicuous would be that of difference, which can be visually felt. To appreciate this highlighting of difference by Ku, it is necessary to consider the relationship between difference and Western modernity.

As universalism was one of the defining features of Western modernity, the process of modernisation was one of erasing differences. At the heart of modernity lay 'the ideology of sameness'.[67] As Bauman points out, '[m]odernity brought the levelling of differences'.[68] To borrow the words of Chernela and Pereira, modernity meant 'an end to difference'.[69] Internally, the modern West promoted standardisation through education, industrialisation, and commercialisation to shape the mindset of people and their ways of living and working, marginalising, excluding, or even eradicating the Other. Externally, the modern West attempted to impose on other nations and peoples its model of life and governance, which it believed to be universal. Where peaceful means failed to achieve this end, violence was promoted and carried out, as typically shown in various forms of racism and colonialism.

This feature of Western modernity as the erasure of differences provides us with a lens through which to explain Ku's use of language mixing on the title pages of his translated Confucian classics. Ku's use of languages other than English can be taken as his response or resistance to the tendency of Western modernity to erase difference. Ku's use of other languages in English-written books was an act of promoting heterogeneity and resisting homogeneity. In particular, his preservation of Chinese characters in both of his two translated works was to make visible the Other that was marginalised and silenced by the West. In his construction of a narrative of difference through the use of language mixing, Ku's visibility as a translator was made explicit. In this sense, Ku does not just adopt a domesticating strategy, as the existing literature on Ku's translation, informed by Venuti's foreignisation/domestication dichotomy, asserts.[70]

[65] M. Baker, 'Translation as an alternative space for political action', *Social Movement Studies* 12 (2013), pp. 41–44.

[66] Tymoczko, *Translation, Resistance, Activism*, p. 250.

[67] A. de Benoist, *The Ideology of Sameness* (Budapest, 2022).

[68] Z. Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Maldon, 1989/2007).

[69] J. Chernela and E. Pereira, 'An end to difference: imagining Amazonian modernity at the dawn of the twentieth century', *Journal of Anthropological Research* 74 (2018), pp. 10–31.

[70] Wen-hsin Lin, 'Zaici biancheng zhongguoren'; Shisheng Lv 'Zhongyong de duoyiben jiedu yu yizhe wenhua shenfen yanjiu'; St. André, *Translating China as Cross-Identity Performance*, p. 215; Lin Yang and Lijun Yan, 'Guhongming lunyu guihu fanyi celue'; Xiaobo Zhang 張小波, 'Qiangshiyu xia de wunai—guhongming guji yingyi de guihua' 强勢語下的無奈—辜鴻銘古籍英譯的歸化 [The dilemma with the hegemonic language: Ku's domestication in his translated Chinese classics], *Zhanjiang haiyang daxue xuebao* 湛江海洋大學學報 [*Journal of Zhanjiang Ocean University*], 5 (2004), pp. 70–74.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The physical positions of the languages that appear on the title pages are also interesting. In both books, the Chinese characters appear at the top. This physical hierarchy can be metaphorical: Ku seems to use the physical hierarchy to construct a narrative that the Chinese civilisation that is encoded in his translated works is at the top, which means it is the best, as expressed in the meanings of the four Chinese characters. In this sense, Ku subverts the dominant hierarchical structure that was established by the modern West. His choice to use these strategies on the title page makes Ku's agenda of critiquing modernity more prominent, as the foregrounding function of title pages can better impress readers in a way that casts Ku's translation agenda into relief.

Conclusion

I have in this article offered a new thinking on Ku's translations which proposes that we take Ku's translation agenda as the critique of Western modernity rather than viewing his translation of Confucian classics as a response to the bullying of China by the West or as a way of his identity-building, as current scholarship asserts. Although the scope of this article does not allow me to present how Ku critiques various aspects of Western modernity throughout his translated Confucian classics, as I have done elsewhere,[71] I have demonstrated that, without necessarily analysing the translations proper, an investigation of Ku's three broad choices regarding his translation project—translational directionality, the invocation of Goethe, and the use of language mixing on the title pages and in the front matter—can bring into relief Ku's agenda of critiquing Western modernity. By proposing that Ku's translation project was to critique Western modernity, I have aimed to initiate a paradigm shift in the research on Ku Hung-Ming's translation of Confucian classics. By so doing, I have dismantled what I am calling the 'eccentricity thesis' in Ku Hung-Ming studies that has long overshadowed Ku's scholarly image. The 'eccentricity thesis' is far from doing justice to Ku and indeed glosses over valuable and important aspects of Ku's thought. Rather, we need to recognise that Ku was a serious thinker who was genuinely concerned with humanity as a whole rather than a Chinese nationalist who was merely concerned with the fate of the Chinese nation or someone with a crisis of identity.

At the same time, I would like to point out the explanatory power of narrative theory as applied in translation studies. Narrative theory, which views translation as a form of narrative (re)construction and resistance, has greatly facilitated my reconceptualisation of Ku's translation of Confucian classics as the critique of Western modernity and Ku as a serious thinker—a profound critic of modernity. In particular, narrative theory—taking every choice as 'a kind of index that activates a narrative'[72]—has enabled me to consider Ku's three broad choices as significant rather than random or trivial. In this sense, I have demonstrated the power that narrative theory has in elaborating on major themes through the analysis of seemingly minor choices.

I believe that it would be rewarding to explore Ku as a critic of modernity, as he critiqued modernity at a time when Western modernity had taken shape in the West and began to spread to other quarters of the globe. What makes Ku more special as a critic of modernity is that he was a 'cultural amphibian' who was well equipped with both Western and Chinese learning.[73] The investigation of Ku as a critic of modernity would

[71] Zhang, 'Ku Hung-Ming's Translation of Confucian Classics'.
[72] Baker, 'Reframing conflict in translation', p. 156.
[73] Du, 'Gu Hongming as a cultural amphibian'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373 Published online by Cambridge University Press

shed light on the advancement of the project of modernity in our own time, which Habermas has called 'an unfinished project'.[74]

Acknowledgements. I owe great thanks to Dr. Anna Strowe, who gave invaluable and constructive comments on earlier drafts of this article.

Conflicts of interest. None.

[74] J. Habermas, 'Modernity: an unfinished project', in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on the Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, (eds.) M. P. d'Entreves and S. Benhabib (Cambridge, MA, 1997 [1980]), pp. 38–55.

Cite this article: Zhang L (2025). Translation as the critique of modernity: a new perspective on Ku Hung-Ming's translation of Confucian classics. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* **35**, 181–195. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000373