

YAN FU'S UNFAITHFUL TRANSLATION OF THOMAS HUXLEY'S *EVOLUTION AND ETHICS*

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Abstract

This paper analyses Yan Fu's translation of the title and the key terms in Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* and shows that his unfaithfulness was mainly due to his personal intention to inspire the Chinese people to fight against foreign enemies and the feudal system in late nineteenth-century China. In his famous *The Heavenly Theory of Evolution*, the translation of *Evolution and Ethics*, Yan Fu added the traditional Chinese value of 'heaven' by translating 'evolution' as 'heavenly evolution' in order to make Darwin's theory more acceptable and easier to understand by target readers. When he translated terms such as 'competition' and 'natural selection', Yan Fu borrowed the slogan of the Westernizing reform to explain the relationship linking evolution, competition and selection. Yan Fu wanted to arouse people's attention to the theory of evolution and hoped they would use evolutionary thought as a theoretical weapon to save themselves and the country from a national crisis. His unfaithful translation appealed to the scholars to make them spread the theory through their social influence.

Keywords: *Yan Fu, unfaithfulness, culture, evolution, competition, selection.*

INTRODUCTION

Yan Fu (1854-1921) was a Chinese translator and educator. He became famous for his translation of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, renamed *The Theory of Heavenly Evolution*. Additionally, he stood for the westernizing reform effort in the late Qing Dynasty (1840-1911) and inspired the New

Culture Movement.¹ This movement called for the awakening of the Chinese people amidst the crumbling of the Qing dynasty and the carve-up of the country by Western powers and Japan. Yan Fu's translation of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* promoted Darwin's theory of evolution in China and called on the people to understand and overcome the national crisis using the concepts of "competition", "natural selection" and "survival of the fittest".² According to Wang Min and Chen Youliang (21), in the decades following the publication of *The Theory of Heavenly Evolution*, 'competition', 'selection' and 'the survival of the fittest' became popular concepts in Chinese publications, both in China and overseas. They inspired enlightened scholars and changed their worldview to seeking social reform and innovation, mainly after the Sino-Japanese War³.

As a translator, Yan Fu put forward three translation principles—faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance. However, he did not follow this 'faithfulness' in his translation of *Evolution and Ethics*. Instead, he renamed the book, changed the original structure, selectively translated the text, and added his own notes in the translation. In *The Theory of Heavenly Evolution*, Yan Fu even combined his translation with Herbert Spencer's thoughts on evolution that do not exist in the original text.

YAN FU AND HIS TRANSLATIONS

Yan Fu was born in Fujian⁴ in 1871. He graduated from Foochow Shipbuilding Institution⁵. In 1877, he was sent to the Royal Navy College⁶ in Dartmouth. Yan Fu was born in the aftermath of the First Opium War⁷, so he experienced the rise

¹The New Culture Movement, a so-called 'Enlightenment Movement' developed in China from 1915 to 1923, which opposed old-fashioned thinking and promoted the slogan 'democracy and science'.

²Originally referring to the natural laws of living things in nature, these concepts are also used later in relation to the development of human society.

³In 1894, Japan launched a war against China and Korea known as the Sino-Chinese War. Japan won it in 1895.

⁴Located on the southeast coast of China. Fujian is the historical starting point of the Silk Road and Zheng He's journey to the West during the Ming Dynasty.

⁵Established in 1866, Foochow Shipbuilding Institution was the first navy school in modern Chinese history and initiated modern navy education in China.

⁶Founded in 1863, the Royal Navy College educates and trains junior naval officers.

⁷A war of invasion waged by Britain against China from 1840 to 1842. China was defeated and had to cede part of its territory to the British government. The Chinese and British governments signed the Treaty of Nanking, the first unequal treaty in Chinese history.

of the Tai Ping Tian Guo Movement⁸ and the Self-strengthening Movement⁹. He also witnessed the Sino-Japanese War and the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki¹⁰. Yan Fu lived in an age when China became a semi-colonial society and faced a profound national crisis. He was concerned about the future of China and wanted to actively take part in the regeneration of his country (Fan and Lin 2).

During his studies in Britain, Yan Fu read Western books on philosophy, law, and science. He compared the situation in China with the West, reflected on reforms, and considered that the most urgent measure needed was to inspire the Chinese people. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Qing government had to reform under military pressure from Western powers, mainly the UK and France. According to Yan Fu, reform in China should start at the ideological and cultural levels. Through his translations, such as Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Law*, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, and Herbert Spencer's *The Study of Sociology*, Yan Fu wished to refute current political and cultural theories in China. He directly criticized the restoration thoughts and claims for reform put forward by Kang Youwei¹¹ and Liang Qichao¹². Yan Fu had a deeper understanding of modern Western culture than Kang and Liang because of his studies abroad. He was convinced that the methodology of natural sciences could play a role in transforming the ethical and moral beliefs of the Chinese people. Yan Fu believed that first, the natural sciences should be developed in China, and secondly, the methods and values of natural science should be applied to study the Chinese society (Qi 269).

In 1868, the Emperor of Japan took hold of the throne and proclaimed the Meiji Restoration, a total westernization and modernization reform spanning

⁸Tai Ping Tian Guo Movement was a peasant war and revolt to rebel against the feudal ruling and foreign invasion which took place in China from 1851 to 1864.

⁹Also referred to as the Westernization Movement. From the 1860s to the 1890s, Chinese officials and thinkers promoted a movement that introduced advanced western thoughts, science, and technologies to strengthen China.

¹⁰A treaty signed between the Chinese and Japanese governments in 1895 which required the Chinese government to cede some territories and pay the Japanese government. The signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki was the symbol of the end of the First Sino-Japanese War.

¹¹Kang Youwei (1858-1927) was a politician and thinker in the late Qing Dynasty. He was one of the leaders of the Hundred Days Reform (a political reform in politics, education, and trade calling for teachings from the West), while after the failure of the reform he turned to support the emperor and opposed revolutions.

¹²Liang Qichao: 1873-1929, a politician, thinker in the late Qing Dynasty, one of the leaders of Hundred Days Reform. He was one of the major reformists and New Legalists, the same as Yan Fu.

from the 1860s to the 1890s, during which a new government with separation of powers was established and a process of national industrialization was initialised.

The failure of the First Sino-Japanese War caused an outrage in the entire country. Yan Fu, as a former navy officer, also felt angry and inconsolable. He proposed that reform should begin with a spiritual change in the Chinese people, enabling them to reconnect their own future to that of the country. From February to May 1885, Yan Fu published five political articles in *Zhi Bao*¹³, including *On the Urgency of Change*¹⁴, *Original Power*¹⁵, *On Han Yu's Yuan Dao*¹⁶, *Sequel to Original Power*¹⁷ and *The Assertion of Saving a Dying Country*¹⁸. In *Original Power*, Yan Fu introduced Darwin's and Spenser's theories of evolution to the Chinese people. He thought that 'competition', 'natural selection' and 'survival for the fittest' were the most critical thoughts in Darwin's *The Origin of Species* and would arouse the people's will to fight, making them think about their own future and that of the country.

The Theory of Heavenly Evolution

The Theory of Heavenly Evolution is the translation of *Evolution and Ethics* and is one of the most influential translations by Yan Fu. *Evolution and Ethics* was written by Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895), a British biologist known as a supporter of Darwin who actively advocated his theory of evolution. However, he did not agree with some of Darwin's theories, such as gradualism, which was also reflected in Yan Fu's translation of *Evolution and Ethics*. In 1893, Huxley was invited to deliver a famous lecture at Oxford University entitled "Evolution and Ethics", which focused on the interdependence between the natural forces of

¹³*Zhi Bao*: 《直报》— a newspaper first published in Tianjin in 1895.

¹⁴*On the Urgency of Change* 《论世变之亟》, published in *Zhi Bao* in 1895. This article aimed to illustrate the rapid and numerous changes happening in modern China.

¹⁵*Original Power* 《原强》, published in *Zhi Bao* in 1895. In this article, Yan Fu firstly introduced Darwin's and Spenser's theories and thoughts to the Chinese people.

¹⁶*On Han Yu's Yuan Dao* 《辟韩》, published in 1895. This article was written about Han Yu's *Yuan Dao*. Han Yu (768-824) was a government official, scholar, and philosopher in the middle Tang Dynasty. In *Yuan Dao*, Han Yu called for restoring the ancient methodology and worship of Confucianism.

¹⁷*Sequel to Original Power* 《原强续篇》, published in 1895, was the continuation of *Original Power*.

¹⁸*The Assertion of Saving a Dying Country* 《救亡决论》, published in 1895. In this article, Yan Fu criticized traditional Chinese academies and culture and called for learning from the West.

the universe and the human forces of ethical processes. This lecture further interpreted and developed Darwin's theory of evolution. Then in 1894, Huxley published the book of the same name—*Evolution and Ethics*, which was a collection of several of Huxley's lectures and other speeches on the theme of evolution. *Evolution and Ethics* can be divided into two parts. The book's first half was devoted to the theme of evolution and the second half to the theme of ethics.

The translation of *Evolution and Ethics* was Yan Fu's first step toward enlightening the Chinese society. He saw the theory of evolution as an ideological weapon that called upon the people to fight against foreign enemies and the feudal ruling of the Qing Government. Therefore, Yan Fu did not directly translate Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. Instead, he translated *Evolution and Ethics*, written by Huxley. To some extent, it showed that Yan Fu thought Huxley's thinking was applicable. According to Hu Weixi (158), Yan Fu's intention of translating *Evolution and Ethics* was not only to arouse the Chinese people's ambition of 'self-strengthening' and 'preservation of the nation', but also to provide the theoretical basis for new morality and ethics to the Chinese society.

In the preface to *The Theory of Heavenly Evolution*, Yan Fu put forward for the first time his famous translation principles of 'faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance', of which 'faithfulness' is fundamental and means that translations should be faithful without deviation, omission, or arbitrary addition or subtraction of the original text. However, readers today may easily find that Yan Fu himself did not follow this principle of 'faithfulness' in his translation of *Evolution and Ethics*.

Huxley's *Evolution and ethics* was divided into two parts: evolution and ethics. However, Yan Fu only selected and translated the 'evolution' part of the original text. Yan Fu was not faithful, but selective and critical in his translation. He renamed his target text *The Theory of Heavenly Evolution*, which only retained half of the original *Evolution and Ethics* title, reflecting his unfaithfulness. In addition, Yan Fu's translation was not faithful in the full text either. In the following, I will take Yan Fu's translation of the title and the fundamental evolutionary concepts as examples. By comparing Huxley's original text, Yan Fu's translation, and my translation of Yan Fu, I will illustrate and discuss his unfaithful translation of *Evolution and Ethics*.

EXAMPLES AND ANALYSIS OF YAN FU’S UNFAITHFUL TRANSLATION IN *THE THEORY OF HEAVENLY EVOLUTION*

‘Heaven’ in Yan Fu’s Title of *The Theory of Heavenly Evolution*

The word ‘heaven’ was never mentioned in Huxley’s original text, while Yan Fu not only introduced it in his own translation but also used ‘heavenly evolution’ as the title. In China, the concept of ‘heavenly evolution’ has been considered to be first coined by Yan Fu. This translation reflects his understanding of *Evolution and Ethics*, his knowledge of the theory of evolution, as well as his consideration as a translator for the receptiveness of his audience.

| Huxley’s Title | Yan Fu’s Title | My Translation of Yan Fu’s Title |
|-----------------------------|----------------|---|
| <u>Evolution</u> and Ethics | 《 <u>天演论</u> 》 | The Theory of <u>Heavenly Evolution</u> |

(The comparison is between the underlined words)

More specifically, ‘Heavenly evolution’ reflects Yan Fu’s understanding of evolution from a Chinese perspective, i.e., he understood and interpreted ‘evolution’ and the theory of evolution within the theoretical framework of Chinese culture. As ‘evolution’ was a foreign concept to the Chinese before his introducing it, Yan Fu attempted to guide his audience into the world of this new term through the traditional concept of ‘heaven’. He particularly hoped that Chinese scholars, who were to be his major audience at the time, would understand better and accept the knowledge of evolution.

First, ‘heaven’ has a special meaning in traditional Chinese culture. Under the feudal monarchy, the emperor was ‘the son of heaven’. This notion arose from the farming culture of China. Harvest depended on factors that were believed to be controlled by heaven and the Chinese people believed that if they obeyed heaven’s command, they would have a good harvest to live a good life. They recognized ‘heaven’ as their father and the emperor, chosen to govern the people, as ‘the son of heaven’.

Second, Yan Fu had the command of the ideas of *I Ching*, and he applied these ideas to explain the theory of evolution. ‘Heaven’ is a core concept in the *I Ching*¹⁹. Yan Fu wrote: “What we know as ‘I’ (in *I Ching*) in China is

¹⁹*I Ching*: a philosophical work that integrates the natural and social sciences of China. It is said that there were three books of *I Ching*, but the first two have been lost. The only existing *I Ching* refers to the book of *Zhou I* of the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BC - 220 AD). *I Ching* takes a holistic approach to understanding the world and sees human

called ‘heavenly evolution’ in Western studies.” We may see that Yan Fu thought the law of nature defined in *I Ching* was similar to the theory of evolution. *I Ching* is seen as the general framework of traditional Chinese culture and a classic with a foothold in all schools of thought. According to Zhou Zhijie (3), the term ‘heavenly evolution’ was created by Yan Fu based on the explanation of ‘the way of heaven²⁰’ in *I Ching*. Most Confucian scholars viewed the historical processes and social evolution from the perspective of ‘the way of heaven’, so they thought that the fortune of the Chinese people relied on heaven. After the Opium War, although these scholars sought political change and reform, they still attributed temporary disorder and chaos to ‘the way of heaven’.

‘I’, pronounced as ‘e’ in English, is directly translated as ‘change’. *I Ching* illustrates the law of nature that everything in the world is in a never-ending development process, revealing the character of the entire universe and encompassing the properties of all things. Yan Fu found the similarities between the *I Ching* and *Evolution and Ethics* in explaining the laws of nature and human development. For example, ‘the way of heaven’ is similar to ‘evolution’ in a sociological sense. Therefore, he applied the concept of ‘heaven’ from *I Ching* to translate the term ‘evolution’ in *Evolution and Ethics*.

‘Competition’ and ‘Natural Selection’

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| <p>Huxley’s original text</p> | <p>That which endures is not one or another association of living forms, but the process of which the cosmos is the product, and of which these are among the transitory expressions. Moreover, in the living world, one of the most characteristic features of [1] this <u>cosmic process</u> is the struggle for existence, [2] the <u>competition</u> of each with all, the result of which is the <u>selection</u>, that is to say, [3] the survival of those forms which, on the whole, are best adapted to the conditions which at any period obtain; and which are, therefore, in that respect, and only in that respect, the fittest.</p> |
| <p>Yan Fu’s translation in <i>The Theory of Heavenly Evolution</i></p> | <p>虽然，<u>天运变矣</u>，而有不变者行乎其中。不变惟何？是名<u>天演</u>。[1]<u>以天演为体</u>，而其用有二：[2]曰<u>物竞</u>，曰<u>天择</u>。</p> |

beings and nature as an organic whole that is mutually inductive, which is called ‘the unity of heaven and human beings’.

²⁰The way of heaven, “天道”, in Chinese.

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| <p>My translation of Yan Fu</p> | <p>Although <u>the operation of heaven</u> is changing, there is still something unchanged. What is the only thing that does not change? This is '<u>heavenly evolution</u>'. [1] Heavenly evolution is the body, and its use is twofold: [2] One is '<u>the competition of things</u>', and the other is '<u>the selection of heaven</u>'.</p> |
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(The comparison is between the underlined words)

This paragraph is part of the first chapter of *Evolution and Ethics*. Huxley explained 'competition' and 'natural selection' in the biological and natural sense, but Yan Fu abandoned this view. Instead, he explained the terms in his own way. Yan Fu translated the 'evolution' that Huxley saw as 'the cosmic process' into 'heavenly evolution', and used the slogan 'Chinese essence and Western utility (Chinese learning for the body and Western learning for the use)',²¹ that was put forward during the Self-Strengthening Movement to summarise the concepts of 'competition' and 'natural selection' to his Chinese readers.

To be more precise, in the first chapter of *Evolution and Ethics*, Huxley explained 'evolution' as 'the cosmic process' and revealed that one of the most characteristic features of evolution is 'the struggle for existence'. He introduced the concept and causality of 'competition' and 'natural selection' by describing the rules that living things have to obey to adapt to nature for survival.

However, Yan Fu's translation virtually abandoned Huxley's explanation and merely kept the terms of 'competition' and 'selection'. We have analysed why Yan Fu translated 'evolution' into 'heavenly evolution' above. In this example, we will discuss the interpretation of 'evolution' in this paragraph and focus more on Yan Fu's translation of 'competition' and 'selection'.

[1] *Evolution and the cosmic process*

Yan Fu did not faithfully translate Huxley's description of 'the cosmic process' limited to the natural world but expanded it to include all aspects of nature and human society (Jin 63). Furthermore, he replaced 'the cosmic process' with 'the way of heaven' from *I Ching* in the translation and thus introduced the concept of 'heavenly evolution'. Jin Xiaoru (63) thought this translation reflects the importance of *I Ching* to Yan Fu, while I think it also shows Yan Fu's attempt to make his translation more accessible to the Chinese

²¹'Chinese essence and Western utility', the guidance of the Westernization school in the late Qing Dynasty. Essence (body) refers to traditional Chinese values, mainly Confucianism. Utility refers mainly to Western science and technology, including tools and weapons.

audience, especially to the well-educated people, by translating within the context of Chinese culture. Yan Fu's ultimate aim of was to warn the people and influence the society. Only when the original biological meanings of Huxley were extended to social and human level would these aims come into play.

[2] *Competition and selection*

Yan Fu translated 'competition' and 'selection' into 'the competition of things' and 'the selection of heaven'. When he added 'things' in translating 'competition', Yan Fu extended the scope of these two concepts beyond biology and nature. He also added 'heaven' in translating 'selection', which is the same as his translation of 'heavenly evolution'. According to Jin Xiaoru (63), Yan Fu used the ethical ideas of *I Ching* to explain the selection and survival in the natural world of Huxley's original text and added what did not exist in the original text at all.

[3] 'Heavenly evolution is the body and its use is twofold.'

This expression was also coined by Yan Fu. He borrowed the slogan 'Chinese essence and Western utility' (referring to maintaining Chinese values as the body and learning from the West for use) of the Self-strengthening Movement to express his understanding of the relationship between evolution, competition, and selection. During the Self-strengthening Movement, some government officials and scholars came up with this slogan to call for the reform of the Qing Government that the old political system should be maintained, but new science and technology should be introduced from the West to defeat foreign enemies and improve the society.

In the original slogan, the body mainly refers to traditional Chinese values and culture, and the use refers to Western science and technology. In Yan Fu's translation, he viewed the 'heavenly evolution' as the body and 'competition' and 'selection' as two uses. Nature and human society must abide by the unchanging law of evolution. Competition and natural selection are the ways to adapt to the law of evolution and survive in the world. So, people should apply these rules to drive foreign enemies who threaten the country's territory and interests and take the country under their control.

DISCUSSION ON YAN FU'S UNFAITHFUL TRANSLATION

According to the examples above, Yan Fu's unfaithful translation of *Evolution and Ethics* is mainly evident in his adding the concept of 'heaven', expanding the scope of the terms and borrowing a Chinese slogan to explain the law of

evolution based on his understanding of *I Ching*, his knowledge of evolution and the political situation in China at the time.

Yan Fu believed that the principles of how things develop as explained in *I Ching* bear some resemblance to those in the theory of evolution, so he replaced 'evolution' with 'heavenly evolution' for readers to better understand evolution by incorporating the values of traditional Chinese culture. Expanding the scope of the terms and borrowing a Chinese slogan served the same purpose. First, however, we should pay attention to Yan Fu's target audience. In the late Qing Dynasty, not many Chinese people were educated. Those who had read *I Ching* and knew the slogan of the Self-strengthening Movement were mainly educated people, including government officials and scholars. (Yan Fu's translation of *Evolution and Ethics* came when the Self-strengthening Movement had just failed). Most scholars had been educated in Confucianism, and they were the primary advocates and leaders of the potential reform. Yan Fu wanted to make his translation more understandable and acceptable first to a broader range of scholars, and then the theory of evolution would spread and become influential in Chinese society as well.

After the defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War, Yan Fu realized the urgent need for national reform. He thought these Confucian scholars could only recognize and follow a traditional 'heavenly way' instead of making political and ideological changes. Yan Fu wanted to tell the Chinese people that they themselves controlled their fortune, not heaven or the ruling class. Through introducing 'competition', 'natural selection' and 'survival of the fittest', Yan Fu encouraged people to fight against foreign enemies and challenge the old-fashioned political system because only the strongest in the competition would save themselves and the country.

Besides, we should also pay attention to Yan Fu's attitude towards 'heaven' and the Westernization slogan he adopted in his translation. According to *Yan Fu's Ideas on Heavenly Evolution and the Social Trends in the Late Qing Dynasty*, 'heaven' was regarded as the master of all things in the universe in ancient China. Such notion of 'heaven' maintained the Chinese monarchy, imprisoned people's minds, and ultimately became an obstacle to reform in the late nineteenth century. Yan Fu wanted to tell people that everything evolves, and the law of evolution reveals that only the strong survive through competition and natural selection. However, the weak should not be subject to heaven but be independent and strengthen themselves for survival. In addition, Yan Fu did not agree with the westernization reform of the Qing dynasty and considered it a cure for the symptoms, not for the root cause of the disease. He also witnessed the failure of the Hundred Day Reform that attempted to bring political reform. It can be concluded that Yan Fu disagreed with the traditional value of heaven

and the slogan of the Self-strengthening Movement that he used in the translation. I think it was Yan Fu's compromise to appeal to the well-educated class of the time.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, through some examples of Yan Fu's unfaithful translation in *The Theory of Heavenly Evolution*, we recognize that the translator does not just play a mechanical role responsible for transforming information but can bring his own subjective initiative into play. Yan Fu's intention manifested itself from two perspectives: first, he translated Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* by himself, hoping to introduce the theory of evolution to China. He aimed to use the law of evolution, including 'competition' and 'natural selection', to evoke the will of the Chinese people to resist the invasion by foreign enemies and the feudal governance of the Qing government, and to seek survival for themselves and the country. Second, Yan Fu took the initiative to shift and adjust the concepts and expressions in Huxley's original text during the translation process. Yan Fu used traditional Chinese concepts, such as 'heaven', to translate 'evolution' as 'heavenly evolution'. In translating important evolutionary concepts such as 'competition' and 'natural selection', he extended Huxley's biological concepts directly to human society. In addition, he used the slogan of the Self-strengthening Movement to explain the relationship between evolution and competition and natural selection. This intention was absent in Huxley.

The unfaithful translation suggests that Yan Fu did not see himself as a mere translator. In the late Qing Dynasty, Yan Fu believed China urgently needed reform, especially political reform, and that his translation of evolution theories could be a theoretical weapon for such reform. In *The Theory of Heavenly Evolution*, the content was more important than faithfulness. Yan Fu's translation was his reinterpretation of evolutionary thought. This approach should give his audience a better understanding of the theory of evolution and what it could mean for China. Yan Fu believed that reform should begin with changing people's minds, and the first people to be influenced were the intellectuals. As there were very few educated people in China at the time, and those who could read and possibly accept his ideas were mainly the well-educated class, Yan Fu's translation aimed to cater to these people. By combining Confucianism with his reformist ideas, Yan Fu hoped that his audience would embrace evolution and spread the ideas of evolution through their social influence.

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BIONOTE

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