

Zelei Lian Research Proposal Slides

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Trends and Changes in the Evolving English Translations of Early China Texts

The Case of *Mozi*

Zelei Lian 16. Nov. 2023

A Research Proposal

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Introduction

Early China texts (texts produced from the earliest times to the end of the Han Dynasty in 220 CE that are of **canonical and foundational** significance), encapsulating the intellectual richness of ancient Chinese literature and philosophy, have become essential reservoirs of knowledge for global audiences.

As these texts traverse linguistic boundaries through English translations, it is imperative to scrutinize how they have been interpreted and represented over time.

This proposed research endeavors to conduct an in-depth mixed-method and interdisciplinary research into the trends and changes in the English translations of Early China texts, with a specialized focus on the seminal work of *Mozi*.

By employing multiple methodologies and integrating a diverse array of sources, this study aims to elucidate the evolving interpretations and representations of this foundational text in English translations, which in turn can inform and enrich our understanding of Early China texts on a globalised stage.



Mozi: the mythical man & the eponymous work

Mozi, also known as Mo Di or Master Mo, was a Chinese philosopher and founder of the Mohist school of thought during the Warring States period (5th to 3rd century BCE) in Early China. He lived around the same time as Confucius and is considered one of the most important early Chinese philosophers.

1. Universal Love: Mozi emphasized the concept of universal love, advocating for impartial care and concern for all people, not just family or close associates. This idea promoted a sense of benevolence and harmony in society. Early English translation from missionaries were especially drawn to this tenet, as they tried to connect it with the Christian doctrine.

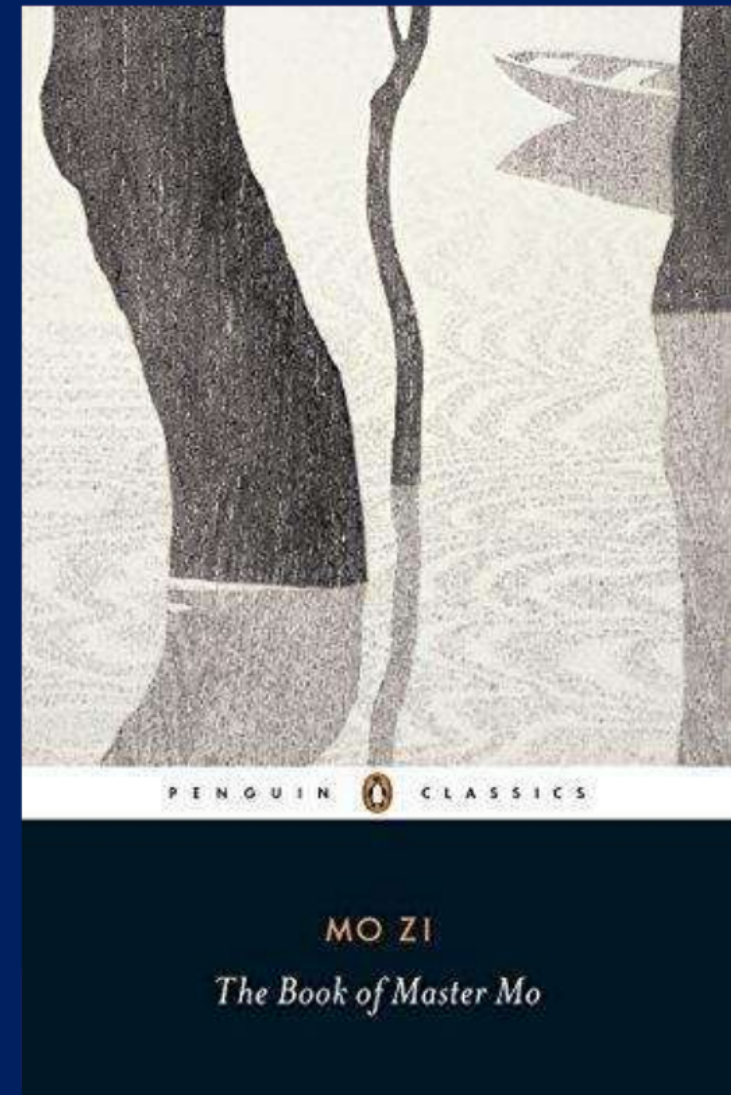
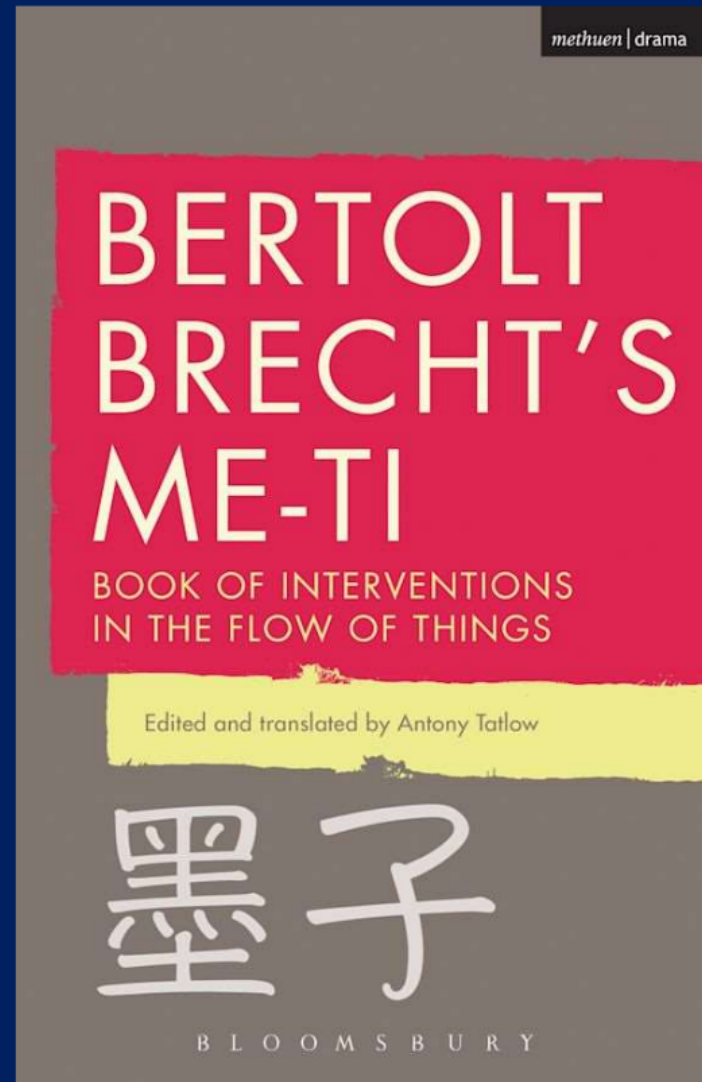
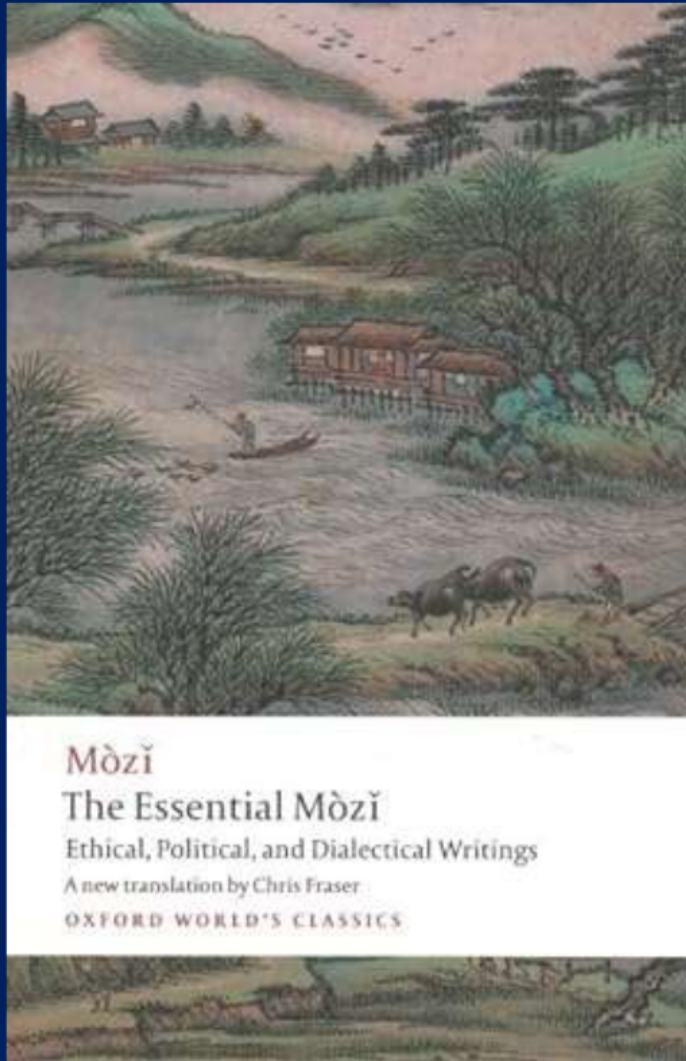
2. Utilitarian Ethics: Mozi's ethical philosophy was utilitarian in nature. He believed in actions that would bring about the greatest benefit to the majority of people. This utilitarian approach focused on maximizing overall welfare and minimizing harm. Early 20th century translations, especially those influenced by American pragmatism, were influenced by this feature of Mozi.

3. Anti-War Stance: Mozi was known for his strong opposition to warfare and believed in defensive military actions only when absolutely necessary. He promoted the idea of resolving conflicts through peaceful means and diplomacy.

4. Logic and Reasoning: Mozi had a keen interest in logic and rigorous reasoning. He believed that clear and sound arguments should be the basis for ethical and philosophical discussions. This focus on logical reasoning set his philosophy apart from some other contemporary schools of thought.

Mozi in English Translations

Time	Translator	Translator identity	Title	Description
1861-1872	James Legge	Missionary; Sinologist	<i>The Chinese Classics</i>	Partial translation
1929	Y. M. Pei	Chinese scholar	<i>The Ethical and Political Works of Motse</i>	Partial translation
1954-present	Joseph Needham	Scientist; Historian	<i>Science and Civilization in China series</i>	Partial translation
1963	Burton Watson	Sinologist	<i>Mo Tzu: Basic Writings</i>	Partial translation
1978	A. C. Graham	Sinologist; Philosopher	<i>Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science</i>	Partial translation
1980	Robin Yates	Sinologist; Military historian	<i>Military Chapters of Motzu</i>	Partial translation
2006	Wang Rongpei	Chinese translator	<i>Mozi</i>	Complete translation
2010	Ian Johnston	Linguist; medical doctor	<i>The Mozi: A Complete Translation</i>	Complete translation
2013	Jeffrey Riegel	Sinologist	<i>Mozi: Ethical and Political Writings</i>	Partial translation



1. Is the English translation of an Early China text different from other genres of texts in translation linguistically, culturally and stylistically? If there is, how can we measure and make sense of the differences?
2. From a diachronic point of view, can we identify major changes and trends of the English translations of Early China texts? If so, what are these and why do they exist?
3. From the translator's point of view, how does one rendition of Early China text differ significantly from another's? What factors and strategies should be taken into consideration?
4. From the methodology's point of view, how can a mixed method of both quantitative and qualitative research help us map a comprehensive and nuanced view ?
5. What implications can we draw from the case study of the English translations of Mozi? How can it fill in the gap in research, enrich our understanding of Early China texts in translation, and impact future translation projects?

- 1.To conduct an expansive and in-depth analysis of the historical development of English translations of Mozi, contextualizing it within the broader landscape of Early China texts.
- 2.To identify key trends, shifts, and methodologies employed in the translation process of Mozi, discerning distinctive features and approaches employed by translators across different historical periods.
- 3.To assess the profound impact of cultural and linguistic considerations on the interpretation of Mozi in English, evaluating how these factors have influenced the translational choices made by scholars.
- 4.To evaluate the enduring implications of evolving translations on the contemporary understanding and reception of Mozi within the global academic community, considering the enduring legacy and relevance of this ancient text.
- 5.To draw implications for the English translations of Early China texts in the future.

1. Corpus-based Textual Analysis:

Build a corpus
from the web
in 5 mins



This approach makes possible the analysis of **researcher-constructed parallel corpora**, for example an English–Chinese pair or series of pairs of **Mozi** in electronic format.

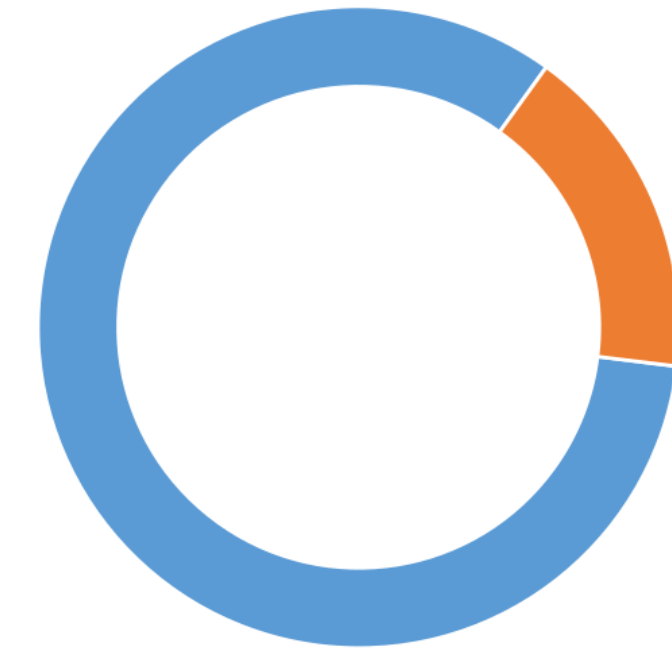
This approach enables both **quantitative analysis** (comparing English and Chinese statistics for key term frequency, repetition, distribution etc.) and **qualitative analysis** (close analysis of individual instances where significant deviance occur).

It allows **triangulation** by comparing results with other standard corpora of English language use in translations.

**2. Statistically-informed Analysis: Take as an example
the period from 2010-2020 of English Translations of Early China
texts**

Between 2010 to 2020, Early China text translation witnessed unprecedented growth. More than a hundred English translations of Chinese texts were published around the world.

Q: How can qualitative research help us carry out an statistically-informed analysis? What can we do with the rich bibliographical data?

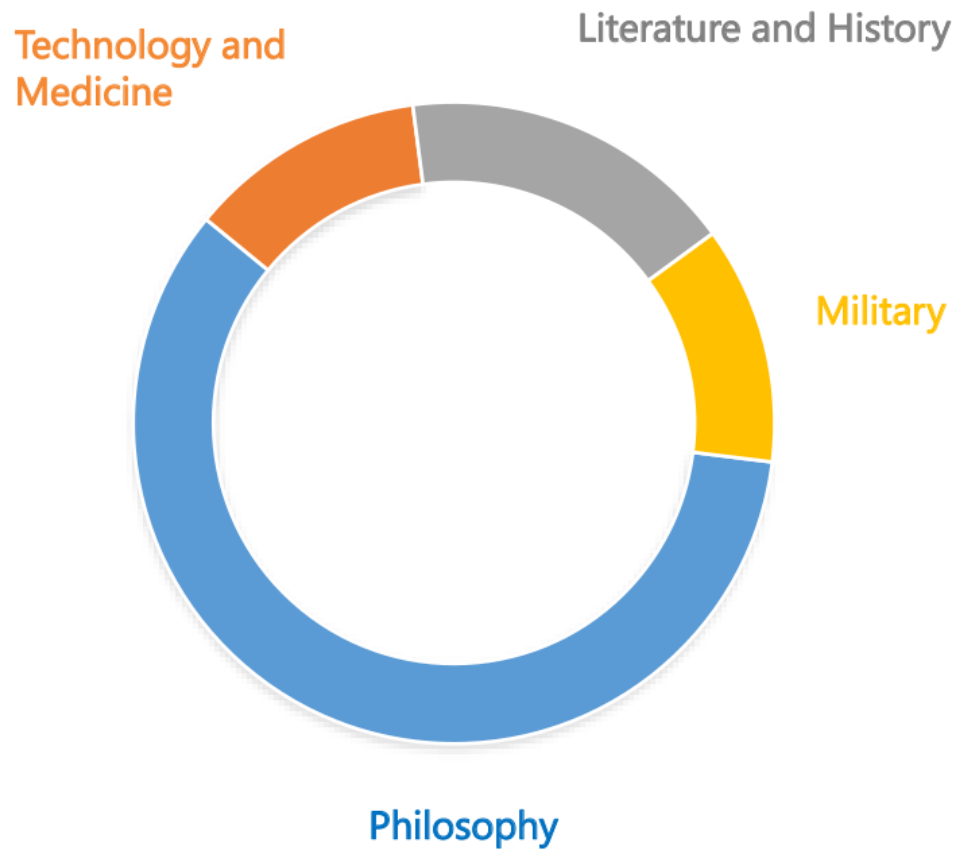


83 new translations

17 first complete translations
into English

Two conclusions we can draw:

- 1, While most classical texts already have an English translation, they keep being re-translated.
- 2, It's becoming increasingly rare for an Early-China text to not to have an English translation: leaving fewer stones unturned.



Two conclusions we can draw.

- 1, During the period 2010-2020, philosophical texts are the dominating type of text that is being translated or re-translated.
- 2, Technical texts (including military) are starting to catch up the publishing trend.

3. Historical Contextualization:

a. Historical Periodization:

The research will employ a sophisticated **periodization approach**, categorizing translations into distinct historical epochs (e.g., late 19th century, early 20th century, post-WWII, contemporary). This framework will facilitate a systematic analysis of translation trends, enabling a deeper understanding of the evolving methodologies employed by translators.

b. Examination of Translators' Biographies:

An in-depth exploration of the backgrounds, training, and intellectual influences of prominent translators of Mozi will be undertaken. This biographical approach will illuminate the contextual factors that may have shaped their translation choices, providing valuable insights into their translational strategies.

4. Reception Studies:

a. Reader Response Analysis:

Drawing on **reader response theories**, the research will assess how different translations of Mozi have been received by English-speaking audiences over time. This analysis will encompass a diverse array of sources, including reviews, commentaries, and scholarly discussions, offering a multi-faceted perspective on the reception of Mozi translations.

b. Influence on Scholarship:

The research will delve into how specific translations of Mozi have contributed to shaping and influencing scholarly discourse on early Chinese philosophy. By considering the enduring impact of these translations, the study will provide a comprehensive assessment of their significance within the broader academic landscape.

5. Linguistic and Cultural Analysis (SFL-informed but not SFL-based) :

a. Translation Strategies & Styles:

An in-depth examination of the translation strategies employed in rendering Mozi into English will be conducted. This analysis, informed by **Systematic Functional Linguistics**, examining, from top-down from bottom-up, the **sociocultural environment, discourse, genre, register, discourse semantic, and lexico-grammar**, encompassing an assessment of syntactical choices, semantic nuances, and linguistic adaptations, offering valuable insights into the intricate process of translation.

b. Cultural & Political Considerations:

The research will delve into the intricate web of cultural challenges and considerations faced by translators in conveying the philosophical nuances of Mozi to an English-speaking audience. This analysis will shed light on the translational decisions made in relation to cultural context, providing a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in the translation process.

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A Tentative Timeline

01	Literature Review	Jun 1 st - Aug 1 st , 2024
02	Research Design	Aug 1 st - August 30 th , 2024
03	Corpus Design	Sep 1 st - Sep 30 th , 2024
04	Data Collection	Oct 1 st - Nov 30 th , 2024
05	Data Analysis	Dec 1 st - Dec 31 st , 2024
06	Workshop, Seminar, and Conference	Jan 1 st – Apr 1 st , 2025
07	Writing	Apr 2 nd - Nov 30 th , 2025
08	Revision	Dec 1 st - Apr 30 th , 2025-2026
09	Submission	May 1 st – Aug 1 st , 2026

Thanks!

Zelei Lian Research Proposal Slides

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

80/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Your work displays comprehensive knowledge and detailed understanding of the subject area ·
Extensive background study is evident here. ·
Highly focused answer and well-structured drawing on a range of appropriate literature.

Your work displays comprehensive knowledge and detailed understanding of the subject area ·
Extensive background study ·
Highly focused answer and well structured ·
Logically presented and defended arguments ·
Original interpretation ·
New links between topics are developed ·
New approach to a problem ·
Excellent presentation with very accurate communication.

Exceeds expectations for most primary criteria · Complete command of subject and other relevant areas ·
Ideas/arguments are highly original·
Exceeds expectations for some primary criteria ·
Complete command of subject ·
Ideas/arguments are highly original. ·
Logically presented and defended arguments critically ·
No factual/computational errors ·
Original interpretation ·
New links between topics are developed ·
New approach to a problem ·
Excellent presentation with very accurate communication.

Exceeds expectations for most primary criteria · Complete command of subject and other relevant areas ·
Ideas/arguments are highly original·
Exceeds expectations for some primary criteria ·
Complete command of subject ·
Ideas/arguments are highly original. The overall impact is very promising.

You managed to get the main points across within the timescale in an engaging way.

You demonstrate thorough knowledge of the key theory and research methods - well done excellent work.

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