

# Comparative Study on Two English Versions of Three Word Primer from the Perspective of Translation Aesthetics

Xingyu Zhu, Xin Chen

Nanchang Normal University, Nanchang 330032, China.

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**Abstract:** Chinese character is the essence of Chinese traditional culture, including education, history, astronomy, geography and ethics. It is believed that only a good translation can truly reflect the beauty of the story and the original structure of the language, phrases and phonology. This paper mainly analyzes the two versions of *Three Word Primer* by Wang Baotong and Zhao Yanchun, aiming to show the manifestation of Chinese culture in different languages and different levels through the comparison of English translations of Chinese Traditional Children's Primer.

**Keywords:** Translation Aesthetics; *Three Word Primer*; English Translation

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## Introduction

*Three Word Primer*, as one of the most influential Chinese Traditional Children's Primer works in China, is known as the "Children's Encyclopedia". It is the condensation of the wisdom and knowledge of the ancients, and also a rare educational material later on. At present, this book has been translated into more than 40 languages and disseminated around the world, and is one of the books distributed by the United Nations Children's Organization. *Three Word Primer* is the precious heritage of the Chinese nation, and also has unique intellectual expression and cultural values. This book is a "enlightening star" in ethics, morality and etiquette, and also contains profound philosophical truth. Even in today's modern society, *Three Word Primer* is rich in its intellectual and philosophical expressions of the times. Based on the translation aesthetics, this paper compares the characteristics of the two English translations, stress, pronunciation and accessibility of the original book. The two English translations are: Wang Baotong's *The Triword Primer & The Kiloword* published in 2008, and Zhao Yanchun's *The Three Word Primer* published in 2014.

### 1. The significance of Three Word Primer in education

*Three Word Primer* enjoys a long history of more than 700 years, whose text form is similar to that of ancient poetry. There are more than 1,000 Chinese characters in *Three Word Primer*. The content as a whole rhymes harmoniously, and the text is even more vivid and concise. As part of the classical tradition and art that has lasted for more than five thousand years, It is also an educational treatise on the importance of education and learning, emphasizing the importance of "virtue" in education and the significance of persistence in learning.<sup>[1]</sup>

Faced with complex and ever-changing society, moral education is an important topic in the current educational reform. Today, many schools regard ancient Chinese culture as an important tool to promote the moral education. In *Three Word Primer*, it is said that "Stress piety more. Than your lore", indicating that moral education is the first priority in ancient Chinese education.

A series of English translations of *Three Word Primer* have been published in various forms. At present, there are two successful English versions in China that are accepted by the public, one is Wang Baotong's *The Triword Primer & The Kiloword* and the other is Zhao Yanchun's *The Three Word Primer*.

### 2. The definition and form of expression of translation aesthetics

The theory of translation aesthetics is an exploratory new theory in translation, which studies how translation is closely related to aesthetics. Translation work has the following definitions in the dictionary of aesthetics: the origin of translation aesthetics is the understanding of translation under special aesthetic consciousness, the use of scientific and artistic aesthetics to translate different meanings of texts, and the analysis, explanation and solution of aesthetic problems in the conversion of various languages. In his book *An Introduction to Translation and Aesthetics*, Mr. Liu Miqing laid the basic framework of translation aesthetics. Starting from aesthetic symbols, i.e. formal systems, Mr. Liu identifies different aesthetic categories by comparing different languages, words, sentences and

paragraphs. Emphasis is placed on informal systems that include vague aesthetic categories such as “feeling”, “taste” and “imagination”.  
[2]

Gideon Toury was a pioneer of Descriptive Translation Studies. He proposed “translation norms”, which refers to the translation standards of translators in the target language and culture, including formulate rules of initial standards and operating standards. In other words, the translator should select the content, translation method, structure, and language to be translated under specific circumstances before the translation begins. Under the influence of the above-mentioned standards, translation should be carried out gradually to test whether the translation work is understood and accepted according to the social and cultural conditions at that time.

### 3. Different styles of Wang Baotong and Zhao Yanchun

Wang Baotong is a scholar studying poetry translation. His representative work *The Triword Primer & The Kiloword* was published in 2008. At the beginning of his work, Wang Baotong expresses his deep love for ancient Chinese poetry and for rhythm. In *Three Word Primer*, every three words form a sentence with a harmonious rhythm, which completely meets Wang Baotong’s interests. As the director of the Institute of Foreign Languages, Zhao Yanchun has published literary works on *Foreign Language Research* for many times, and has a deep understanding of the use of Chinese and English grammar. Therefore, when he translated the *Three Word Primer*, Zhao Yanchun also perfectly demonstrated the subtleties of language and the image of translation.

Translators like Zhao Yanchun and Wang Baotong had greatly promoted the dissemination of Chinese language and traditional Chinese culture. In traditional Chinese education, Children’s Primer books must have the content of etiquette, civilization and morality. If international students learn Chinese and learn Chinese culture, they should first understand Chinese correctly. And the Three Character Classic is undoubtedly the best choice.

In short, translating *Three Word Primer* can help people overseas learn Chinese and Chinese culture. The difficulty of translation lies in that it is difficult to explain the words and inspirations clearly and then convey them to others. Zhao Yanchun uses a literal translation that provides many hints for readers to find their own preferences. While Wang Baotong uses free translation to help readers understand historical allusions and cultural background by annotation and annotation.

### 4. Comparison of two versions of Three Word Primer

#### 4.1 The phonetic level

Language needs to be fluently first, and then pay attention to the tone of suppression. To achieve this, translators should summarize the different characteristics and deficiencies in English translation, apply the “aesthetics” theory to translation itself, and select the appropriate translation methods and strategies. Therefore, translators should also show the emotional points of the original text in translation, such as Section 1, *Three Word Primer*:

The original text: 人之初，性本善。性相近，习相远。

Translation by Wang Baotong: At first mankind, Is kind at heart. With natures alike, But habits apart.

Translation by Zhao Yanchun: Man on earth, Good at birth. The same nature, Varies on nurture.

It is not difficult to find that although Wang Baotong’s translation seems detailed, it lost the charm of the original text. While Zhao Yanchun’s translation is concise and brief, and the emotion and connotation of the original are still remained.

#### 4.2 The syntactic level

The majority of *Three Word Primer* consists of rhythmic forms, one is three-character short sentences and the other is four-character stanzas. Zhao translated the book into three corresponding rhymes, which is a relatively traditional translation rhyme. Wang Baotong translated three-character poems into English phrases composed of several words, which is a new translation technique. In Wang Baotong’s translation, he explains three Chinese characters in three or four English words. Zhao Yanchun’s translation uses three English words to represent three Chinese characters, with a concise syntax and good structure.

### Conclusion

As the foundation of Chinese traditional culture, it is necessary to translate and disseminate *Three Word Primer* to the world. This book has unique cultural connotation and artistic characteristics, only after truly understanding, combined with their own unique views, can reflect the beauty of culture and art. By comparing the translations of Wang Baotong and Zhao Yanchun, it is easy to find that Wang

Baotong not only translated the book, but also expressed his opinions in a marked way, which shows the depth of his literary foundation. Zhao Yanchun translated *Three Word Primer* from the surface to the connotation, which is vivid and precise in terms of diction. When translating a literary work, translators should choose the preferred translation strategy, create a new translation method with own characteristics instead of sticking to the existing form.

## References

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