

Research on the Translation and Dissemination of Confucius's Works and Thoughts in the Arab World



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Abstract: This study examines the translation and dissemination of Confucius's works and thought in the Arab world, with a particular focus on the role of translation as the primary mechanism of cross-cultural transmission. It explores how Confucian thought has been introduced into Arabic-speaking contexts through various historical phases, ranging from indirect translation via European languages to direct translation from Chinese sources, as well as collaborative efforts between Chinese and Arab scholars. The study argues that the dissemination of Confucian thought is not a simple linguistic transfer but a complex process of semantic adjustment and cultural reconstruction. Key Confucian concepts such as “Ren” (benevolence), “Li” (ritual propriety), and “Xiao” (filial piety) undergo significant reinterpretation when expressed in Arabic, due to differences in philosophical systems, religious traditions, and cultural frameworks. These semantic shifts reflect both the internal richness of Confucian philosophy and the interpretive constraints of the Arabic cultural context. Methodologically, the research adopts a descriptive and analytical approach, combining historical analysis with conceptual comparison. It traces the evolution of Confucian dissemination from early literary introductions by Arab intellectuals to institutionalized translation projects supported by academic and cultural organizations in the 21st century. The findings suggest that the reception of Confucian thought in the Arab world is characterized by gradual expansion in both scope and depth, moving from elite intellectual circles to broader public engagement through universities, Confucius Institutes, media platforms, and publishing initiatives. However, the study also highlights ongoing challenges related to conceptual equivalence and cultural interpretation. Ultimately, the paper concludes that the Arabic reception of Confucian thought demonstrates the dynamic nature of intercultural communication, where meaning is continuously negotiated and reconstructed. This process not only facilitates the global circulation of classical Chinese thought but also contributes to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural philosophical exchange.

Keywords: Confucian Thought; Classical Chinese Thought; Arabic-language Context; Reception; Cross-cultural Dissemination; Translation and Introduction

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1 Introduction

Against the backdrop of deepening global cross-cultural exchange, the translation and dissemination of classical Chinese thought have gradually become a major focus of

academic attention. As a key representative of Chinese philosophy, the works and ideas of Confucius—with their systematic ethical concepts and unique intellectual frame-

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work—hold significant research value in terms of their dissemination across different cultural contexts. In recent years, with the advancement of China's cultural outreach, Confucius's works and ideas have gradually entered the Arab world, and their core concepts have exhibited certain characteristics of semantic adjustment and reinterpretation during the process of cross-linguistic translation.

Existing research has largely explored the translation and dissemination of Chinese philosophical classics from a macro perspective, yet there remains insufficient attention to the specific translation practices and dissemination mechanisms of Confucius's works and ideas within the Arabic context. In particular, there is a lack of systematic analysis regarding the process of meaning generation and cultural reconstruction of core concepts such as “Ren” (benevolence), “Li” (ritual propriety), and “Xiao” (filial piety) in Arabic expression. Accordingly, this paper takes Confucius's works and thought as its subject, focusing on the process of their translation and dissemination within the Arabic context. It analyzes the cross-linguistic modes of expression and the pathways of meaning generation for these core concepts, with the aim of revealing the patterns of semantic evolution in the cross-cultural transmission of classical Chinese thought.

2 Foundations and Early Encounters of Confucius's Writings in the Arabic Context

Chinese and Arab civilizations represent two great civilizational traditions in human history that have developed in parallel, each possessing profound depth. Their encounter and convergence were not accidental but were built upon prolonged geographical contact and sustained cultural interaction. [2] Since the Han Dynasty, the Silk Road—linking East and West—has closely connected China with the Arabian Peninsula. Porcelain, tea, and silk flowed into the Arab world via camel caravans and sea vessels, while spices, medicinal herbs, and astronomical knowledge traveled in the opposite direction along the same route into China. This exchange, which began with material trade, gradually evolved over time into deeper intellectual engagement and civilizational dialogue, laying a solid historical foundation for the subsequent transmission of classical Chinese thought into the Arabic-speaking world.

The Tang Dynasty was one of the most vibrant periods in the history of Sino-Arabic cultural exchange. [5] Beginning in 651, when the Arab Caliphate officially dispatched an embassy to Chang'an, the two sides engaged in extensive and in-depth exchanges across political, commercial, and cultural spheres. The cultural interaction of this period was distinctly two-way: the Chinese art of papermaking was introduced to the Arab Empire during this time, profoundly influencing the material conditions for the dissemination of knowledge in the Islamic world; [4] meanwhile, Arab knowledge of astronomy, calendrics, and medicine was transported eastward via caravans and envoys, enriching the scientific and technological heritage of Chinese civilization. During the Song and Yuan dynasties, the Arab traveler Ibn Battuta (ابن بطوطة) ventured deep into the Chinese interior to conduct his explorations, meticulously recording his observations and experiences in (The Travels of Ibn Battuta رحلة ابن بطوطة), thereby leaving behind invaluable historical records of cultural exchange. This long historical accumulation demonstrates that there has been a sustained mutual curiosity and respect between the two great civilizations of China and the Arab world, which constituted the most fundamental prerequisite for Chinese philosophical texts to later enter the Arabic cultural context.

However, it is worth reflecting on the fact that, despite the long history of Sino-Arabic exchanges, [9] the introduction of Confucius's works into the Arabic cultural context was significantly delayed. This phenomenon is not coincidental but reflects the complex tension between the distinctive characteristics of Confucian thought and the conditions for its reception within Arab culture. Compared to the mystical cosmology and transcendental expressions found in the Dao De Jing, the latter resonated more readily with the inner spirit of Sufi thought (الصوفية) within Arab Islamic culture, thereby sparking the interest of Arab translators and readers at an earlier stage. Confucian thought, however, centers on the systems of ritual and music, hierarchical ethics, and the construction of worldly order. Its political and social implications, deeply embedded in China's specific historical context, present greater challenges for cultural translation when crossing linguistic boundaries. Core concepts such as “ren” (benevolence), “li” (ritual propriety), and “xiao” (filial piety) lack single Arabic terms with exact semantic equivalents; translators have had to rely on explanatory translations or cultural analogies to convey them. This has objectively created barriers to reception, confining the dissemination of Confucian thought within elite intellectual circles in the Arabic context for a

long time, preventing it from sparking a widespread popular reading craze as the *Dao De Jing* did. This contrast itself reveals a pattern of cross-cultural communication worthy of in-depth exploration: the degree of affinity between a philosophical system and the target culture largely determines the speed and scope of its dissemination.

Since modern times, faced with the shared impact of Western colonialism, the Chinese and Arab nations have exhibited a certain profound similarity in their historical destinies. This shared historical experience gradually transformed into political mutual understanding and cultural mutual recognition in the mid-20th century. The convening of the Bandung Conference in 1955 marked the establishment of the spirit of solidarity among Asian and African nations. Following the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Egypt in 1956, China successively established diplomatic ties with 22 Arab countries, [10] ushering Sino-Arab relations into a new phase of institutionalized development. Entering the 21st century, the launch of the “Belt and Road” Initiative and the deepening operations of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum have created more favorable conditions for the systematic dissemination of classical Chinese thought to the Arab world. [3]

Against this broader backdrop, the early pathways through which Confucius’s works entered the Arabic-speaking world primarily took two forms: first, indirect exposure via European languages by the Arab literary and intellectual elite; and second, direct translation and dissemination undertaken proactively by Chinese Muslim scholars. Regarding the former, the Lebanese poet Gibran Khalil Gibran (جبران خليل جبران) extensively studied Eastern philosophy during his time in the United States, placing Confucius alongside Socrates as pioneers of human spiritual civilization and frequently praising them in his prose works; Lebanese literary figure Mikha’il Na’ima, in his 1932 essay collection *The Stages* (المراحل), dedicated an entire essay to introducing Confucian philosophy, extolling the idea of “Ren” as possessing universal value that transcends cultural boundaries. He thus became one of the earliest known literary figures to systematically introduce Confucian thought to Arab readers. These early introductions share a common feature: they were all written by literary figures rather than professional sinologists, focusing primarily on aesthetic appeal and spiritual resonance. While they lacked systematic academic support, they inadvertently sowed the first seeds of Confucian thought within the Arabic-speak-

ing cultural sphere and objectively demonstrated the inherent potential of Confucian humanistic spirit to transcend linguistic barriers and reach readers in foreign lands.

Regarding the latter, the contributions of the Chinese Muslim scholar Ma Jian (1906–1978) were landmark in nature. In 1931, Ma Jian went to study at Al-Azhar University (الأزهر الشريف) in Egypt. Using the original Chinese texts as his source, he translated the *Analects* into Arabic. The work was officially published in 1935 [16] by the Cairo House of Classical Knowledge (دار المعارف), becoming the first verifiable work of classical Chinese philosophy to be translated directly from Chinese into Arabic. In the preface to his translation, Ma Jian stated explicitly: “I am both a Muslim and a Chinese national, bearing dual obligations to my religion and my country. I am determined to promote Chinese philosophy and culture to the peoples of Arab-Islamic nations and regions through the Arabic language.” This statement reveals a noteworthy phenomenon in cultural transmission: Ma Jian’s translation practice was not merely an academic endeavor, but an active dialogue between civilizations underpinned by his dual cultural identity, reflecting the translator’s profound recognition of the commonalities between Chinese and Arab cultures. The publisher of the translation, Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib (محب الدين الخطيب), also described Ma Jian’s work as “a major contribution to the Arabic canon,” fully demonstrating that the arrival of Confucius’s works sparked a genuine and positive response within Arab academic circles.[7]

Entering the 21st century, the translation and introduction of Confucius’s works in the Arab world entered a new phase of accelerated progress, with a group of Arab sinologists specializing in Chinese becoming the core driving force behind this process. Muhsin Farjani [20] (محسن فرجاني), a professor in the Department of Chinese at Ain Shams University in Egypt, is one of the most prominent figures among them. Using the original Chinese texts as his source, he has successively completed Arabic translations of numerous ancient Chinese classics, including the *Analects*, the *Tao Te Ching*, the *Strategies of the Warring States*, and the *Book of Songs*. His translations are renowned for their concise language and fidelity to the original meaning. They garnered widespread attention during their serialization in Egypt’s *Literary News* (جريدة أخبار الأدب) and have been honored with the “Special Contribution Award for Chinese Books” and the “Outstanding Contribution Award for China-Arab Friendship.” When discussing his initial motivation for translating the *Analects*, he wrote: “Through the translation of ancient Chinese texts, we can grasp some

of the fundamental characteristics of Chinese culture and understand its developmental trajectory. Perhaps translation can uncover the secrets behind these texts.” This statement not only expresses the translator’s personal sentiments but also reflects the sincere curiosity and academic expectations of the Arab Sinology community toward classical Chinese thought. Another scholar worthy of attention is the head of the Chinese Department at the Faculty of Languages and Translation at Al-Azhar University (الأزهر الشريف), who not only spearheaded the establishment of the Chinese Department at Al-Azhar University in 2001 but also translated important works on the history of Confucian thought, such as *A History of the Development of Chinese Thought*. [13] His efforts have provided a crucial intellectual foundation for the Arabic-speaking academic community to systematically understand the Chinese intellectual tradition, and the founding of the department marked a significant milestone in securing an institutional foothold for Confucian thought within Arab academic institutions. Syrian scholar Firas al-Sawah [19] (فراس السواح), drawing on his deep background in comparative religion and cultural studies, collaborated with Chinese scholar Xue Qingguo to complete Arabic translations of *The Analects*, *The Works of Mencius*, and *The Dao De Jing*. After three years of work, these publications were widely acclaimed at book fairs across the Arab world and became among the first Chinese books to sell out. The Confucius Institute Headquarters also designated them as priority titles for distribution to Confucius Institutes, further expanding the reach of *The Analects* among Arabic-speaking readers.

In 2010, the General Administration of Press and Publication of China and the Secretariat of the League of Arab States signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the Sino-Arab Classical Texts Mutual Translation and Publication Project, incorporating the Arabic translation and introduction of Confucian classics such as the *Analects* and *Mencius* into the framework of the national cultural strategy. This marked a transition in the dissemination of Confucius’s works in the Arab world from individual academic initiatives to organized, systematic promotion. As of 2023, the project has produced 50 translated works, with over 20 Chinese classics—including the *Analects*, *Mencius*, and *Laozi* [1]—translated into Arabic, ushering in a new, deeper, and broader historical phase for the dissemination of Confucius’s works within the Arabic-speaking world.

Looking back at the historical process of Confucius’s works entering the Arabic context, one can discern an un-

derlying logic that runs throughout: the depth of dissemination fundamentally depends on the maturity of the conditions for cultural reception. The core values of Confucian thought—the emphasis on human relationships, the stress on moral self-discipline, and the advocacy of social responsibility—all find a certain degree of spiritual resonance within Arab-Islamic culture, forming the latent foundation for cross-cultural reception. However, the profound cultural differences inherent in conceptual systems such as “Ren,” “Li,” and “Xiao,” coupled with the structural difficulties of linguistic translation, have imbued this process of reception with the tension inherent in semantic adjustment and cultural reconstruction. It is precisely within this tension that the dissemination of Confucian thought in the Arabic context has both found room to flourish and faced ongoing challenges, thereby unfolding its unique and complex journey of cross-cultural transmission.

3 Pathways and Characteristics of Confucian Thought Dissemination in the Arab World

The dissemination of Confucius’s works in the Arab world did not occur overnight; rather, it underwent a long evolutionary process—from sporadic introductions to systematic translations, from indirect transcriptions to direct translations, and from individual initiatives to national strategies. The driving forces behind this evolution stemmed not only from the continuous deepening of Sino-Arab political relations and the gradual accumulation of Sinological expertise in the Arab world, but also from the genuine cultural demand among Arab readers for Eastern wisdom. [14]

The initial dissemination of Confucius’s works in the Arabic context relied primarily on indirect mediation through European languages. At that time, English, French, and German editions of the *Analects* were already widely circulated among European intellectual circles. Some Arab intellectuals educated in the Western tradition encountered Confucian thought through these intermediary translations and introduced it into Arabic cultural discourse through literary essays and critical prose. However, this transmission pathway had fundamental structural limitations: the intermediary translation through European languages inevitably introduced an interpretive framework rooted in Western Sinological perspectives. Consequently, the Confucian

thought encountered by Arab readers was, to a certain extent, a “second-hand” image filtered and reconstructed through Western culture, rather than a direct presentation of the original Confucian classics. This structural bias left a profound and undeniable impact on subsequent Arabic translation and introduction activities.

The Arabic translation of the *Analects* completed in 1935 by the Chinese Muslim scholar Ma Jian (1906–1978) marked the first significant attempt to overcome these limitations. As the first work of classical Chinese philosophy translated directly from Chinese into Arabic, Ma Jian’s translation used the original Chinese text as its basis, deliberately bypassing the interpretive frameworks mediated by European languages, and sought to establish a direct channel of dialogue between the Chinese and Arabic languages and cultures. However, constrained by the conditions of the time, the circulation of this translation was quite limited, circulating primarily within Egyptian academic circles, and failed to generate a broader social impact. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, with the successive establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Arab countries, the dissemination of Confucius’s works gained new political backing. [12] Through its embassies and cultural centers abroad, China presented classical Chinese cultural texts to Arab nations, and Confucian classics such as the *Analects* began to enter the collections of public libraries and university libraries in some Arab countries as donated books. At the same time, the successive establishment of Chinese language departments at universities in Arab countries provided an institutional foundation for the cultivation of professional Sinologists and built up a human resource pool for higher-quality translation and introduction of the *Analects* in the future. However, overall, the dissemination of Confucius’s works in the Arab world during the second half of the 20th century remained in a state of slow accumulation, with significant deficiencies in both systematic organization and scale. The focus of Sino-Arab cultural exchange had long been concentrated in the political and economic spheres, while in-depth interaction at the level of ideology and culture had not yet received sufficient attention or resource investment; Confucius’s works were thus largely present but not prominent. [11]

Entering the 21st century, the dissemination of Confucius’s works in the Arab world experienced a historic acceleration. The diversification of dissemination agents and the institutionalization of dissemination mechanisms advanced in parallel, enabling the Arabic translation and introduction of Confucian classics such as the *Analects* to

achieve historic leaps in terms of scale, quality, and influence. In terms of translation quality, a new generation of Arab sinologists, represented by Muhsin Farjani (محسن فرجاني), has produced high-quality Arabic translations of the *Analects* based on the original Chinese texts, drawing on their solid command of the Chinese language and deep cultural and academic backgrounds. Farjani’s translation is concise, emphasizing fidelity to the original meaning while accommodating Arabic expressive conventions, and striving to strike a balance between readability and accuracy. When discussing his initial motivation for translating Confucian classics, he wrote: “Through the translation of ancient Chinese texts, we can grasp some fundamental characteristics of Chinese culture and understand its developmental trajectory. Perhaps translation can uncover the secrets behind these texts.” “This statement not only expresses the translator’s personal sentiments but also reflects the sincere curiosity and academic expectations of the Arab Sinological community regarding classical Chinese thought. The Arabic translations of *The Analects* and *The Works of Mencius*, completed through the collaboration between Xue Qingguo, a professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University, and the Syrian scholar Firas al-Sawah (فراس السواح), represent the first joint effort by Chinese and Arab scholars in the field of Confucian classics translation. The significance of this collaborative model lies not only in the improved quality of the translations but also in the fact that it embodies a new logic of dissemination: scholars from within both cultures jointly participate in the cross-linguistic reconstruction of the texts, thereby reducing, to a certain extent, the risk of interpretive bias arising from a single cultural perspective.

In terms of dissemination channels, the establishment of Confucius Institutes (معهد كونفوشيوس) represents the most structurally significant institutional innovation of this period. Since 2004, China has successively established numerous Confucius Institutes across the Arab world, integrating Chinese language instruction with the promotion of Chinese culture. [18] Within the curriculum of Confucius Institutes, content related to the *Analects* has been systematically incorporated as general cultural reading material, extending the dissemination of Confucius’s works from elite academic circles to a broader audience of general learners. Book fairs across Arab countries have also become important platforms for promoting translations of the *Analects*, with Arabic editions frequently being among the first Chinese books to sell out—a clear indication that Con-

Confucian thought has established a genuine and stable readership among Arab readers. At the same time, Arabic-language newspapers and online media have begun to play a role in popularizing Confucian thought. Egypt's Literary News (*جريدة أخبار الأدب*) serialized the Arabic translation of *The Analects*, while mainstream media outlets such as Al Jazeera (*قناة الجزيرة*) have produced numerous special programs introducing Confucian thought and traditional Chinese culture. [8] This has enabled the dissemination of Confucius's works to transcend the boundaries of academic and publishing circles, reaching a much broader Arabic-speaking audience. In the realm of academic research, scholars at universities such as Ain Shams University (*جامعة عين شمس*), Cairo University (*جامعة القاهرة*), and Al-Azhar University (*الأزهر الشريف*) have begun incorporating Confucian thought into their research. Academic discussions in Arabic centered on Confucius's core concepts—such as “benevolence” (*ren*), “ritual propriety” (*li*), and “filial piety” (*xiao*)—have increased year by year, and some Arab scholars have begun to explore the similarities and differences between Confucian and Islamic ethics from a comparative philosophical perspective. This marks a transition in the dissemination of Confucius's works within the Arabic-speaking world from mere textual introduction to a phase of in-depth intellectual dialogue. In 2010, the General Administration of Press and Publication of China and the Secretariat of the League of Arab States signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the Sino-Arab Classical Texts Mutual Translation and Publication Project, incorporating the Arabic translation and introduction of Confucian classics such as the *Analects* and the *Mencius* into the framework of the national cultural strategy. This marked a historic transition in the dissemination of Confucius's works in the Arab world, shifting from individual academic initiatives to organized and systematic promotion.

Looking at the overall history of the dissemination of Confucius's works in the Arab world, several fundamental characteristics can be identified that run throughout. First, the agents of dissemination have undergone a historical evolution from singular to plural: from the early personal initiative of individual scholars and literary figures to the collaborative efforts of translators, scholars, publishing houses, cultural diplomacy agencies, educational institutions, and mass media. This diversification of the dissemination landscape has not only expanded the scale of dissemination but also enhanced its systematic nature and sustainability. Second, translation strategies have undergone a significant shift from indirect to direct methods, transitioning from translations mediated through

European languages to high-quality direct translations based on the original Chinese texts. This trajectory reflects the continuous accumulation of expertise in Sinology within the Arab world and the intrinsic demand within the Arab academic community for more faithful and accurate Arabic versions of Confucius's works. Third, the focus of dissemination has gradually shifted from elite circles to the general public. From early professional introductions within academic circles, to the incorporation of Confucius's works into the curriculum of Confucius Institutes, and further to their popularity at book fairs and media coverage, the audience structure for the *Analects* in the Arab world is undergoing profound changes. Confucius's ideas are increasingly entering the daily cultural life of Arab society through more diverse channels. It is worth noting that these three characteristics are not independent of one another; rather, they reinforce and interact with one another, collectively constituting the internal logic behind the evolution of the dissemination pathways of Confucius's works within the Arabic-speaking context.

4 The Reception and Cultural Impact of Confucian Thought in the Arab Context

The translation and dissemination of Confucius's works in the Arab world is not a one-way cultural export, but rather a dynamic, two-way interactive process. When Arab readers encounter the *Analects*, they do not passively accept it with a blank slate; rather, they actively interpret and selectively assimilate Confucian thought through the lens of their own cultural traditions, religious backgrounds, and ways of thinking. [15] The complexity of this reception process is evident not only in the diverse interpretations of Confucian thought among different reader groups but also in the semantic adjustments and cultural reconstructions that occur during the cross-linguistic translation of core concepts.

In terms of the composition of the audience, readers of Confucius's works in the Arab world are not a monolithic group but exhibit distinct stratification. Academic researchers constitute the group that engaged with Confucius's works earliest and most deeply. Sinologists and scholars of Oriental studies in countries such as Egypt, [17] Lebanon, and Syria have examined Confucian thought within the academic frameworks of comparative philoso-

phy and comparative culture through their reading of translations of the Analects and related scholarly literature. Within this group, the academic interest sparked by Confucian thought often centers on exploring the internal logic of the Confucian ethical system and the potential for its universal values. The renowned Egyptian writer Jamal al-Ghitani, during his tenure as editor-in-chief of *Akhbar al-Adab* (Literary News), strongly advocated for the serialization of complete Arabic translations of Chinese cultural classics such as *The Analects*, *The Art of War*, and *The Book of Songs* in the newspaper. This clearly demonstrates that Confucius's works have gained genuine and enduring recognition among Arab cultural elites. He himself noted that the philosophical path emphasized by Confucius—cultivating oneself, harmonizing the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world—resonates deeply with the Arab Islamic cultural emphasis on personal moral cultivation and social responsibility, making it feel familiar and approachable to readers.

At the same time, the general public's reception of Confucius's works manifests more as an intuitive spiritual resonance rather than systematic academic research. The strong sales of the Arabic translation of *The Analects* at book fairs across Arab countries, as well as the widespread interest in Confucian culture among students in Confucius Institute Chinese language classes, both indicate that Confucius's ideas have generated a cultural influence among ordinary Arab readers that extends beyond academic circles. Many readers, after engaging with the Analects, have noted an unexpected intrinsic harmony between Confucius's discourses on interpersonal relationships, family ethics, and personal cultivation, and the Islamic tradition's emphasis on family responsibility and moral self-discipline. This cross-cultural spiritual resonance is a crucial prerequisite for Confucius's works to take root in the Arabic cultural context.

However, acceptance does not equate to endorsement, much less to flawless understanding. As Confucian thought entered the Arabic context, its core concepts inevitably underwent varying degrees of semantic adjustment and cultural reconstruction. This phenomenon is most concentrated in the Arabic expressions of the three core Confucian concepts: “Ren,” “Li,” and “Xiao.”

“Ren” is the most central concept in Confucius's philosophical system. Its connotations are extremely rich, encompassing multiple layers such as love for others, compassion, moral self-awareness, and the state of oneness with the universe. The essence of “Ren” lies in its being a

love with degrees—beginning with love for one's relatives, extending from the near to the far, and ultimately reaching all living beings under heaven. This logic of love—rooted in kinship and expanding outward through moral practice—exhibits a fundamental structural difference from the Islamic understanding of divine love (المحبة الإلهية): in Islam, love is directed first toward God and only secondarily toward human relationships; its logical starting point is sacred rather than kinship-based. Consequently, when Arabic translators attempt to render “Ren” into Arabic, they often face a profound conceptual mismatch. Some translators choose to render it as “رحمة” (mercy), while others prefer terms such as “محبة” (love) or “إنسانية” (humanity); however, regardless of the choice, each can only capture a certain aspect of “Ren,” making it difficult to fully convey its semantic depth. This divergence in translation strategies itself reflects the tension surrounding the acceptance of the concept of “Ren” within the Arabic cultural framework.

The cross-cultural translation of “Li” similarly faces complex issues of semantic reconstruction. In Confucian thought, “Li” is not merely a set of specific behavioral norms and ritual procedures, but rather a fundamental principle for maintaining social order and human relationships, possessing profound metaphysical implications. However, in the Arabic context, the concepts most closely associated with “li” are often “آداب” (etiquette) or “طقوس” (ritual), both of which emphasize the level of external behavior and lack the deep structural significance inherent in “li”—namely, the integration of personal moral cultivation with socio-political order. This semantic gap makes it easy for Arabic readers to simplify “li” into a set of cultural etiquette norms, overlooking its broader theoretical function as a central pillar of Confucian political philosophy.

In contrast, the cross-cultural reception of “filial piety” has encountered relatively less resistance in the Arabic context and is one of the core Confucian concepts most likely to resonate emotionally with Arabic readers. Islamic culture has always placed great emphasis on the moral obligation to honor one's parents; the Qur'an (القرآن الكريم) contains numerous explicit instructions for believers to treat their parents well. The moral norms regarding filial piety in Islamic tradition align closely with Confucius's concept of “filial piety” in terms of values, constituting the most direct spiritual intersection between the two civilizations on the ethical level. Nevertheless, there remain profound differences between the two that cannot be ignored: Confucian “filial piety” is rooted in blood ties and familial affection, serving as the logical starting point and practical

foundation of the entire system of benevolence; whereas Islamic filial piety is established within the framework of religious obligations to obey Allah's commands, ultimately aiming at piety toward Allah rather than the maintenance of familial ethical order. Although subtle, this difference fundamentally reveals the deep divide between Confucian and Islamic ethics—one rooted in humanism and the other in the divine.

The reception of Confucian thought in the Arabic context is manifested not only in the semantic adjustment of individual concepts but has also exerted observable influences on Arabic culture and intellectual cognition at a broader level. In the realm of literary creation, some Arab writers have begun to draw upon Confucian thought as a source of inspiration for their work. The renowned Syrian cultural scholar Firas al-Sawah (فراس السواح) noted, after completing his Arabic translation of the *Analects*, that Confucian thought provided him with a new perspective for understanding the commonalities of human civilization, leading him to realize that the fundamental values shared by different cultural traditions far outweigh their superficial differences. In the realm of academic research, comparative studies on the relationship between Confucian and Islamic thought have gradually increased in Arabic academic journals in recent years. Some scholars have begun to compare Confucian "Ren" with Islamic "Rahma" (mercy) to explore the similarities and differences between the two civilizations in terms of their humanitarian traditions. This marks a shift in the Arabic academic community, where Confucius's works have moved beyond mere textual translation and introduction to a genuine level of intellectual dialogue.

It is particularly worth noting that the dissemination and reception of Confucius's works in the Arab world profoundly reveal a universal yet often overlooked phenomenon in cross-cultural communication: when any ideological system enters a heterogeneous cultural context, it cannot be fully accepted in its original form but must inevitably undergo a process of meaning reconstruction guided by the internal logic of the target culture. Arab readers' reception of Confucius's concept of "Ren" essentially constitutes a creative transformation of "Ren" within the interpretive framework of Islamic culture; this transformation itself is both a necessary condition for the survival and dissemination of Confucian thought in the Arabic context and the fundamental cause of the inevitable loss and distortion of its original meaning. How to promote a more accurate and profound dissemination

and reception of Confucian thought within the cultural soil of the Arabic-speaking world, while preserving its core essence, remains a critical issue that urgently requires in-depth exploration in the current realm of Sino-Arab cultural exchange.

5 Conclusion

The translation and dissemination of Confucius's works and ideas in the Arab world represent a profound dialogue between the two great civilizations of China and the Arab world that transcends language, geography, and history; it is also a vital component of the broader process by which classical Chinese thought is reaching the world. Through a systematic examination of the foundations, pathways, and reception of this dissemination, several pattern-based insights can be summarized.

First, the history of friendly exchanges between China and the Arab world spanning more than two thousand years serves as the fundamental prerequisite for the entry of Confucius's works into the Arabic context. Without deep historical roots and sustained civilizational interaction, the cross-cultural transmission of any ideological system would be like water without a source. It is precisely on this solid historical foundation that Confucius's works have gradually overcome language barriers and found space to take root and flourish in the cultural soil of the Arab world. [6]

Second, translation serves as the core mechanism for the dissemination of Confucius's works in the Arab world. The translator's linguistic proficiency, cultural stance, and translation strategies fundamentally determine how Confucian thought is presented and received within the Arabic context. From the early days of indirect translation relying on European languages as intermediaries, to the precedent of direct Chinese-to-Arabic translation pioneered by Ma Jian's version, and on to the new model of joint translation and introduction by contemporary Chinese and Arab scholars, the continuous improvement in translation quality is the most direct driving force behind the ever-expanding influence of Confucius's works in the Arab world. In this sense, cultivating more high-quality translators who possess both solid Chinese language skills and a deep understanding of Arabic culture remains the most urgent practical need for promoting the in-depth dissemination of Confucian thought in the Arab world.

Third, the semantic adjustments and cultural reconstructions that the core concepts of Confucian thought undergo

when entering the Arabic context are not merely translation errors or cultural misreadings, but rather universal laws that cannot be avoided in cross-cultural communication. The meaning generated by concepts such as “Ren,” “Li,” and “Xiao” in Arabic expression is profoundly shaped by the intrinsic interpretive framework of Arab-Islamic culture. This structural constraint not only constitutes an inherent limitation on the cross-cultural transmission of Confucian thought but also objectively offers the possibility for Confucius’s works to take on new vitality within the Arabic context. How to maximize the semantic integrity of core Confucian concepts while respecting the interpretive autonomy of the target culture represents a profound challenge facing both future translation efforts and academic research.

Fourth, although the dissemination of Confucius’s works in the Arab world has achieved considerable historical progress, there remains a significant gap compared to the depth and breadth of dissemination achieved in the English, French, and German-speaking worlds. This gap stems both from the relatively late start and limited accumulation of talent in Arabic Sinology, as well as from the difficulties of cross-cultural translation posed by Confucian thought’s conceptual framework, which is deeply embedded in China’s specific historical context. Bridging this gap requires long-term collaborative efforts between China and the Arab world in the areas of talent cultivation, translation and publication, academic exchange, and media dissemination.

The world today is undergoing a period of profound transformation unseen in a century, and exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations are increasingly becoming a vital force driving the peaceful development of human society. Faced with the dominant influence of Western culture in the era of globalization, the two great civilizations of China and the Arab world should uphold the spirit of mutual respect and equal dialogue to deepen two-way interaction at the ideological and cultural levels. The concept of “harmony without uniformity” advocated by Confucius—acknowledging differences, respecting diversity, and seeking coexistence—holds profound practical significance in this context. It not only provides spiritual guidance for the ongoing dialogue between Chinese and Arab civilizations but also contributes ancient Eastern wisdom to the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind that transcends cultural boundaries. It is foreseeable that, with the continued deepening of Sino-Arab cultural exchanges and the ongoing development of Arab Sinology, the dissemination of Confucius’s works and ideas in the Arabic-speaking world will open up broader historical horizons. The positive role they can play

in cross-cultural intellectual dialogue will also continue to be highlighted as mutual understanding between the two great civilizations deepens.

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