

Translating "仁": Russian Interpretations of Confucian Moral Ideal from the Enlightenment to the Fin-de-Siècle

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Abstract:

This paper examines the intercultural dynamics in Russian translations of the Confucian concept 仁 (often translated as "benevolence" or "humaneness") from contexts such as *Daxue* (大学) and *the Analects* (论语). Situated at the intersection of translation studies and intellectual history, the research discusses how Russian scholars and translators drew upon the vocabulary and conceptual frameworks of Orthodox Christianity to interpret this key Confucian ideal.

In the 18th century, in the first Russian translation of *Daxue* by Denis Fonvizin, the writer employed 仁 to express the Enlightenment era political ideal. This translation marks the beginning of a tradition of reading Confucianism through a lens of Russian Orthodox Christianity, which persisted well into the fin-de-siècle, showing its influence in the late 19th-century writings of Russian thinkers such as Leo Tolstoy and Nikolai Fyodorov, and even contributing to the intellectual foundations of early Russian sinology.

To illuminate this process, the paper also draws brief comparative reference to English and French sources, namely, the influential translation of *The Analects* by James Legge (1861) and French sinological thought, which had a significant impact on Russian intellectuals of the period. This contrastive approach highlights how Russian representations diverge from Western interpretations, thus revealing the cultural filters through which Chinese philosophy is perceived and reframed in Russia.

Ultimately, the study contributes to understanding how translation does not merely transmit meaning but transforms it, integrating elements of foreign cultures into the native culture. By focusing on the Russian context, this paper sheds light on the evolving image of China and Chinese philosophy in Russian intellectual discourse.

Keywords: 仁 (Ren) , Confucianism, Russian intellectual history, intercultural interpretation

