

Book review: The Legal Image of China in the Chinese Legal Tradition

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Article Detail:	Abstract
Received: 03 June 2026; Received in revised form: 30 June 2026; Accepted: 05 July 2026; Available online: 12 July 2026 Keywords – <i>The Legal Image of China, Translation, Chinese Legal Tradition</i> ©2026 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).	The book, <i>The Legal Image of China in the Chinese Legal Tradition</i>, authored by Chinese scholar Xiaobo Dong and Yiran Luo, provides an elaborate exploration of the legal image of China in Chinese legal tradition, encompassing process of image construction, modern significance and guidance for self-construction. Adopting a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach covering fields like communication study, translation study, imagology and so on.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Legal Image of China in the Chinese Legal Tradition offers a thorough examination of China's legal image construction in domestic research and western academia, discussing not only the various types of China's legal image construction in the past time, but also the path of the self-shaping China's legal image in modern times. With numerous cases drawn from historical sources, this book presents a systematic analysis of the image construction from multiple perspectives, hence this book is rigorous in structure and authoritative in content. With the aim to offer a feasible path for constructing China's legal image in the New Era, this book delves into Chinese legal philosophy and practice, exploring the legal wisdom of ancient China. While this book introduces Chinese legal tradition including legal classics and legal thoughts, it also investigates the historical, cultural and political contexts surrounding the dissemination and the reception by western audience (Dong & Luo, 2025). Grounded on the analysis of historical material

and former research, this book points out that the historical change of western attitude towards legal image of China shifts from positive stance to negative one owing to the ideological needs of the west world. In this case, corresponding strategies are recommended to construct the self-shaping legal image.

The book is structured into eleven chapters, each chapter with one specific topic. It is well-organized in an order from general introduction to detailed descriptions, from analysis of the past to instructions for the future. The majority of the chapters begin with an introductory section to brief readers about every topic of the corresponding chapter and ends with a summary as a review for readers. The chapters are complementary to each other, together presenting a portrait of China's legal image through detailed analysis of Chinese legal tradition from different perspectives.

II. REVIEW OF THE CONTENT

Chapter 1 probes Chinese legal tradition in terms of its richness in content and its significance to the world, with focus on the formation and the guiding ideology of Chinese legal system, as well as the spreading of Chinese legal tradition in the world. Known as one of the five legal family in world legal system, Chinese legal system has a profound impact on East Asian nations, featuring a long history of 2000 years. The formation of Chinese legal system contributes to three main external factors including the similarity between the East Asian countries and political vassalage, together with diplomatic and educational activities among nations. In terms of the guiding ideology, there are five principles derived from Chinese Confucianism, which are the philosophy of “unity of heaven and man”, humanistic ethics, the quest for a harmonious concept of “non-litigation”, a blend of statutory law and case law in legislation, together with the legal oversight, regarded as the core of the guiding ideology of Chinese legal system and the inner motivation to shape the Chinese legal system. The spreading of legal classics can be elucidated in three key phases, encompassing the phase of understanding for missionary and commercial purposes, that of incomplete translations by sinologists and that of spreading of full translations and research dissertations. The contemporary value of the Chinese legal tradition is highlighted after an historical overview of its spreading. This chapter concludes not only historical overview of Chinese legal tradition including the philosophical origin and its spreading in past time, but also the contemporary value of Chinese legal tradition.

Chapter 2 extends the discussion to the construction of China’s legal image after conducting a general historical review of Chinese legal tradition. The disparity existing in different legal system and their pursuit of interests contributes to the very need for foreigners to understand Chinese legal culture. In addition, as part of global legal culture, the Chinese legal system differs from others and encapsulates the essence of Chinese people’s wisdom. Wang (2019) holds the idea that translation conveys the information about characteristics of the society, culture, literature, language of another nation, which shape the image of Other, therefore the image of

other is the core research topic of the translation study from the perspective of imagology. The influence of Chinese legal culture on western culture is further discussed in this chapter: China’s legal image is viewed as the Other through translation and dissemination, which means that the western world judges China’s legal image by Western standards, with western world dominating the discourse. It is suggested that the legal image of China pivots from “Utopia” to “backwardness, barbarism and cruelty”, in that the image construction cater to the needs of westerners in different specific period. Undeniably, “Utopia” comes from their admiration for a strong country, while “backwardness, barbarism and cruelty” reveals their superiority for rapid development and wild ambition of external expansion. Some Chinese scholars consider it necessary that Chinese laws and regulations should be translated and engage in the international exchange, contributing Chinese experience and wisdom of rule of law, constructing China’s legal image (Dong & Hu, 2020). This implies that, as China’s national strength continues to grow, it is essential for China to engage in global legal discourse to reconstruct legal image, a process associated with the selection of texts, translators and translation strategies.

Chapter 3 turns to a discussion of current domestic research on the dissemination of Chinese legal classics, using visual measure tool to examines research hotspots and explicate research tendencies. According to the definition of Chinese legal classics, the study sets search conditions to explore research samples in CNKI (the abbreviation of China National Knowledge Infrastructure). Through analysis of these samples, research on Chinese legal classic translation is presented in four aspects encompassing annual publication volume analysis, prolific authors analysis, publication institutions examination, and highly cited literature statistics. The annual publication volume of legal classic translation witnesses three phases, from few articles related to some specific historical events, to a surge in numbers and a shift in research focus on representative legal classics, finally to fluctuating growth in number contributing to the policies. With respect to the authors of these studies, they form two main research rings with different research perspectives. Moreover,

the study indicates that researchers are expected to equip themselves with interdisciplinary knowledge and the spirit of teamwork. In terms of the publication institutions, they share the similarity of their location being in the language departments of universities or colleges specialized in political science or law. As for highly cited literature, they have different research focus. Furthermore, this study also presents a panoramic overview of research hotspots through an analysis of the keyword features including keyword co-occurrence, keyword clustering and emerging words. Moreover, Chapter 3 elucidates that there are still research limitations including the lack of research samples, few collaborations between scholars with different academic backgrounds, few in-depth and comprehensive studies and few empirical research. Additionally, Chapter 3 delineates the research outlook on different research topic respectively to improve the foresight, depth, breadth, theoretical understanding, practical relevance and continuity.

From the perspective of the discourse of legal orientalism, Chapter 4 details the construction of China's legal image in western world and the ways of image extraterritorial spreading, delves into the reason why westerners shift their attitudes towards China's legal image. It is argued that the 19th century becomes the overt turning point of extraterritorial spreading of China's legal image. According to the historical records, China was regarded as a civilized country with advanced legal system for a long time by westerners in the early stage. However, the late 18th century and the early 19th century saw the reversal of China's image in western world. Through the dominance in discourse, westerners overstated the cruelty of Chinese law in comparison with the superiority of civilized western law. The stereotypes on Chinese law were formed and reinforced through spreading of the half-truth. By genre, the information can be categorized into codex translation, newspaper reviews, memories and experiences, copperplate etchings, academic research and the perfect imagination of westerners. Collectively, these constituted a series of discursive offensives, having an adverse effect on shaping China's legal image. After the presentation of this phenomenon, this chapter proceeds to deconstruct the Other-shaping of China's legal image. It is stated that China's legal

image in west indirectly projects the self of western culture. By shaping China's legal image of "backwardness", the west aimed to achieve their purposes of safeguarding commercial interest through seeking extraterritoriality and maintaining the hegemony by adopting western law as a measuring standard.

Chapter 5 to 8 examine the image construction from different perspective. Chapter 5 delves into details about the image construction in ancient Chinese code. The exploration of relationship between the image construction and the Chinese code is led by the analysis of a representative example, Ta Tsing Leu Lee, the first complete Chinese code available by westerners. Chapter 5 begins with a nuanced review of Ta Tsing Leu Lee covering the historical significance, content, textual features, providing necessary information for readers. It is worth noting that Ta Tsing Leu Lee is viewed as the bridge for the west to understand the ancient Chinese law. Because of its global influence, the legal idea of westerners undergoes two changes— —their focus pivoting from criminal provisions to civil provisions, and a shift in their attitude toward the code. Furthermore, it is emphasized that an overt phenomenon of "misreading" exists in the process of translators' comprehending the code, whether unintentional or intentional. This chapter specifies two levels of misreading: one is the avoidance and simplification in translation and transmission of some Chinese cultural information, while the other is complete interpretation and replacement with western legal terms. In the discussion on the reasons of misreading, the unintentional one is irrelevant to westerners' ideology, whereas the intentional misreading under the disguise of the cultural exchanges reveals the ideology and value judgement of the translators who manipulate the translation to exaggerate the cultural superiority of the west.

After the meticulous case study of Chinese code in Chapter 5 are the textual analysis of paratext of Chinese legal classics in Chapter 6 and that of Chinese legal words and terms in Chapter 7. From the paratextual perspective, Chapter 6 offers commentary on the paratext of translated Chinese legal classics, aiming to facilitate the comprehension of the role played and work done by the translators. The analysis on paratext of the translated legal

classics respectively followed by the basic introduction of four translations of Chinese legal classics among which are Ta Tsing Leu Lee, The Great Qing Code, The T'ang Code, The Great Ming code. The narrative of George Thomas Staunton on preface presents the characteristics of multivocality and the invisibility of "I" to disguise the subjectivity in expression, with the purpose of integrating his personal opinion into other's perception. Working on the same source text, William C. Jones adopts the method of blending narrative with evaluation and accentuating the mutual enhancement of research and translation. In terms of the paratext commentary on The T'ang Code, the translation of Wallace Johnson is based on his understanding about Chinese philosophical idea of "unity of heaven and man", with the translation strategy of annotation, representing a meticulous and practical piece of work. With regard to the paratext commentary on The Great Ming Code, Jiang Yonglin not only inherits the translation styles from the predecessors but also brings about some transformations such as transliteration and the use of parentheses and square brackets in annotation strategy, with an emphasis of Chinese cultural nuances. Consistent with translators' purpose, these paratext serves as a bridge for cross-cultural dialogue on legal culture.

Similarly, Chapter 7 presents an analysis of image construction from the perspective of ancient Chinese legal words and terms in A Dictionary of the Chinese Language compiled by Robert Morrison, along with an exploration of performance and reasons of rewriting legal words and terms. The legal words and terms discussed are classified into three branches of law, namely criminal law, civil law, procedural law. In addition, the examples of the legal words and terms are paired or grouped for comparative analysis, such as "笞"[to beat with the small bamboo] and "杖"[to beat with the great bamboo], "徒"[to transport to another district, and subject to hard labor for a term of years] and "流"[to banish perpetually to the confine of the empire] in criminal law. Although the differences between words are accentuated in translation to minimize the unclarity, some of terms are mistranslated due to the limited proficiency in Chinese. The phenomenon of rewriting legal words and terms is undeniable, involving overinterpretation, subjective commentary and

replacing Chinese legal concepts with western legal terms. The condemnation and criticism of some aspects of Chinese system from translators account for the overinterpretation and subjective commentary and the latter one is attributed to the western thought pattern.

The examination on image construction pivots from the textual level to the cultural level in Chapter 8. From the viewpoint of Morison who compiled A Dictionary of the Chinese Language, it is emphasized that Morison capsulizes and introduces Chinese culture through three Confucian concepts involving "仁" [Benevolence], integration of rituals and music, the aim of "educating people". Furthermore, Chapter 8 also traces the Morison's translation activity following the temporal and spatial clue. When Morrison arrived in China on his missionary task, he was faced with the challenge that "the unity of heaven and humanity" in Confucianism prevailing in China contradicted "dichotomy between human and the world" in Christianity from western world. Through his acquisition of both Chinese and western languages and cultures, Morrison seeks for similarities between Confucianism and Christianity, that is the common pursuit of love, creating a harmonious space for the communication of languages, thoughts and civilizations between the east and the west. During Morrison's staying in China, he upheld the idea that the learning of a foreign language was a process of equal communication and that China was not linguistically inferior to the west. Furthermore, he criticized Eurocentrism, advocating cultural diversity and equality, which explains his success of promoting communication and mutual learning between the two civilizations.

Chapter 9 explores the source of Chinese legalism from the perspective of the representative Chinese legalist, Guan Zhong and its extraterritorial spreading. In this chapter, an historical review of development of the Chinese legalism is expounded from its advent in Xia and Shang Dynasties, its application in pre-Qin period, finally to its maturity in Han Dynasty. As a key scholar in Spring and Autumn period, Guan Zhong in pre-Qin period served Duke Huan of Qi whose national strength significantly increased with the assistance of strategies. The book Guanzi was a compilation of

various school of thoughts in the name of Guan Zhong, covering fields such as politics, economics, law. The idea of Guanzi in governance can be unfolded in three principles embodying a people-oriented principle, the rule of the golden mean, and the governance of rule-by-law, which are the source of Chinese legalism, transcending time and space and influencing the contemporary society. The cultural impact of Guanzi was global. A great many of its copies exported to Japan due to the expansion of Japanese cultural class in Edo period. Although Guanzi was given a cold reception by Korean society at early stage, it is now regarded as an essential material to understand China. In addition, in the middle of twentieth century, the translation of Guanzi enjoyed popularity and was later under systematic study in western world.

After the meticulous examination of the previous situation of legal image construction and spreading, Chapter 10 delineates the possible path of legal image self-shaping through traditional term translation, providing suggestions on addressing present translation-related difficulties in extraterritorial spreading of China's legal image. This chapter discusses the traditional term translation by categories—ancient legal terms and classic terms. The ancient legal terms are characterized by inheritance, creativity and plurality, in that the ancient legal terms witness the changes of the whole Chinese legal system. Significantly, the untranslatability of ancient legal terms is an obstacle in legal classic translation, originating from the uniqueness of the Chinese legal system, the differences in ways of thinking and the historicity of ancient legal terms. As expounded in Chapter 10, the compensation strategy should be adopted to fill in the linguistic or cultural vacancies in translation under the guidance of six compensation principles of demand, relevance, focus, proximity, equivalence and consistency. It is stressed that the compensation strategies can be summarized to be equivalent literal translation and descriptive interpretation. Particularly, the standardization of the ancient legal term translation is necessarily promoted by establishing ancient legal terms translation table and strengthening the comparative and critical study of terminology translation. Similarly, the standardization of terms can also facilitate the classic

term translation. In terms of the characteristics of the classics term, the classic terms can be described as the containers of a specific history, the embodiment of the deepest pursuits of the Chinese people and they vary in meaning with the context. After the features of the classic term are elaborated on, the inherent requirements of classic term translation are proposed accordingly, together with the notable issues of conceptual prominence, symbolic normativity and the level of communicative choice.

Building upon the comprehensive analysis of legal image construction and spreading, the last Chapter indicates the strategic planning on content and framework for dissemination of Chinese legal classics. This chapter underscores the current situation and existing problems in three aspects: "Learning purpose of proselytizing and profit", which deviates the translation purpose in contemporary China; "Incomplete translation by sinologists", which results from the purpose of cultural assimilation and the complexity and length of Chinese legal classics; and "spreading of complete translations and research papers", whose existing problems lie in the scarcity of types, paucity of numbers, concentration of applicable regions, insufficient attention in academic research. It is worth mentioning that the "Going Global" for Chinese classics is feasible and necessary. The feasibility is grounded on the homology of legal culture with some countries along the "Belt and Road" and the influence on western countries. What necessitates the "Going Global" for Chinese legal classics is the task of advancing the rule of law in all-round way, reshaping the international image of traditional legal culture and strengthening national cultural confidence. A strategic planning is elaborated on content and framework for "Going Global" of Chinese legal classics. The strategic planning consists of the planning in status, ontology, education and spreading. Status planning stresses a systematic study on Chinese history and culture under the guidance of President Xi in a congratulatory letter on the establishment of the Chinese Academy of History, requiring greater attention and political support for legal classics; ontology planning entails understanding the essence of legal classics, thus making an internal system planning and fostering a distinctive and compatible

legal disciplinary discourse system; education planning indicates the significance of an ample reserve of talents with interdisciplinary knowledge; spreading planning highlights the complementary role between translation and spreading and the importance of the relation between translation and various factors involved in spreading. A strategic planning exists at four levels: government level, industry level, academia level and media level, upholding the principles of scientificity, systematicity, pertinence and openness. Following the principle of scientificity, the translation of legal classics should ensure the completeness, sufficiency and truthfulness of the information, investigating the needs of readers. It is emphasized in the principle of systematicity that strategic planning requires consideration from a holistic perspective to tackle with the problems like disconnection between discourse translation and discourse spreading. Pertinence planning suggests that the strategic planning will avoid blindness and generality, adjusting measures to local conditions. It is pointed out in principle of openness the formation of policies or planning will feature in a certain degree of openness, dynamism, flexibility and interactivity to adjust with the time.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, The Legal Image of China in the Chinese Legal Tradition is comprehensive study based on Chinese legal tradition to probe the image construction and the possible path of reconstructing the legal image of China. It presents a detailed exploration on China's legal image from the interdisciplinary perspective, offering new theoretical insights to future image construction. In addition, the mixed quantitative and qualitative methods are employed to examine the translated Chinese classics in this book. The domestic studies are visualized through the quantitative method, offering a panoramic display of the research development. As a consequence of adopting a qualitative method, nuanced textual analysis is conducted on representative cases and shed light on the generality of phenomena. Additionally, this book establishes a systematic study on Chinese legal image, and further research can be conducted in light of the research outlook mentioned in this book. Apart

from these theoretical contributions, there are also practical contributions for cultivating talents and providing insights on legal image reconstruction in multicultural legal landscape. The targeted readers of this book can be both the laymen and the professionals in China due to the in-depth study with simple wording. This book not only offers readers with a scientific understanding of the Chinese legal image built on Chinese legal tradition, but also facilitates mutual learning of civilizations between China and west. Furthermore, this book offers valuable insights for retranslating the Chinese classics. From Chinese traditional code to Chinese modern law, the development in law studies is based on the legal translation and legal transplantation (Zhao & Long, 2023). This book stresses that this era calls for a new path to reconstruct China's legal image. The translation for external communication in new era is aimed to establish cultural identity, construct national image and increase international significance (Wu, 2022). The translators are expected to "tell a Chinese story well" in legal domain under the guidance in this book, by integrating the ancient wisdom into modern perspective, achieving China's having a greater say on rule of law in the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Guangdong Provincial Philosophy and Social Sciences Planning Project (No. GD26YWY10)

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