“Fusion of Horizons”—Analysis of *Fortress Besieged* From the Perspective of Gadamer’s Hermeneutics

LU Shuang

Southwest Jiaotong University, Chengdu, China

According to Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, two processes of “fusion of horizons” can be described as: the “horizons” of the text, the translator, and the target reader are “fused” together. Based upon the “fusion of horizons” of the hermeneutics proposed by Hans-Georg Gadamer, a leading German Continental philosopher of the twentieth century, this article aims to analyze English version of *Wei Cheng* written by Qian Zhongshu and then cooperatively translated by Jeanne Kelly and Nathan K. Mao. It is found that the translator can give new meaning to the text through “interpretation”, and on that basis, each interpretation of the text means a new process of “fusion of horizons”.

Keywords: Wei Cheng, *Fortress Besieged*, philosophical hermeneutics, fusion of horizons

Introduction

Traditional translation theories were centered on linguistic level, where the text translated was regarded as the focus of translation activities. Under this circumstance, translation was emphasized to “be loyal to the original text”. Influenced by this philosophy, the translator was later described as “dancing with shackles”, which implied that the translator had always been marginalized in translation field for quite a long time. In the 1970s, “unfaithful” or “treasonable” translation began to emerge as a challenge to traditional translation theories. Thus, the 1980s saw the “cultural turn” in translation studies, of which the translation subjectivity gained much concern. The idea of “cultural turn” in translation circle has opened up a new path for translation studies. As the representatives of culture studies of translation, Bassnett and Lefeverede clared that the scope of translation studies has “moved beyond the linguistic approach” and begun to “consider broader issues of context, history and convention” (Bassnett & Lefevere, 2001, p. 123).

The philosophical basis of cultural translation is the hermeneutics that focuses on understanding and interpretation of significance in the second half of the twentieth century. And since then, the hermeneutics, as the most influential philosophy, has thus been introduced into translation criticism. One highlight of the hermeneutics comes from Gadamer. Under his influence, the dualism of the subject and the object in translation studies has been cleared up, which indicates that the translation activity is actually the outcome of the “dialogue” conducted between the author, the translator and the target reader. As a result, in translation process, the translator is perceived as the “subject”, and the translated text as the “object” in the concepts of hermeneutics.

LU Shuang, Master of Translation and Interpreting, the School of Foreign Languages, Southwest Jiaotong University.

Therefore, the entire translation process can be described as the process of the subject's perception and understanding of the object. It thus appears that hermeneutics is of some significance for translation studies.

Wei Cheng was first published in 1947. Qian Zhongshu, the author of *Wei Cheng*, is a major literary figure in China and one of the most knowledgeable Chinese scholars known to the Western world. As a masterpiece of Qian Zhongshu, *Wei Cheng* has attracted a wide spectrum of Chinese readers with its unique insight of human nature. The author Qian Zhongshu has successfully provided readers with an observant, witty and rhetorical description by employing a wide range of references in Chinese and Western literature, social custom, philosophy, proverbs and so on. It has also been commented by renowned Chinese-American literary critic Hsia Chih-ting to be "the most delightful and carefully wrought novel in modern Chinese literature" (Hsia, 1961, p. 323). Hsia also points out that "it is a safe bet that future generations of Chinese readers will return to this book more frequently than to any other novel of the Republican period for its delightful portray of contemporary manners, its comic exuberance, and its tragic insight" (Hsia, 1961, p. 434). However, it was not until 1979 that the first English version of it came out into public.

The only full text of *Wei Cheng* is translated by two scholars. The first translation draft is finished by American scholar called Jeanne Kelly, and then revised and polished by Chinese-American scholar and sinologist Nathan K. Mao. In addition, Nathan K. Mao wrote the introduction, refined the footnotes, and prepared the manuscript for publication. *Wei Cheng* is a sarcastic and humorous novel describing Chinese middle-class society in 1940s. It is a vivid description of the intellectual existence in the Anti-Japanese War period as reflected in the sentence "the people outside the city want to break in and the people inside the city want to escape" (Qian, 2003, p. 185). Since its publication, it has received a great success that caused a big stir in America and other countries in the world. Some scholars even emphasized that this novel would help change the attitude of the Western world toward modern Chinese literature.

"Fusion of Horizons" in Translation Activities

Since the 1980s, the "cultural turn" in translation studies (referring to literary translation in general) has brought multiple subjects, including the author, the translator and the target reader, into our attention. Translation has been neglected for a long time in history and can hardly escape from gradually being marginalized. The latest research findings of philosophy, aesthetics, semiotics, literature and art and other disciplines have deepened our understanding of translation itself so that we can constantly expand the field of translation research. As a result, translation activity is destined to occupy its own position in history. Characteristically, for Gadamer, he does not describe the translation process in a direct way throughout his theory. According to his point of view, however, he actually disagrees with the idea of coping with the text from the perspective of linguistics. The translation activity actually begins with 'dialogue', that is, the essence of translation lies in the "dialogue" conducted between the author, the translator as well as the target reader throughout the whole translation process. Both continuous "dialogue" processes and interpretation make the meaning of the original text be gradually revealed and thus accepted by target language readers. "Horizon" is "a term given a special philosophical meaning in the works of Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger, and other phenomenologists and hermeneutical philosophers. A horizon is a framework or field of vision within which one understands. Everyone as an historical being is conditioned by a tradition and culture and hence dwells in some horizon. A horizon is one's life-world" (Bunnin & Yu,

2004, p. 311). The horizon could get expanded only when one gets into touch with horizons of others. Gadamer (2004, p. 391) defined "horizon" as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point". Therefore, both the translator and the reader are under certain historical background, which means that the "pre-understanding" serves as a very basis for achieving reading or even comprehending the whole text. However, the "understanding" of the object cannot go beyond the historical environment, and on that basis, the "fusion" cannot be restricted by what has been seen. As far as the "fusion of horizons" is concerned, Gadamer (2004, p. 318) argued that "a horizon is not rigid boundary but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further". The translator's own "fusion" contains not only all the knowledge, cognition, and attitude that have been already existed in his or her mind before the ultimate translated text appears, but all the information the translator has obtained throughout the translation process.

According to Gadamer's viewpoint, there are two "horizons" always existing and interacting with each other during the text interpretation process. One is the "horizon" of the translated text shaped in the past, that is, the text is considered as the object to be understood, for the text is to be created and its creator is in a particular historical context. The other is the current "horizon" of the interpreter, that is, the interpreter is unchangeably in his or her own certain historical background. Of course, there must be some differences between the two "horizons", and in the face of the objective fact, to give up one horizon for keeping another in translation is the only way out? In other words, is there any possibility for the two "horizons" to be interconnected with each other so that to achieve the "fusion of horizons"? In light of Gadamer's hermeneutics, the truth is that, this is achievable, because any translation process is deemed to be process of interpretation. Or we can compare the translation to the process of interpretation. In other words, the translation process requires that, first, the translator has to interpret the original text, then conducts the "dialogue" with the author, and thus "fusion of horizons" can be finally achieved.

However, due to some factors, i.e. time and space, the "fusion" of the translator and that of the original text are different in many aspects. Therefore, from the perspective of Gadamer's hermeneutics, the process of twice "fusions of horizons" can be achieved in a progressive way and it is never possible to fully realize the "fusion of horizons". To some extent, in this process, the translator's "horizon" has been fused with the author's or text's horizon, that is, the "fusion of horizons" has been realized by generating a new "horizon". However, does this mean the end of the entire translation process? Of course, the answer would be no, for the "horizon" of the translated text has failed to be taken into account, which means that the entire translation activity is far away to be ended until the translator conveys his or her own understanding to the target readers in target language after the first "fusion of horizons" has been completed, or in other words, making it function in a new linguistic world. In translation, text is just a trigger to generate the meaning, making it possible for different interpretations. However, the meaning produced also requires the synergy between the translator and the text. Meaning is the outcome yielded by the text and the translator. "In the words of Gadamer, it is the outcome of the 'fusion of horizons' of the text and that of the interpreter" (Zhu., 2009, p. 98). To sum up, the whole translation process actually includes twice "fusion of horizons" processes presented below:

Figure 1. A model for the process of the "fusion of horizons".

From what is shown above, we can conclude that in the first and second process of "fusion of horizons", the translator has different focuses. To be more specific, in the process of the first "fusion of horizons", the main task of the translator is to "understand" the original text, and that is to say, in the fusion of the translator's "horizon" and that of the original text, the translator should take efforts to figure out what the source text tries to tell the readers. As a result, the translator should not be limited in noticing the literal meaning of the text, but pay much more attention to the connotations behind the text. This is also the prerequisite for all translation activities. In the second process of "fusion of horizons", the translator's newly-formed "horizon" is fused with the "horizon" of target language culture after the first "fusion of horizons" process is completed. On the basis of "understanding", the translator begins to focus on how to select the appropriate words, phrases, or sentences in target language culture to convey his or her own understanding of the original text. This process requires the translator's to be deliberate, thorough and conscientious towards the words chosen, syntax selected, the structure design and so many aspects of the translated text.

The Analysis of "Fusion of Horizons" in *Fortress Besieged*

In the previous parts, we have made an in-depth discussion on the "fusion of horizons" of Gadamer's hermeneutics. The translation of quotations takes us a stage further in considering the question of meaning and translation, for idioms or proverbs, are culture bound. Based upon the former analysis, we might further touch upon some specific translation examples selected from *Fortress Besieged* and find out whether they have achieved the relevant effects we mentioned above.

Example (1)

信后又添了几句说道：“塞翁失马，安知非福，使三年前结婚，则此番吾家破费不赀矣”。(Qian, 1991, p. 8)

The postscript read: "This may be a blessing in disguise. If you had married three years earlier, this would have cost a large sum of money. (Kelly & Mao, 2003, p. 10)

Note: Literally, "just like the old frontiersman losing a horse, who knows but that which seems a misfortune may be a blessing in disguise." (Kelly & Mao, 2003, p. 354)

“塞翁失马，安知非福” (“this may be a blessing in disguise”) is quoted from *Huai Nan Tzu* (《淮南子》), a collection of essays created during the Western Han Dynasty in China and is a mainstay in Taoism books. One of the stories goes like: in ancient China, there lived a divination master near the frontier fortress. Two important things happened to him. The first thing was that his horse ran into the Hu people's (Chinese ancient nomads

living in the north and northwest China), but he was inclined to believe that this was a blessing instead of a curse. As expected, a few months later, the lost horse came back with the Hu people's horses. The second thing was that his son fell down from the horseback, but he also held the idea that it was a true blessing. Surprisingly, a few months later, the Hu people invaded the frontier fortress. Thanks to the broken leg, his son finally was not conscripted and saved his own life to some degrees. This story tells that bad things can turn into good things under certain conditions, and vice versa. The blessing and curse of one thing can travel in both directions under given conditions, which should be treated with truly dialectical vision. In other words, under the influence of Taoism, nature is considered as the unity of opposites of Yin and Yang, and the evolvement of everything in the universe must move towards the opposite direction. Therefore, there is a saying goes like "under certain conditions, a curse can be transformed into a blessing, and a blessing can also be transformed into a curse". The dialectical relation of unity of opposites constitutes the general principle of Taoism. In translation, language and culture are interacting with each other, penetrating and influencing the translator's ideology. In this novel, the author quotes this allusion to refer to Fang Hung-chien's father's sorrowful emotion but with a bit of rejoice when he gets to know the bad news of his future daughter-in-law. It is not hard to find that the translator has already understood the author's intention before translation. Hence, in the second process of "fusion of horizons", the translator goes deep into the reader's cultural background and overlooks the Chinese Taoist culture to translate it into an English idiom "a blessing in disguise". In fact, the translator can also place the historical allusion with footnote, but the author of the article holds that it may not be necessary to introduce the whole story, because doing so would inevitably affect the reading fluency of the target readers. Therefore, the author of the article thinks that the translation method adopted by the translators is not only successful in avoiding interrupting the readers' reading process, but also bridges the "horizon" of target language readers.

Example (2)

又如前天的日记写他叫鸿渐到周家去辞行，鸿渐不肯，骂周太太鄙吝势利，他怎样教训儿子“君子躬自厚而薄责于人，亲无失亲，故无失故”，结果儿子怎样帖然“无词”。(Qian, 1991, p. 132)

The entry in Tun-weng's diary of the day before yesterday stated how Tun-weng had asked Hung-chien to go to the Chous to say goodbye and how when Tun-weng had refused and cursed Mrs. Chou, calling her a stingy snob, he had admonished his son, "A gentleman is severe with himself while being indulgent toward others, and so he does not lose relations or friends." As a result, his son had submissively "fallen silent." (Kelly & Mao, 2003, p. 129)

“躬自厚而薄责于人” (“A gentleman is severe with himself while being indulgent toward others”) is quoted from *Duke Spirit of Wei of The Analects of Confucius* (《论语·卫灵公》) (Yang Bojun & Din Cheuk Lau, 2008). With “rituals” as its core concept, and “benevolence” as its external requirement, people are led to be “junzi” (“君子”) by Confucius. There are mainly two meanings of “junzi” in *The Analects of Confucius*: the first is to describe a man of rank; the other is the one of high morality. According to the author of the article's statistics, there are more than ten translations of “junzi” at all times where “gentlemen” is included.

Fang Tun-weng keeps encouraging his son to endeavor to become a “gentleman”, and thus be strict with himself, as gentle and generous as possible while blaming and criticizing other people. Since “gentlemen” is adopted to translate “junzi” by the translators, Chinese Confucianism has been spread in Western countries, the Great Britain in particular, where gentlemen with the same qualities as in China are admired by the English

society. This kind of translation has not only achieved the two processes of “fusion of horizons” in meanings and cultural acceptance, but also conforms to the unique style of *The Analects* as an ancient traditional classic in China. How to be a gentleman is a life-long lesson for the protagonist Fang Hung-chien taught by his father Fang Tun-weng, who never stops to expect that his son can build himself into a “gentleman”. In the process of translation, the translator’s “horizon” was first fused with that of the original text with fully understanding of the Confucianism contained in the original work. At the same time, *The Analects of Confucius* is the record of Confucius’ and his disciples’ words and behaviors, a best reflection of Confucian wisdom, so the language style of *The Analects* should be very concise in linguistic level and easy to be understood in syntax. In the second process of “fusion of horizons”, the translator made his or her own “horizon” fuse with that of the target language culture, avoiding the cultural misunderstanding and even facilitating the target language readers’ understanding of the source text. The translators’ adoption of a concise language expression has clearly interpreted the meaning of the original text, making the translated sentence style conform to the language feature of *The Analects* that requires to be accurate, brief, and elegant.

Example (3)

只可惜这些事实虽然有趣，演讲时用不着它们，该另抱佛脚。(Qian, 1991, p. 34)

Such a pity that while these items of information were all very interesting, they could not be used in the lecture. He would have to read something else. (Kelly & Mao, 2003, p. 36)

Note: Literally, “clasp the feet of Buddha.” The idiom means that when someone gets into trouble through lack of due preparation, he seeks help at the last critical moment. (Kelly & Mao, 2003, p. 357)

The background here is that what Fang Hung-chien should do is to collect lecture materials for his forthcoming speech, but he is reading a few books he thinks interesting but have nothing to do with his speech. However, the speech is just around the corner, and he has wasted so many hours on reading those useless books. Finally, he made a hasty last-minute effort to figure his speech out by scraping all sorts of lecture materials together. There is such a story about the proverb of “抱佛脚” (“clasp the feet of Buddha”). In the Song and Yuan dynasties in ancient China, the ruling class strongly advocated Buddhism, so the monk’s status was in a particularly high position. Anyone who committed various kinds of sins can ask for the monks’ protection and be pardoned. Therefore, a person who committed a felony can even be saved if he ran into a Buddhist temple. The literal meaning of “抱佛脚” is “clasp Buddha’s feet” when Buddhism was very popular in the Han dynasty. Later, “临时抱佛脚” has become a proverb that refers to “not make timely preparations” or “start to prepare at the last critical moment”. Qian Zhongshu is a master of language, and he is so familiar with both Chinese and Western cultures. For the translator, when the first “fusion of horizons” is finished, he or she already grasps the meaning of what the original text is trying to convey. The new “horizon” formed continued to be fused with that of the target language culture, and the meaning implicit in the original text was accurately conveyed. “抱佛脚” here specifically means that Fang Hung-chien has to immediately start to read the books related to his speech. According to the understanding of the author of the article, if it is translated literally here, it definitely does not make any sense for the target language readers, and more seriously, it may take risk in making the translation more complicated to understand. In order to compensate the culture default, the translators choose to add a footnote to explain the Chinese idiom “抱佛脚” loaded with Chinese culture. This to some extent has bridged the

“horizon” of the target language reader in a proper way, and preserved the Chinese culture in targeted language culture.

Example (4)

“也许你表姐有她的心思，遣将不如激将，非有大敌当前，赵先生的本领不肯显出来。可惜我们这种老弱残兵，不经打，并且不愿打——” (Qian, 1991, p. 61)

“Maybe your cousin has her own ideas. Dispatching a general on a mission isn't as effective as challenging him to do it as a mission impossible. There has to be a major adversary before Mr. Chao's ability can come to the fore. Too bad the tired soldier can't live up to the fight and for that matter isn't interested in the fighting.” (Kelly & Mao, 2003, p. 62)

The underlined sentence “遣将不如激将” (“dispatching a general on a mission isn't as effective as challenging him to do it as a mission impossible”) actually means that “it is better to motivate a general than to dispatch him directly on fighting a battle”. This is quoted from *Voyage to the West* (《西洋记》), a supernatural evil-spirit novel written by novelist Luo Maodeng in the Ming Dynasty (Luo Maodeng, 1995). It portrays that during Yongle era of the Ming Dynasty (as early as 600 years ago) China owned world's largest ocean-going fleet commanded by Admiral Zheng He who made seven ocean voyages to the Western seas, hoping to inspire the monarchs in Ming Dynasty to fight against Japanese pirates and rejuvenate the whole nation. Placed it in the background of the original text, this is Fang Hung-chien's reply to Miss T'ang Hsiao-fu. In the novel, Chao Hsin-mei likes Miss Su for a long time and he misunderstands that Fang Hung-chien loved Miss Su as well, but whom Fang Hung-chien really cares about is Miss Su's cousin Miss T'ang Hsiao-fu. As a result, in order to win Miss Su's heart, Chao shows jealousy for Fang Hung-chien by regarding him as a rival in love. Therefore, Fang Hung-chien uses such a metaphor in his answer to Chao's question, comparing Chao to the “general” who should be confronting the “powerful enemy” instead of “motley troops incompetent for combat duty” like himself. He wants to tell Mr. Chao that he has no interest and even does deserve to be considered as Chao's adversary. Fang has expressed his own thoughts in a euphemistic and humorous way, and also brought the conversation back to other topics. More importantly, by this way has Chao been given enough respect as well. Anyhow, Fang's reply successfully serves multiple purposes. Back to translation, we can find out that the translator actually has understood the author's intention of using the metaphorical rhetoric in the process of the first “fusion of horizons”, and constantly approaches his or her “horizon” to that of the original text. Therefore, in the second process of “fusion of horizons”, the translator directly adopts the “general” to translate “将” and “adversary” to translate “敌”, reproducing the metaphor of the original text in the translated text. In this way, translators successfully spread the ancient Chinese culture. On the other hand, the target language readers will be marveled at the author's sense of humor.

Conclusion

Traditional translation theory regards translation as a process of linguistic code switching. Gadamer's hermeneutics theory of “fusion of horizons” precisely gives many clues to and even provides a new orientation for the study of text interpretation in translation activities, literary translation in particular. There is no translated text that can be completed in a “void”, but entangled in a complex network where the author, translator and the

reader are all involved. According to the “fusion of horizons” of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, each process of translator’s interpretation of the original text is a new process of “fusion of horizons”.

Yet, the problem that translators inevitably meet in translation is the unavoidable language and cultural differences. Based on the analysis of *Fortress Besieged*, it can be found that, as the “operator” of the translation process, the translator needs to find a balance between the “horizons” of the author and target readers. Thus, the author of the article holds an idea that a good translator shall be bilingual and bicultural in the process of achieving cultural communication. To identify those language and cultural signs, the translators need to, firstly, achieve the “fusion of horizons” of all the subjects, and on that basis, accumulate cultural knowledge to make adaptations in an appropriate way, so as to achieve successful literary translation as well as cross-cultural communication.

Through the analysis of *Fortress Besieged*, it is fair to say that Jeanne Kelly and Nathan K. Mao have done an excellent job in the translation, especially in dealing with those words or expressions that are hard to find relevant equivalents in target language culture. “Language, then, is the heart within the body of culture, and it is the interaction between the two and that results in the continuation of life-energy” (Bassnett, 2004, p. 22). In addition, cultural differences are hard to avoid in any translation activities, “one common feature of much of the research in translation studies is an emphasis on cultural aspect of translation, on the texts within which translation occurs” (ibid, 2004, p. 2). In other words, translation is seen, as it undoubtedly is, as “vital to the interaction between cultures”. (Bassnett & Lefevere, 2001, p. 6). After being analyzed and reconstructed in heterogeneous cultures, one’s own culture has become a new existence. If we push the boundaries of translation skills, but to comprehend translation from the level of human understanding and communication behavior, and examine the translation process from the perspective of culture and text, we are possible to deal with different kinds of contradictions that could be faced in the translation process based on our deeper understanding of the essence of translation activities in theoretical level. The article, therefore, in light of the “fusion of horizons” of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, is in hope of giving some random shots for the translation studies of modern Chinese literary classics such as *Wei Cheng* as well as further relative studies.

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