

Readership in Shaping Fu Donghua's Translation of *Gone With the Wind*

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Abstract

This thesis intends to introduce a few key concepts of the reception theory like Jauss's "horizon of expectations" and Iser's "the implied reader" and apply them to justify, in terms of the translation strategies, the first Chinese translation of the novel *Gone With the Wind* by Fu Donghua, which was once popular among readers at that time but later on received bitter criticism from scholars in the translation domain.

Key words: Horizon of expectations; The implied reader; Reader; Translation strategy

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INTRODUCTION

The conventional study of translation has mainly concentrated on the pursuit of the answer to the seemingly simple question "what constitutes a good or successful translation?"

Since translator Yan Fu proposed the principle of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" a hundred years ago, many scholars engaged in translation studies have presented a large number of papers for the discussion of the criteria for evaluating a translation. It is considered foredoomed and self-evident for translators to be faithful

to both the original author and the original work. The so-called "one servant with two masters" is a vivid expression of the relationship among the original author, the translator and the reader. The opinion, featured by the emphasis on the translator's faithfulness to the original, has exercised far-reaching influence on translation theory and practice.

In recent years, the issue of the translator's role has become a common topic which interest both theorists and translators. With a thorough study of the translator's characters in them, the subjectivity of the translator has been more recognized and highlighted. As a result, the translator is liberated from the status as a servant but is identified as a dynamic subject which affects other components in translation practice. Some theorists have gone so far as to propose that the translator is endowed with the privilege of rewriting and manipulating the original.

It is a regret that during the discussions one important element is somehow excluded or at least is ignored. Of course, mainly due to the influence of some foreign theories such as Eugene Nida's "dynamic equivalence" theory, there are indeed many scholars who hold that the translators should be accountable to readers in general and the position of readers should be highlighted. However, compared with the mainstream study of the role of the original and the translator, the research on readership appears to be somehow marginalized in translation studies. Since the process of translation generally consists of three basic elements: The original text, the translator and the reader (of the translation), it seems neither reasonable nor practical to attach the only importance to the first two elements while overlooking the last one.

In this thesis, the writer would like to conduct a study on the above issue by drawing on some essential notions of some theories, represented by reception theory. Certainly, there have been quite a few articles written on the translation study by appealing to reception theory

after it was introduced into China in the early 1980s. For instance, in the *Chinese Translators Journal*, the first article related to reception aesthetics (namely reception theory) was published in the sixth issue of 1989 with a title of *Thoughts After Translating 'The Sky Is Gray'*. Just like the functionalist *Skopostheorie* which was once misunderstood as unsuitable for literary translation, the cases of applying reception theory into literary translation are fairly rare and infrequent. The present thesis intends, in a tentative way, to interpret the first Chinese version of the American novel *Gone with the Wind* primarily from a historical view, by drawing on some essential conceptions of reception theory. Naturally, it is not in the least the writer's purpose to put forward a so-called reader-centered translation principle, but it is just an attempt of probing into a typical case of literary translation to justify the recognition of readership in translation.

1. AN OVERVIEW OF RECEPTION THEORY

Like many other theories, reader reception theory is not suddenly established overnight. In fact, long before its appearance some thoughts and concepts concerning readership were already recorded in other names. But reader criticism became recognized as a distinct critical movement and an integrated theoretical framework only in the 1960s in Germany represented by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. With a more accurate term "Reception Aesthetics" (*Rezeptionsaesthetik* in German), the primary focus of the reader reception approach falls on the reader and the reading act rather than the author or the text as traditionally practiced by previous critical theories like structuralism and formalism.

Reception theory highlights the status and role of the reader during the process of reading and interpreting the text in the value concretization of literature. According to reception theory, the literary text is endowed with no fixed and final meaning or value; there is no one meaning that stands right forever. Each text arouses different responses in different readers. Since a reader's knowledge and presumptions about the text in general are challenged, affirmed and transformed during the interaction of the reader with the text, different readers are expected to make responses of their own when faced with the same text.

Reception theory is roughly divided into two directions, represented by Jauss and Iser respectively.

Jauss is dedicated to the study of readership with a focus on the reader's horizon of expectations and aesthetic experience. In the theoretical works of Jauss, he adopts the concept of "horizon of expectations" invented by Mannheim and Popper. The term "horizon of expectations", has not been precisely defined since the day of its creation. Generally speaking, it indicates the set of expectations against which readers perceive the text.

It generally refers to an integrated demand and level for literary appreciation which are expressed as a potential aesthetic expectation in the specific reading activity. Several factors, ranging from the outlook of the world and life, the general literate horizon, the literate and artistic attainment, to the literary competence, take effect in shaping a reader's horizon of expectations.

According to Jauss, some traits are displayed with regard to text, reader, and the horizon of expectations. First, a new text can be approached by the very reader with a certain knowledge framework. Without the pre-understanding, the reader's comprehension of the text is doomed to failure from the outset. Second, the new text is constantly situated in a historical setting with the existence of both texts and receptors. An informal reception will occur on condition that the information and style of the text are released in some way to the reader in advance. With the former memory recalled and awakened in this way, the reader is prepared for a prospective reception with the new text. Third, the horizon of expectations is in an ever-changing process. The previous horizon of expectations will be transformed and enhanced, and hence new horizon of expectations will be generated in the communication between new texts and the former ones.

Unlike Jauss who applies himself to the study of collective reception and vast social background, Wolfgang Iser dedicates himself to the study of the specific reading activity. His primary contributions lie in the exposition and extension of the term "the implied reader" and in the research on the indeterminacies and gaps of meaning within the text.

According to Iser, the implied reader refers to the possible reader who is subject to the structure of a text and exists inside the author, participating in and affecting his writing. To be exact, the implied reader is the one expected to read the future work by a certain author. Abstract as it is, the implied reader is by no means an entity created purely on the basis of the imagination of the author, but is generalized from a great deal of information based on the reading practice of the actual reader. Therefore, the implied reader is rooted in the actual reader and bound to change the latter.

According to Iser, it is in the reading process that the text is transformed into a literary work in the true sense. Without the participation of the reader, the potential meaning will fail to be realized.

According to the above main notions of reception theory, we can gain some inspirations in the study of literary translation in the following.

Firstly, it is conceivably a fact that the translator would bear in mind the target of his writing and make a sound judgment of the horizon of the expectations of the implied reader in order to better satisfy and meet the needs of the future reader of the writing.

Secondly, the horizon of expectations of the reader is subject to change as the time and circumstance concerning the social ethos and cultural environment is changed.

Thirdly, on condition that the implied reader's horizon of expectations disagrees or even conflicts with that of the translator, different horizons call for an amalgamation in a successful reading activity, in the way either the translator or the reader compromises.

Hence it is not incidental that numerous literary works had been shaped differently in another language by different translators in different eras. If we probe into these cases, we may find readership played a dramatic role in the process, such as the translation of the German play *Mother Courage's Cucumbers* into English and the English novel *Gone With the Wind* into Chinese.

2. INTRODUCTION OF *GONE WITH THE WIND* AND FU'S TRANSLATION

Gone With the Wind is the only published work of the American woman novelist Margaret Mitchell and also the best-selling Civil War and reconstruction period novel. The novel meets with an instant and tremendous success not only in America but also in many other countries. In 1938, the novel was adapted into a film, which turned out to be even more popular. This landmark film has received generous honors more than any other previous films to date in the history of Hollywood.

In China, the movie *Gone With the Wind* created a great sensation. As Fu Donghua describes in the preface to his translation of the novel, "... Shanghai citizens all get extremely excited. This film has set an unparalleled record in the history of foreign film show..." (Fu, 1979, p.1, my translation) The popularity of the movie prompts Fu to translate the original novel. As a result, the first Chinese version of *Gone with the Wind* was first published in the year 1940 and then was republished in 1979 by Zhejiang People's Publishing House. The version by Fu Donghua, though beloved by numerous Chinese readers ever since the day of its appearance due to its vivid description and easy style, has constantly received negative comments from critics mostly because of his excessive use of domesticating translation strategy. His version is of distinct Chinese characteristics, full of Chinese names, idioms and expressions, which have always been criticized by critics. It is held by many critics that the excessive use of domesticating strategy has caused the reader almost to misunderstand the story as a Chinese tale which took place in the near past but not a story taking place during the American Civil War (Feng & Wang, 1998, pp.53-54, my translation). Generally, Fu's version is regarded as flexible and vivid, but lacking in faithfulness to the original.

If we view Fu's translation in the perspective of readership by using some notions of reception theory, the questioning about his translation strategies may be well answered.

According to Jauss, expectations of the reader or the reader community include oriented expectation and the innovative expectation. The former is conventional and tends to be invariant whereas the latter tends to shift and break. The two kinds of expectations coexist inside an individual reader and a reader community. As a result, the reader's horizon of expectations on the one hand regulates the selection of the reading and interferes with the understanding of it in the assimilative and stereotype manner and on the other hand, it constantly attempts to break through the conventional mode and opens up to originalities that are different and even contradictory to the previous horizon of expectations.

When Fu translates *Gone With the Wind*, he may have conceived that the novel would be readily accepted by the public since the movie has been so popular with the audience that his friends commission him to translate it. The reception is almost certain to be a success because he is conscious of the expectations of such readers judging from the public's responses to the movie. In such a circumstance, the reader's oriented expectations are supposed to outweigh the innovative expectations. Fu's primary task is expected to fulfill the oriented expectations of the implied reader.

2.1 Fu's Comprehension and Overview of the Original

In the prefaces to the translation, Fu reveals, more or less, his evaluation of the whole original and gives his comments on it. The overview of the original will in turn potentially affect his selection of translation strategies.

Fu's preface, which was written in 1940, is rather concise, mainly telling his experience of translating the book, with little mentioning of the American Civil War which constitutes the background of the story. Fu states in the preface to the first version of *Gone With the Wind* with a seemingly casual tone,

after I have read through the novel and seen the movie, I am aware that it is by no means a kind of modern novel of poor taste even if it may not be on a par with those marvelous works left by the eminent writers in ancient times. (Fu, 1979, p.1)

Driven by the enchantment of this novel, Fu gives up his idea of ceasing his translation career for boredom and immediately sets out to translate *Gone With the Wind* as he mentions in the preface. Besides his general and high evaluation of the novel, Fu reveals his understanding and attitude towards it by refuting the viewpoint that considers the novel as pacifism. He says,

the author just intends to create a few characters and describe universal human feelings by resorting to a piece of true history. Why should we make such a false charge against her since there is neither -ism nor propaganda in any name? (Fu, 1979, p.3)

Judging from his argument in the preface, he denies that the novel is political but considers it just as a fascinating and excellent romance happening in a special time.

2.2 Fu's Interpretation of the Theme

According to reception theory, the meaning of a text varies to different readers. When we review the historical settings in the period when Fu translated *Gone With the Wind* in Shanghai, we probably feel it confusing for him to translate the novel in the late 1930s because, to most people's knowledge, this period represents an age of turbulence and misery. At that time, revolutionary literature sprang up and prevailed as a new type of literature. In such a situation, it seems inappropriate for the translating of a novel like *Gone With the Wind* or at least, Fu is not expected to define it as a romance. However, when we view the age closely we may discover Fu translated *Gone With the Wind* actually at a time when Shanghai city entered a relatively peaceful and flourishing period called "Isolated Period" which lasted for more than four years after suffering the heaviest attack from the enemy in the first three months of Anti-Japanese War. Various industries, including the circle of literature and translation, recovered from the depression. A number of outstanding literary works were translated during that period, such as *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexander Dumas, *John Christopher* by Roman Rolland, and *Ball-of-Fat* by Maupassant. Fu's translation of the popular and successful *Gone With the Wind* entertained Shanghai citizens who lived a relatively peaceful and relaxing life again after the initial enormous hardships and met their psychological needs for compensation during an age of war.

Besides, it is an unwonted event that the movie of *Gone With the Wind* was introduced into China prior to the translation of the original novel. In such a special circumstance, the public were prejudiced by the first impression and they would appraise the later translation based on their former impressions on the movie, just in the same way that the public often unavoidably judge whether the later adapted TV or movie is successful or not from the previous impressions of the original novel. The particular experience of the novel and the public is supposed to be a more direct and important factor affecting Fu's opinion of *Gone With the Wind*. It is a fact that, before Fu read Mitchell's novel by himself, he had heard of many comments on the movie from the people around. He mentioned in the preface that the movie *Gone With the Wind* had been on show in Shanghai for more than forty days and thousands of people rushed to the cinema to see the movie which was reported to have conquered Hollywood and even the world. The picture poster of *Gone with the Wind* were within everyone's sight at that time.

It is reasonable that *Gone With the Wind* is accepted as a quasi popular romance after the public has seen the movie which is adapted on the basis of the novel and entitled 乱世佳人 (*Beauty in the Turbulent Days*) in Chinese. Consequently, the audience of the movie and the

interested public desired to read the novel of *Gone with the Wind* by themselves. However, due to the adaptation and the difference in the way of expression between movie and novel, the audience gains an impression that the novel is centered round a triangle romance full of twists and turns. It is inevitable that the public's presuppositions unconsciously affect Fu's judgments when he tries to interpret the novel before starting to translate. As he argues in the preface to his translation, "since the American Civil War depicted in the novel took place eighty years ago in a land with a distance of thousands of miles, what does it have to do with us?" (Fu, 1979, p.3) Since the novel, before the appearance of the translation, has been presumed to be a popular romance by the public who would be the future actual reader, the assignment for Fu seems to merely satisfy the psychological needs of them. According to reception theory, "as far as the popular or entertaining literary works are concerned, the reception aesthetics does not need any changes of horizon," the author is just required to "fulfill the expectations of people in line with the prevailing taste," because "such a practice can meet the demand for the reproduction of the familiar beauty, intensify the common sentiments and maintain the expected notions..." (Jauss, 1987, p.32) Therefore, in translating Fu pays little attention to the background of the war in order to conform to the interest of readers who are ready to seek pleasure in a fabulous foreign romance. And his translation of the novel, not surprisingly, turns out to be an immediate success.

2.3 Fu's Understanding of Major Characters

In Fu's eyes, the image of the heroine Scarlett O'Hara is no more than a charming young female with striking personality, who may appear familiar or strange to the reader at times owing to the perfect techniques of Margaret Mitchell (Fu, 1979, p.3). Fu does not reveal anything more with regard to his understandings of the characters, but after reading through his translation, we would find Miss Scarlett is translated in accordance with what Fu remarks in the preface. Pretty, willful and passionate as she is, she just emerges as a true heroine of a romance.

As for other characters like Rhett, Ashley and Melanie, Fu does not mention them in the preface. However, their personalities are fully expressed between the lines of his translation. For instance, Rhett, the hero, a sophisticated and doughty speculator, is a man in deep love with Scarlett for a long time but appears to be casual and irresponsible. In Fu's translation, another side of Butler as a shrewd speculator is thereby weakened to a great extent. This is not difficult to understand if we keep it in mind that the translator defines *Gone With the Wind* as a pure love story.

In the opinion of the writer, the fundamental reason that Fu acquires such understanding of the characters in

the original lies in his visions of the novel. Fu considers it as an entertaining romance and hence, he would not comprehend the characters with the combination of the war background and the political climate at that time. Instead, he is ready to approach those characters only for the sake of the story.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above analysis, it can be judged that Fu's translation principles and strategies result from his evaluation of the novel and understanding of the novel which is in turn affected by the particular historical setting together with the special experience of *Gone with the Wind* in China. Just as Fu claims in his preface, "my intention is to be as faithful as possible to the original in spirit but not to the details," he believes "to translate a novel like *Gone With the Wind* should be different from translating classics. It would probably be boring and lacking in pace if it was translated word by word" (Fu, 1979, p.3). Therefore, he translates the novel by applying domesticating principle. If we use the significant notions of the reception theory like Jauss's "horizon of expectations" and Iser's "the implied reader" to explain Fu's translation, we will probably not decide his translation as a failure but a successful translation at a certain historical setting. After all, he and his translation were faced with a readership quite different from that of today.

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