

## **Fusion of Horizons in Classical Literary Translation**

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**Abstract.** As the theory and methodology about understanding and interpretation of text meaning, Hermeneutics is closely linked to translation. Hans-Georg Gadamer, the most renowned contemporary philosopher in Germany, founded philosophical hermeneutics in 1970s and it opened up a new ground in the field of translation study. In view of the growing significance of classical literary translation, this paper introduces philosophical Hermeneutics and analyzes the hermeneutic comprehension in classical literary translation from three perspectives: dialogues between translator and text, between translator and target readers and between different horizons of different times. Lastly it discusses its significance in classical literary translation from a macroscopic perspective.

**Keywords:** Hermeneutics; classical literary translation; fusion of horizons; dialogue

### **1. Hermeneutics and Translation**

#### **1.1. An Overview of Hermeneutics**

As a theory of interpretation, hermeneutics stretches all the way back to ancient Greek philosophy. In Middle Ages and the time of Renaissance, hermeneutics emerged as a crucial branch of Biblical studies; later on, it comes to include the study of ancient and classic cultures. In modern times, Hans-Georg Gadamer founded philosophical hermeneutics by publishing his famous masterpiece *Truth and Method* (1975). In terms of philosophical hermeneutics, there are several important concepts such as historicity of understanding, fusion of horizons, and effective history. Gadamer suggests that different readers have unique fore-understanding or prejudices, which refer to reader's past knowledge which influences his inclination in thinking. And no one could ever break off his "fore-understanding". Only in the dialogue between readers and the texts, can readers grasp the meaning of the text. The result of the dialogical reader-text interaction is what Gadamer called a "fusion of horizons", where the limited horizon of a text and the limited horizon of the reader have generated a new, intermediary creation that can be called the meaning of the text in the readers' minds. He also proposes that understanding always takes place in a concrete hermeneutic situation. Either the reader or the text exists historically, as they change and develop in the evolution of history. In an effective history of beings, new elements constantly emerge through the fusion of horizons. Understanding and interpretation is not a one-time behavior of the subject but a permanent process. In all, philosophical hermeneutics are demonstrated in both synchronic and diachronic dimension.

#### **1.2. Fusion of Horizons in Translation**

Though starting from the philosophical angle, Gadamer's hermeneutic notions shed light in the field of translation. In translation process the translator himself is reader in the first place. As for the concept of horizon, it refers to the readers' scope in understanding. Gadamer defined horizon as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point". According to him, history bestows both readers and texts with unique horizons. Texts gain their horizons from the past, while the present situation of readers constructs readers' horizon. In reading, horizons of texts and readers fuse into each other, and it could be counted as the fusion of the past and the present. That also holds true in the translation process.

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Therefore, in order to make the translator's interpretation of the ST closer to the ST author's original intention, the translator should keep his horizon close to the horizon of ST author in a dialogue with the text and the readers in historical position so as to realize the fusion of horizons in translation to the greatest extent.

## 2. Classical Literary Translation as Hermeneutic Comprehension

### 2.1. Dialogue between Translator and Text

Classical literary, the splendid treasure of a nation, always attracts translators to read and translate. However, it is very difficult for them to render a perfect version. From a hermeneutic approach, the source text is an embodiment of the author's values, opinions and aesthetic preferences. Identical empathy or complete understanding on the part of the translator is almost impossible. The translator, therefore, can be said to be a creator, trying to negotiate with the author to reveal the hidden message in the source text. There are two horizons involved in interpretation, one is the horizon of the translator and the other is the horizon of the text. While the text embodies some historical significance and features its own horizons in the situation when the text was produced, the translator also has his horizons and interprets the text from his particular prejudices, as has been revealed in Gadamer's exposition on the historicity of being.

Generally speaking, bearing different pre-understandings, translators could get totally different interpretations of the meaning of ST content and consequently work out their respective versions. Let's take a look at the translation of Great Chinese poet Li Bai's verse:“不知明镜里，何处得秋霜？”.

H. A. Giles: Though how it comes within a mirror's scope

To sprinkle autumn frosts, I don't know.

Liu Junping: Take a look of me in the mirror, I puzzle,

From where comes the gray on my temples.

In the original poem,“秋霜”is white and it refers to a head of white hair. This image will remind the readers of desolation in late autumn and old age in one's life. Here, Li Bai used this word to express his disappointment for the reality. British translator Giles(翟理士) showed his misapprehension of the Chinese image and rendered a literal translation. In the second version, the Chinese translator Liu used the word “temple”, which will be easier for the target readers to imagine that “gray” here refers to the white hair. With adequate understanding, Liu's version keeps the original aesthetic beauty.

Undisputedly, different translations are the results of fusion of the text and the translator's own horizons. In short, a translator' cultural situations and situational context, as well as language level and personal experience, form his present horizon. Accordingly, the translator's horizon influences his choice of the historical horizon of the cultural word. And the fusion of the two is his understanding of this cultural word in the translation.

### 2.2. Dialogue between Translator and Target Reader

Truly, one of the most far-reaching influences that hermeneutics has brought to translation studies is the diversion of attention from the source text to the target readership. Any translator, competent or not, is obliged to attach importance to the target reader, who will influence, though indirectly, the translation strategies chosen by the translator. “The translator, as the author of the translation, should learn to communicate with the reader”.

Sometimes the translator would meet the readers' needs; it is likely that he, consciously or unconsciously, will make his translation in accordance with the dominant expectation of a certain time in the receiving culture. A famous example comes from Chinese poem “Midnight Song(子夜歌)”, one of the famous poems of Yuefu poetry. There is such a line in this poem: “依作北辰星，千年无转移。欢行白日心，朝东暮还西。” According to the original verse, it describes a woman, deeply in love, who is waiting for her lover while the man blows hot and cold and befools her with tricks.

Carolyn Kizer's version: I'm as monogamous as the North Star. But I don't Want you to Know it. You'd only take advantage. While you are as fickle as spring sunlight.

Kizer is a renowned female poet in the U.S., who rendered the version with feminist feature. The difference between the original version and translation owns to the ethical values of the TL readers. Reader's reception ability is changing. "You'd only take advantage" shows the woman realized the man changed his heart and so she defended herself in her own way. This version was accepted easier by the readers nowadays and added more flavors of the original. We can say that it is the readers' expectation that matters in the whole literature circle and restrain the translation strategy or skills in certain period of time. For the consideration of the readership, it is sensible for translators to adjust his translation orientation.

### 2.3. Dialogue between different horizons of different times

If we take the understanding of Chinese classics into account, we could say that interpretation involves continual mediation of past and present. The understanding of classics involves the fusion of historical horizon of source text and the translator's present horizon. There is a long time gap between the two horizons. With the passage of time, the diachronical change of language may cause obstacles in interpretation. It poses difficulty for the understanding of the Chinese classics.

Let's examine *the Cooing* (《关雎》), the first and the most famous poem in *The Book of Songs*. As we know, the first stanza is "By riverside are cooing a pair of turtle doves. There's a good maiden fair Whom a young man is wooing." (关关雎鸠，在河之洲。窈窕淑女，君子好逑。) For translator, he needs to identify the meaning of the cultural words in this poem for some have undergone great changes through times. The original meaning of this word referring to the son of the ruler, and it later extended to refer to the noble man. However, this word was widely used in the classical works of Confucius and Mencius to describe the man with virtues, which broadened its meaning. Because the particularly high status of Confucius's classical works this meaning is kept until now and the other three meanings seldom appear in modern Chinese. The meaning of this word has been narrowed with the development of language and society. So what does "junzi" refer to in this poem? Whether he is a noble man or a virtuous man or a common lad? Some saw it as a love poem, describing a man of the royal family in love with a girl collecting edible water plants, and his efforts to court her. According to Zhu Xi's *Shi Ji Zhuan* (《诗集传》), "junzi" refers to King Wen. This opinion is adopted by many ancient feudalistic scholars. As time passes, scholars in modern times tend to analyze *the Cooing* is a song for common labor people and then "junzi" refers to common young man. For example, Yu Guanying commented: "a young man longs for the girl on the bank picking water plants, he indulges in fantasy all day long to marry her." This explanation is supported by some modern Chinese scholars. And still, some scholars held the opinion that "junzi" is a noble man in this poem based on the original meaning.

In dissemination of Chinese culture, two famous foreign translators translated the poem. James Legge explained "junzi" as "our prince" and Arthur Waley rendered "our lord". Different from the real intention of the poem, Legge's "our prince" is not appropriate for he just divided the word "君子" into two characters "君""子" and literally translated it into the son of the king. On the other hand, it doesn't necessarily refer to "lord" either. It is obvious that the foreign translators kept a pedantic adherence to the traditional Chinese exegeses in the translation. Indeed, the explanations of "junzi" have evidences but some of them are false and need the translator's judgment. From this aspect, literary translation is a process of internalization of the different historical horizons.

### 3. Significance of Fusion of Horizons in Literary Translation

Under the framework of philosophical hermeneutics, interpreting can no longer see an end to itself. Human's understanding activity is like an endless circle in this way and the text meanings will be deepened and get new life again and again. Since the meaning of the source text is open to interpretation, so any reasonable existence should be allowed under certain historical circumstance. Different translators, embedded in different historical and social backgrounds, produce translations that bear distinctive traces of their prejudices. All the different versions presented in specific time forms an "increase in being" of the original, and in fact constitute the effective history of the source text. Thanks to the multiple translations, the original remains its vitality and influence in the target culture.

Translation, as an extension of the life of the original text, can never transcend temporal and spatial barriers to exhaust the meaning and significance of the original. Different translators, embedded in different historical and social backgrounds, produce translations that bear distinctive traces of their prejudices. One translation only serves as one understanding and interpretation of the source text. As is evident in the often-quoted saying, “there may be one thousand Hamlets if there are one thousand readers”, the same source text can bring about different responses in the reader. The translator, upon reading the text, deals with their understanding of the text in different fashions. Therefore, a translation by no means demonstrates only one horizon; instead, it should be a synthesis of all the possible horizons: translator’s horizon, the author’s horizon, and the reader’s horizon, etc.. From this perspective, classical literary translation is a product of the creative activity of the translator and plays a significant role in the making of the meaning.

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