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Translation As Polyphonic Dialogues

翻译： 作为复调的对话



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致 谢

可以说，我也是属于被“文化大革命”撞了一下腰的一代人，想不到时断时续竟然一路读到博士！亏得众多师友亲朋的鼎力支持与鞭策，才一步一步走到今天。

首先，我要衷心感谢我的导师冯庆华教授。蒙先生错爱，得以于2001年金秋时节进入心仪的上海外国语大学攻读博士学位，得沐先生渊博的学识和儒雅的风范，并由此窥得学术研究的门径；先生的严谨与宽容一直是学生前进的动力。可以说，没有先生的精心指导，就没有本论文的诞生。

另外，读博期间，曾或长或短期地听过何兆熊、李维屏、束定芳、张定铨、许余龙、谢天振、胡曙中、史志康、梅德明等诸位教授的课程或讲座。他们的治学方式给了我不同程度的启迪。谨在此向他们表示诚挚的敬意和谢意。

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Abstract

As is known to all, translation has, undoubtedly, been playing an important role in the cultural formation and intercultural communications almost at all times and in all countries or lands. Translation theory has not, however, developed or been paid much attention to correspondingly as it should have been, which is, as it were, despite the fact of the lack or less development of relevant disciplines of the time, due to the following misread methodology and epistemology universally existent in the translation circle. The former, confined to the limitation of empiricism, emphasizes the translator's accomplishments and insight; as for the latter, some kind of nihilism usually stands closely associated with such things as translation theories either inside or outside the field, helps for a strongly established binary opposition between its theory and practice, consequently resulting in an unfavorable cycle of theoretical development.

However, during the past thirty years, especially since 1980s, approaches to translation almost in all countries have seen much rapid progress, ushering in an unprecedented boom. Thus comes the saying that "The growth of Translation Studies as a separate discipline is a success story of the 1980s." (Lefevere 1992: iii) Translation Studies is now better able to borrow from and lend techniques and methods to other disciplines. We must point out here, nevertheless, that such a qualitative leap was not made at one

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go, and of course leaves much to be desired.

It is, therefore, a must for us to trace this leap hereinto, which will show clearly that the two mainstreams (humanism vs. scientism), the two shifts (from author to text, then text to reader), and the three turns (the irrational turn, the linguistic turn and the cultural turn) have exerted great influence on the development of the nowadays translation studies. It is argued on the one hand that a trace of the development of western translation theories from prescription to description will bring us back to that of western philosophy and literary theories (including linguistics). Closely related to them, it begins with a one-way absorption and digestion, and after a successful combination of multi-disciplines, thrives to be a separate interdisciplinary subject that can in turn equip the relevant subjects with necessary insights. On the other hand, because of its absolute reliance on the disciplines as hereinabove set forth, the whole frame of such approaches is inevitably confined (especially to western literary theories and linguistics). The two shifts, first from 'the author-centered' to 'the text-centered' and then to 'the reader-centered', for example, have not somehow or other escaped something of the embarrassment of 'the elephant and the blind men', with their research a little too unitary or narrow (such as either 'author-centered', or 'text-centered', or 'reader-centered'), or somewhat too all-embracing like cultural studies. In general, Translation Studies has taken a similar path as the western literary theories, with the only exception that a claim of the translator-centered is added, characteristic of a more static study and a less dynamic one. The prosperity in this field still cannot benefit us with a more

comprehensively applicable interpretative model.

As for translation studies, the claim of the 'author-centered' enjoys a time-honored history and is still well-established, notwithstanding some doubt. Built upon such an assumption, the traditional translation theories, both at home and abroad, all consider the 'original', the unquestionable God, as the ultimately exclusive object to attain. The relation between the 'original' and the 'translated' reveals itself as such binary oppositions as creation/imitation, primary/derivative, subject/object, active/passive, signifier/signified, essence/appearance, constructive/destructive, independent/dependent, male/female, etc. always with overwhelming precedence of the former over the latter. A translator's unique task is thus to measure up to the original text, and the only standard to judge a 'good' or 'bad' translated text is determined according to the degree of fidelity to the original text, which has, however, continuously been challenged by those translation cases commonly seen in the history of different cultures. Such being the case, we will set out from Derrida's deconstructive position and try to square up, even subvert the above metaphysics theoretically in the hope of rethinking the logocentrism of the author- or text-centered. By tracing and comparing the key conceptions 'Logos' and 'Tao' in sino-western philosophy respectively, we maintain that this author- or text-centering has its metaphysical heritage from Tao or Logos. This, in some sense, is believed to have better shown the common pursuit of some pure, unified metalanguage with the transcendental signified; and by calling into question any definition of translation as reproducing, transporting or communicating the 'meaning' of the original,

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Derrida suggests that translation might better be regarded as one instance in which language can be viewed as always in the process of modifying the original text, of deferring and displacing for ever any possibility of grasping that which the original text desired to name, which dialectically reveals that the source can be viewed as a starting point in stead of an ultimate goal. The meaning of a text is never present but is in a process of infinite *différance*, erasing, disseminating and supplementing, existing in the reciprocal reading and rereading, i.e. "in the work's presence of works appears the truth, which is being's opening of works." By transgressing the limits of the target language, by transforming original texts in the source language, the translator extends and makes languages grow. Such an approach tends to break down the power of the transcendental signified and free the research from evaluating translation only in terms of their proximity to pure equivalence exclusively.

The exploded myth of the author- or text-orientation declared the birth of the reader/translator and the liberation of individuality. At the same time of producing reader/translator, author, the God of text, grants its own death penalty in some sense or other. "It is just in the great arts that artist means little compared with arts, who, like a passage, perishes himself while writing in order to open up the passage to works." (Heidegger) All writings depend on reader's/ translator's absorption and reception. The blank area between author/ text and reader leaves translator much dynamic room of interpretation, which meanwhile ensures that a translator get something done or undone between the two extremes of his power to do nothing or to do anything at his own will. A description and

investigation of translation phenomena of history informs us that in a dialogue between the author, translator, reader with the text, the discourse roles of translator and readership cannot be defined as singular, static or exclusive, but complex, dynamic and complementing. The translator is by nature a liberator, someone who liberates the text from the confines of its source language and allows it to live again in the target language, making it no longer subordinate to the source text but visibly endeavoring to bridge the space between source author and text and the eventual target language readership. As a result, approaches to this aspect will certainly involve the fundamental classification of these roles, which for translator should, this paper argues, at least include reader, author, rewriter, researcher, conqueror, mediator, spokesperson and manipulator, etc.; and for reader, implied reader, executor, negotiator and patron, etc. This done, the way is better paved for the following idea of a polyphonic dialogue.

This tells us very obviously that translation did /does not happen in a vacuum; instead, it is never unnecessary part of an ongoing process of intercultural transfer as well as a highly manipulative action or event involving all kinds of stages in that process of transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Translators (especially those in the period of post-colonialism) do not play the sedulous ape after the original. Moreover, it is translation that endows the given text with its after-life. We should rightly view the translated as 'a new original written in another language'. Since singular approaches like author- (or text-, translator-, reader-) centered repeated their doomed limits of translation studies, we should have a more open, broader and

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interdisciplinary vision in order to give a better comprehensive description of it. So it is better to understand translation as an essentially multiple dialogue that happens in a space that belongs to neither source nor target absolutely, a process of negotiation between texts, cultures and dialogic subjects, which is a rejection of linear/ one-dimensional notion of the predominant translation studies. Hence comes this new proposition 'Translation As Polyphonic Dialogues', which suggests that a translated text is the result of a dialogue that calls for each participant like author, translator and readers with the given text as the topic. It is expected to be a more proper synchronic and diachronic dialogic model for translation studies, 'perhaps the most complicated phenomenon in the world'.

The very being of man consists in the naturalized dialogue. To be means to communicate and so to translate, we may say. "That which consists of type of natural being is thought about from the point of dialogue, i.e. according to the ability that we listen to each other exactly." (Gadamer) The dialogic nature of the idea begins to live and to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*. Human thought will become genuine thought only under conditions of living contact with another and alien thought. From this consequently derives this paper after we investigate the origin and constraints of each 'centering'. We thus apply to translation studies Bakhtin's term '*Dialogicality*', a special form of interaction among the autonomous and equally signifying consciousnesses. Properly and actively applying to translation studies Bakhtin's dialogic theory and other theories such as philosophic

hermeneutics and pragmatics makes us believe with ample justification that 'translation is but a polyphonic dialogue'. Upon this premises are tentatively built a new interpretative map and three-leveled fugue-like conversation. This dialogic idea in progress of translation leads us to considering author, text, translator and reader as a unity across space and time. This consideration does not focus on any of the mentioned 'centers', nor suppresses or replaces this with that; but it maintains that "Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction." (Bakhtin) This proposition tries to integrate the reasonable elements of each 'center' into translation studies, and listen to, and mediate between, "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" made by author, translator, text, reader in translating. It also lets "a plurality of consciousnesses" and voices, "with equal rights and each with its own world " form contrapuntal opposition and mediation. These consciousnesses and voices are liberated from their monologism of isolation and finalization shared by each 'center', they become thoroughly dialogized and enter the great polyphonic dialogue of translation on completely equal terms with each other. It is impossible to ascribe to these consciousnesses and voices the finalizing function of either authorial, translator's or reader's ideas in a monologic manner. They are all equally privileged participants in the great dialogue, which does not necessarily come to a conclusion that the output of translation represents a symmetric relationship between the author, the

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translator and the readership. The impulse of a plural dynamic interaction of equal dialogue enables the dialogic theme to develop continuously and complete the integral producing of a text's meaning. We thus hope that this idea can not only make us rethink those one-way or monologic principles such as the longstanding 'equivalence' and 'fidelity', but, most important for us, offer a more comprehensively descriptive methodology for the contemporary translation studies.

Both Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 deal with positive case studies of cross-cultural transmission concerning translation from a contextual perspective of dialogism.

Chapter 6 investigates the origin and the naming of the book title '*A Dream of Red Mansions*' and '*The Story of the Stone*', and offers therefrom a new translation. From Cao Xueqin's novel we may well infer that Vanitas' (the Taoist's) words "starting off in the Void came to the contemplation of Form; and from Form engendered Passion; and by communicating Passion, entered again into Form; and from Form awoke to the Void" foresee and conclude with justification the basic theme and general development of the story. And the 'three sub-worlds' skillfully constructed with Form, Passion, Void, correspond respectively to another three relatively independent images of Red, Mansion, Dream. They refer to each other and build a multilevel, three-dimensional world. From 'Red' to 'Dream', beginning with 'Form' and ending in 'Void', it is just what the author hopes to express and thinks about human life with his vivid and insightful pen rich in Taoist philosophy and culture after his cutting experience of great awakening; and it best accounts for the most

popularity of the title *A Dream of Red Mansions* rather than *The Story of the Stone*. The above reading makes us believe that the cited English versions of the book title are not so satisfying, for the simple reason that the word 'red' cannot be viewed as the color modifying 'mansion' or 'chamber', especially in the target culture.

Taking for examples the translation of the idioms (in a broad sense) in *Red Mansion Dream*, Chapter 7 compares David Hawkes' style with that of Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang, showing that the former, consciously or unconsciously, understands the alien culture with the eye of his cultural superiority, projects European images onto the source culture, makes colonial writing of *others* with his native culture in order to erase their cultural identities and so consolidate the 'center' of colonies and the periphery of those colonized, representing some kind of 'colonizers' eyes'. The latter, on the other hand, have almost managed to metaphrase in the target language what there are in the story, regardless of the unnecessary possible difficulty that may well impose on its target readers. These two versions ineluctably manifest themselves in a confrontation of *colonization* vs. *decolonization*. It is hoped to draw some attention to the problems that we have to cope with arising in the conversation / confrontation, communication/ contestation between *strong* cultures and *weak* cultures in a globalized context, and to find solutions to them.

Finally, the dialogic nature of human thought in translating, i.e. the unfinalizability of dialogue, is probed into from the point of view of intertextuality, intersubjectivity, indeterminacy. The universality of 'unfinalizability' shows that, "As long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not

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yet uttered his ultimate word." A living being cannot be turned into the voiceless object of some secondhand, finalizing cognitive process. Only through an inner dialogic and participatory orientation can each equally valuable discourse find itself in intimate contact with another discourse, and yet at the same time not fuse with it, not swallow it up, neither dissolve in itself the other's power to mean; that is, only thus can each retain fully its independence as a discourse. Translator's subjectivity and freedom we speak of here exist within the limits of the text and its artistic design, and in that sense is just as much a created thing as is the unfreedom of the objectivized text. But it must be made clear that to create does not mean to invent and every creative act is bound by its own inner special laws within given cultures at given time.

It is here especially significant for us to notice the phenomenon of *hidden dialogicality* (Bakhtin). The statements of the other two dialogic subjects of author and reader are present invisible, their words are not there, but the general sense is not at all violated and deep traces left by these words have a determining influence upon the present and visible words of the translator. Such a dialogue draws in, as it were, sucks in to itself the other's questions and replies. The translator, as it was, is at all times reacting intensely to someone else's word, answering it and anticipating it. It is a well-founded dialogue, although only one person is speaking, for each uttered word responds and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible speaker, points beyond its own limits to the unspoken words of another person/ dialogic subject.

The 'truth' of a text is not present, but can only result from a polyphonic dialogue between the author, translator and reader.

Monologism representative of 'the centered', at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself another voice with equal rights, another *I* with equal rights (*thou*). "Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any decisive force," pretending to be the *ultimate word* but in vain. Text is open for good and all to *thou* and calls for every successor's heeding, comprehending and responding. We can never exhaust the growing meaning of a text in that every heeding, comprehending and answering add to new referents in some way or other. Dialogue is always in the continuous tense. What translation, as polyphonic dialogues, demands of each dialogic subject is to vigorously enlarge and rework at his own special consciousness so as to embrace the equally signifying consciousness of *yours* and to approach man's unfinalizable innermost pursuit rather than repress or deny the other's voice. (This well accounts for the reality and rationality of the longstanding *retranslation* in a way.) Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live, we must translate and participate in dialogue, for, "nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future." (Bakhtin 1989:166) Just as the modern philosopher has it that, as regards philosophy, we are always but *on the way to language*, as for translation, we are as much forever *on the way to dialogue*.

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