

Literary Translation From Perspective of Reception Theory: The Case Study of Three Versions of *Na Han*

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Supported by Zhejiang Federation of Humanities and Social Science Circles (No.2012Z71) and Scientific Research Fund of Zhejiang Provincial Education (No.Y201223249).

Received 12 June 2013; accepted 3 September 2013

Abstract

This paper will focus on opinions of two major leaders of reception theory, namely, Iser's "blanks and indeterminacy" and Jauss's "horizon of expectations" to explain translators' creative reproduction of literary translation. The blanks and indeterminacy in literary texts are used to reveal the style and enhance the aesthetic effects of a literary text. Reproduction of the blanks and indeterminacy in literary translation can give the target text reader space to exert their imagination and enjoy the aesthetic effects the original text expresses. This paper is going to explore three English versions from layers of rhetoric devices in Lu Xun's *Na Han*, proving that the extent of reproducing the blanks and indeterminacy is determined by the horizon of expectations of different translators as well as their adjustment in merging their own horizon of expectations with that of target text readers. The paper draws a conclusion that there is not definitely good or bad translation as the translators and target text readers have different horizon of expectations in understanding literary works. Different versions give different and various blanks and indeterminacy to readers so that the target readers can give different interpretation of literary works which to some extent contribute to the artistic life of literary works.

Key words: Literary translation; Reception theory; Blanks and indeterminacy; Horizon of expectations; *Na Han*

ZHOU Wangyue (2013). Literary Translation From Perspective of Reception Theory: The Case Study of Three Versions of *Na Han*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 7(2), 19-25. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/j.sll.1923156320130702.2721>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.sll.1923156320130702.2721>

INTRODUCTION

In the last century, most of translation studies focus purely on the study of original text. Many theorists of translation studies are concerned about the comparison between different versions of literary works with the standard of equivalence in linguistic levels (Catford, 1965) or the standard of "Xin, Da, Ya (Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance)" put forward by Yan Fu in China. But the comparison of different versions, as a whole, is subjective judgment of the renditions. At the same time, it is not so fair for many translators who devote a lot of time in translation but couldn't be given due respect and due understanding. As Yang Wuneng put it, the subjectivity of translators and their hardworking were neglected, and were taken for granted to be neglected, for a long time (Yang, 2003, p.13). With the translation study transferred from linguistic level to cultural level, many other factors except linguistic level were gradually studied by theorists. The role a translator plays, the most important factor in the translation process, is gradually acknowledged. The development of reception theory diverts the translation studies into focusing not only on source text, but on translators' subjective thinking and their corresponding translation strategies. Many Chinese theorists in translation studies begin to apply the reception theory to the study of nature of translation, subjectivity of translators, the relationship between translated text, translators and target text readers, translation strategies as well as reception theory as an explanatory tool in translation studies, etc. (Yang, 2003; Hu, Kaibao & Hu Shirong, 2006) Translation, to some extent, is the

reproduction of literary works by the efforts of the translator's understanding of the original work and how he put it in another language. Reception theory, based on the study of reader, poses a new way for explanation of literary translation. This paper will focus on opinions of two major leaders of reception theory, namely, Iser's "blanks and indeterminacy" and Jauss's "horizon of expectations" to explore translators' creative reproduction of literary translation. The "blanks and indeterminacy" existing in literary works calls for different interpretation of readers and at the same time "reader's horizon of expectations" can explain why different translators will give different versions of the same literary works.

1. RECEPTION THEORY AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

1.1 Blanks and Indeterminacy

Blanks and indeterminacy are frequently used by Roman Ingarden, who wrote in *The Literary Work of Art* that literary works form organic wholes, and the point of the reader's filling in their "indeterminacies" is to complete this harmony (Eagleton, 2008). In his early piece *The Literary Work of Art*, he said, "there are no places where such objects would not be in themselves totally determined—the objects represented in a literary work exhibit 'spot' or 'points' or 'places' of indeterminacy" (Ingarden, 1973). Iser borrowed it from Ingarden and introduced it to the Reception Aesthetics. He stated: "...every literary text invites some form of participation on the part of the reader. And so it can be said that indeterminacy is the fundamental precondition for readers' participation... the indeterminate element of literature represents the most important link between text and reader." (Iser, 1988, p.230). Iser is a much more liberal kind of employer, granting the reader a greater degree of co-partnership with the text: different readers are free to actualize the work in different ways, and there is no single correct interpretation which will exhaust its semantic potential. So the blanks and indeterminacy act as the bridge between the literary works and readers, which to some extent guides the readers to give creative filling-up or imagination of the literary works. The language in literary works, different from that of scientific works, is descriptive rather than prescriptive. It aims at providing readers with spaces of aesthetic evaluation with languages of blanks and indeterminacy. A famous saying goes like that: There are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes. It is just because of the blanks and indeterminacy endowing Shakespeare's work of Hamlet with immortal literary value, which gives readers aesthetic space in reading.

1.2 Horizon of Expectations

Jauss's Horizon of Expectations derives from the terms "pre-understanding", "prejudice" and "horizon" in Phenomenology and Hermeneutics. According to Jauss, "a literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions." (Jauss, 1982, p.3). Namely when readers enter a text, they bring their horizon of expectations and it awakens memories of what has been already read, bringing the reader to a specific emotional attitude. And with its beginning arouses the expectation for the middle and end which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the genre or type of text (Jauss, 1982, p.23). Jauss believes that the aesthetic value of literary work is not objective, but has very close relationship with the readers' experience and values. The new text evokes reader's horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced. During the process of reading, it functions as selection, orientation and finding out familiarity. Thus it helps readers understand the work well. However, readers cannot be satisfied just by familiar information. Rather, they have a tendency to accept the information that is different from, contrary to or even lacking in their original horizon of expectations, and then reconstruct their horizon of expectations. Their desire for knowing more about foreign things is the very reflection of their creative expectation, which is a power of force motivating readers to know more about the foreign cultures during the process of reading.

1.3 Reception Theory in the Process of Literary Translation

Translation, especially translation of literary works, should never be the retelling of some stories or any kind of paraphrase which will lead to the destruction of the blanks and indeterminacy. Professor Xu Jun once said, "The mental level is the basic level for translation while it is also very necessary to consider the semantic expression of translation. But in terms of literary language, except for the correctness of meaning translation, the aesthetic value should be considered as well." (Xu, 1994). Readers have to exert their imaginations, experiences and even personal aesthetic standard to endow a certain meaning to the meaning blank and sense the aesthetic effect the version transmits. The process of reading, for reception theory, is always a dynamic one, a complex movement and unfolding through time (Eagleton, 2008, p.67). Translators first act as the reader of source text, who occasionally

have interactive communication with the original text and his horizon of expectations will be modified by the process of reading. Translators are the first readers of source texts, and he has to involve himself in the background information as well as things related with the original literary works so as to modify his own horizon of expectations. The understanding of the original text is a result of the translator's fusion of horizon of expectations with that of the author and this fusion will lead to some new meanings and indeterminacies to the literary text. But at the same time, he needs to take the target text reader's horizon of expectations into consideration, with the distance not too far away from the translators' horizon of expectations or too close in case the target text may lose its artistic value. So the target readers' horizon of expectations needs to be modified and improved in the process of reading to have aesthetic enjoyment. With different horizons, the meaning of the original text could be given more different interpretation. Meanwhile, since translation is the most comprehensive cultural manifestation of human beings, the study of translation shall be placed under intercultural contexts (Ning, 2013). In this process, the artistic value of the literary works could be prolonged in different time and space.

2. NA HAN AND ITS THREE VERSIONS

2.1 *Na Han*

In the history of Chinese literature, *Na Han* is of epoch-making significance. It was written in the period of New Culture Movement, which is said that the volume is a milestone in the development of Chinese literature. Qian Liqun has commented that Lu Xun is the national soul of modern China as well as one of the world's cultural giants in the 20th century (Qian, 2006, p.29). From content to its form, the volume has fresh characteristics and a strong originality. As Lu Xun said in its preface, he took the attitude of writing this novel by "waking up the sound sleepers who were to be suffocated to death in an iron house in order to give them hope to break out from the house and relive their life". In his *Na Han* he also wanted to "comfort those brave people who fight themselves in the dark society in loneliness to proceed with their revolutionary cause" (Qi, 1998, p.2). In this book Lu Xun creates a series of unique artistic characters such as Ah Q, Kong Yiji, etc. Since these personages have profound social significance, and are all vivid and reliable, the book has produced a huge impact on the society and contributed to the development of the Chinese revolution. With the aim to transform the Chinese psyche, Lu Xun showed high techniques of writing in *Na Han* which to some extent deepened the influence of this book. The famous writer Bai Yang commented, "Lu Xun's stories are the best since the vernacular movement with their weighty

content, simple techniques and profound meanings in each one." (Yuan, 1999, p.304). The language in the book is rich and thought-inspiring in content, while succinct and simple in form.

2.2 Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang's "Call to Arms"

Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang devoted all their life to the translation of Chinese literature from the classic "Outlaws of the Marsh", "The Dream of Red Mansion" to "Selected Stories of Lu Xun", etc. Yang Xianyi has very good command of Chinese, while Gladys is a native English speaker. Their cooperation in translation contributes a lot in Chinese English translation and created wonders in translation history. "Call to Arms" is one part from their *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*, the first attempt at a systematic introduction to Lu Xun in English, on which most translated versions in different languages all over the world are mainly based.

2.3 William Lyell's "Diary of a Madman and Other Stories"

William Lyell was a recognized authority known worldwide for his work on such major modern Chinese writers as Lu Xun, Lao She, Mao Dun, and other contemporary writers. Lyell attended a number of conferences in China dealing with these writers, and in 1987 was invited by Peking University to teach courses on modern Chinese literature. (<http://news.stanford.edu/news/2009/february25/william-lyell-memorial-resolution-022509.html>) His rendition of "Diary of a Madman and Other Stories" is worldly acknowledged. Here is a comment from Word Literature today:

Here at last is an accurate and enjoyable rendering of Lu Xun's fiction in an idiom that masterfully captures the sardonic wit, melancholy pathos, and ironic vision of China's first truly modern writer." (<http://www.uhpress.hawaii.edu/p-924-9780824813178.aspx>)

2.4 Julia Lovell's "Outcry"

The new edition *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Luxun* by Julia Lovell gives a complete version of *Na Han*—"Outcry". In the beginning of this book, she gives the introduction of Lu Xun and the background information about the time Lu Xun lived. Apart from the above, she also provides some notes on Chinese names and pronunciations. All those showed that she had a very good command of Chinese and had spared great efforts in the translation. Her comments that "Lu Xun's is an angry, searing vision of China—where he uses humour, it is decidedly black, and designed to underscore the darkness that he saw about him" (http://www.danwei.org/translation/julia_lovell_complete_lu_xun_f.php) can best prove her adequate knowledge about Lu Xun.

3. THE AESTHETIC VALUE OF RHETORICAL DEVICES IN *NA HAN*

The rhetorical level of language must be paid much attention to if the translator is to fully appreciate all that a text signifies and transmit it to the target readers with a similar perception. The most commonly used devices are simile, metaphor, personification, euphemism, etc. I will focus on some of the rhetoric devices to make a comparative analysis of sentences from Lu Xun's *Na Han*.

3.1 Simile

A simile is a way of comparing one thing with another, of explaining what one thing is like by showing how it is similar to another thing, and it explicitly signals itself in a text, with the words as or like (Thornborrow & Wareing, 2000, p.95). In *Na Han*, there are a lot of similes which is uniquely and cleverly used. Let's see the following example:

Example 1 老栓也向那边看，却只见一堆人的后背，颈项都伸得很长，仿佛许多鸭，被无形的手捏住了的，向上提着。(Lu Xun, 2005: 28)

Version 1: Old Shuan looked in that direction too, but could only see people's backs. Craning their necks as far as they would go, they looked like so many ducks, held and lifted by some invisible hand (Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang, 1985, p.59).

Version 2: Big-bolt also looks toward the intersection but can see nothing except the backs of the crowd. Their necks are stretched out long, like ducks whose heads have been grabbed and pulled upward by an invisible hand (Lyell, 1990, p.51).

Version 3: Shuan watched them, the view beyond blocked by the ranks of backs and extended necks—as if they were so many ducks, their heads stretched upwards by an invisible puppeteer (Lovell, 2009, p.38).

The simile gives a lot of symbolic meaning. The target of the word “duck” can easily remind Chinese readers the idiom of “趋之若鹜” (Qu Zhi Ruo Wu), of which 鹜 (Wu) means duck and gave derogative meaning. “Qu Zhi Ruo Wu” means that people do something because others all do so, and it usually refers to things that are bad. On the other hand, “ducks' necks held and lifted by invisible hands” means that they are so numb, not able to change their fate. Chinese people can appreciate this usage of simile because it is in the horizon of Chinese people's expectation that a duck whose neck was lifted by people means that it was going to be killed without any way to escape itself. The blanks and indeterminacy which Lu Xun leaves to Chinese readers are very successful in readers' exertion of their imagination to have the aesthetic effect in reading. Yang's version, by using “craning their necks as far as they would go”, gives vivid description of the situation when the numb people are watching the execution of Xia Yu. Lyell's version is a little different

from Yang's with the usage of “head” instead of “neck”. Here head could be perceived by English readers as a kind of pun, which not only means the most important part of one's body, but also means one's thoughts and feelings. So Yang's version is closely related with the western readers' horizon of expectations that if one's head is grabbed by others, they couldn't find ways out for escape both physically and mentally. Lovell's version keeps the original simile and by using the word “puppeteer” reminds the English readers how numb the people are.

3.2 Metonymy

Metonymy is a figure of speech that has much to do with the substitution of one thing for another. In other words, in metonymy the author does not mention the name of the object directly, but uses a substitution instead. The substitute and the substituted should be so closely associated that the mention of one naturally calls the other to mind. In translation, the translator should try not to explicit the metonymy but express it to the target reader in a way they can appreciate the style of the source text.

Example 2 如果出到十几文，就能买一样荤菜，但这些顾客，多是短衣帮，大抵没有这样阔绰。只有穿长衫的，才踱进店面隔壁的房子里，要酒要菜，慢慢地坐喝 (Lu, 2005, p.21).

Version 1: ...while a dozen will buy a meat dish; but most of the customers here belong to the short-coated class, few of whom can afford this. As for those in long gowns, they go into the inner room to order wine and dishes and sit drinking at their leisure (Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang, 1985, p.52).

Version 2: If he's got enough to lay down a dozen coppers or so, he can even get a meat dish. But most of the patrons at such places belong to the short-jacket crowd, the gentry, who can afford to saunter into the room next to the bar, order a main course, some wine to go with it, and then sit down and linger over their cups (Lyell, 1990, p.42).

Version 3: But such extravagance was generally beyond the means of short-jacketed manual laborers. Only those dressed in the long scholar's gowns that distinguished those who worked with their heads from those who worked with their hands made for a more sedate, inner room, to enjoy their wine and food sitting down (Lovell, 2009, p.32).

In the above example, “short-coated” and “long gown” are used to substitute people in different classes. It is clear to Chinese readers that in the past time those people who wore short coat usually do labouring work while those who wore long gowns usually refers to the rich people or those who have official ranks. It's reasonable that Yang's version keep the original metonymy without any explicit explanation of the blanks and indeterminacy the author intended to give to readers and successfully transferred the original flavor Lu Xun created. Both Lyell's version and Lovell's version made the metonymy explicit by explaining the meanings of “short-coated” and “long

gown” in detail. So we can guess that in the western people’s culture, it is very difficult to connect “short-coated” and “long gown” with doing labor work and mental work respectively. Though their versions didn’t preserve the original metonymy, they still give the western readers new culture and knowledge of the Chinese people by modifying their horizon of expectations and keep them interested in the fiction with less processing effort in understanding the new cultural factors.

3.3 Euphemism

Euphemism is a substitution for an expression that may offend or suggest something unpleasant to the receiver, using an agreeable or less offensive expression, or to make it less troublesome for the speaker. Euphemisms may be used to hide unpleasant or disturbing ideas, even when the literal term for them is not necessarily offensive (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euphemism>). In Lu Xun’s *Na Han*, a lot of euphemisms were used for some political reasons. Example 3 is a typical case in point.

Example 3 在他面前，显出一条大道，直到他家中，后面也照见丁字街头破匾上“古轩亭口”这四个黯淡的金字 (Lu, 2005, p.21).

Version 1: The sun too had risen, lighting up the broad highway before him, which led straight home, and the worn tablet behind him at the crossroad with its faded gold inscription: “Ancient Pavilion.” (Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang, 1985, p.60).

Version 2: Before him it reveals a broad road that leads straight to his home; behind him it shines upon four faded gold characters marking the broken plaque at the intersection: OLD PAVILION ROAD INTERSECTION (Lyell, 1990, p.51).

Version 3: The sun was now fully risen, painting in light the road home, and the faded gold characters of a battered old plaque at the junction behind: “Crossing of the Ancient—Pavilion” (Lovell, 2009, p.39).

In the short story entitled “Medicine”, Lu Xun intentionally leaves the second character out from “古轩亭口”，where the hero Xia Yu was martyred. The author intentionally omitted the character “轩” from the name of the execution ground. Yang’s translation did not preserve the author’s usage of euphemism and it might make no sense in the target reader about the image of “古轩亭口”. This is because in Chinese readers’ horizon of expectations, most of them know the historic event of Qiuqing, so they can understand the meaning of “古轩亭口” very easily. The explicit expression doesn’t make any difference since the reader is clear about the place. Lovell’s version, by using dash between “Ancient—Pavilion” leave some blanks and indeterminacy for English readers to ponder over the dash. Lyell’s translation, however, retained the original rhetoric device of euphemism and stopped readers by using the incomplete words of pavilion and intersection. To Lyell and Lovell, it is of great importance to stop the readers

to pause over the euphemism and arouse their interest in finding out the reason for this usage so that their horizon of expectations could be modified by the historical events which are totally not known to them. Only with this background information can western readers exert their imagination to fill up some blanks and indeterminacy in their later reading.

3.4 Zeugma

The rhetorical device zeugma is not widely used while it can be seen in Lu Xun’s *Na Han*.

Example 4 那船将大不安载给了未庄，不到中午，全村的人心就很动荡 (Lu, 2005, p.92).

Version 1: This incident caused great uneasiness in Weizhuang, and before midday the hearts of all the villagers were beating faster (Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang, 1985, p.135).

Version 2: That boat carried a cargo of unrest into Wei Village. Well before noon, every one had heard about it and was quite worried (Lyell, 1990, p.147).

Version 3: The boat brought with it great disquiet to Weizhuang; by midday, the village was in the grip of a full-scale panic (Lovell, 2009, p.108).

Ship is originally used to ship people and cargoes, but in this example, the arrival of the ship brings the people of Wei Village great anxiety, so here the author uses “那船将大不安载给了未庄”，creating the rhetorical device zeugma. As it is the same in both Chinese reader’s and English reader’s lexical entry that “不安”(upset) cannot be shipped by boat, the use of zeugma reflects the author’s skillful wording. In the rendition, Yang and Gladys successfully preserve the original flavor by using “caused great uneasiness in Weizhuang”, as “uneasiness” usually refers to a person but not a village, here another rhetorical device “transferred epithet” is used to endow readers with blanks and indeterminacy. Lyell’s version, retaining the original zeugma by “carried a cargo of unrest into Wei Village”, preserves the blanks and indeterminacy for target text readers. In Lovell’s rendition, “不安”(upset) is translated into “disquiet” in order to be in consistency with the rest of the sentence that “the village was in the grip of a full-scale panic”. The concrete expression of “disquiet” to replace abstract expression of “upset” is to give the target text reader blanks and indeterminacy to perceive what the stylistic value of this sentence is by objective observation of the people in Wei village.

3.5 Hyperbole

Example 5 阿Q要画圆了，那手捏着笔却只是抖。于是那人替他纸铺在地上，阿Q伏下去，使尽了平生的力画圆圈 (Lu, 2005, p.107).

Version 1: Ah Q tried to draw a circle, but the hand with which he grasped the brush trembled, so the man spread the paper on the ground for him. Ah Q bent down and, as painstakingly as if his life depended on it, drew a circle. (Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang, 1985, p.150).

Version 2: Ah Q tried to compose himself enough to make the circle, but the hand that held the brush refused to stop trembling... The long-gowns carefully spread the paper out flat on the floor before him. Ah Q leaned forward over it, and marshaling all the strength and concentration at his command, approached the task at hand (Lyell, 1990, p.166).

Version 3: Although Ah-Q wanted to draw a perfect circle, his hand shook uncontrollably. So the man then spread the paper over the floor for him. Bending over, Ah-Q focused all his energies on the drawing of this circle (Lovell, 2009, p.120).

Ah Q is the typical outdated peasant poisoned by the feudal thought. The above sentence depicts the situation how Ah Q signs before his death. The rhetorical device hyperbole is used here to arouse readers again Ah Q's spiritual victory. His humor expressed here is by no means some joyful and relaxing jokes; on the contrary, it is serious and heavy under the peaceful and ridiculous surface which makes people laugh with tears in heart. Yang's version "as painstakingly as if his life depended on it" vividly gives a humorous and ironic image of Ah Q, which leaves the blanks to target readers how Ah Q triumph himself by numbness till the last minute of his life. The rhetorical device hyperbole is retained very well by the strong feeling he showed in the rendition. Lyell's version "marshaling all the strength and concentration at his command" preserved the original hyperbole for western readers to perceive the humor as well as the irony. The two versions can evoke in readers' understanding of Lu Xun's attitude toward the peasants like Ah Q—sorrow for their misfortune while anger about their nonresistance. However, Lovell's version "focused all his energies" didn't reproduce the exaggerated expression as the original text did. It may be the result of her horizon of expectations not totally merged with that of the original text and she cannot quite understand Lu Xun's strong and desperate feelings toward Ah Q. But as a whole, she retained the simplicity of Lu Xun's writing skill, to some extent leaving blanks and indeterminacy for readers to perceive the aesthetic value.

CONCLUSION

Literary translation, to some extent, is not only the satisfaction in the transmission of meanings, but the reproduction of the blanks and indeterminacy in tasting the aesthetic value of source text. As Mao Dun said in his article *Fighting for the development of literary translation and improvement of translation quality*, "Literary translation is to use another language to convey the original artistic conception so that the target text reader could be enlightened, moved, and receive the aesthetic feeling as that of the source text reader..." (Mao, 1984, p.508). Within the framework of reception theory, there is

not definitely good or bad translation in the judgment and different translators have different horizon of expectations in the reproduction of blanks and indeterminacy in literary works. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, William Lyell and Julia Lovell all contribute a lot in conveying the aesthetic value of *Na Han*. The version of Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang can both arouse the interest of English readers and Chinese readers with their consideration of both languages and cultures. William Lyell's version is deep planted in the hearts of American people—the land of freedom with his informal expressions, and humorous presentation of Lu Xun's works. While Julia Lovell's version is relatively simple and more explanation-oriented, as she aimed at "I had the hope, of course, that I could try to explain to contemporary English-speaking readers why Lu Xun is seen as such an important author in China" (http://www.danwei.org/translation/julia_lovell_complete_lu_xun_f.php) Their different horizon of expectations in reading the original text as well as predicting the implied readers' horizon of expectations give birth to their diversity in versions, providing readers blanks and indeterminacy to exert their imagination in understanding this artistic literary works. But as a whole, their versions are based on the history of the era when Lu Xun wrote the fictions and contribute a lot in readers' interpretation of the blanks and indeterminacy retained both by Lu Xun and the history he lived.

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