

# *The History of the Former Han Dynasty: A Critical Translation with Annotations* Translated by Homer Hasenpflug Dubs

JIANG Yuan-yuan

Jiangsu University, Jiangsu, China

Translation is an important medium of cultural communication. It is not a mere transfer of two languages, but the interaction of two cultures. Cultural misreading, which results from cultural discrepancy and translator's subjectivity, truly reflects where the blockade and conflict in the cultural communication is. Cultural misreading is an objective phenomenon that exists in the entire process of translation. This paper intends to make a comprehensive analysis and discussion on *The History of the Former Han Dynasty: a Critical Translation with Annotations* translated by Homer Hasenpflug Dubs. As for the reasons of cultural misreading, this paper divides them into three types—language, thinking habit, traditional culture. It is to be hoped that this paper will draw more attention from the translation circle to the phenomena, and make contribution to the development of literary translation.

**Keywords:** *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, a critical translation with annotations, translation; cultural misreading

## 1. Introduction

*The History of the Former Han Dynasty* is, as its own "Introductory Memoir" says, an "encyclopaedia of scholarship" dealing with the Chinese world of the first two centuries B.C (Shryock, 1938, p. 485). It has a broad reflection of the Western Han Dynasty's political, economical system, cultural, academic thought, national policy and external relations, social life and customs, geography and Changes (Bodde, 1939, p. 641). It is an important document of the history of the Han Dynasty for both Chinese and foreign scholars. In the 19th century Western scholarships begin to translate it. Unfortunately, even now, there is no full translation of it. British sinologist Homer Hasenpflug Dubs' (Homer Hasenpflug Dubs, 1892-1969). *The History of the Former Han Dynasty: A Critical Translation with Annotations* is classic and basic reference book which Western Sinologists who research Qin and Han history must read. The translation adapts the traditional Chinese way of commentaries, using the "Annals" as backbone, adds some related historical data. Homer Hasenpflug Dubs explored the role and influence of the effect of Confucianism on the Western Han Dynasty. And his understanding about historical trends of the Western Han Dynasty Rise and Fall are more accurate, deep and incisive. However, as a Western scholar, the misreading about Chinese culture in Literary Translation is inevitable. So this paper is aimed to explain some cultural misreading in the translation of *the History of the Former Han Dynasty*. As the purpose of

translation is to get the meaning across, so faithfulness is the top priority that a translator should insist. However, the unavoidable conflict of ideology and poetics caused by cultural misreading between two different cultures makes explanation necessary. So the author of this thesis hopes the thoughts in the paper can help readers have a deeper understanding about Chinese culture.

## **2. Literature Review**

“Misreading” is a literary theory term that originally developed by Bloom’s work: *The Anxiety of Influence* which was published in 1973. In this book, he proposed the “Poetic Misreading” theory, and attributed the poems’ influence to the creative misunderstanding and correction about senior poets’ works, and that is what is called misreading (Bloom, 1973). One thing which must be pointed out is, different with the traditional single understanding about “misunderstanding”, Bloom inclined to agree with the rationality and creativity of misreading. If we use the traditional binary oppositions of right and wrong theoretical model to understand the phenomenon of misreading, it is definitely a deviation and betrayal of source text, and it would be labeled “traitor” and became the object of criticism. But with the rise of the modern literary theory and Western deconstruction thought, the certainty of texts and the presence of author’s intentions have suffered a great deal of criticism. Instead, the main status of the reader’s interpretation on texts gradually receives more attention.

“Cultural Misreading” is a fact that can not be neglected during the process of culture exchange; the consequences can be seen from both positive and negative. On the one side it distorts the original text, it can lead to the failure of the cultural information transmission, make it difficult for readers to see the truth of heterogeneous culture. On the other hand, cultural misreading is a kind of objective existence, it also plays a positive role for the construction of national culture: (1) So that the heterogeneous can be easy to spread in the country, and the native readers can understand the information easier; (2) In the cultural misreading, some creative things can be added to the original texts without intention, and then the values of the original works can be found by readers; (3) Finally, as the cultural misreading is caused by the writers’ cultural background, so it can promote the development of national literature.

Western scholars use a series of methods to research cultural misreading. People such as: Taylor, Baumert, Richards, Ogden And Richards, famous writer Austin all advocate using philosophical approaches for research. Wittgenstein called the combination of language and action as language games, He pointed out that when we play the game we must obey the rules of it, therefore, in order to properly use the language we must understand the language usage rules otherwise it will cause some kinds of semantic misunderstanding. British philosopher Richards in their work systematically elaborated his own idea about rhetoric philosophy, the necessity of misreading studies and the causes of the formation of misreading, the ways to eliminate misunderstanding are all mentioned in his book.

Fabian is the representative scholar who research the cultural misreading use the ethnology method. It is a study of human culture which based on language, it discusses about syntax and semantics translation and speech event and some other factors that result in cultural misreading in detail.

Scholars such as American social linguist Tannen and Holmes advocate the Social linguistics method as a method for misreading research.

Tannen analyze the women and men’s language characteristics with the help of linguistics and sociology, he

intends help people to understand the communication problem between men and women. The author mainly do the research from the aspect of social linguistics, that is to say, the author attaches great importance on language habits, language patterns, models, language policy difference, and pays attention to do the research from the perspective of social linguist.

In real communication, cross-language question often comes along with cross-cultural issues. But the pragmatics can study of these two problems, respectively. Kasper researches on the relationship about pragmatic failure, miscommunication, misunderstanding, communication breakdown and divergence in "Interlanguage Pragmatics" in 1996. She says, negative transfer may cause communication error, but it is not logical or experience necessarily the case, a lot of evidence can prove that, deviate more or less causes communication errors.

Other solutions to cultural misreading are: Gumperz, Fairclough, Maltz, borker's Cross-cultural linguistics research, Tomas, Gudykunst, Miller's Cross-cultural international method research, Sarangi, Linell, LiYue'e, Grimshaw's Conversational analysis and discourse analysis research. And the Ordinary pragmatics method researched by homas, Dascal, Dressler, Fisher. The Cognitive Pragmatics method researched by Sperber and Wilson with the Revelance Theory. The Grammar study mainly researches by Xusiyi and Wangjianhua.

### **3. Cultural Misreading**

#### **3.1 Existence of Cultural Misreading**

The misreading is a kind of objective existence in reading or aesthetic process. Within the category of literature, misreading is more likely to be thought as the understanding and interpretation of a text from multiple angles and levels, which has a certain rationality and creativity.

With the frequent development of international exchanges and the trend of cultural integration, the cultural misreading that exists between cultural exchanges attaches more attention. Many scholars have already explained the objective existence of cultural misreading. So as an important medium in the process of cultural exchange-translation for its essential characteristics cultural misreading is also inevitable. Because when the translator begins to do translation, he reads to understand the source texts, after that he works as a translator. Special identity determines the author's readers in the reading process inevitably doped own social and cultural awareness. The special identity as a reader makes him inevitably add his own cultural awareness in the process of creation. Different with the technology or legal texts, cultural texts exist both closeness and openness, and it embodies the cultural connotation of a country at the same time. Therefore, the success of literary translation is to some extent determines the success of national cultural exchange and communication. And the misreading during the process of literary translation need to be paid attention to and solved urgently.

#### **3.2 Root of Cultural Misreading**

Cultural Misreading formed mainly from cultural differences at the level of the objective and translator's subjectivity on the subjective level. Among them, the cultural difference at the level of the objective is the root cause. It decides the inevitability of cultural misreading phenomenon. This necessity works through the translator's subjectivity in translation practice. All social and cultural factors are concentrated in the translator's own consciousness. The subjectivity of the translator is restricted to the restriction of objective cultural framework. No matter how translator adheres to objective reading of the source language, he can not clean out his

cultural background carried by him. Once an individual begins to receive information, it is inevitable for him to mix his own cultural background information. Considering the essence and characteristics of translation itself are influenced by political, cultural, ideological, and other external factors, translators are likely to translate the original texts from different perspectives in order to receive the intended goal, then consciously or unconsciously in different extent, deviated from the original text form of language and culture manifestations. And this kind of the deviation of language and cultural forms of the original is a misreading.

## 4. Analysis and Discussion

### 4.1 Different Language Expressions

Language is a social product of specific social, cultural and historical decisions. It reflects the particular cultural tradition that the language users present. It is a tool for a social group to exchange ideas. The different histories, geography, natural conditions of all nationalities in the country cultivate the distinctive cultural soil. This difference is embodied in the language, thus creates traditional literature which contains distinctive ethnic characteristics. Chinese and English belong to the Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan language family respectively. The formations of language are distinct, and are very different in cultural origins. The expression habits of Chinese and English are different, so the modes of understanding for language are different. Sometimes it even results in the opposite conclusions. As for some of the vocabulary, their lexical meanings have changed today. They are caused by changes of the internal regional history and time. And these changes often cause mistakes on the translator in the language expression.

#### Example (1)

十一月，召诸县豪桀曰：“父老苦秦苛法久矣，诽谤者族，耦语者弃市。吾与诸侯约，先入关者王之，吾当王关中”。(班固,2005, p. 76)

In the eleventh month [the Lord of P'ei] summoned the eminent and distinguished people from the prefectures and said [to them], "Fathers and Elders, you have suffered long enough from the cruel laws of the Ch'in [dynasty]: those who spoke ill or criticized [the government] have been cruelly executed with their relatives, those who talked in private have been publicly executed in the market place. I and the nobles have made a covenant that he who first enters through the passes will be king in [the region inside the passes], [therefore] I ought to be king in Kuan-chung. (Homer Hasenpflug Dubs, 1934-1937, p. 115)

Thousands of years of feudal autocracy have a significant impact on the Chinese people's thinking. The Chinese choose to be euphemistic and have ties of kinship or friendship when they are speaking. The elderly who manage public affairs are mostly respectable old men. Homer Hasenpflug Dubs here translates the elderly into Fathers and Elders, while overlook its profound connotation. This is the emperor Gaozu's provocative speech to the Qin people. You must put yourself in the Qin people standing perspective, when considering the tyranny of the Qin Dynasty you must look from the prospect of the Qin people. He views himself as a member of them, at the same time he expresses the respect and amity to the people of Qin Dynasty.

#### Example (2)

八月，沛公攻武关，入秦。秦相赵高恐，乃杀二世，使人来，欲约分王关中，沛公不许。(班固, 2005, p. 125)

In the eighth month, the lord of P'ei attacked the Wu Pass, and entered [the state of] Ch'in. The Chancellor of Ch'in, Chao Kao, was afraid, so he killed the Second Emperor and sent men[to the Lord of P'ei], desiring to make an agreement

to divide [with him] the kingship of Kuan-chung; [but] THE lord of P'ei would not consent to it. (Homer Hasenpflug Dubs, 1934-1937, p. 143)

In the spring and autumn period and the warring states period ,states fought between each other. During the warring states period there were seven governors fighting for the overlord status. Among the countries they named people of other countries the titles of their states. In 221BC, Qinshihuang finally unified the sic countries after more than ten years' war; he establishes the first feudal dynasty in Chinese history -the Qin dynasty. Here Qin has the same meaning as the Kanto pointed out later in the article, and it means the territory of Hangu Pass in the Warring States period.

#### Example (3)

亚父范增说羽曰：“沛公居山东时，贪财好色。今闻其入关，珍物无所取，妇女无所幸，此其志不小。(班固, 2005, p. 128)

His Second Father, Fan Tseng, advised [Hsiang] Yu, saying, “When the Lord of P'ei was east of the mountains, he was greedy for money and loved women. Now I have heard that since he entered the passes, he was not taken any precious things nor granted favors to any women. These [facts] show that his designs are great.” (Homer Hasenpflug Dubs, 1934-1937, p. 154)

The meaning of Shandong, Henan, Hebei, Kanto in ancient classics is different from these today. Shandong is also called the Kanto in the warring states period, it represents Xiaoshan or east of the Mountain Region in the period of Qin Dynasty. And Henan and Hebei are also refers to the north shore and the south bank of the Yellow River. While Homer Hasenpflug Dubs here translates it into east of the mountains, he overlooks the exact meaning of mountain in the article. Due to his negligence, Homer Hasenpflug Dubs ignores the unique expression of Chinese language, with the superficial understanding of literary language, then it results in the formation of the cultural misreading. Of course, to Homer Hasenpflug Dubs, it is understandable. Although Homer Hasenpflug Dubs is a famous sinologist, but it can not be denied that, even if he knows much about Chinese culture, it also can't exceed the understanding of his mother tongue, the native culture is still the dominant unconsciously, so the omission is inevitable in the process of translation.

## 4.2 Different Thinking Patterns

The origins of Chinese and western culture are different. And the system of social rules that formed is naturally different. All of these social rules need to experience a long-term osmosis. Then in the minds of every member of the society will form a fixed model of thinking. Interpersonal behavior and other things are done according to their own potential social way of thinking.

#### Example (4)

酒罢，吕媪怒吕公曰：“公始常欲奇此女，与贵人。沛令善公，求之不与，何自妄许与刘季？”吕公曰：“此非兒女子所知。(司马迁, 2005, p. 157)

When the feast was over, the old lady of lǚ was angry with the old gentleman lǚ, and said; “Previously you sir, has always wanted to hold this girl precious in order to give her in marriage to some distinguished person. The magistrate of P'ei is your good friend. He has asked for her, but you would not give her to him. Why did you yourself thus senselessly promise to give her to this Liu Chi?” The old gentleman lǚ replied, “This is not anything that children or woman can understand.” (Homer Hasenpflug Dubs, 1934-1937, p. 166)

Chinese feudal society has very evident division of social classes, social members subconsciously identify their social position and relationship with others. The traditional ideological and ethical standards clearly point out that what kind of thought and behavior should people have in their own positions in dealing with the relations between its top and bottom or so. This is to maintain the social system services. In China since the ancient times, the idea of female subordination prevailed, the women are restrained by the feudal ethical code, they had no right to read, and they were Just parenthood tool. As the saying goes, innocence is the virtue for women, men manage external affairs while women manage the internal things. The status of sons and daughters are just the same as women's. But Westerners can not understand why this thing children and women do not understand. While Homer Hasenpflug Dubs translates them into children or women, without taking the English readers' thinking mode into consideration.

#### Example (5)

行前者还报曰：“前有大蛇当径，愿还。”高祖醉，曰：“壮士行，何畏！”乃前，拔剑斩蛇。（司马迁，2015，p. 186）

The man who was in front returned and reported, “Up ahead there is a large serpent blocking the path. We had better go back.” Kao-tsu was drunk and said, “When a strong man walks along, what is there to fear?” (Homer Hasenpflug Dubs, 1934-1937, p. 193)

The occurrence of strong man's frequency is higher in the classics, it means emotional heroic and brave people.

#### Example (6)

后人至，高祖觉。告高祖，高祖乃心独喜，自负。诸从者日益畏之。（班固，2005，p. 173）

When the man [who came along] afterwards reached [the place where Kao-tsu was], Kao-tsu had awakened, [and so] he told Kao-tsu [about it]. Then Kao-tsu privately rejoiced in heart and took confidence in himself, while his followers daily feared him more and more. (Homer Hasenpflug Dubs, 1934-1937, p. 211)

Fear has two meanings: (1) be afraid of; (2) admire. At the end of Qin Dynasty, the productivity is very low, the whole society was in turmoil, People all long for stability. But under the harsh punishment of the Qin dynasty, people dare not oppose tyranny, in order to seek for psychological comfort they can only believe ghosts and gods, So here people's attitude to Liu bang mixed fear with worship. Here in the article is translated into “fear” by Homer Hasenpflug Dubs, without considering the thinking way of people at that time.

### 4.3 Different Cultural Traditions

Due to the same living environment, historical and cultural traditions' long-term infiltration, some things in the process of development and utilization has formed a relatively stable unique cultural image. Members within a particular cultural system of the society can generate the corresponding cultural association without too much language explanation when in touch with things containing national cultural symbolic images. They can exchanges and communication thoughts and feelings smoothly.

#### Example (7)

高祖常徭咸阳，纵观秦皇帝，喟然大息，曰：“嗟乎，大丈夫当如此矣！”（班固，2005，p. 282）

Kao-tsu was frequently made to do fatigue duty in Hsien-yang, and had free access to see the Emperor of Ch'in [dynasty]. Moved in spirit he would heave a deep sigh and say, “Ah! A real man should be like this.” (Homer Hasenpflug

Dubs, 1934-1937, p. 311)

This is a story about Liu Bang going to Xian yang lord, although Qin II died, and here the Qin Emperor represents the Qin Shi Huang.

And here's the Qin Emperor Qin Shi Huang means. Homer Hasenpflug Dubs here translates it into the Emperor of Ch'in [dynasty] causes ambiguity ,it should be translated into the first emperor of Ch'in dynasty.

Example (8)

南阳守欲自刭，其舍人陈恢曰：“死未晚也。”(班固，2005, p. 314)

The Administrator of Nan-yang wanted to cut his own throat, but a man of his suite, Ch'en K'ue, said to him: "it is never late to die." (Homer Hasenpflug Dubs, 1934-1937, p. 386)

Suite means people who serve beside. In western countries the essence of suite is employment relationship, in China suite means a kind of superior-subordinate relationship, they are not same. The suite is a servant when he is away from home, while he is at home he can be a think tank that can help the owner to deal with things.

## 5. Conclusion

"What's the most difficult thing about translation? It is the difference between the two cultures. In one microkernel inside there are some self-evident things, while in another culture actually we have to spend a lot of effort to explain" (Levitt, 2013, p. 35). Therefore, in order to compensate linguistic and cultural gap between the two texts, a variety of methods will be used to reduce the amount of information error during the conveyance. The problem translator face is not correct or not, but the amounts of mistakes happened during the conveyance. In the process of translation, language forms inevitably change, and then the information carried by language changes inevitably. How hard the translators try, this change may still be inevitable. Only the translator well-read, fully understand the translation of culture, can the cultural misreading be reduced to the minimal extent.

## References

- Bloom, H. (1973). *The anxiety of influence: A theory of poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bodde, D. (1939). Review on *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*. *The American History Review*, 44(3), 641-642.
- Danton, G. H. (1945). Review on *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*. *Books Abroad*, 19(2), 145-146.
- Erkes, E. (1946). Review on *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*. *Artibus Asiae*, 9(1/3), 229-230.
- Inge, M. T. (2000). Mo Yan through western eyes. *World Literature Today*, 74(3), 501-506.
- Kinkley, J. C. (1994). China—Red Sorghum: A novel of China by Mo Yan and translated by Howard Goldblatt. *World Literature Today*, 68(2), 428.
- Shryock, J. K. (1938). Review on *The History of The Former Han Dynasty*. *Journal of the American oriental Oriental Oriental Society*, 58(3), 485-488.
- Swann, N. L. (1994). Review on *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*. *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, 4(1), 67-70.
- LSY. (1956). Review on *The History of Han Dynasty*. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 19(3/4), 435-442.
- Levitt, A. (2013). *Howard Goldblatt's life in translation*. *Chicago Reader*, 4(11), 32-46.
- Homer Hasenpflug Dubs. (1934-1937). *Translation of the Former Han Dynasty*.
- (汉) 班固撰. (2005). (唐) 颜师古注. 汉书. 中华书局.
- (汉) 司马迁撰. (2005). (唐) 张守节正义. 史记. 中华书局.
- 白钢. (1993). 《中国官制大辞典》介绍. 古籍整理研究学刊.
- 陆谷孙主编. (1989). 英汉大词典. 上海译文出版社.
- 《古代汉语词典》编写组编. (1998). 古代汉语词典. 商务印书馆.