



Yifeng SUN
University of Macau

After Abel in China

**Engaging with Translation.
New Readings of
George Steiner's *After Babel***

Marco Agnetta
Larisa Cercel
Brian O'Keeffe
[eds.]

1/2021
**Yearbook of Translational Hermeneutics
Jahrbuch für Übersetzungshermeneutik**

Journal of the Research Center
Zeitschrift des Forschungszentrums



Hermeneutics and Creativity, University of Leipzig
Hermeneutik und Kreativität, Universität Leipzig

DOI: 10.52116/yth.vi1.23



Cite this article:

Sun, Yifeng (2021): „*After Abel* in China“. In: *Yearbook of Translational Hermeneutics* 1, pp. 189–207. DOI: <10.52116/yth.vi1.23>.



Yearbook of Translational Hermeneutics 1/2021
ISSN: 2748-8160 | DOI: 10.52116/yth.vi1.23

After Babel in China

Yifeng SUN
University of Macau

Abstract: When George Steiner's *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* was published in 1975, the excitement and controversy generated by this book in the West were naturally unknown in China since the country was still in the thrall of the Cultural Revolution. Nevertheless, the subsequent journey of *After Babel* to China seems to be unimpeded, though apparently belated, which is understandable, given the fact that the Chinese Cultural Revolution only came to an end in late 1976, prior to which the conditions for accepting such Western theoretical works did not exist. This paper will present a succinct trajectory of the reception of *After Babel* by reviewing how some of the key concepts of Steiner's hermeneutic theory were and are perceived and adapted to the Chinese environment. The travel of Steiner's theory to China will be briefly sketched, followed by accounts of different interpretations of Steiner's chapter "The Hermeneutic Motion" and a discussion of the various attempts to supplement and expand it in a critical light. Some specific examples concerning English-Chinese and Chinese-English translations are discussed in order to illuminate the relevance and applicability of the theoretical concepts contained in *After Babel* for addressing some of the fundamental issues pertaining to translation.

Keywords: Hermeneutic Theory, Translator's Subjectivity, Multi-Layered Meaning.

1 Introduction

Steiner's *After Babel* was published in 1975 when China was still gripped by the Cultural Revolution. Naturally, therefore, there was

no way for the book to enter a country that was being wrecked. Although the Revolution was announced to end in 1976, recuperation was slow and difficult. In 1981, the name of Steiner was first mentioned by Dong Qiao, who was based in Hong Kong, when he published an article entitled “Jiegouzhuyi de fengbo” (“Squabbling Over Structuralism”), in which he likened Steiner’s experience at Cambridge to that of F. R. Leavis and Colin MacCabe, calling the three the victims of a group of “jealous” old guards in the English Faculty at Cambridge (cf. Dong 1996: 547). However, it was very unlikely that this essay would have found its way to mainland China because the control over publications from Hong Kong and Taiwan was still tight.

It was not until 1987 that an abridged version of *After Babel* was translated into Chinese by Zhuang Yichuan and published by China Translation and Publishing Corporation. Its original title was changed into *Tongtianta: wenxue fanyilun yanjiu* (*Babel: Studies in Theories of Literary Translation*). Still, the belated arrival of this book to China, even though not in its entirety, was sensational. In the 1980s, existentialism became popular in China – Sartre and Heidegger were well acclaimed. People not only read their works but were also keen to read their biographies. Steiner’s *Martin Heidegger* was considered to satisfy this demand. Two Chinese translation versions appeared in 1988 and 1989 in succession, and these helped to corroborate the impression of Steiner as an author of biography as well among Chinese readers.

2 Steiner and China

It is not difficult to imagine the impact Zhuang’s translation of *After Babel* had on the translation community in China. In retrospect, however, the fact that the source text was abridged met with criticism. The editorial note to an article published in 2015 introducing Steiner and his *After Babel* contains a set of remarks impugning this translatorial treatment: at issue is that the incomplete title, which dropped the preposition “after”, and the replaced subtitle *Studies in Theories of Literary Translation*, “reflects to a certain degree the mis-

reading of the source text” on the part of the translator. Even more seriously, it “for the bulk of last century misled the Chinese readers’ perception of this book by Steiner and the man himself” (Li 2015: 48). This is a harsh indictment, hardly fair, and no further explanation is provided to justify it. It can be said, however, that even if this is true, an inappropriate subtitle can scarcely do such serious damage. In Zhuang’s abbreviated translation and compilation, the book is condensed and reorganized into four chapters:

1. Understanding as Translation
2. Language and Gnosis
3. Translation Theories (i. e. Steiner’s Chapter 4: Claims of Theory)
4. The Process of Translation (i. e. Steiner’s Chapter 5: The Hermeneutic Motion) (cf. Zhuang 1987: vii).

Zhuang’s translation version dropped altogether Steiner’s Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 and moreover selectively translated the parts concerning literary translation in Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5.

In the early 1990s, however, Steiner’s name faded into oblivion, even though, in *The Evolution of English Prose* by Wang Zuoliang, there are two references to Steiner (cf. Wang 1994: 283 and 298). In the mid-1990s, the tide began to turn and Translation Studies emerged as a fully-fledged academic discipline which coincided with and was related to the steady growth of Steiner’s reputation in China (cf. Li 2015: 51). The year 2001 saw the publication of an anthology of British translation scholars (cf. Liao 2001) and a whole chapter entitled “Fanyide wenxue chanshixue” (“Literary Hermeneutics of Translation”) is devoted to the introduction of Steiner’s hermeneutic theory of translation. More significantly, in the same year, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press published the third edition of the original text of *After Babel* (1975/2001) in its entirety under licence from Oxford University Press for sale in mainland China. Its impact on the academic community of translation studies in China was palpable because it was instantly put on the required reading list for translation students in many universities. In the event, however, the book proved to be difficult and recondite and some students were so overawed by its Byzantine style

of writing that they preferred to eschew reading it altogether. Nevertheless, it has since become a very influential book and remains frequently cited by translation scholars.

The enduring attraction and relevance of *After Babel* is attested to by a recent article published at the beginning of 2020 which once again elucidates and discusses the four movements posited by Steiner in Chapter Five (cf. Ye 2020: 105–108), and more significantly, confirmed by the long-awaited complete translation of *After Babel* published by Zhejiang University Press in August 2020. The blurb of the translated book states:

This book is one of the most important academic works by George Steiner, a famous American literary theorist. It is also a masterpiece in the field of Translation Studies. It avails itself of the realms of linguistics, literature, philosophy, art and even science and technology including biology. It can be described as an overall study of linguistics and translation theory.

This much belated but greatly needed translation indicates the unrelenting challenge to accomplish the task of translating this book and the undiminished interest in *After Babel*. According to the on-line *Baidu Encyclopedia*,

first published in 1975, this book has been a first systematic attempt to investigate translation theory and the process of translation since the eighteenth century. After constructing a map of its research area, the book has become a controversial but influential work. Even today, as an important modern classic, its status is unequivocal, replete with insightful comments that are inspirational and thought-provoking. (Baidu Encyclopedia s. v. “*After Babel*”)

These are enthusiastic plaudits. On the whole, however, there is relative paucity of notice given to the controversial parts of *After Babel*. In a similar vein, the Chinese preface to *After Babel* published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press makes no mention of the controversial dimensions of the book. Instead, it highlights the merits of the book by calling it a pioneering “milestone work” on translation theory (1975/2001: iv).

However, in recent years, with further study of Steiner in China, some negative or disparaging remarks by Western critics about Steiner have been reported or relayed by Chinese scholars. He is sometimes shown in an unflattering light. For instance, Li Xiaojun

quotes Joseph Epstein who is rather scathing in his criticism of Steiner in an article published in *East Journal of Translation* (cf. Li 2015: 50). In 2011, Liu Zheng, though mainly informed by Steiner's own reminiscences, revealed Steiner to have thoughtlessly planned to write a biography of Joseph Needham, the famous British biochemist, historian and sinologist. Needham is well-known in China because of his multi-volume work *Science and Civilisation in China* (Liu 2009: n. p.). Liu quotes at length from Steiner's *My Unwritten Books*, which records his rendezvous with Needham as it was arranged by Frank Kermode (cf. Steiner 2008: 4f.). To Liu's great relief, the project never took place on the grounds that Steiner knew nothing about sinology.

After referring to Terry Eagleton and Joseph Epstein who both berate Steiner for his pretentious erudition, Liu Zheng offers a conciliatory view:

On the question of whether erudition is necessary, the views of many may be somewhat stringent. I tend to think that an erudite polymath should be viewed as entrusted by us, that is to say, we have no time, no energy and no ability to become erudite, so we entrust him [Steiner] with this work of acquiring knowledge and let him learn for us. We should just be satisfied that he reports to us the result of his erudition. (Liu 2009: n. p.)

Although tongue-in-cheek, these words show an appreciation of the wide range of Steiner's references to other related sources – these can help explain things more clearly, even though sometimes more than necessary. The awareness of and attentiveness to these sources can be enlightening and lead to further investigation.

3 *After Babel* and its Reception

Of course, numerous inaccuracies found in the book can be confusing and misleading, particularly as regards the parts that are controversial and which can therefore potentially cause misunderstanding and misperception concerning the operations of translation. However, in line with the fact that the worth of Steiner's erudition is fully recognized, the accuracy and reliability issue is cast aside, as if not important. As for the fact that Terry Eagleton "cavils at the

lack of depth and accuracy” (Liu 2009: n. p.) with regard to the writing of Steiner, Liu argues that depth and accuracy would of course be most desirable but to demand both at the same time is apparently unrealistic (cf. *ibid.*).

In any event, translation – the means by which Steiner’s ideas are disseminated – exacerbates the matter further. The discussion of the theoretical and conceptual issues handled by Steiner in *After Babel* inadvertently provides an illustration of the unsettling difficulty of introducing theoretical works to a different cultural system. It has been pointed out, by Edward Said, for instance, that original theoretical ideas are taken out of the original contexts and transplanted into the system of reception for a different “period or situation” (Said 1993: 226). The transformative potential and opportunities for application and diverse dimensions of adaptation for a “national culture” are fully displayed in the context of the reception of *After Babel* in China. In this respect, conceptual interpretation is closely tied to subjective unavoidability, accompanied by exclusion of or resistance to what may be regarded as the parts that seem to be unnecessary or irrelevant distractions. It can be plainly observed that some exclusion is built in here, revealing the mechanism of preferential selection. The theoretical assimilation and practical application of Steiner’s conceptualizations reflect the extent and consequences of localization.

In his *Dangdai yingguo fanyiyilun (Contemporary British Translation Theories)* Liao Qiyi offers an extended and elaborate exposition of some of the key points made in *After Babel*. In many ways, it is an elaborate summary of the original work, some parts in the original being translated into Chinese and it has served to encourage more Chinese translation scholars to pay attention to Steiner’s book. Liao’s introduction is interspersed with some Chinese material to help illustrate Steiner’s theoretical points as well (cf. Liao 2001: 67–123).

Despite Zhuang Yichuan’s adamant conviction that Steiner’s basic tenet is that all understanding is translation and that it is impossible to overemphasize both the difficulty of understanding and the necessity to understand the source text (cf. Zhuang 1987: iv),

this primordial hermeneutic principle is often allowed to fall into disregard. Instead, the main focus of critical interest is on the hermeneutic process where a proper understanding and interpretation of meaning is sought for and activated in preparation for translation.

Most Chinese translation scholars concentrate on Chapter Five of *After Babel* as is exemplified in an article by Xu Yuli and Gao Cun, who indicate that “The best chapter of the Book is Chapter Five” (Xu/Gao 2018: 46). Indeed, it can be observed that Steiner’s fourfold hermeneutic motion theory is a focal point in many articles published in Chinese. It is thus observed that the interpretation and appropriation of meaning comprises “four steps”: trust, aggression, incorporation, and restitution, all of which are “mutually linked and supplement each other” (ibid.). It should be pointed out that because of lack of contact with the international scholarly community, many of the Chinese articles discussing *After Babel* show a dearth of references in English. They tend to draw on Chinese sources without engaging in scholarly exchange with international colleagues.

4 The Hermeneutic Motion

The title of Chapter Five of *After Babel* is “The Hermeneutic Motion”. It has been variously translated (these are back translations, of course) into Chinese as “the process of translation” (Zhuang 1987: 69), “the hermeneutic steps” (Xie 2008: 86) and “the operation of interpretation” (Chan/Chang 2000: 31). This lack of consistency in terms of terminology is due to the fact that these translators understand and interpret the title differently. There is, however, a general, albeit tacit, agreement among Chinese translation scholars that Steiner’s translation theory should be called “hermeneutic translation theory” and that other parts of his discussion can be neatly subsumed under the rubric of hermeneutics, as if hermeneutics is what constitutes the core content of *After Babel*. They accordingly seem to think that Chapter Five is the most relevant chapter and that Steiner’s translation theory can be encapsulated as hermeneutic translation theory.

It is generally accepted that hermeneutic theory is a very valuable theory, but it has also its own limitations. Ye Fangfang, for instance, lambasts Steiner's theory for its "confusion and contradictions" (Ye 2020: 108). It is further pointed out that with an emphasis on the interpretation of the original, there arises the possibility that a sentence or a paragraph can encompass countless interpretations. This is precisely why the validity of hermeneutic theory is questioned. Is interpretation limited or unlimited? How closely should interpretation be predicated on the original? Can the extent of interpretation be measured? None of these questions is properly answered in hermeneutic theory, and that, by the same token, further establishes the necessity to study hermeneutic theory further (cf., for example, Jin/Li 2003: 47). Some scholars have expressed the concern that a chaos of interpretations can thus be generated given that the focus is decidedly on the translator's subjectivity. At the same time, however, they do not seem to trust this subjectivity since this may lead to overinterpretation or even misinterpretation. Ironically, viewpoints like these seem to be a willful interpretation of Steiner's 'trust'.

In this connection, it is perhaps illuminating to quote a line from a Song Dynasty Chinese poem: "The peak is on the side of the ridge, and the height is different from far to near". All of what has been discussed thus far may just be a matter of perspectives—some far, some near—showing the volatile and potentially contradictory dynamics of observation and perception. Various interpretative strategies are employed in the process of translation to reconstruct the lexical-semantic chain in the original, and in a specific context—favouring one particular interpretation is not only appropriate but often unavoidable as well. The explicitness induced by translation reduces the original semantic range, thus curtailing the potential semantic richness and nuances of meanings. The contextualized expressions of the target language in its cultural setting are processed interpretatively and comparatively, highlighting thereby the distinctive feature of the translation language. Thus, Xia Tian argues that it is necessary to probe the hermeneutic theory of trans-

lation by supplementing, expanding, or adjusting Steiner's theory (cf. Xia 2009: 83).

Xia subscribes to the way in which the four translation steps or the hermeneutic motion are translated into accessible and intelligible Chinese, which is nothing like the arguments being entangled with each other and tending towards conceptual incoherence in the source text. This is a lucky situation for Chinese translation scholars (cf. Xia 2009: 82). This seems to suggest that because the original is convolutedly overwritten, a somewhat straightforward translation helps overcome the problem. Meanwhile, Xia also challenges the hierarchical formation of the four phases concerning the hermeneutic motion and its goal to achieve balance. As he sees it, both 'aggression' and 'incorporation' are encompassed in comprehension but just with different emphases. And it is difficult to simply juxtapose them in a sequential way. The boundaries between them are always blurring and dissolving (cf. *ibid.*: 81). Some of the activities can occur synchronously. While trust is tied up with the selection of the source text, incorporation is tied up with its reception. Thus, Steiner's hermeneutic should not be understood as a simple classification of translation phases but as a means to precipitate understanding and narration (cf. *ibid.*: 81).

Some probing questions are raised: what does the trust in textual meaning really refer to? What exactly are the factors that influence the culture of the source text being incorporated into the target text? What is compensation and how can it be administered? And how can the balance discussed by Steiner be achieved? What is proposed for the four phases of translation may not adequately answer such questions. But these are inescapable questions that cannot be ignored when evaluating the effectiveness of a translation theory (cf. Xia 2009: 82).

It has also been pointed out that Steiner's 'trust' is a one-directional process. The translator trusts the text to be translated but only passively identifies meaning—meaning is an extant entity, un-governed by external factors, and it is inherent in the text. In this sense, Steiner's 'trust' can only be an idealized trust in a vacuum. This is closely related to traditional hermeneutic theory as posited

by Schleiermacher. However, Steiner's notion of 'trust' is worthy of exploration because the attitude of the translator is very important in that it can be linked with the choice of text in translation activity. But 'trust' needs to be liberated from its vacuum if it is to enter the mortal world. Only so doing can the concept be of value to the actual practice of translation. In translation practice, 'meaning' is multi-layered, and doesn't just refer to the semantic meaning inherent in the text. If the 'human' factor in the process of text formation and understanding is taken into account, meaning includes the intention of the original author and the representational meaning generated by the interaction between the reader and the text (cf. Xia 2009: 83).

5 The Case of *Cathay*

The four phases of Steiner's hermeneutic motion are applicable to the analysis of Pound's translation of *Cathay* and this is compellingly demonstrated by Steiner himself when he comments on and compares Arthur Waley's translation. On what was Pound's trust placed? He had to work with the incomplete translation notes taken by someone else and he himself did not know any Chinese. All of this makes for a fascinating study of the complexity of translating a remote language.

Interestingly, without any knowledge of Chinese, Steiner offers an engaging and carefully argued critique of the English translations of Chinese poetry by Pound and Waley. By relying on secondary sources (mainly the work by Wai-lim Yip), he pinpoints the mistakes made by Ernest Fenollosa whose notes provide the basis for Pound's translation and he "points out" that "Fenollosa misreads the first two characters in the second line of Li Po's 'Ku Feng' (After the Style of Ancient Poems)" (Steiner 1998: 377). Steiner concedes that "[t]he difficulties of translating Chinese into a Western language are notorious" (ibid.: 375). And, to make matters worse, Pound "had no Chinese" (ibid.). However, there is an advantage to this lack of linguistic knowledge. Steiner maintains: "Pound imitate and persuade with utmost economy not because he

or his reader know so much but because both concur in knowing so little” (ibid.). In his view, all this contributes to “a Western ‘invention of China’” (ibid.: 375). Steiner basically echoes Hugh Kenner’s defense of Pound’s translation of *Cathay*.

Indeed, this discussion can create fecund ground for a cultural-historical exploration of the whole process of translating between Chinese and English or other Western languages when cultural knowledge is of crucial importance. While the unreliability of Pound’s translation has been well noted, his achievements as a poet-translator is gaining more recognition. Steiner was among the scholars who saw the value of Pound’s approach to translation, one which is carefully compared with that of Arthur Waley.

As previously noted, in his discussion of Pound’s translation of Chinese, Steiner draws from the study by Yip, and, according to the latter, the translated poems by Pound

are bound to differ from the originals in the sense that certain literal details are either eliminated or violated; local taste is modified or even altered to suit the English audience and certain allusions are suppressed in order to relieve the readers from the burden of footnotes. (Yip 1969: 164)

In this context of the transmission of cultural knowledge, accuracy or reliability is not the prime consideration in evaluating the artistic merit of translation. In this case, Pound’s ignorance of the Chinese language necessitated the invention of *Cathay*, which is not strictly a translation in its conventional sense. Ignorance helps remove constraints on the translation activity. And in this particular case, distortion or inaccuracy is of secondary importance.

Curiously, and somewhat surprisingly, this rare venture into Chinese-English translation by Steiner has scarcely roused any critical attention among Chinese translation scholars. There is no doubt, however, that he is on shaky ground when relying overtly on secondary sources. For instance, he writes that “[i]n older Chinese literature it is almost impossible to demarcate prose from verse” (Steiner 1998: 376) and quotes Achilles Fang to buttress this claim. He also seems to exaggerate the worth of context in the absence of adequate linguistic knowledge of the source language by claiming: “No grammar or dictionary is of very much use to the

translator: only context, in the fullest linguistic – cultural sense, certifies meaning” (ibid.). This is undeniably true, but only to a certain extent.

Steiner illustrates the significance of aggression in Pound’s translation. It was armed with Fenollosa’s notes that Pound was emboldened to embark on the translation project. In one instance, Pound “respects the literary surface but also penetrates beneath it to restore what Fenollosa has missed or obscured” (Steiner 1998: 377). One wonders how it was possible for Pound to know what is missed or obscured. Moreover, Pound made no attempt to compensate for losses because he did not know what was lost. However, as long as the essential parts and features were preserved or reproduced, the task of translation was superbly accomplished.

As I have already said, it is somewhat surprising that so very few Chinese translation scholars pay attention to or account for Steiner’s analysis of Pound’s translation of *Cathay*. An exception is the article entitled “Cong sitanna chanshi buzhou kan Huaxiaji yizhe de zhutixing” (“On the Translator’s Subjectivity Reflected in *Cathay* in the Light of George Steiner’s Hermeneutic Motion”) which sets out to examine this part of Steiner’s work (cf. Chao/Zhao 2011: 193). Once again, the subjectivity of the translator is foregrounded. Pound’s creativity, which was necessitated by his ignorance of the Chinese language, is ascribed to his subjectivity on display as a translator. The hermeneutic motion is aptly applied by the authors of this article. Several questions are raised: As the first step, where did Pound’s trust come from? Fenollosa’s notes were incomplete and Pound did not understand Chinese. By any measure of means, this was a hazardous venture. Yet rich sources of imagism in classical Chinese poetry coincided with Pound’s poetics. He believed that his appropriative translation of Chinese poetry could serve the purpose of “rejuvenating English poetry” (Xie 1999: 3). In addition, it has been pointed out by Chao and Zhao in their essay that war themes resonated with Pound and in light of this consideration, some of the poems selected are linked with war, including 诗经·小雅·采薇 (Song of the Bowmen of Shu), 古风十四·胡矣

(Lament of the Frontier Guard), 古风六代马 (South-Folk in Cold Country) (Chao/Zhao 2011: 194).

In translating the poem entitled “The Beautiful Toilet”, many images appear to be changed by Pound. For instance, consider the first two lines:

青	青	河	畔	草,
blue	blue	river	bank	grass
[green]	[green]			
郁	郁	园	中	柳
luxuriantly	luxuriantly	garden	in	willow
spread the	spread the	[middle]	willow	willow
[dense]	[dense]			

The words in brackets are provided by Yip, and they are corrections to the original notes by Fenollosa (cf. Yip 1969: 313). As Eric Hayot observes, before translating this poem, Pound read Herbert Gile’s early version, which reads “Green grows the grass upon the bank, / The willow-shoots are long and lank [...]” (Hayot 1999: 518). However, Pound chooses to forsake “green”, and instead, adopts “blue” found in Fenollosa. “Blue grass” sounds exotic, conjuring up an alien image. Pound’s translation runs like this:

Blue, blue is the grass about the river
 And the willows have overfilled the close garden. (Pound 2016: 7)

The retention of the repetition of blue in the first line is not repeated in the second line which, in the original, contains another double character 郁郁. This flexible approach shows that Pound takes advantage of his relative ignorance of Chinese poetry, since it spurs his provision of a creative alternative. Thus recreation is brought into full play here. The word “overfilled” illustrates what is meant by “the penetration of *Cathay* across remoteness and linguistic intermediacy” (Steiner 1975/1998: 378). As can be seen, this line is completely recast so as to give rise to an image different to that which is presented in the original. The verb “overfilled” is much more animated and powerful than Gile’s linking verb “are” in his translation of the poem. This act of appropriation, Steiner argues, constitutes an aggressive decipherment (ibid.: 315). However, its

aggressiveness is not destructive or disabling. On the contrary, the semantic integrity of the original is successfully reproduced and its aesthetic appeal, if anything, is distinctly enhanced.

6 The Translator's Subjectivity

Numerous articles by Chinese scholars are devoted to the subjectivity of the translator, and these are primarily inspired by Steiner's hermeneutic theory of translation. The concept of the translator's subjectivity is antithetical to the traditional understanding of faithfulness associated with translation. In general, Chinese translation scholars respond to *After Babel* by foregrounding the translator's subjectivity in reference to the first stage of trust. It has been observed that the translator's subjectivity is embedded in 'trust' (Xu/Gao 2018: 47). The trust of the translator in the Other is construed as a reflection and manifestation of the translator's subjectivity. From the point of view of these translation scholars, trust and interpretation are the two major factors contributing to the translator's subjectivity. Steiner's insights into the various modes of interpretation have accordingly generated many discussions on how the translator's subjectivity is brought to bear on the practice of translation.

It is generally believed that the precipitating factor of translation is 'trust', and we can see this demonstrated in the translations of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. By comparing the translators of two versions, Sun Yingchun asserts that both translators certainly displayed trust before embarking on their translation tasks. While still an undergraduate student at Peking University, Zhang Guruo was engrossed with Hardy's works. After years of reading and study, he found himself identifying with Hardy and, as a result, felt increasingly aligned with the author (cf. Sun 2004: 3). The other translator, Sun Zhili, lionized Hardy's *Tess*, calling it "a great masterpiece of tragedy" and "a bright pearl in the treasure house of world literature" (Sun/Tang 2005: i).

The translator's subjectivity is linked with creativity, which is an antithesis to the invisibility conventionally cast upon the transla-

tor. To embellish the putative banality of the original, the translator may add adorning elements to translation. This interfering visibility is aggressive as we can see it expounded in the second stage of Steiner's hermeneutic motion. As is shown in the following example by Wu Qian, part of the conquering act seems to be "excessive" (Wu 2008: 121). For the descriptive account of beautiful young women in the original text of *Tess*: "beautiful eyes, beautiful nose, beautiful mouth and figure", Zhang Guroo uses a series of four-character phrases: "美目流盼", "鼻准端正", "樱唇巧笑" and "身材苗条". The back translation can help demonstrate the differences: "bewitching glances of a beauty", "an upright nose", "Cherry lips smiling" and "a slender figure" – this constitutes the typical portrait of "an ancient Chinese beauty". The localized classical Chinese aesthetics is obtrusively foregrounded as some of the original parts are backgrounded. In a sense, this translation strategy can be regarded as a measure of compensation as posited by Steiner. However, the way to address what might be perceived as imbalance seems to be disproportionate, and this makes for an unbalanced rhetoric and an exaggeration of description, reducing thereby the interpretative space for the target reader. This unbridled use of compensation in Chinese translation is not entirely uncommon. In the same vein, it can be imputed to the subjectivity of the translator – now allowed or configured to come to the fore. By contrast, however, in Sun's version, four adjectives, namely "ravishing", "pretty", "delectable" and "graceful" are used in a straightforward manner and in parallelism to the syntactical structure in the source text. Two different aesthetic perceptions are represented through this comparison (Wu 2008: 121). As is expected, what this seems to attest to is none other than the translator's subjectivity. The translator as non-author becomes the translator as author.

This appropriative translation is in the stage of aggression. To further illustrate this point, a more subtle difference can be detected in the following translation:

He was inexorable, and she sat still, and d'Urberville gave her *the kiss of mastery*. (Hardy 1891/2005: 61; my italics)

但是他却丝毫不肯通融,所以她只得坐稳了,让他硬迫强逼,吻了一下。

The back translation is that “she [...] allowed him to force a kiss on her”.
(Hardy 1891/1984: 65)

德伯维尔毫不通融,苔丝一动不动地坐着,德伯维尔老练地亲了她一下。

The back translation is that “d’Urberville kissed her with dexterity”.

(Sun/Tang 2005: 33)

Both interpretations are supported by dictionary definitions and the context involved is exactly the same. Why this difference? This is also classified as “aggression” (Wu 2008: 121). It can be said that subjectivity is allowed to play a key role here. It is up to the translator to make the right judgement based on his/her consideration of the contextual information.

As I stated earlier, what is closely related to the translator’s subjectivity is trust. But trust is not something that can be taken for granted. If occasional portions of the original are meaningless or simply untranslatable, trust can be eroded (cf., for instance, Miao/Hu 2012: 53). In addition, trust is also shown to pertain to the value and significance of the source text. In short, an interpretive style of translating the source text tends to be ascribed to the translator’s subjectivity, which is often turned into the description and analysis of translation performance. The heightened preoccupation with and unremitting attention to the translator’s subjectivity on the part of many Chinese translation scholars is rather enigmatic but what is apparently clear is that this notion is indebted to Steiner’s theory, albeit in a curiously oblique way.

7 Concluding remarks

As Steiner complained himself, many translation scholars, including those attacking his theory, have used his ideas without proper acknowledgement. However, this can hardly be said to be the case in China, where his *After Babel* has been well received and readily acknowledged. The practice of production, transmission and reception, as Steiner characterises it, has been well linked with his four stages of the translation process, just as Steiner’s account of

that process and those stages have been extensively applied to analytic approaches. Admittedly, to some extent, *After Babel* is reduced or essentialized to a theory of hermeneutics or a hermeneutic theory of interpretation. But the benefit of Steiner's insight and inspiration has provided Chinese translation scholars with powerful research tools. In the meantime, they are also very much mindful of what Steiner emphasises in respect of achieving balance in translation by means of compensation. With the publication of the unabridged translation of this book, there is reason to expect that there will be unflagging interest in his hermeneutic motion and newfound interest in other aspects of *After Babel*. At any rate, all of this has contributed, and will continue to contribute to the development of translation research in China.

8 References

- BAIDU ENCYCLOPEDIA. URL: <<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%80%9A%E5%A4%A9%E5%A1%94%E4%B9%8B%E5%90%8E%E5%BC%9A%E8%AF%AD%E8%A8%80%E4%B8%8E%E7%BF%BB%E8%AF%91%E9%9D%A2%E9%9D%A2%E8%A7%82>> (05.03.2021)
- CHAN, Tak-hung / CHANG, Nam-fung [eds.] (2000): *Xifang fanyi lilin jingxuan* [Masterpieces in Western Translation Theory]. Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press.
- CHAO, Zheng / ZHAO, Zhengjun (2011): "Cong sitanna chanshibuzhou kan hua-xiaji yizhe de zhutixing" ["On the Translator's Subjectivity Reflected in Cathay in the Light of George Steiner's Hermeneutic Motion"]. In: *Overseas English* 20/6, pp. 193–196.
- DONG, Qiao (1996): *Dong Qiao Wenlu* [Collection of Essays by Dong Qiao]. Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe.
- HARDY, Thomas (1891/2005): *Tess of the D'urbervilles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- id. (1891/1984): *Tess of the D'urbervilles*. Trans. by Zhang Guruo. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe.
- HAYOT, Eric (1999): "Critical Dreams: Orientalism, Modernism, and the Meaning of Pound's China". In: *Twentieth Century Literature* 45/4, pp. 511–533.
- JIN, Jinghong / LI, Siguo (2003): "Sitanna he ledailei de chanshi fanyi lilun pingjie" ["The Hermeneutic Translation Theories of Steiner and Lederer"]. In: *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching* 4/9, pp. 44–47.

- LI, Xiaojun (2015): “Qiaozhi sitanna: qiren, qiuzu, jiqizai zhongguo de yijie” [“George Steiner: the man, his works and translations in China”]. In: *East Journal of Translation* 6/1, pp. 48–52.
- LIAO, Qiyi [ed.] (2001): *Dangdai yingguo fanyi lilun* [Contemporary British Translation Theories]. Wuhan: Hubei Education Press.
- LIU, Zheng (2009): “Fangkaiile, xinzhong de moguihetianshi douchulaile” [“Let go. Both the devil and angel in the heart are out”]. In: *Oriental Morning Post*, 27 September 2009. URL: <<https://www.douban.com/group/topic/18559308/>> (05.03.2021).
- MIAO, Fengbo / HU, Sile (2012): “Xiandai chanshixue shijiaoxia sitanna de fanyi lilun” [“Steiner’s Translation Theory from the Perspective of Modern Hermeneutics”]. In: *Journal of Inner Mongolia University of Technology* 21/2, pp. 52–55.
- POUND, Ezra (2016): *Cathay, For the Most Part from the Chinese of Ribaku: From the Notes of the Late Ernest Fenollosa, And the Decipherings of the Professors Mori and Ariga*. London: Elkin Mathews.
- SAID, Edward (1993): *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred Knopf.
- STEINER, George (1998): *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- id. (1975/2001): *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press
- id. (2008): *My Unwritten Books*. New York: New Directions Publishing.
- SUN, Yingchun (2004): *Zhang Guroo fanyi yishu yanjiu* [Study of Zhang Guroo’s art of translation]. Beijing: China Translation and Publishing Corporation.
- SUN, Zhili / TANG, Huixin (2005): “Preface”. In: *Tuomasi hadai taisi* [Tess by Thomas Hardy]. Trans. by Sun Zhili and Tang Huixin. Beijing: Yanshan chubanshe.
- WANG, Zuoliang (1994): *Yingguo samven de liubian* [The Evolution of English Prose]. Beijing: Commercial Press.
- WU, Qian (2008) “Qiaozhi sitanna chanshi fanyi lilun guanzhaoxia de yizhe zhutixing – taisi liange zhongyiben duibi fenxi” [“The Translator’s Subjectivity from the Perspective of Hermeneutic Translation Theory: A Comparative Analysis of Two Chinese Versions of Tess”]. In: *Journal of Dalian Maritime University* (Social Sciences Edition) 7/2, pp. 120–123.
- XIA, Tian (2009): “Sitanna chanshi yunzuo lilun de yingyong, wenti yu fangfa” [“Application of G. Steiner’s Theory of Hermeneutic Motion: Adaptation and Extension”]. In: *Foreign Languages Research* 25/3, pp. 81–87.
- XIE, Ming (1999): *Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry: Cathay, Translation, and Imagism*. New York: Garland Publishing.
- XIE, Tianzhen (2008): *Dangdai guonwai fanyi lilun* [Contemporary Foreign Translation Theories]. Tianjin: Nankai University Press.

- XU, Yuli / GAO, Cun (2018): “Qiaozhi·sitanna chanshi yunzuo lilunzhong de zhutixing” [“The translator’s Subjectivity of George Steiner’s Theory of Hermeneutics”]. In: *English Square* 7/3, pp. 46–47.
- YE, Fangfang (2020): “Fanyi lilun piping: qiaochi stantanna sibuzhou chanshiunzuo lilun bianxi” [“Criticism of Translation Theory: An Analysis of George Steiner’s Four Phases of Hermeneutic Theory”]. In: *Journal of Lanzhou University of Arts and Science* 36/1, pp. 105–111.
- YIP, Wai-Lim (1969): *Ezra Pound’s Cathay*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- ZHUANG, Yichuan (1987): “Preface”. In: *Tongjianta: wenxue fanyi lilun yanjiu* [Babel: *Studies in Theories of Literary Translation*]. Beijing: China Translation and Publishing Corporation, pp. iii–vii.