

Book Review

Fan Shengyu. *The Translator's Mirror for the Romantic: Cao Xueqin's Dream and David Hawkes' Stone*. Oxon and New York: Routledge. 2022. ISBN: 9781032147741. 250 pp.

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In 2022, Dr Fan Shengyu's book *The Translator's Mirror for the Romantic: Cao Xueqin's Dream and David Hawkes' Stone* was published by Routledge. This work is a general guide to the master translator David Hawkes and his English version of the all-time classic Chinese novel *The Story of the Stone*, also known as *The Dream of Red Chamber* (*Honglouloumeng*). Fan's close reading of the original and translation allows readers a better appreciation of the style of both and an understanding of the serious playfulness with which Hawkes approached his work as a translator. The work, featuring numerous detailed comparisons between Cao Xueqin's and David Hawkes' lives and characters, offers its readers a fresh perspective to look at the novel *Honglouloumeng* and its translation *Stone* as two sides of the same coin and brings them closer to the true taste of them both.

Cao Xueqin's *Honglouloumeng* (traditionally translated as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*) could be regarded as the most sophisticated book by Chinese readers ever since its birth. The novel enjoys a special status in Chinese literature, and redology, the academic study of *Dream*, is becoming ever more active on the world stage. The seemingly romantic *Dream* has an all-encompassing content as John Minford observes: "Over the years, almost every part of the Chinese-speaking liter-

ary, philosophical, religious and political universe ... has become somehow or other engaged with the novel and its interpretation” (307). The Chinese writer and literary critic Lu Xun (1881–1936) concludes that different groups of readers will see different things in *Dream*: “Classical scholars see in it signs from the *I Ching*, Confucian pedants see debauchery, talented young scholars see love affairs, revolutionaries see the anti-Manchu sentiment, while gossip-mongers see scandals from the Imperial Palace” (145). The popularity and influence of *Dream* in China could be seen in the saying that “even if you were well-versed in the classics, if you could not talk about *Dream*, you were still deemed to be uncouth” (De 354). Despite its great reputation among Chinese readers, the comprehensive masterpiece is notorious for its difficulty in being translated as there are dense allusions, jargon from various fields, hundreds of characters’ names and nicknames, and all types of classical Chinese poetry, among others. As for today, most of the novel’s translations are excerpts, and the whole book has been translated by a very limited few, among which the two most famous versions are Gladys Yang’s and David Hawkes’. Hawkes is a master translator and Sinologist who translated the first eighty chapters of Cao’s *Dream*, and the latter forty were finished by John Minford. It is no exaggeration to say that *The Story of the Stone* is the lifeblood of David Hawkes, which could be proven by his resignation of professorship in 1917 from the University of Oxford “to devote himself fulltime to translating *Dream*” (9). Fan’s *Mirror* is a book that decodes the translator’s art in *Stone* and clarifies what makes it a classic.

Fan’s *Mirror* argues that literary translation should be an art piece, and Hawkes’ *Stone* is a perfect embodiment of this idea. The work illustrates Hawkes as a translator at work—from his preparation to revision, and how, in a transformative manner, he dealt with the pragmatic and poetic aspects of *Dream*. Fan addresses a wide range of topics in six chapters of his book. Chapter One depicts Hawkes’ early life and how that fits into his later encounter with *Dream* and a lifelong commitment to *The Story of the Stone*. This chapter highlights that Hawkes’ creativity is a result of both his knowledge in Sinology and his cultivation in the fields of gardening, painting, music, and poetry. Chapter Two analyses how Hawkes handles textual issues and the way he collates the source texts before translating. Fan expounds that the textual critic role of Hawkes is a primary part of the success of *Stone*. Chapters Three to Six comprise the second part of the book, which concerns the idea of Hawkes’ sensitivity and creativity as a writer. Chapter Three reveals sound, shape, and style featuring the original work and how the translator manages to reproduce the visual and acoustic effects in *Stone*. By examining the specific techniques that Hawkes adopted in creating the visual and aural effects, this chapter demonstrates

Hawkes' ability to engage the reader. Moreover, the way that Hawkes relates sound, shape, and style to the delivery of emotion and meaning also provides the reader with a unique perspective of the "Hawkesian world." Hawkes' expert knowledge and command of English slang, social register, and rhetoric skills allowed him to recast social hierarchies and personal relationships in *Dream*. In Chapter Four, Fan indicates that just like its original work *Dream*, *Stone* is full of word games, and he offers clues to decoding the hidden meaning constructed by Hawkes in various forms. According to David Crystal, a writer's playfulness is reflected on several levels: typographical, sound-based, letter-based, and word-structure play (Carrol, 20). Fan illustrated Hawkes' imagination and genius ability of wordplay on these four levels, which further testifies that Hawkes is a very capable translator and an insightful reader of *Stone*. Chapter Five restores some essential aspects and stages of the translator's laborious revision process and points out that the key to a good translation is revision. For Hawkes, revision is a never-ending process. Fan presents some of the key revisions made in *Stone* from its initial manuscripts and typescripts to its published form. Fan also examined the translator's drafts, notes and writers, all of which showed Hawkes' enormous attention to detail in his revision. Chapter Six deals with the controversial issue of translating allusions. In line with Fan's argument that "literary translation is more literature than translation" (xxxiv), he elaborates how Hawkes as a novelist (rather than a translator) pays homage to his predecessors by giving examples of using Western literary allusions in the rendition of a Chinese novel. Readers can find a plethora of Greek and Latin elements and English classics.

Fan's *Mirror* encompasses multiple topics with quite in-depth views. Just as the title of the book, *Translator's Mirror for the Romantic*, indicates, Hawkes' *Stone* and the original *Dream* are the "two sides of a mirror" (Fan 167). The former is not only a translated text of the latter but also stands as a work of literature itself — a world constructed by Hawkes. Fan's *Mirror* offers its readers an approach to interpreting Hawkes' *Stone* and also, in a way, an opportunity to get closer to *Dream* through Hawkes' unique perspectives. Specifically, Fan presents the Hawkesian world to the reader in two general aspects: Hawkes' ability as a translator and his creativity as a writer. Regarding the first aspect, Fan reviews Hawkes' upbringing and educational background to demonstrate how his personal experiences helped him understand the setting and the social environment of an aristocratic family of *Dream*. Besides that, Fan devotes much ink to explicating Hawkes' language aptitude and his erudition in Sinology, which are the foundation for a successful translation. A pivotal point to Hawkes' great sensitivity comes from his mastery of several

languages, which helped him in more than one way. As illustrated by Fan in Chapter One, Hawkes referred to numerous materials about *Dream* researched by Japanese redologists, which turned out to be useful in text collation. Furthermore, since there are countless allusions in the Chinese original and most of them cannot find counterparts in English, translating these cultural-specific expressions is deemed impossible by the majority of translators. Hawkes, as a polyglot, solved this tricky problem by deploying allusions in multiple languages, including French, Latin, and Greek, which is evidenced in his *Stone*. In Chapter Five of *Mirror*, the author gives a list of examples of the Western allusions adopted by Hawkes. The reason that Fan advances Hawkes' practice of using Western allusions in the translation of a Chinese novel is threefold. First of all, Fan holds that literary translation should also be an artwork itself. Therefore, the freedom of creativity on the translator's part is required, and the traditional sense of faithfulness is not always favourable for reproducing a masterpiece like *Dream* in another language. Moreover, the act of referring to European literature is a mimicry of Cao's love for using a wide range of allusions in *Dream*. What is more, the integration of classic English, Greek, and Latin literary elements into a Chinese novel has added to the depth and width of Hawkes' *Stone* and brought a unique personality to it.

Another advantage of *Mirror* is the explanation of how Hawkes' cultivation of art and his personality contributed to the translation of *Dream*. Cao's *Dream* is regarded as an encyclopedia because it contains knowledge of religion, philosophy, music, opera, poetry, painting, medicine, architecture, horticulture, tailoring, culinary art, and politics. As observed by Fan, Hawkes' curious nature and personal interests in various forms of art such as music, painting, and gardening enabled him to be sensitive to the fine details of the subjects in these areas and translate them to his own taste. In addition, based on his contacts with Hawkes and thorough research, Fan notices that Hawkes' "profoundly melancholy attitudes toward life" (12) echo Cao's despair and depression as well as the tragic tone of *Dream*. On top of that, Hawkes resonated so intensely with the rebellious protagonist Baoyu of the novel, as can be seen when he relinquished professorship together with the strictures of the academic world before devoting wholeheartedly to translation (Fan 10).

Admittedly, Fan's *Mirror* is excellent guidance for readers to explore Hawkes' way of understanding and rewriting *Dream*. Some of the author's views about Hawkes can be subjective and fail to analyse the translator's unideal parts of *Stone*. Except for very limited examples of Hawkes' revised part covered in Chapter Five, Fan hardly mentioned any other "mistakes" in *Stone* as a translated text. Though Fan does not directly address the issue of translatability in the book, it makes sense

to deduce that he is pretty optimistic about the feasibility of translation by inventing new ways to get an idea across. This also explains why he thinks highly of Hawkes' approaches to conundrums, including poetry, allusions and even sound effects in translation. However, whether all of Hawkes' inventions are "ingenious strokes" or not remains elusive. An immediate case in this regard is Hawkes' rendition of names. In *Stone*, he used innumerable Greek or Latin names when translating those of religious practitioners in the novel — be they Taoists, Buddhist nuns or monks. For example, *jingxu*, which literally means "quiet and void," is translated by Hawkes as *euergesia* (a Greek word for "beneficence" or "good deed done"), and his version of *miaoyu*, whose literal meaning is "wonderful jade" is *adamantina* ("adamant" or "diamond"), to name only a few. Fan agrees with this way of translation as he comments that "[t]hese Latin-sounding names are used to give an impression of a scholarly or religious aura" (Fan 171). Nevertheless, using these culture-loaded names could be misleading as target readers familiar with the Latin literature would inevitably connect a character in the novel with the stereotypical impression embedded in a foreign name.

From the perspective of translation studies, the book is educational as translators can learn both specific translation methods with detailed text analysis and get inspiration from the predecessor's creative practices. Translation critics would be interested in finding how a nontheoretical way could be used in evaluating literary translation. For monolingual readers of *Stone*, *Mirror* is of much value as a guidebook to acquiring a deeper understanding of the novel's gist and means of artistic expression; for those who have read both the Chinese original and English translation of *Dream*, this book deciphers the easily overlooked word games and unveils covert allusions built in *Stone* by Hawkes. The book also has much to offer to the discipline of comparative literature as Fan makes some novel comments when he compares the Western and Chinese copious forms of poetry, ballads, allusions and rhetorical devices throughout the book. Fan's whole book is an attempt to promote the idea that a literary translation should have its own artistic value and expressive ambitions (192). Just as Fan suggests with the name of his book *Mirror* — readers should scrutinise *Dream* and *Stone* "side by side with enquiry, wonder and empathy and embrace language's power to move and change" (192).

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