

**中国典籍英译之挑战：以
《后汉书·桓谭冯衍列传》
的英译为例**

**Challenges in Translating
Chinese Classics into
English: Example of
*Biography of Huan Tan
and Feng Yan from Book
of the Later Han*¹**

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范晔《后汉书》作为“前四史”之一，富有很高的史学价值，同时也具有一定的文学价值，很多东汉的文章都赖以保全。随着西方汉学界对中文古籍的日趋重视，翻译的学术价值与实用价值愈加重要。笔者首次英译《后汉书·桓谭冯衍列传》，在翻译过程中，认为古文译英有三个问题值得注意。古文英译并非一蹴而就，往往需要借助白话翻

As one of the Early Four Historiographies, Fan Ye's *Book of the Later Han* preserves significant works of both historical and literary value. This is something increasingly significant in response to the dynamic growth in popularity of classical Chinese texts among Western sinologists. Through reading the English translation of the

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译（语内翻译），再完成英译（语际翻译）。然而，白话翻译是一把双刃剑，借鉴时要特别注意其中的误读与错误。其次，《后汉书》中收录了很多作家的文章，常常引经据典，若不对其背后深意加以剖析与注解，英译的文字不利于受众阅读理解。再次，历史学是高度跨学科的综合研究，对译者的知识素养要求极高，在这一文本细读与精研的过程中会促进更新的学术研究。本文以《后汉书·桓谭冯衍列传》的英译为个案，对以上三个问题加以分析探讨，以彰显古籍英译是一项充满挑战又富有意义的工作。

[关键词] 早期中国史学；《后汉书》；《桓谭冯衍列传》；中国典籍；英译

“Biography of Huan Tan and Feng Yan” from the *Book of the Later Han*, the following three issues are arguably noteworthy for the translator’s consideration. Firstly, the English translation may involve an interim step of intralingual translation from classical Chinese to modern Chinese, before a subsequent interlingual translation from modern Chinese to English. While this facilitates the process of translation, the vernacular translation also involves further risks in misinterpretation. Secondly, translation of such historiographical work which consists of literary works by various writers with numerous historical references, not only requires the translator to conduct additional analysis and write explanatory notes, it also makes the English output inaccessible to most readers. Thirdly, the highly interdisciplinary knowledge in relevant historiography not only demands a high quality of competency in translators, but also arguably acts as a catalyst for further academic research in the process of close reading and research. This paper intends to analyse the above three issues through a case study on the “Biography of Huan Tan and Feng Yan”, thereby demonstrating how the translation of Chinese classics is an arduous yet meaningful challenge.

Key words: early Chinese Historiography; *Book of the Later Han*; Biography of Huan Tan and Feng Yan; Chinese classics; English Translation.

Starting from Sima Qian (c. 145-86 BCE), the first historian to employ a structured approach in the writing of history, there was an imperial tradition of officially compiling standard history. *Records of the Grand Historian* 史記, *Book of Han* 漢書, *Records of the Three Kingdoms* 三國志 and *Book of the Later Han* 後漢書 are known as the Early Four Historiographies 前四史, and are also recognized as the most important four historiographies among all the Twenty-Four Histories which covered a period from 3000

BC to the Ming dynasty in the 17th century. It is not surprising that in this increasingly globalized world, there are increasingly more Western scholars studying Chinese history, so as to better understand Chinese culture. This is not only for their own interests, but also due to China's raising power in the emerging modern society. According to the *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide* by David Knechtges, the very first scholar who started the translation work of Chinese historiography was French sinologist Édouard Chavannes who translated the *Records of the Grand Historian* into French (Chavannes, Édouard, 1895-1905). A lot of translation work was done thereafter, such as *Records of the Grand Historian of China* (Watson, Burton, 1961), *Records of the Historians* (Yang Hsien-yi, Gladys Yang, 1974), *Historical Records* (Raymond Stanley Dawson, 1994), and *The Grand Scribe's Records* (William H. Nienhauser Jr., 1994-, ongoing translation), etc. Chinese historiographies were not only translated into English, but they were also translated into other languages including Russian (Vyatkin, Rudolf V., 1972-2002; Vyatkin, Anatoly R., 2010), Japanese (Mizusawa Toshitada, Yoshida Kenkō, 1996-1998), Danish (Svane, Gunnar O. 2007) and German (Gregor Kneussel, Alexander Saechtig, 2016).

The subsequent historiography, *Book of Han* had only one full translation by American sinologist Homer H. Dubs (Dubs, Homer H., 1938-1955), followed by selective translations such as *A Translation of the Official Account of His Rise to Power as Given in the History of the Former Han Dynasty, with Introduction and Notes* (Sargent, Cyde B., 1947) and *Food and Money in Ancient China: The Earliest Economic History of China to A.D. 25* (Swann, Nancy Lee, 1950). Similarly, for *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, the *Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel* (Roberts, Moss, 1991) is the only full English translation on record, nonetheless, more translations could be found in Japanese (Miyakawa Hisayuko, 1960; Imataka Makoto, Inami Ristuko, and Kominami Ichirō, 1977-1989; Maruyama Matsuyuki, 1979-1980).

Compared to the other three historiographies, the *Book of the Later Han* compiled by Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445) seemed to be the neglected one among all four early historiographies. The full translations are either in German (Zach, Erwin von, 1958) or Japanese (Fujita Shizen, 1970; Watanabe Yoshihiro, 2001). As far as we know, other than the three chapters that have been translated into English, i.e. "Three Generals of Later Han" (Young, 1984), "Hou Han shu: Biographies of Recluses" (Watson, 1990) and "The Hou Han shu *Biography of* Cai Yong (a. d. 132/133-192)" (Asselin, 1991), there

is only a selective English on-going translation project under Shu-Hui Wu at Mississippi State University. Though the records in Knechtges' reference may not cover all varieties of the translation and research works, it clearly indicated the following two facts. Firstly, more researches await to be done on the *Book of the Later Han*. Secondly, the full English translation of the *Book of the Later Han* is not yet available.

Huan Tan 桓谭 (c. 43 BCE-28 CE) and Feng Yan 冯衍 (c. 20 BCE-60 CE) were usually considered as writers and politicians from the Eastern Han although they lived through the period from the late Western Han, Xin dynasty, to the early Eastern Han. Huan Tan was also famous for his *Xin Lun* 新论 (New Disquisitions). For the first time, we translated the "Biography of Huan Tan and Feng Yan" 桓谭冯衍传, *juan 28* of the *Book of the Later Han*, into English, and in the process we found that the following three issues are arguably important for the translator's consideration.

Classical Chinese text is very concise and comprehensive; however, the translation from classical Chinese to English requires one additional step in between, which is the translation from the classical Chinese text to modern Chinese, otherwise known as intralingual translation. This is followed by a translation from modern Chinese to English, which is known as interlingual translation. The following paper will discuss the challenges in the intralingual translation and interlingual translation respectively.

1. Double-edged Sword: The Impact of the Vernacular (Baihua) Translation

Vernacular translation is useful in helping us understanding the classical Chinese text, however, some translators; native Chinese speakers included, might have some misinterpretations or overlooked some details during the process of intralingual translation. This paper has chosen to take a close look at three different books, *Vernacular Translations of the Twenty-Four Histories* (Xu Jialu, 2004), hereinafter referred to as the *Quanyi Edition*, *New Translation of the Book of the Later Han* (Wei Lianke, 2013), hereinafter referred to as the *Xinyi Edition* and *Vernacular Twenty-Four Histories* (Xie Shengming, 1999), hereinafter referred to as the *Baihua Edition*, aims to elaborate more on the above mentioned three issues through a close reading of the three books, and finally to propose a viable approach for translating classical Chinese text into English. Below are some of the causes for the misinterpretations:

1.1. Omission of the Subject/Object

Original text

夫有國之君，俱欲興化建善，然而政道未理者，其所謂賢者異也。(Book of the Later Han: 640)

Rulers who governed the country all wanted to develop education and establish good morals. However, the reason why politics is not clear, is because there is a difference in the so-called sages.

Quanyi Edition

所以執政國君，都想要興教化立善德，然而政治未能清明的原因，就在於所說的輔佐大臣是否賢明。(Xu, 2004: 718)

Thus, the rulers who govern the country, all wanted to develop education and set up good morals, yet the reason why politics is not incorruptible, is because the assisting ministers are not sagacious.

Xinyi Edition

凡是執政的君主，都想要興教化而建善政，然而政局沒有治理好的根源，是對所謂的賢者的認識不同。(Wei, 2013: 1541)

The rulers who govern the country all wanted to develop education and carry out good governance, the reason they failed to do so, is the difference in their knowledge towards the sages.

Baihua Edition

作為國家的君主，都想興教化建善政，然而政事不能治理好，是由於賢者意見不一。(Xie, 1999)

As the rulers of the country, they all wanted to develop education and carry out good governance; the reason for the lousy governance is that the opinions of the sages are not unified.

Our English Translation

Thus, the reason for failing to achieve sober politics for an emperor who wants to be virtuous and keen in civilizing the people, is (his judgment towards) the sages are different.

We can see two different meanings for the last clause from the three books. The first translation refers to the previous sentence, i.e. the sagacious minister, hence the word “difference (異)” is in comparison with the emperor’s “sagacity (賢明)”. The second translation refers to the previous clause, i.e. the emperor, hence the clause has omitted the subject “the emperor”. The last translation refers to the opinions among the ministers with the omission of the object “opinions”. It is clear that the first two translations have the same rationale behind the translations, which is that the clause is the conclusion of the previous messages, though the former emphasises the competency of the ministers while the latter

emphasises the competency of the emperor. The last translation is probably based on the example that Huan Tan wrote in the following sentences, the conversation between King Zhuang of Chu 楚莊王 (r. 613-591 BCE) and his court minister Sunshu Ao 孫叔敖 (r. 630-593 BCE) on how to manage the country. The moral of the conversation is to show that the country should not be governed by the emperor himself, but together with his ministers. It also highlighted that conflicts between those two parties would affect the country as well.

Huan Tan stated clearly, at the start of his memorial, *I heard that the rise or fall of a country depends on governance while the success or failure of governance depends on the ministers*. This tells us that the purpose of his entire paragraph cited here, was to suggest for the emperor to not only select capable ministers, but also to support their political propositions, so that these sagacious ministers would avoid duplicating the failures of Jia Yi 賈誼 (c. 200-169 BCE) and Chao Cuo 晁錯 (ca. 200-154 BCE). Therefore, the authors believed that the second translation is more appropriate in the context by putting the responsibility of selecting the right sagacious ministers on the emperor's shoulder.

1.2. Unclear Reference of Pronouns

Original text

帝大怒曰：“桓譚非聖無法，將下斬之。” (*Book of the Later Han*: 643)

The emperor in a huge rage said: “Huan Tan is not a sage and is lawless. Bring him out and execute him.”

Quanyi Edition

皇帝大怒說：“桓譚非議聖上無視國法，推下斬首。” (Xu, 2004: 720)

The emperor raged and said, “Huan Tan criticizes the Emperor and defies the law, take him out and behead him.”

Xinyi Edition

光武帝大怒道：“桓譚誹謗聖人，目無禮法，推下去斬了！” (Wei, 2013: 1546)

Emperor Guangwu raged and said, “Huan Tan defames the sages and has no respect for etiquette, take him out and execute him.”

Baihua Edition

帝大怒說：“桓譚非聖無法，帶下去斬首。” (Xie, 1999)

(Note: Almost similar as the original text in the *Book of the Later Han*)

Our English Translation

The emperor was so incensed that he said, “Take Huan Tan out and behead him, for his contempt of me and the law.”

In the above example, we see three different versions of vernacular translation. Without a doubt, the last version, i.e. *Baihua Edition* is hardly useful in helping us translate the text into English as it is not a precise translation. It is an interesting phenomenon that some of the Chinese terms are neglected during the process of intralingual translation, especially among native Chinese-speaking scholars. We may not necessarily conclude that the translators had difficulties in understanding the classical Chinese text, however, to some extent, we would argue that they either had the perception that some terms are too conventional and thus, removing the need to translate them, or they lack a rigorous attitude towards intralingual translation. Back to our question, is Huan Tan criticizing the Emperor or the sages? Or is he defying the law or misconducting himself?

The “Biography of Zhou Xie” said, “(Zhou Xie) does not read books that are not written by the sages” (周燮)不讀非聖之書 (*Book of the Later Han*: 1175), the “Biography of Zhang Heng” said, “Zhang Heng thinks apocryphal texts are ridiculous and thus, not from the teachings of the sages” 衡以圖緯虛妄，非聖人之法 (*Book of the Later Han*: 1291), while the “Biography of Confucians” said, “apocryphal texts are not written by the sages.” 讖書非聖人所作 (*Book of the Later Han*: 1726). The above quotes showed us that the word “sage” (聖) usually has a meaning related to Confucianism, which opposes against the reading of apocryphal texts. Huan Tan replied Emperor Guangwu (5BCE-57CE) saying, “I do not read apocryphal texts” 臣不讀讖, then he talked about the unreliability and ridiculousness of those texts. At this moment, how could Emperor Guangwu be judging him on his criticism on the sages? Hence, the authors believed that Emperor Guangwu was referring to himself.

Huan Tan was so outspoken despite knowing how Emperor Guangwu was obsessed with the reading of apocryphal texts.

According to the laws of the Han dynasty, Huan Tan’s act would probably fall under “criticising the emperor, with defamatory words, is a very serious offence” 指斥皇帝，發言誹謗而情理切 (Wen, Zhang, 2014), and is considered to be insulting or embarrassing the Emperor. To the ancient Chinese, being disrespectful to the Emperor, 大不敬, is considered to be the most serious crime. This is the juridical logic of Emperor Guangwu when he sentenced Huan Tan to death. Moreover, “Fa” 法 (law) and “Li” 禮 (etiquette) are two different concepts, or contrary concepts in ancient China. It is stated clearly in the first *juan* of *Book of Lord Shang* 商君書 that, “Law, is to take good care of the people; etiquette, is to create convenience for implementation” 法者，所以愛民也；禮者，所以便事也.

Thus, contempt of the emperor and the law were the reason why Emperor Guangwu wanted to behead Huan Tan.

2. Between the Lines: The Implication of Allusions

English is a more explicated language when compared to Chinese. Moreover, classical Chinese text has an allusive style of writing; thus, it is a source of difficulty in our understanding of the deeper meaning behind the literal meaning during the process of interlingual translation from Chinese to English. Hence, native English-speaking readers might encounter some problems in understanding the allusions within classical Chinese text.

2.1. Omission of Allusions

Original text

是故賈誼以才逐，而晁錯以智死。(Book of the Later Han: 640)

The above sentence is from Huan Tan's memorial. We must understand the fact that during the Han eras, the people are well acquainted with the magnificent contributions of Jia Yi and Chao Cuo, it is, thus, not necessarily for Huan Tan to write too much about them. However, it is now more than one thousand years from that era, hence, modern readers might not be able to understand Huan Tan's objective without the aid of professional knowledge if we directly translate the text to "Jia Yi was expelled because of his talents, Chao Cuo was killed because of his wisdom".

Hence, it would be better if we could add a footnote to serve as a further explanation. For example:

1) Jia Yi was frequently opposed by a group of senior officials who had been early supporters of Liu Bang, the founder of the Han dynasty, and who continued to hold important positions under Emperor Wen. This old-guard faction, probably feeling that Jia was a threat to their own positions, protested when Emperor Wen was considering to promote Jia to a ministerial post, saying that Jia was "young and just beginning his studies, yet he concentrates all his desires on arrogating authority to himself, and has brought chaos and confusion to everything."

年少初學，專欲擅權，紛亂諸事 (Book of the Later Han: 2222)

2) Chao Cuo help orchestrated the central government's efforts to reduce in size and undermining the subordinate kingdoms within the Han Empire. When disaffected kings of seven different kingdoms plotted rebellion against the central authority, Chao's political enemies at court used this as an excuse to persuade Emperor Jing to remove and eliminate

Chao to appease these kings. Therefore, Emperor Jing had Chao executed in 154 BCE.

The above footnotes are helpful in providing a friendlier reading experience for ordinary readers, yet at the same time, they required boarder background knowledge from the translator.

2.2. Twisting of the Allusions

Original text

蓋仲由使門人為臣，孔子譏其欺天。(Book of the Later Han: 652)

Last time when Zhongyou vested his followers as officials, Confucius mocked him for defying heaven.

The above sentence is lifted from the letter written to Feng Yan from Tian Yi. In this letter, Tian Yi supported his point by using an allusion from the *Confucian Analects/IX TSZE HAN*. The original text goes “During a remission of his illness, he said, ‘The Master being very ill’, Tsze-lu appointed the disciples to act as ministers to him. During a remission of his illness, he said, ‘Long has the conduct of Yu been deceitful! By pretending to have ministers when I have them not, whom should I deceive? Should I deceive Heaven?’” 子疾病，子路使門人為臣。病間，曰：“久矣哉，由之行詐也。無臣而為有臣。吾誰欺？欺天乎？” (James Legge, 1861) The tone that Confucius has here is more critical, when compared to Tian Yi’s sarcastic tone. If we translate from the original text, we could not be able to show Tian Yi’s sarcasm towards “Junchang (referring to Bao Yong 鮑永) and Jingtong (referring to Feng Yan) taking the official seals to appoint each other”. Hence, we translate 譏其欺天 into “mocked him for defying heaven” to be more in line with Tian Yi’s tone.

3. Translation: Arduous Interdisciplinary Work

Translating from classical Chinese text to English is an interdisciplinary and knowledgeable work, which requires the translator to do tons of researches, from ancient to modern, from east to west. This may also promote research from a more comprehensive perspective.

3.1. Translation of Historiography is Really Knowledgeable Work

Historiography, like a grocery shop, is a collection of varied works, such as history, literature, language, philology, documentology, politics, culture, religion, sociology, astronomy, military, diplomacy, ritual, etc.

Translation is not a simple language translation. To be a good translator of ancient historiography, you have to know “everything” or have knowledge about many different kinds of subjects. Below are a few examples:

3.1.1. With Religion and Culture

Original text

今諸巧慧小才伎數之人，增益圖書，矯稱讖記，以欺惑貪邪，誑誤人主，焉可不抑遠之哉！臣譚伏聞陛下窮折方士黃白之術，甚為明矣；而乃欲聽納讖記，又何誤也！（*Book of the Later Han: 642*）

Nowadays, some *fangshi* 方士 (Alchemist) added superstitions into the books *hetu* 河圖 (Yellow River Map) and *luoshu* 洛書 (Lo Shu Square), use these as apocryphal texts, spread fallacies to deceive and defraud people, how could we not stop them and stand them off? I have heard that you, the Emperor, used to inquire and analyse into the root of their alchemy, that was brilliant. Yet you still want to hear the apocryphal texts, how paradoxical is this!

In the above example, to avoid confusion, we need to know Chinese religion and culture. For instance, 圖書 is referring to 圖 (Yellow River Map) and 書 (Lo Shu Square), but not the “book” as we all know in English. The Yellow River Map and Lo Shu Square are typical reference books in apocryphal texts.

In Western countries, there are two meanings of 黃白之術, it may refer to the creation of an elixir of immortality, also it may refer to chrysopoeia. However, it is hard to tell the actual meaning in the above context, as there is no difference between the two meanings in ancient China. Therefore, “alchemy” is the word we choose, for it is a generalized term.

3.1.2. With Geography

In the letter written by Feng Yan to Tian Yi 田邑：

夫上黨之地，有四塞之固，東帶三關，西為國蔽。（*Book of the Later Han: 649*）

Shangdang is bound by forts, connected to three passes in the east, protects the country from its west.

The Chinese word “為” has several meanings, with the most commonly used being ‘be’ which is pronounced as ‘wéi’, and ‘for’ which is pronounced as ‘wèi’. Is Shangdang contiguous to the west fort of the country, or is Shangdang protecting the country from the west? To be more accurate with

our translation of the text, we must first investigate the details of the geography.

From the geographical location of Shangdang, to the east lies the Taihang Mountains 太行山, to its south lies the Zhongtiao Mountains 中條山 and to its west lies the Taiyue Mountains 太岳山, the three mountain ranges intersect each other to form an enclosed basin, to the east of this area lies the He Bei Plain, therefore, it was a place that allowed one to occupy a commanding position (GE, 2014: 16). Hence, we could conclude that based on military perspective Shangdang is located at the west of the country and is one of the important forts.

3.1.3. With Lexicology

This is in the imperial decree from Wang Mang to his general Lian Dan.

莽追诏丹曰：“仓廩尽矣，府库空矣，可以怒矣，可以战矣。” (*Book of the Later Han*: 644)

Wang Mang 王莽 (c. 45 BCE-23 CE) sent an order to Lian Dan: “When granaries and repositories are empty, it is the right time to show our wrath and start the war”.

“怒” typically means “anger” in many context. The meaning of the word here could also be similar as Zhuang Zhou’s description about Peng in his *Free and Easy Wandering*, “When Peng is trying its best to fly, its wings are like the clouds in the sky.” (鹏)怒而飞，其翼若垂天之云 (Guo, 1961: 2). In another word, it means “spare no effort”. In fact, the situation Lian Dan was facing could be very similar to what Han Xin faced in the battle of Xing Jing, in terms of their supplies.

A wide range of researches was done by many scholars, including William S. Frederick Mayers’ contribution in the study of political science in China (Mayers, 1877), Rafe de Crespigny’s contribution in the study of history during the Later Han to Three Kingdoms era (De Crespigny, 2006), David R. Knechtges’ contribution in the study of ancient and early medieval Chinese literature (Knechtges, 2010), etc. As a translator, we need to refer to such researches, extract the necessary information and compile them into the translation to make it more comprehensive and accurate.

For example, in Rafe de Crespigny’s book, proper nouns such as 議郎給事中 (Consultant) is defined clearly. We could avoid the wrong translations -供事於禁中 (work at the imperial palace). And avoid translating 掾 (Senior Clerk) to 屬吏 (subordinate).

On top of these, it is important for the readers to train up their skills in understanding classical Chinese text through good dictionaries that specialize in ancient Chinese, such as the recent publication of Professor Paul W. Kroll's *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* (2017). This would help minimize the mistakes which may occur in the process of intralingual translation, i.e. vernacular translation.

3.2. Translation is a Catalyser

3.2.1. Observing Current Scholarship

Translating classical Chinese text to English is a meaningful project as it promotes the research among Western scholars, as well as the conversation between different schools of thoughts. Based on the *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, among scholars who did researches on Huan Tan and Feng Yan, we seldom see Western scholars except for David R. Knechtges and Timoteus Pokora, most of the studies were conducted by Chinese and Japanese scholars. For example, researches on the dates of Huan Tan were done by Timoteus Pokora (1959, 1961, 1963, 1965), Jiang Liangfu and Tao Qiuying (1963), Moriya Mitsuo (1964), Ōkubo Takao (1968, 1969), Su Chengjian (1984), Dong Junyan (1986, 1988), Hentona Tomokuni (1991), Han Hui (1997), Zhang Zixia (1997), etc. Pokora's "Two Answers to Professor Moriya Mitsuo" (1965) and "Last Note on the Dates of Huan T'an: Answer to Professor Chiang Liang-fu and T'ao Ch'iu-ying" (1965) showed that there were substantial discussions between the Western scholar Timoteus Pokora and Eastern scholars in the 1960s. Yet we do not see such kinds of discussion today, although there were still scholars doing researches on this until 1997.

As for the other areas of researches on Huan Tan, Ōkubo Takao (1970, 1971) and Hentona Tomokuni (1991) did researches on his political thought, Hentona Tomokuni (1987, 1989) and Liu Xiuming (1992) did researches on his philosophic thought, more researches on his *Xin Lun* were carried out by Takeuchi Yoshio (1921), Zhong Zhaopeng (1959), Kanō Naoki (1965), Dong Junyan (1989) and Guo Yin (1996), etc. Nonetheless, only one of Huan Tan's articles were translated, namely, "Huan T'an's 'Fu on Looking for the Immortals (Wang-hsienfu)", by Timoteus Pokora (1960).

Studies on Feng Yan showed a slight difference as there were more researches done on his contributions to literature, such as Nakajima Chiaki (1963), Wan Guangzhi (1989), Numaguchi Masaru (1979), Cheng Yanxia (2005) and Feng Xiaolu (2005). Not only did his *Xian Zhi Fu* 顯志賦 (Making Clear My Aims) attracted Numaguchi Masaru (1979) and Knechtges (2008)

to do a close reading, his “Yu Fu Di Ren Wuda Shu” 與婦弟任武達書 (Letter to My Wife’s Younger Brother Ren Wuda), had also drawn some scholars’ attention to translate it, such as Jack L. Dull (1978), Chung and Eva Yuen-wah (1982). More information could be found in the reference.

Clearly, the studies on Huan Tan and Feng Yan show a distinct difference between Eastern and Western scholars, at least, in terms of quantity. Thus, we believe that the lack of English translation work played an important role in delaying such researches.

3.2.2. How to Tap the Value of Literary Works in Historiography

As one of the Early Four Historiographies, which well-preserved lots of literary works, the *Book of the Later Han* not only has a great historical value, but also has a great literary value. However, from the researches we mentioned previously, which has been carried out on Huan Tan and Feng Yan, only Feng Yan’s *Xian Zhi Fu* was selected by Fan Ye. In contrast, the majority of Feng Yan’s literary works that were selected are memorials and letters. Similarly, Huan Tan’s literary works selected by Fan Ye are memorials. This phenomenon indicates that the Chinese classics were not just limited to rhapsody and poetry. Close reading on Chinese classics would give us a clearer view on classical Chinese literature. Eastern scholars have already noticed that historiography would be used as resources for studying literature, for example, using the literary works selected in the *Book of the Later Han* as primary sources to discuss literature transformation, hence showing that the literature of the Eastern Han has an irreplaceability and unique value during the transition period from Han to Wei & Jin (Guan, 2016), or to discuss Fan Ye’s view of literature (Hua, 2014).

3.2.3. Can’t Neglect Any Small Detail

On the other hand, translation also promotes researches due to new questions arising during the close reading process, even a very small detail can lead to a valued research. One of the examples we have found in the translation work is with regards to the term Nine Tigers 九虎. It was used in Feng Yan’s letter to Bao Yong:

(光武) 破百萬之陳，摧九虎之軍。(*Book of the Later Han*: 646)

(Emperor Guangwu) breached the formation made by millions of troops and defeated the army of the Nine Tigers.

The numbers such as three 三, nine 九, hundred 百, thousand 千, etc, are commonly used to describe a virtual figure instead of an accurate

value. However, the word Nine Tigers, unlike the millions of troops 百萬之军 used in its previous clause, is referring to exactly nine generals under Wang Mang. We wondered whom these nine tigers were, hence, we tried to look up this term within many resources. *Ciyuan* 辭源 listed this term as “nine generals of Wang Mang”, it is believed that the word came from the *Book of Han*, “(Wang Mang) appointed nine generals, named them as tigers, therefore they are called nine tigers (莽)白將軍九人, 皆以虎爲號, 號曰九虎” (*Book of Han*: 4188). According to *juan 39* of the *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance), among six of the nine generals who were defeated by Yu Kuang 于匡 and Deng Ye 鄧曄, two (Shi Xiong 史熊 and Wang Kuang 王況) of whom committed suicide, while “the names of (the other four tigers) were lost in the annuals of history” 史逸其名. The other three tigers, Guo Qin 郭欽, Chen Hui 陳翬 and Cheng Zhong 成重, retreated to Weikou 渭口 (in modern Shanxi province, it is the River Wei’s 渭水 entrance to Yellow River) with the remnants of the troops. In the list of officials in Wang’s Xin dynasty recorded in the *Ershiwushi bubian* 二十五史補編 (Supplement to the Twenty-five Official Dynastic Histories), it showed that Wang Kuang’s designation is *huben* 虎賁. However, this was in the second year of Wang Mang’s era (10 CE), and we know that the nine tigers were defeated in the year 23, which is more than ten years later. Was *huben* still Wang Kuang’s designation? If not, what is it by then? How about the other eight tigers? These are new areas waiting to be explored.

Another inspiration for research could be the evolution of the word Nine Tigers. If we take a closer look at the first occurrence of this word in book of Han, it is used to describe a subjective fact, and it is said that Wang Mang used their families as hostages and only gave each of them 4000 *qian* 錢, despite him owning enormous amount of gold. This demoralized the nine tigers, at the same time, earned himself their grudges. In fact, the nine tigers were not as skilful and valorous in the battlefield as Feng Yan intended to present. However, Feng Yan’s interpretation was more universally accepted thereafter, in *juan 118* of the *Quan Tang Wen* 全唐文 (Complete Tang Prose), Nine Tigers was used as a description of a brave and fierce army force capable of defeating millions of people and the nine tigers” 劍敵萬人, 力摧九虎. The rationale behind this change could be another area of study.

In conclusion, the translation of Chinese classics is an arduous yet meaningful challenge. Firstly, As classical Chinese text is very concise, a translation from classical Chinese text into English cannot be completed within a single step, but may instead involve an interim step of intralingual translation from classical Chinese to modern Chinese, before a subsequent

interlingual translation from modern Chinese to English. While this facilitates the process of translation into English, the interim translation into modern Chinese also involves further risks in misinterpretation. Secondly, translation of such historiographical work such as the *Book of the Later Han* which consists of literary works by various writers with numerous historical references, not only requires the translator to conduct additional analysis and write explanatory notes, it also makes the English output inaccessible to most readers. Thirdly, the highly interdisciplinary knowledge in relevant historiography not only demands a high quality of competency in translators, but also arguably acts as a catalyst for further academic research in the process of close reading and research. Therefore, the translation of Chinese classics is usually a long-term project with multilateral collaboration, and continuous revision and correction.

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