

Astor' Hermeneutics as a Collateral Evidence for the Misinterpretation of Chinese Philosophy

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Abstract: The subject's interpretation of the work retains the correctness of subjective consciousness, but never able to reproduce the subjective emotion of the author when creating. It lies in the transformation of two misinterpretations, the first one is the author's misinterpretation of the world, and the second one is the transformation of meaning thinking, i.e., the reader's misinterpretation of the work. The work itself is not a perfect linguistic imitation of the objective world, nor can the author make a perfect reproduction, for no work can perfectly reproduce anything in the objective world. The Astorian hermeneutic of 'seeing the process of understanding as a reproduction of the process of creation' provides a good example of the phenomenon of the misreading of post-Chinese philosophical writings by later scholars, which has occurred through the passage of time.

Keywords: Astor; Hermeneutics; Misreading; Chinese philosophy

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The classic works of Chinese philosophy have always encountered ambiguities when they are interpreted and understood. Unlike Western philosophy, where most philosophical terms are interpreted with precision, Chinese philosophy is written in a more mystical manner, with more profound philosophical ideas expressed in as short and concise a statement as possible. However, the simpler statements often brought more ambiguities. This has led to later generations always having a misinterpretation of classic Chinese philosophical texts, which everyone can interpret according to the original classics to support their own views. This does not mean that it is a wrong way of interpretation.

As a pioneer of modern hermeneutics, Friedrich Astor follows the spirit of ancient Greece and believes that it is the inner unity of existence, the form of vitality that makes the inner parts of existence harmonious. Therefore, Astor's hermeneutics is committed to entering the inner spiritual world contained in the work itself, rather than analysing the text of the work. He believes that the spirit of the work must be grasped on the basis of the understanding of the expression of the work, even if this 'spirit' is not entirely obtained from the work.

In Astor's view, the basic aim of hermeneutics is to grasp this 'spirit' as constructed by time, practice, and reality, and undoubtedly all works can be presented with great clarity. Chinese philosophy ideas have always been found in the classics, and later studies of ancient Chinese philosophy have usually taken the form of analyses of the history of philosophy in order to search for the truth. However, under the changing times, modern scholars have always encountered various problems in their attempts to find the true meaning of ancient works, and 'misinterpretation' is one of them. Compared with literary works, the philosophical classics are more prone to "misinterpretation" because of their discursive nature. It seems that 'misinterpretation' has always been rejected by scholars of Chinese philosophy as 'wrong understanding'. Through Astor's hermeneutic interpretation of this 'spirit', the shortcomings and prejudices of Chinese philosophy in terms of 'misreading' can be shown from the side.

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In the history of Chinese philosophy, ancient textual works have always been obscure and difficult to understand, which seems to be associated with the characteristics of the times in which they were written, but underneath the difficulty of interpretation is actually an inner spirit that cries out for clarification.

Astor believed that hermeneutics existed to reveal the spirit of antiquity by making all that remains of antiquity relevant as the foundation of understanding. For Astor, the understanding of the texts of the past was not merely to acquire a mere means of obtaining a textual interpretation or meaning, but also to derive from it a unity sufficient to infuse the entire spirit of antiquity into the new age, so that even different works could maintain a similar harmony.

In Astor's conception, spirit is the core of life, without which there are no senses, no life, and even no existence. The significance of placing our attention on the 'ancient spirit' is that this spirit does not limit the subject's specificity, and we can still maintain the exploration and pursuit of the spiritual characteristics of our own time in the process of learning from and inheriting the ancient spirit. This makes the spirit of antiquity and the spirit of contemporary times merge and harmonise with each other, revealing the spirit of the whole in the unique subjectivity.

Taking Chinese philosophical literary writings as objects, we can find that the history of Chinese philosophy is not a mere search for so-called experience from the vast historical materials, nor is it a boring Chinese grammatical translation of texts. Instead of taking the empirical as a normalised means of studying philosophy, we should grasp this highly condensed spiritual unity, which reveals the work itself and the spirit.

1. 'Understanding' in Astorian Hermeneutics

The task of hermeneutics is to understand and explain works, and Astor clearly divides this task into three parts at the level of understanding: 'historical understanding', 'grammatical understanding', and 'spiritual understanding'. Of the first two, 'historical understanding' means that the understanding of the content of the work may be artistic, scientific, and universal. The 'grammatical understanding', on the other hand, is the most basic understanding of the text; As for the last 'spiritual understanding', it is Astor's original thinking, that is, to understand the work both from the overall spiritual conception of the author and the characteristics of the times.

When a work is completed, it needs to be understood and interpreted by the subject in order to become a complete being that forms a bridge between subject and object. At this point the work can be acquired and understood by anyone in any form. When a subject understands it, it is infused with the subjective consciousness of the one who understands it, and when this consciousness arises, the spirit of the work itself takes on a new dimension. To put it in another way, the spirit of each of the comprehenders is absorbed by the work, so that it completes its epochal metamorphosis in a new spirit. This is also the reason why the classic works of Chinese philosophy have not been eliminated by the times because of a single understanding after the baptism of time. On the contrary, the interpretations of successive generations of scribes and thinkers have given new understandings to these works, thus completing the inheritance of the spirit presented in the works.

In terms of interpretation, the author has the same timeliness; at the time the author completes the work, the work presents a complete thought, which may be influenced by the times or by the author's own ideas.

In Astor's view, the work does not change again, but the spirit is not static. After the passage of time, the author may no longer be able to fully grasp the spirit of the work at the time of its completion, that is to say, he cannot recall the complete thinking of the time, and at this time the author, on the basis of all the interpretative rights of the work, will redefine the spirit of the text and the ideology of the work by the experience gained in the new era. At this time, the work has also formed a new semantic field.

When the author loses his complete grasp of the spirit of the work, it is not only the spirit that was given when completed. At this point, the author is still the same author, but the spirit is no longer only the same spirit. It is difficult to determine whether the interpretation of the work by later generations relies on the spirit given by the author or the spirit traversed by interpreters.

As far as the 'spirit' itself is concerned, every work has its own uniqueness in terms of external expression, which is the unique 'spirit' given by the 'individual spirit' of the subject. Of course, in the understanding of ancient writings, we should not only pay attention to the author's own 'individual spirit', but also consider the 'overall spirit', reflecting how the work was born under the influence of the author's time background and the interpretation of his individual spirit, so that the works of different times, different regions and even different authors can have relevance and heritage.

Taking the history of Chinese philosophy as an example, the literature or the works of individuals recorded in history always cover the general overall spirit of the time as well as the unique individual spirit of the author, this is what we need to seek for 'spiritual understanding' when interpreting the texts.

In essence, 'misinterpretation' is not an understanding or interpretation that deviates from the author's original intention and the meaning of the text. Rather, it is a creative interpretation that the interpreter consciously distinguishes from the mainstream interpretation on the basis of his grasp of the original meaning. Misinterpretation refers to inconsistency with the mainstream or orthodox understanding and explanation, rather than inconsistency with the meaning of the text or the author's original intention, it can be said that 'misinterpretation' is an alternative interpretation of the interpreter intentionally.

Particularly in Chinese philosophy, there are many nouns, concepts and proprietary terms that are difficult to understand, and even a single word can express multiple layers of different meanings, or denote different meanings in different contexts.

Taking Confucianism as an example, the term 'Ethical Self-cultivation' has been interpreted in two Confucian classics, 'The Great Learning' and 'The Doctrine of the Mean', during which it has been subjected to different interpretations in different eras.

As a method of cultivating one's moral integrity in Confucianism, it has been regarded as a kind of behavioural state of a gentleman. The meaning is understood to be that a gentleman 'must remain cautious even when alone', which is the root of the saying 'a gentleman does not cheat in a dark room'.

This interpretation has been widely recognised in academic research since Zheng Xuan's commentary in the Eastern Han Dynasty.

As an act of understanding, the original text of the 'The Great Learning' and 'The Doctrine of the Mean' does not have an absolutely correct interpretive context, and it may be a misinterpretation to fail to understand the full meaning of the object of interpretation.

Zhu Xi, a Song Dynasty scholar of science, also made a special explanation of 'prudence' and turned towards consciousness on the basis of behaviour, indicating that prudence is not only about 'prudence' in behaviour, but also 'prudence' in the heart. 'It is not only the behaviour that is prudent, but also the heart.

In the 'Five Elements' chapter of the Mawangdui Palindrome and the GuoDian bamboo slips unearthed in later times, the interpretation of 'Ethical Self-cultivation' is 'being able to be one', which means that the interpretation of 'solitude' does not only remain on the physical level, but also on the consciousness, which is also an interpretation that is not mentioned in the misinterpretation.

When the author creates a work, he will give the work a special spirit, and later interpreters will understand this spirit, but this understanding will not be unified because of the different times and inconsistencies in the

subject, which will lead to the so-called 'misinterpretation'. When later interpreters inject their own spirit into the work, the work is given other meanings, and the spirit of the work can be said to be richer, which is also the necessity for the work to be passed on. The work will be given a new spirit by different interpreters at different points in time. Whether the later interpreters understand the original work or understand it on the basis of previous interpreters, they will make the work acquire a new spirit, and it is destined not to be in complete agreement with the work in the very beginning. In fact, the conscious inconsistency of the understanding of the work with the original author is not the root of 'misreading'. The root lies only in the difference of the times, and when the spirit of the times is not grasped, a misreading of personal subjectivity will arise, relying only on one's own spirit and mistakenly grasp of the author's spirit is, in fact, the product of the fusion of one's own spirit and one's own times. When the so-called 'misinterpretation' arises, the spirit of each interpreter is also included, and his own spirit is linked to the spirit of the text.

Works are contemporary and historical. All inherited classic texts are historical, the product of the meeting between the present and history, and the language of the text has become a kind of symbol with the characteristics of time, and the semantics of the language as a carrier is influenced by the historical connotation and has a specific historical significance, and the structure of linguistic significance changes with the advancement of history. Besides, the text is contemporary, and all the inherited classics have the contemporary interpretation of the historical text, in fact, the semantics itself is also constantly attached to the significance of the times, and the interpretation of the linguistic meaning of the former historical stage in the latter stage of history will be changed due to the change of the social form, which means that the text has the feature of co-temporality. If we consider words and phrases as unchanging categories with the same structure of meaning, the modern interpretation of traditional classical semantics, compared with the linguistic meaning of the text itself, is prone to differences in understanding, and then misinterpretation occurs. This difference in understanding is extremely obvious in the modern interpretation of classical Chinese texts, because of the linguistic and technical interference in the understanding of ancient and modern languages.

In approaching the study of Chinese philosophy, it is now usual to take the history of Chinese philosophy as an entry point, choosing to argue with history and draw conclusions from the analysis of the history of the text. The work itself, on the other hand, is imbued with more spirit with the passage of history, which is not in conflict with the spirit that the author wants to express and shrinks into the work in a harmonious way. From the point of view of Astorian hermeneutics, the key to the misinterpretation of Chinese philosophy lies in the fact that interpreters in the history of Chinese philosophy usually substitute their own spirit in their understanding of ancient texts and works, which makes misinterpretation easy, and some researchers either rely on the historical records alone to interpret, or translate the words and phrases of the texts and works step by step, or substitute their own empirical understanding into the texts. Such interpretation from a single field only makes the interpreter far from the author's original intention. However, very often, this kind of misinterpretation, which is in contradiction with the author's original intention, often brings a brand new perspective, interpreting through the textual work itself in a way that the author has never thought of. This is the spirit of the work itself is carried by the interpreters inspired, interpreters in the text of the work of misinterpretation at the same time is actually a new creation, interpreters in the interpretation of the text of the work of the text is to rely on the spirit of the self around the text of the interpretation of the text of the text of the text of the existence of their own entity is only the raw material for the text, itself will not be in the thought of the self-presentation. At this time, The interpreter is the only one who can give spirit to the text to form a collection of multiple meanings.

The interpreter, with the help of the text, combined with historical data, integrated with his own experience or simply from the study of the text, with his own spirit and alternative resonance to the spirit of the work itself may come up with innovative thinking independent of the author of the work itself. With the spirit of unity, understanding the text while recreating the 'text', this misinterpretation of the 'text' contains the spirit of the

interpreter and the spirit of the work itself, to complete the creative process of the reproduction.

2. 'Description' in Astorian Hermeneutics

Corresponding to the three levels of understanding, there are also three levels of illustration in Astorian hermeneutics, i.e., the hermeneutics of lexis, the hermeneutics of meaning, and the hermeneutics of spirit. The hermeneutics of lexical meaning is conceived quite broadly, since it includes an account of the word, i.e., grammatical understanding, as well as an account of the actual context and history. This hermeneutics requires not only an actual understanding of the historical context of the discourse, but also an understanding of the literature of that discourse, its historical evolution and individual characteristics. The hermeneutics of meaning refers to the examination of the originality of the period and of the author. It defines meaning when it takes on a particular point of reference because of the location in which it appears. According to Astor, 'The understanding and interpretation of a work is the authentic reproduction or re-creation of what has already been formed.' is based on the insight that proper understanding and interpretation is based on knowledge.

In the hermeneutical cycle that Astor expounds, there is such a cycle of knowing that 'the fundamental principle of all understanding and knowing is the discovery of the spirit of the whole in the individual and the apprehension of the individual through the whole.'

Taking the philosophical words in Chinese philosophy as an example, the term 'study things to acquire knowledge' comes from the Book of Rites - The Great Learning, which has had a profound influence on the later generations, but there are different interpretations. Zhu Xi of the Song Dynasty and Wang Yangming of the Ming Dynasty have both interpreted this philosophical term, but their explanations are different. The most common saying is that Zhu Xi believed that "to study things in order to achieve knowledge" is to study the principles of things in order to obtain knowledge. Wang Yangming, on the other hand, believed that "to study things in order to achieve knowledge" should be to have a good conscience with an upright heart and sincere mind. Of course, later generations of interpreters may have misinterpreted these two men, but we can see that the work itself does not "explain", but must rely on the interpreter to stimulate the spirit. Even in the same text, it is possible that the meaning of the same words and phrases may change with the change of context and location, not to mention the misinterpretation arising from the understanding of different texts under the migration of time.

The third level, hermeneutics of the spirit, is mainly concerned with the search for the spirit of antiquity and the spirit of the ancient authors themselves. The spirit has independence and at the same time has unity across time, and can build a bridge across the gap of time, which is a kind of existence that can bridge the gap between works, authors and even times. At the same time, Astor's hermeneutics of spirituality also explores a 'dominant conception' and a 'conception of life.' For Astor, the dominant conception represents the union of meanings, and in the search for a conception of life, there is a diversity in the unfolding. In this synthesis, the content of the concept and the concept of life are balanced and complementary within the concept of dominance.

Astor's construction of hermeneutics is based on the study of philology, but makes it very clear that the interpretation of a work should explore the spiritual world of the work itself, rather than just examining the text itself and pursuing only the literal meaning. Later interpreters should interpret the text in order to understand the author's spirit after understanding the meaning of the text, so as to grasp the overall spirit of that era.

But how can we grasp the spirit of the author and the work itself? It is still necessary to return to the text, whether it is the overall spirit of the times or the subjective spirit of individuals need a medium to show, this medium is the language or text, that is, the interpretation of the 'description'. From ancient times to the present,

the most accurate and convenient way to convey the spirit is language and words. Without them, the spirit will be suppressed and hidden, because there is no carrier for it to be expressed. When the spirit cannot be 'explained', it cannot be manifested.

The spirit of the ancient world can be glimpsed through words passed on by word of mouth or texts handed down from generation to generation, and in the study of Chinese philosophy, the interpreter is bound to inherit this spirit through these mediums as well. Therefore, in the face of the misinterpretation of Chinese philosophy, it is necessary to consider whether it is valuable, and it is very important to prove whether it is a spiritual description of the work or of the author, which requires the unification of the spiritual connection between the author, the work, and the interpreter, which can be said to be united under the spirit of the times, but at the same time there is also a specific distinction between the degree of relevance of this spiritual connection and its relevance to the spirit of the times. But at the same time there is also a specific distinction between the degree of relevance of this spiritual connection and its value to the times.

3. The Paradoxical Evidence of Astorian Hermeneutics on the Misreading of Chinese Philosophy

What we need to be clear about is that Chinese philosophy has a rather special nature, and Chinese philosophers of different schools of thought have naturally built up an internalised will to think through this spirit.

This will to think is difficult to tell in concrete words, which is why most philosophers prefer to describe without writing, but some interpreters nowadays maintain a negative attitude towards 'describing without writing', thinking that it is backward and uninnovative. In Chinese philosophy, Confucianism plays a pivotal role. In the Analects of Confucius, Confucius said, 'To narrate without composing, to believe in the ancient world, and to steal from my old peng.' This sentence expresses the idea of not creating or innovating oneself on the basis of inheriting the doctrines of the predecessors. Many scholars have then taken this as the basis for thinking that Confucianism is the root of backwardness and conservatism, which is actually a misinterpretation of Confucianism.

As a matter of fact, 'to narrate but not to create' is not to oppose innovation, but to respect and pass on the doctrines of predecessors. As a unity of understanding and explanation, 'narration' already contains different interpretations and creations. According to the hermeneutical field of view, it is not 'making' that is innovation, but 'describing' itself is also a kind of innovation, and has already covered the interpreter's own field of view framework, that is, before describing it, it is necessary to determine that this kind of illustrative interpretation must be within a field of meaning and intention that has already been recognised.

When Wang Yangming of the Ming Dynasty was developing his philosophy of mind, his disciples wanted to record his teachings in the same way that Confucius' disciples had compiled the Analects of Confucius, but at first Wang Yangming was opposed to this, believing that when words were recorded, they would become a stereotypical paradigm, and could not be taught according to the individual's ability. Every word he said that was written down by his students as a guideline could easily lead others astray, because even a sage could not sum up what he said in different situations into one absolute truth.

When we talk about Taoism and Buddhism, it is very difficult to interpret through language or words alone, and we can only rely on the spirit of communication, i.e., the work and the spirit that the author wants to convey is grasped by the interpreter. Often, the author wants to convey his own Tao or spirit, it is difficult to use language to outline the complete, if only by relying on the text itself is no way to fully understand the author's thoughts at that time, which requires the interpreter to study from different dimensions, different angles, and feel the spirit of the complete.

At the same time, as a Romantic hermeneuticist, Astor was not only concerned with the question of 'how to obtain correct understanding', but also with understanding itself, which he regarded as the derivation of the spirit of the self and its return to the spirit of the whole by means of this derivation. On the other hand, our study of Chinese philosophy only focuses more on how to obtain a correct understanding, and argue about it with own reasoning, aiming to boast who is the inheritor of the orthodoxy. We only focus on pursuing the direction of the interpretation of the text, but we seldom develop the investigation of the relationship between ourselves and the text. Therefore, many misinterpretations are inevitable.

The reason why a classic is called a classic is that it has its spirituality, specificity and artistry across the ages. In order to understand such works, it is necessary to grasp and appreciate the spirit of the works, not only the history of that era, but also the characteristics of the artistry presented at that time. Only when we understand as much as possible about the spirit of the author, the spirit of the era, and the art of the author's words, can we understand the classics as much as possible, and can we go on interpreting the texts. The modern interpreter can only connect his own spirit with the ancient knowledge and spirit as well as accurately grasp the work itself if he has complete access to it. The work itself is a combination of epoch, spirituality, and language, especially the ancient works. It is more necessary for us to go back to the origin when we are not sure of the semantics, and to find its meaning in line with the spirit of the times.

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