

On Eileen Chang's Chinese Version of *The Old Man and the Sea* from the Perspective of Feminist Translation Theory

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Abstract: The feminist translation theory is the combination of feminism and translation studies, originated from Western Translation. It draws great attention and provides a new scope of translation studies with in a specific social, historical and cultural context. The advocators of feminist translation theory which focuses gender issues and emphasizes the translator's subjective, especially that of the female translators query faithfulness, equivalence and translator's invisibility of traditional translation theory and advocate Creative Treason in process of translation. This paper attempts to analyze Eileen Chang's Chinese version of *The Old Man and the Sea* from the feminist translation theory to explore how Eileen Chang's feminist consciousness is manifested with the feminist interventionist strategies adopted by herself and also to deepen the feminist translation theory and broaden the viewpoints of the studies on Eileen Chang's translation works.

Keywords: *Feminist Translation Theory; Eileen Chang; The Old Man and the Sea*

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0 Introduction

Eileen Chang is one of the most outstanding female writers in Chinese literature history. She developed a school of her won in literary world with her skillful writing skills and unique style of writing and attracted the attention of a great number of readers. *The New York Review of Books* has called that Eileen Chang as

a writer is on a par with Hawthorne, Anton Chekhov, Honoré de Blzac, Colette and Wystan Hugh Auden^[1]. She also made a huge contribution in the field of translation, but translation field rarely mentioned her until *A History of Literature Translation into Chinese* included her, which just accepted her status of translator. In fact, when Eileen Chang worked as a translator in the Information Office of the Consulate General of the United States in Hong Kong, she participated in a large number of translation projects of American literary works, including *The Old Man and the Sea*, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *Anthology of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, *The Yearling*, etc. Eileen Chang's Chinese translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* was the first Chinese version in China. *The Old Man and the Sea* is a classic masterpiece by American novelist Ernest Hemingway 1899-1961 in his later years, and was published in 1952, immediately creating a sensation in world literature. In the same year, Hemingway won the Pulitzer Prize for Literature for *The Old Man and the Sea*, and 1954 later won the Nobel Prize for literature. Since then, the book has been translated into many languages and is popular in various countries. While, Eileen Chang's version of *The Old Man and the Sea* does not get so much attention as the version of Wu lao or Hai Guan. As a Chinese female translator, Eileen Chang has an obvious tendency of feminism, however, *The Old Man and the Sea* describes male resolute courage to struggle against fate, and is full of male discourse, which to a certain extent, ignored the status of women, so this essay tries to take Eileen Chang's Chinese version of *The Old Man and the Sea* as a research object based on the perspective of feminist translation theory, which will has a more far-reaching significance.

1 Feminist translation theory

With the development of the feminist movement as well as the cultural turn in 1980s in translation studies, the gender was brought into translation studies for the first time. In fact, the women's movement and the cultural turn can be seen as two catalysts in the combination of feminism and translation. Feminist translation theory not only provides fresh, new blood to the cultural turn of translation studies, but also broadens the translation studies by offering a new perspective. With the rapid development of feminist translation theory from Canada to other countries in the world, lots of scholars have made tremendous contributions to the study, including the representatives: Louise Von Flotow, Sherry Simon, Susanne de Lotbiniere-Hardwood and Barbara Godard, etc. According to Sherry Simon, "Feminist translation theory aims to identify and critique the tangle of concepts which relegates both women and translation to the bottom of the social and literary ladder. To do so, it must investigate the processes through which translation has come to be 'feminized', and attempt to trouble the structures of authority which have maintained this association".^[2] Over a long time, women were considered as the subordination of men and in a lower social status. Just like in the traditional translation studies the translation is inferior to the original text. And the translator is responsible to be loyal to the original text. This inequality is also reflected in the cultural level. So, from this aspect of feminist translation theory, translation is a process of interlingual or intercultural transposition and a process of communicating, rewriting and manipulating. The feminist translator can use the language as a kind of cultural intervention tool to shake the domination of patriarchy. Feminism translation theory includes the following three main respects. Firstly, feminist translation theory holds that the source text is equal to translation. It overturns the translation's marginal status and also changes the writer's absolute authority. Feminist translator does not obey to writers and authoritative source text but takes language as a tool of creative treason and rewriting. Translator is not an invisible any more. So it breaks up the unequal status of translation and translators. Secondly, feminist translation overturns fidelity which is the top criteria in traditional translation concept. In the course of translation, absolute fidelity may never happen and it will deprive of women's right of discourse and gender identity. According to Flotow, fidelity is redefined like this, "a number of women translators have assumed

the right to query their source texts from a feminist perspective, to intervene and make changes when the texts depart from this perspective."^[3] Thirdly, feminist translation gives an opportunity for females to express themselves regardless of patriarchal value system. Douglas Robinson once said, feminist translation is a course that women use the discourse of the translation to give themselves a public voice to give themselves a place in the world of writing.^[4] Because feminist translation is viewed as creative treason of meaning to some extent, the feminist consciousness becomes very important. And feminist translators intervene and rewrite the source text to highlight female identity and political intention. Flotow summarized three main intervention strategies, including prefacing and footnoting, supplementing and hijacking. In the Eileen Chang's Chinese version of *The Old Man and the Sea*, she actually takes these feminist translation strategies to fulfill her purpose and expresses her feminist thought. The following part will elaborate this point.

2 Study on Eileen Chang's Chinese version of *the old man and the sea* from the feminist translation theory

2.1 From the interventional translation strategies aspect:

2.1.1 Prefacing and footnoting

Prefacing and footnoting are indispensable translation strategies to show their gender awareness. They tend to intervene in the translations, explain why they choose the source text, the intention of their translations and how their emotional affinity to the source text to make readers to understand translation process, what particular strategies are used and give prominence to translator's female identity and subjectivity. When Eileen Chang worked in Information Office in Hong Kong, she had no choice for the works she translated but to accept and took translation as a way to earn a living. However, *The Old Man and the Sea* was an exception. In the preface she exposes her love for it. "I am not fond of adventures like capturing whales or hunting lions at all. However, surprisingly enough, *The Old Man and the Sea* is my favorite book among all foreign books. I've read..."^[5] As for Eileen Chang, she is not a typical feminist translator and never declared herself a feminist. However, in the preface, her potential feminist opinion was showed when she expressed her love for the book. And there are some understandings

for this book in the preface, “Many sentences in this novel are full of the bitterness of life although they seem prosaic. I don’t know whether young friends can understand it or not. It is because I like it so much so I am afraid that my translation cannot express the profound humor and sorrow of the original novel and also the charming rhythm of the language.”^[6] “The old man in this novel put up the amazed willpower when fighting with the sea –that is not the superman’s, but a kind of spirit belonged to whole human.”^[6] Here the “superman”, Eileen Chang emphasizes the willpower which belongs to the whole human being, not only to the men, and women are as powerful as men, which implies her discontentment of a male dominated society. So she wields the preface as an interventionist strategy and expresses her feminist thought in preface to enable reader’s understand her purpose of the translation.

In conclusion, she wants to arouse attention of readers to her intention and gain reader’s understanding and emotional resonance. In the preface, she made herself visible and expressed her love for the book and understanding fully. It is no doubt that translator’s gender identity and female consciousness are shown adequately.

2.1.2 Supplementing

Supplementing is used to bridge the gap between the source language and target language for feminist translators. Under the influence of feminist consciousness, they intervene in the text actively. In the process of translating, translators add their own understanding towards the source text with their own ideology and cultural backgrounds to make them visible and heard and fight for themselves in the man-dominated society thereby manifesting their gender identity and political purpose.

Example 1: He always thought of the sea as la mar which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her. ...bought when the shark livers had brought much money, spoke of her as el mar which is masculine.^[7]

Chang’s translation: 他脑子里的海永远是“海娘子”，在西班牙文里，人们爱她的时候总是这样称她。……还有小汽艇，那是他们在鲨鱼肝上赚了钱的时候买下来的——他们称她为“海朗”，那是男性的。^[5]

La mar is a Spanish word, “mar” means the sea in English, “la” is a feminine definite article. Eileen Chang translated it into “海娘子”，which shows the feminine identity. She uses Chinese “娘子” as feminine affix expressing the morphological meaning of a foreign language, which is very better and natural. What’s more, *The Old Man and*

the Sea mainly describes the willpower and perseverance of the old man and nearly no female figure contains. So Eileen Chang adopted supplementing strategy to show female identity of la mar.

2.1.3 Hijacking

Hijacking is used to make women’s humiliations and oppression visible creatively. Feminist translator rewrites the original text to reveal feminist thought hidden in the text.

Example 2: It is what a man must do.^[7]

Chang’s translation: 活总是要干的。^[5]

Example 3; And pain does not matter to a man.^[7]

Chang’s translation: 疼痛是不碍事的，并不伤人。^[5]

The Old Man and the Sea mainly depicts a strong, brave and tough man image and its language is mostly full of male superiority, which ignores the status of woman to a certain extent and Eileen Chang did not translate the original text “man” into the ordinary sense of “男人” or “男子汉”。But a euphemism to express the meaning of human beings, which ignores the status of women, and express feminist idea and complements the lack of women to break monopoly of male discourse power.

From the above analysis on Eileen Chang using some interventional strategies in her translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* with some typical examples, it manifests that Eileen Chang’s interventional strategies are not as aggressive as the western feminist translators’. The western feminist translators are more aggressive for adopting radical means of interventional strategies such as hijacking and improper alteration of the texts. In china, the translators tend to use the mild translation strategies to satisfy traditional translation, and achieve the purpose of feminist translation for which in the traditional Chinese translation theory, the concept of “faithfulness”, “expressiveness” and “elegance” are deemed as the highest standard of translation and Chinese translators have been influenced by the highest standard for a very long time. In addition, Eileen Chang’s translation has more female’s unique words and sentences, which form her own characteristic. The paper will elaborate it as following.

2.2 From translation with feminine characteristics: Using feminine wording

Because of the social status of women and the limitation of their physiological conditions, their language is generally more gentle and weak. But *The Old Man and the Sea* is about male world. The old man has a tough image, at the same time, he is sensitive.

There are lots of sensitive and intellectual descriptions of his deep inside, which enrich his tough image. Eileen Chang's translation exerts some female unique words and sentences to make the work feminized and also downy and emotional. This makes the image of the old man real. It is not a conflict between Eileen Chang's female identity and the old man's tough image. The two combine naturally.

Example 4: He felt the light delicate pulling and then a harder pull when a sardine's head must have been more difficult to break from the hook. Then there was nothing.^[7]

Chang's translation: 他举得那轻微的细致的拉拽, 然后又一次拉的重些, 一定是有一条沙丁鱼的头很难从钩子上扯下来, 然后什么也没有了?^[5]

Here "light delicate pulling", Hemingway used two synonyms to describe the old man's delicate movement when the fish was hooked. Eileen Chang's translation "轻微的细致的拉拽" conveys the meticulous experience very well. The two words, "轻微" and "细致", display woman's understanding. She did not transfer "pulling" to a verb but a noun "拉拽", which makes it more gentle and soft.

3 Conclusion

This paper studies on Eileen Chang's Chinese version of *The Old Man and the Sea* from the perspective of feminist translation theory from two aspects. The first is the interventional translation strategies summarized by Foltow, including prefacing and footnoting, supplementing and hijacking, which she also adopted. However, these interventional strategies applied by Eileen Chang which differ from the western feminist translators, her interventional strategies are mild, not

as aggressive as the western feminist translators. The second is her translation feminine characteristics, i.e. using feminine wording. In additional, Eileen Chang made a huge contribution to the feminist translation in China. Just as Sherry Simon said, translation is supposed to be a form of representation of language, which has the destiny to be a process of inter-linguistic transfer. In the process of translation, translators play a vital role in making the source text available target language readers by communicating, rewriting and manipulating. So translators use language as a cultural invention, whether at the level of concepts, of syntax or of terminology.^[2]The "language" in Simon's discourse means the target language. Therefore, Eileen Chang uses translation to intervene into the target culture, i.e. Chinese culture. All these suggests that she took the literature as a kind of means to fight against the patriarchal system and the translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* shows her gender awareness, feminist consciousness and subjectivity.

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