

A Study on Eileen Chang's Translation of the Old Man and the Sea from the Perspective of Feminist Translation Theory

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Abstract: What kind of sparks will be triggered when heroism meets feminism? This article analyzes how Eileen Chang uses her feminist translation theory to interpret the heroic epic *The Old Man and the Sea* from the perspective of feminist intervention strategies involved in translation studies. Firstly, the article gives a brief introduction to the author and the translator and their works. And then further elaborates the background of feminist translation theory and its main ideas. Finally, the article analyzes how translation strategies such as prefacing and footnoting, supplementing, and hijacking are utilized to influence the text by comparing different translation versions. The article mainly shows the fusion and collision of feminist ideas and heroic epic, and it introduces the use of feminist translation strategies in particular translations in order to increase the public's awareness of feminist translation and ultimately play the role in broadening its influence.

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the Author and the Original Work

Ernest Hemingway was a representative writer of the "Lost Generation" in the United States, and the background of his time gave him a sense of mission to change the world. Therefore, his writings showed the same tragic heroism as his life. No matter what sort of setbacks and difficulties the old fisherman faces, he is "full of joy" and "full of courage". Just like Hemingway himself, he constantly struggled with fate. With his tragic fate, Ernest Hemingway offers the protagonist a tough guy persona that renders him more willing to face adversity and battle to the end. Santiago failed miserably on a material level, but he succeeded on a spiritual one since he battled nature, maintained his dignity, gained the respect of all fisherman, and, in his eyes, asserted himself [1]. In literary works, Hemingway's heroic characters are heroes who are pure and inspire people with hope, possessing strength and spirit that ordinary people may not be equipped with.

The mid-20th century serves as the setting for "*The Old Man and the Sea*." Santiago, the primary character, is an elderly fisherman. He sailed alone obstinately for eighty-four days without catching a fish, but on the eighty-fifth day he finally caught a huge fish. However, there were other hazards

involved in the process of getting the fish back. He fought the shark on his own. Despite defeating the shark, the large fish was eventually devoured, and he was forced to return with the fish bones. Through the depiction of numerous images to portray a deeper symbolic meaning, the entire book is saturated with a tragic heroism. The elderly fisherman, the little child, the large fish, the sea, and the lion are a few instances [2].

1.2. Introduction to the Translator and the Translation

The Old Man and the Sea was initially translated into Chinese by Eileen Chang. Aside from her educational experience, Eileen Chang's historical background and her experience exerted a significant impact on her translations. In her book, Eileen Chang once wrote, "I do love sadness, but I love desolation even more. Majestic is only powerful, but not artistic, and lacks humanity. Sadness is a dramatic comparison, but it is more stimulating than inspiring. The reason why desolation has a more profound flavor is that, like lush green with red, it is a jagged contrast [3].

As the usual literary works of Eileen Chang, the Chinese translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* also reflects a delicate expression of emotion and a distinctive style of writing. It is closely related to Eileen Chang's cultural background of focusing on emotional expression and linguistic condensation. In Eileen Chang's translation, special attention is paid to details and descriptions of emotional changes. What she pursues is not only the accuracy of translation, but also how to express the old fisherman's mental journey as he struggles to overcome the obstacles in his path. In contrast to the detailed, linear psychological explanations found in Western books, psychological descriptions written in an Eastern manner are more flexible. The difficulty of interpreting the psychological descriptions of Western novels with Eastern psychological descriptions is conceivable [4].

2. Feminist Translation Theory

Feminist translation theory places a strong emphasis on fighting for women's equality and dignity, but it downplays the expression of the translator's subjective initiative or the phenomenon of "creative rebellion" that invariably occurs during the translation process because of the translator's individual development and the differences between different languages and cultures. Feminist translation theory condemns the categorization of translators, translated works, and women into sub-classes and proposes abolishing the pervasive gender inequality in translation studies and broader society's perspectives. It encourages the use of the historical and cultural context of the nation or region where the translated language is spoken as a significant factor for evaluating the quality of the translation and highlights the relationship between gender equality and cultural diversity. As a consequence, feminist translation theory has had a distinct identity to engaged in what appears to be "pure" academic research politically since its inception. People may more easily dismiss its contribution to the "academic" side of translation theory study in favor of concentrating on its political philosophy [5].

In their monographs from the 1990s, Sherry Simon and Louis von Flotow both draw attention to a new development in the field of feminist translation practice. The feminist translation theory proposes the claim that the concept of gender equality is present in feminist translation. By highlighting the relationship between gender equality and translation studies, it continues to define "feminist translation" in further detail. It investigates how the patriarchal society triggered women's writing to vanish. Feminist translation is an interpretation of feminist theory that aims to make women visible in language.

The three most crucial translation techniques used by feminist translators, namely supplementing, prefacing, and hijacking, are outlined by Louis von Flotow. According to Flotow, prefacing is a

typical intervention technique applied in feminist translations. Some feminist ideologies go so far as to purposefully invent new terms in their translations in order to represent their unique ideological perspective and emphasize the distinctions between men and women on a more fundamental level [6].

2.1. Reinterpreting “Faithfulness”

In line with traditional translation philosophy, the original work and the translation are incompatible. The original work and the translated work have a subordinate relationship, with the former holding a dominant position and the translated work, which is derived from the original work, lying in a subordinate position, with regard to traditional translation theory. It also holds that the production of a translated work is only a negative meaning transmission process arising after the original work itself. Moreover, conventional studies also frequently depict the original and translated works representing different genders, with the original portraying a mighty authoritative male with ultimate majesty and the translated work depicting a fragile and derivative feminine [7].

Therefore, "faithfulness" and "equivalence" are sometimes considered the definitive or even the only criteria for evaluating the quality of translation in conventional translation studies. However, denying the "absolute, single authority and power center" as well as the "objectivity" and "uniformity" of conventional notions is a crucial component of feminist translation theory. The feminist intervention methodology integrates feminism and translation research, and this challenge to authority is actually mapped in translation research from feminist theory [8].

2.2. Emphasizing the Subjective Role of the Translator

Traditional translation theories typically stress the "invisibility" of the translator while underscoring the centrality of the original text, which obscures the translator's subjectivity. This is disputed by feminist translation perspectives. Feminists contend that a translator cannot be entirely invisible and always has to leave some hint of their work in the final product. Along with the translator's own values, the ideological, political, cultural, and cultural context of his or her period also made its mark. Feminist translators consequently call for a broader definition and more comprehensive understanding of the translator's topic, including the awareness of the translator's cultural identity and his or her responsibilities as a "double writer". There are two features that make feminist translation theory unique in its analysis of the translator's subjectivity. First, it incorporates the male or female gender of the translator to the list of research on translator subjectivity, highlighting the function and effect of gender in translation. Second, feminist translators openly advocate leveraging the subjectivity of the translator to urge rewriting translations in order to highlight the situation of women in the text [9].

Additionally, readers will draw personal inferences from the text depending on what they read, offering the book a variety of interpretations and meanings. The authority of the source text in traditional translation studies turns out to be invalid in this case since it is impossible to evaluate the translation from only one perspective. Translation is now viewed as a "creation, not an imitation" in feminist theory [10].

2.3. Emphasizing Translation as a Political Act

The political nature of translation is emphasized by feminist translation theory. Language and translation exist in tandem. Despite not being class-based, language as a kind of creative activity has an impact on a number of social ties, including political relations. The conventional conception of translation is challenged by feminism, which no longer views language as just an objective,

value-neutral symbolic system but rather as a component of political activity. The main goal of the "gender-neutral" concept put out by feminist translators is to openly reject language's tendency toward masculinity and any connections to masculine sentiments [11].

Translation is an ideologically infused cultural-political practice for feminist translators. The translation process impacts the ideological foundation of the translated culture as well as allowing the translated content to become ingrained in that culture. From the beginning of the translation act, namely, selecting the target text until it is accepted to some extent in the culture of the translated text. Ideology's contribution to the process is inextricably linked from it. Translation also has an impact on and modifies the translated culture's values during the adoption process, as well as the cultural identity of its inhabitants [12].

3. Feminist Intervention Strategies in the Translation

3.1. Prefacing and Footnoting

Feminist translators can interfere in a translation by adding a preface and footnote, which more thoroughly exposes their own cultural and personal background and reveals their initial goals for the translation. Through the translation, readers can additionally experience the translator's ideals and the feminist principles that guide them, demonstrating the female translator's willpower. *The Old Man and the Sea* is full of male power and heroic sentiments, but Eileen Chang still wants to express the concept of gender equality in her translation, so she says in the preface of her translation: "The old fisherman shows amazing perseverance in his struggle with the sea-not superhuman, but a grace and dignity proper to all human beings."

She also wrote in other books that "Superman is male, but there is a feminine part to the Divine, and Superman is different from the Divine. Superman is aggressive, a goal of survival. The Divine is general compassion, mercy, awareness, and rest [4]." This statement fully expresses her unique viewpoint and insistence as a female translator, although the old fisherman is a representative of a hero, possessing a tenacious will and superior skills. While the old fisherman is a hero with tenacious will and superior skills, Chang pays more attention to his inner world and prefers to convey his resilience after confronting the great ups and downs of his life through language. The character of the old fisherman is sculpted more delicately with her unique female perspective.

3.2. Supplementing

Supplementing the translation is regarded as an intervention approach in feminist translation theory. This tactic, as Simon notes, "bridges the gap between languages." The translator adapts the material to conform to feminist values and political objectives while also developing their own ideas and providing original, creative interpretations. According to feminist theory, the supplementing technique allows the translator to make modifications to the text. This method may enhance the way it portrays women's experiences and ideals while advancing the goal of gender equality by filling in any gaps in the text [13].

3.2.1. Cultural Loaded Forms

Following is an example of supplementing in Eileen Chang's translation regarding culturally loaded words.

Original Text: He always thought of sea as la mar which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her [14].

Analysis: The word "mar" in Spanish denotes the sea, and "la" is the feminine definite article. In

Eileen Chang's translation, "la mar" is translated as "hai niang zi" in Chinese. This accurately captures the specific features of the Chinese language in addition to conveying the word's original meaning. Although Wu Lao's translation adds a note to clarify the Spanish meaning of "la mar" in the end, it somewhat detracts from the consistency of the reading. The entire book is devoted to describing the old man's amazing power and perseverance, with hardly any mention of female figures. Eileen Chang's approach not only shows her translation skills, but it also makes up for the absence of female figures in the original work. As a result, the word "hai niang zi" offers a sharp contrast to the overall tone of the book. It represents a feminist translation intervention method in this instance, which effectively highlights the feminist consciousness that underlies her ideas and inventively adds her own perspective [15].

3.2.2. Color Forms

Compared with other male translators, Eileen Chang uses color words more precisely in her translations. This is partly due to the various manners that men and women express themselves linguistically. American linguist Lakoff contends that women have a wider vocabulary and are more accurate at identifying colors than males. The general consensus is that women should handle minor matters like color recognition while males should not be involved. We can observe the power and position disparity between the sexes at the root of the gender language gap and the inequity in the gap because the gender language gap between men and women is in fact a reflection of the difference between the sexes from ancient times [16].

When translating, Eileen Chang varies the use of color terms to fit the context while providing a more deliberate choice of color words than do male translators. She uses more specific hues like mauve, snow blue, etc. In contrast, the male translator's translation of the identical material is purple and blue. From an emotional standpoint, it perfectly expresses Eileen Chang's singular demand as a female translator to honor the author's purpose and linguistic conventions [17].

3.2.3. Reduplicated Forms

The reduplicated forms not only enrich language's rhythm by adding a tranquil and undulating sense of beauty, but it may additionally strengthen or mitigate the language's meaning, which is more readily apparent and communicable. Since women tend to be more affectionate than males, so they have more profound sensory experiences. Studies on gender language has shown that women additionally prefer to use words with passionate and exaggerated expressions in speaking. They occasionally exhibit sensitivity and remain implicit, nevertheless, and these traits are consistent with the many expressive roles that reduplicated forms are capable of. Additionally, the use of duplicated forms is connected to linguistic expressions and an innocent mindset. By virtue of their love of nature, women are discovered to be more like children than males, according to psychological and physiological research [18].

In the translation of *The Old Man and the Sea*, Eileen Chang uses a large number of reduplicated forms. The range of words is also very wide, including verbs, adjectives and quantifiers. These reduplicated forms also help her to portray the details of the environment and the characters more precisely, which is also the advantage of female translators.

3.3. Hijacking

In feminist translation, hijacking refers to the process of introducing feminist viewpoints into writings that weren't equipped with them from the start. This tactic is employed by female translators to combat the terminology and language used in our society that are discriminatory. For instance, using "he" as a gender-neutral pronoun in English only refers to men, hence it is not

genuinely neutral. In order to address this, feminist translators may use alternative, more inclusive language in an effort to increase readers' understanding of gender issues and advance gender equality [19]. Eileen Chang's translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* offers a good example of this strategy.

Original Text: And pain does not matter to a man [14].

Analysis: This sentence is a typical expression of the hijacking strategy in translation. Although "man" is typically translated as "nan ren" in Chinese, Wu Lao chose to translate it as "han zi" in this instance. This translation accurately captures the original text's meaning but has a very strong gender orientation. However, Eileen Chang's translation chose to lessen the expression rather than precisely clarify its meaning, which likewise weakens the gender reference. This strategy perfectly captures the feminist translator's desire to compensate for the absence of gender connotations and to challenge patriarchal culture's hegemonic position. Since *The Old Man and the Sea* mainly focuses on the character of the old fisherman as a stubborn male figure, Eileen Chang's use of a gender-neutral term reflects her feminist perspective and seeks to raise public awareness of women's status.

4. Conclusion

Eileen Chang's translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* not only remains true to the original work but also reveals her strong gender consciousness and feminist thinking, which carries significant political implications. Her translation empowers women's voices through language and demonstrates the value of women. Nevertheless, certain vocabulary and phrase structures could be handled more effectively. Since Eileen Chang's translation, many translators have employed different translation strategies to recreate *The Old Man and the Sea*, each with its own merits. However, the feminism embodied in Eileen Chang's translation is unique and cannot be replicated. The intersection of feminism and heroism found in her translation is rare and remarkable. The emergence of feminist translation strategies has expanded the perspective for evaluating translated works beyond a single criterion of quality and includes the broader societal impact.

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