

The Feminism in Eileen Chang's Translation——A Case Study on the Translated Version of *The Yearling*

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Abstract: Eileen Chang's known as a literary scholar, but her identity as a female translator is little known and her translations are rarely mentioned. *The Yearling* as one of her famous translations has less relevant research. From a feminist perspective and based on feminist translation theory, this study examines the feminism in Eileen Chang's translation of *The Yearling*, and analyses the influence of her feminist ideas on the translation, with a view to adding to the study of feminist literary works.

Keywords: Eileen Chang; *The Yearling*; Feminism translation

When it comes to contemporary Chinese literature, it is necessary to mention Eileen Chang. She is famous and controversial in China and abroad. Her works are unique in the choice of material, characterization and narrative structure, all of which highlight her unique personal charm, and she still has a large following of readers around the world today. Although many scholars have studied her literature, her status as an outstanding female translator is not well known, and her translated works are rarely mentioned. In recent years, *the Old Man and the Sea* has regained popularity, and her translations have become much sought-after, and other translated works have also begun to attract attention, among them *The Yearling*.

Many scholars have studied Eileen Chang's works from various perspectives, but few have studied Eileen Chang's feminist style from the perspective of translation studies. Then this paper will use feminist translation theory as a guide to compare her translation with that of male contemporaries, study the feminism in Eileen Chang's translation of *The Yearling*, and analyze the influence of her feminist ideas on the translation, in order to add to the study of feminist literary works.

1. The origin, development status and translation strategies of feminist translation theory

The emergence of feminist translation theory has injected new blood into the history of translation and provided a new research perspective to translation studies. Feminist translation theory originated in Canada, and the representative figures who put forward the theory include Kaiser Moser, Barbara Goddardt and Louise Van Flotow. Cather Moser believes that translation is the interpenetration between two different languages, and she very sharply suggests that male translators distort and falsify the works of feminist translators and women writers. Another scholar, Barbara, suggests that a translation is a work in itself and does not exist as a copy. She emphasizes the plurality of feminist textual theory to be combined with the element of self-representation of the translator. Scholar Flotow believes that the relationship between gender and translation is very close, and that people should pay attention to and address gender issues because they have ignored gender issues for a long time, which has led to frequent feminist movements. The traditional translation theory believes that the relationship between the translation and the original, the translator and the author are all dependent, similar to the relationship between women and men. This theory unabashedly exposes the discrimination against translators and translations, and even against women. Therefore, the feminist school of translation demands that the relationship between the translation and the original work be re-examined and calls on the public to view the original text, the translation and the translator in the same light.

Feminism in translation practice strongly advocates translator interventionism and calls for feminist creation of translated texts.^[1] Susanne de Lotbinière Harwood says in one of her translations, "My translation practice is a political activity, aimed at making language speak for women; my byline means that I have adopted all translation strategies to make women prominent in language."^[2] Flotow discusses three feminist forms of translation practice: additions, hijacking, and the addition of forewords and footnotes.

Shirley Simon reconceptualizes the traditional view of "fidelity" in translation and reconceptualizes the concept of "fidelity". Therefore, the feminist translator fully cooperates with the original feminist author in the translation, showing the faithfulness to the feminist "writing scheme".^[3] The various translation strategies adopted by feminist translators in their translation practice reflect the concept of "fidelity" as an ideological product and the essence of Simon's feminist concept of fidelity, namely, "fidelity to the writing scheme of the female self."^[4]

Susan Bassnett argues that the translator must first carefully select the text, "empathize" with the original work, thus establishing an intimate "emotional bond," and form a "symbiotic" relationship by carefully reading the original work. "By carefully reading

the original work, a symbiotic relationship is formed, making the translation and the original work interdependent and integrated. In this relationship, the original work and the translated work no longer exist as completely independent individuals, but become an inseparable whole.^[5]

Feminist translators use every possible means to make translation a powerful expression of women, to enhance women's voice, and to improve the status of women in society.

2. Introduction to “*The Yearling*” and background of the translator

The Yearling is a full-length novel written by American author Carolyn, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1939 and topped the bestseller list in the United States in 1939. The novel is set in the post-Civil War era of American settlement, and tells the story of a young boy, Jody, who lives with his parents on the Florida Keys. Jody grows up carefree under the shelter of his parents' love and care, curious about all the unknown things, but at that time Jody thinks more about his own feelings. The text portrays a naive, cunning and intelligent child, but as he experiences various frightening hunts with his father, adopts an innocent young deer, experiences the death of his best friend, and encounters various sorrows and hardships of the world, he begins to grow up and understand what love and responsibility are.

Eileen Chang was born in an era of great change in China. Due to her prominent family background, she was able to study classical Chinese and Western culture with her parents at an early age, which laid a deep foundation for her future literary work. Influenced by multiple factors—a complex family background, an open educational environment, and the particularities of her time—she developed a feminist consciousness at an early age. As a rule, the life experiences of authors and translators have a great influence on the style of their works. As a writer with strong feminist ideas, she must have adopted some techniques to show feminist ideas in her works and translations.

The themes of Eileen Chang's own literary works are mostly love, marriage and women, and the end of these stories is always tragic and miserable. But her translation of this novel is about a much-loved young boy who grows up after various trials and tribulations of life, and the whole book is full of warmth and love and compassion. Translated by Eileen Chang, a feminist translator with a delicate writing style and a focus on the inner world, the two must have sparked something unexpected. Since the author of the original text is also a woman, Eileen Chang is more comfortable with some of the content and must have used feminist ideas, so the feminine color in the translation is worthy of careful study and analysis by researchers.

The author will further compare the two versions with the translations by Eileen Chang and her male contemporaries (in the following, the terms “Chang” and “Li” are used to represent the two translators respectively), and analyze in depth the embodiment of Eileen Chang's feminist thought in the translation.

3. Comparison and analysis of the example sentences of the two translations

3.1 The strengths of feminist thought in translation

Eileen Chang's translation, which is full of feminist ideas, can be analyzed from different aspects. Feminist translation ideology is very different from traditional translation ideology, so her feminist consciousness must have added much to the translation of *The Yearling*. As a woman, she must be able to empathize with the original author's state of mind at the time of writing. The following two examples illustrate this.

Example 1: Original text: “A rattlesnake. A big un.”^[6]

Chang: 裘迪把手一比: “老大的响尾蛇。”^[7]

Li: “一条响尾蛇。很大的一条。”^[8]

In careful comparison, on the one hand, from the analysis of the translation itself, Li Liangmin's translation is faithful but very hard, and the heavy translation accent makes the translation seem numb and senseless. On the other hand, in the translation by Eileen Chang, one sentence and one action (expressing the motive words that one imagines Jody would have at that time) add to the translation of the whole sentence. The transformation of language alone into a combination of action and language reflects her profound linguistic skills and delicate inner world, making the short sentence immediately vivid and full of images, as if Jody were appearing in front of the reader, describing what she saw with a face full of shock. On the other hand, the choice of words, as Jody lives in a primitive rural area, makes the use of dialect more realistic and relevant. For these details, Eileen Chang's feminine and delicate expressions greatly increase the appeal of the translation.

We can conclude that in some aspects, female translators have an advantage over male translators in terms of their unique insight and detailed understanding of the original text.

3.2 Possible development of feminist ideas in the translation

Eileen Chang is a translator with strong feminist consciousness, and when translating, she will more or less exert her own subjectivity to rewrite some parts of the original work and add her own understanding of the original text to pursue gender equality, so as to improve the status of women. However, if the translator's subjectivity is overplayed, the translation may deviate slightly from the connotation and style of the original work and violate the principle of “faithfulness to the original”. Generally speaking, regardless of the style of the original text, the translator should present the original work faithfully with an objective attitude.

From the full text, the main character of “*The Yearling*” starts out as a simple and innocent boy who, after leaving home in anger and experiencing the world, transforms into a brave and responsible man. The language style should change from the initial soft and fragile to the resolute and brave at the end of the essay. However, Eileen Chang weakens the translation of words that can highlight the status of men. See next the following examples.

Example 2. Original text: “Ezra Baxter, do you go trading with the Foresters, you'll do good to come home wearing your breeches.”^[6]

Chang: 艾拉·巴斯特, 你跟那窝盗坯子打交道, 能穿着裤子回家就不错了。^[7]

Li: 艾拉·巴斯特, 你跟福斯特兄弟们打交道, 你会只剩一条裤衩回家的。^[8]

Through comparison, we find that the translation of the name “the Foresters” shows two opposite styles and ideas of male and female translators. Li Liangmin’s translation is directly based on the literal meaning of the name, and the phonetic translation of the name is concise, clear and easy to understand. On the other hand, Eileen Chang’s translation is “盗坯子”, which seems to be full of discrimination and disgust towards the Foster brothers, and she considers them to be a pair of “thieves”. This not only rewrites the names, but also changes the neutral attitude of the original author toward the Forster brothers, so that readers can only read the work from her feminist perspective, which is not faithful and has certain limitations.

We can see that the excessive feminist play will distort the original text and the ideas that the original authors want to convey to the readers, and it also violates the principle of “fidelity” that should be followed in translation.

4. Conclusion

Whether it is to show the fullness of emotions that readers can relate to in her translations, or to inject her own thoughts into the translations that make readers misunderstand the original meaning to a certain extent, it is the human attitude and thoughts and emotions that Eileen Chang wanted to convey to readers through her works and translations, taking into account her own life experiences. Her literary achievements are undeniable, and her translations also injected new energy and vitality into the Chinese literary scene at the time. She wrote and created throughout her life through her own understanding of the world and life, and in choosing works to translate, she also preferred works that were rich in emotion and strong in attitude, which coincided with her heart.

Among her many translations, *The Yearling* is one that Eileen Chang herself could not forget. She also said that when copying the last two paragraphs of the article by hand, tears unknowingly blurred her eyes. From her perception, the last two paragraphs are full of embarrassing melancholy. Through a series of readings and analyses, it is clear that Eileen Chang poured an extremely strong and complex emotion into the translation of this book. In other words, because of the female identity and perspective, the details in the original text of Lu *The Yearling* are more meticulously depicted and the characters’ hearts are more delicately portrayed, thus adding more touching colors to the translation.

Even though the feminist approach to parts of the book may have caused some misunderstandings or limitations, it is basically faithful to the original text. With a strong literary and linguistic foundation and a very distinctive personality and style, Eileen Chang’s translation is also very good and highly readable.

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