

# Eileen Chang's Feminism Reflected in the Translation of *The Old Man and the Sea*

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The article takes Aileen Chang's translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* as an example to observe Aileen Chang's feminist approach to deal with the original text. She seeks to assume her identity and use her unique style of literary language, and utter her feminist voice between the lines of the translated text.

*Keywords:* feminism, transplantation poetics, feminist voice

## Eileen Chang's Feminism

Chang was born in a Chinese traditional family, yet thanks to her mother, a westernized Chinese woman, she received the western style of education. Chang's mother left a deep impression on little Eileen Chang. Eileen Chang longed to grow up as quickly as possible, becoming a graceful lady with beautiful appearance. Chang once recalled in her essay "A Child's of Her Real Thoughts" (童言无忌) that "at the age of eight, I like the Aisi hairstyle. I wanted to wear high-heeled shoes at ten" (Chang, 2003a, p. 5).

After leaving the traditional family, Chang went to St. Mary Girl's School, which was open in receiving western ideas. Later, she spent three years in Hong Kong University, which enables her to be exposed to western feminism.

Modern feminism in the sense of the word originated from America, experiencing two climaxes. The first climax was from the middle of 19th century to 1920s, aiming at obtaining property right, suffrage, and the right to receive education. From 1970s afterwards, feminist movement diverts its attention to gender difference and the uniqueness of women (Liu, 2004, p. 3). The second climax shows that western feminism recognizes and respects the differences between men and women.

Eileen Chang calls to respect the difference of man and woman. "Obviously, there exists difference between man and woman, physically or psychologically, just as one French saying goes 'Vivre le difference'" (Vivre le difference) (Chang, 2004a, p. 163). Eileen Chang's idea of recognizing and accepting the differences concurs with the feminist idea exhibited in the second climax of the feminist movement.

Chang's major feminist views are expressed succinctly in her essay "On Women". She states that

Men tends to develop in certain aspects, while women's development is all-round and fundamental, representing the circulation of the four seasons, the earth, birth, aging, illness, death, eating, drinking and propagation. (Chang, 2003a, p. 64)

Super-men are male, while the gods possess feminine characteristics. The two differ in that superman is aggressive, representing the goal of living; while god stands for the sympathy for all, kind, understanding, and rest. (超人是男性的, 神却带有女性的成分, 超人与神不同。超人是进取的, 是一种生存的目标。神是广大的同情, 慈悲, 了解, 安息。) (Chang, 2003a, p. 65)

Many scholars have cited these words to annotate and prove Chang's feminist tendency. Chang looks at the fate of the Chinese women of her time with a critical eye. She probes deep into the root that caused the current situation of women at her time. Chang analyzes the reason why women were brought into subjugation under patriarchal rule. She asked,

why women were conquered and became the slaves under the patriarchal dominance? Is it because women are physically weak? However, men are weaker than the ferocious animals but did not yield to them. So we can not only blame others for that. (Chang, 2003a, p. 62)

However, Chang seems not to be pessimistic about women's miserable situation in her time. She believes that the submission is only temporary since silence often forecasts rebellions. She said "human beings conquered all the living creatures on earth with the only exception of women. Women have been living beyond patriarchal control and dominance for thousands of years. Who knows they have not been building up their strength in the hope of realizing their great expectations?" (Chang, 2003a, p. 63)

Chang expresses her feminist ideas in her own novels and essays. Chang's works depict many women living under the oppression of the patriarchal society. Gao Quanzhi once commented that Chang's short stories, even Chang's whole literary world, focus mostly on women's status and their way to survive in the drastically changing male-dominant Chinese society (Gao, 2003, p. 165). Yu Qing pointed out that among all the Chinese female writers at that time, no one displayed so deep sympathy, and worked so hard to write the miserable destiny of the Chinese women with so much sympathy and so deep concern (Yu, 2003, pp. 33-34).

Chang's feminism respects the difference between men and women. She focuses on the uniqueness and the difference of women, seeking to uncover the internal factors of women leading to their miserable existence in traditional China. Only by identifying their own limitations did Chang find the hope of their attainment of emancipation and independence.

### **Three Translation Practices of Feminist Translation**

Seen through history, translation seems to have been suffering from the reputation of being a tenant to the landlord which refers to the original text metaphorically. Likewise, women have been relegated to an inferior status in the patriarchal society. Translation and women are two distinctively different things that have been metaphorically brought together because of their secondary status. Those feminist translators tend to correct those texts reflecting male-chauvinism or misogyny in the hope of emphasizing woman's strength. Luis von Flotow names and describes three practices of feminist translation, namely, supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and "hijacking".

Supplementing compensates for the differences between languages and calls for interventionist moves by the translator. Traditionally, the equivalent of supplement is compensation which has been recognized as a legitimate process of translation. The typical example of supplementing is Barbara Godard's translation of *L'Amèr*, a novel by Nicole Brossard. "Amer" contains at least three terms: mère (mother), mer (sea), and amer

(bitter). Godard's method of conveying the untranslatable word play of the title combines three terms: "The Sea Our Mother" and "Sea (S)mothers and (S)our Mothers" in a graphic play around a large "S": "The" standing to the left, "e", "our", and "mothers" vertically lined up on the right, forming "These Our Mothers" or "These Sour Mothers" (Simon, 1996, p. 14). Nevertheless, Sherry Simon commented that "in a cultural context like ours, where the predominant mode of translation is transparent and fluent, the foregrounding of such techniques can begin to look like textual exhibitionism" (Simon, 1996, p. 14).

Prefacing and footnoting, according to von Flotow, have already become routine in feminist translation. This technique explains the intention of the original text and outlines the author's own translation strategies. Prefaces and footnotes draw attention to the translation process, at the same time as they flesh out the portrait of the intended reader.

The third technique, "hijacking", touches on the more controversial and problematic aspects of translation. Here, she refers to the appropriation of a text whose intentions are not necessarily feminist by the feminist translator. Such method asserts the authority and power of the translator. As Lotbiniere-Harwood explains in her preface that "my translation practice is a political activity aimed at making languages speak for women. So my signature on a translation means: this translation has used every translation strategy to make the feminine visible in language" (Gauvin, qtd. Simon, 1996, p. 14).

### **Chang's Feminist Interventions in the Target Text**

In the article "On Eileen Chang's Native Strategies in Her Feminist Translation Poetics", Chen Jirong and Zhang Xiaopeng talked about Chang's native feminist poetics in her translation. Her feminist strategies take a new look via the dialogue between the past and the present, and that between the patriarchal order and the female writing style (Chen & Zhang, 2007, p. 50). Based on the three feminist translation techniques summed up by Luis von Flotow, the following parts are devoted to the comparison of Eileen Chang's and a male translator Hai Guan's versions of *The Old Man and the Sea* to test if Eileen Chang leaves her gendered identity in her translation of the novella.

#### **Prefacing—The Implicit Utterance of Chang's Motives**

Prefacing is often used by the translators to express their understanding of the text, or the difficulties they have confronted with in the translating process, etc. It is also the method Flotow summed up as one of the main strategies adopted by those feminist translators to preserve their identity as a translator and express their feminist intervention of the original text.

Hai Guan's version has no preface, but only a postscript. In the postscript, Hai Guan expresses his opinions on the novella. He focuses on the political significance of the text, as he states that "this reflects the depressed and painful mood of an intellectual with conscience in the capitalistic society" (Hai, 1979, p. 102). His view can be regarded as neutral in terms of gender.

In her preface for the novella *The Old Man and the Sea*, Eileen Chang stated that "the surprising perseverance that the old man exhibits in his stubborn fight with the sea, which does not belong to supermen, but a graceful stance, a spirit that all human beings should possess" (Chang, 2004b, p. 191). It is important here to clarify Eileen Chang's notion of the superman. In her article "On Women" (谈女人), Eileen once talked about the notion of Superman.

The notion of superman was often cited by others since it was created by Nietzsche. Actually, this notion could also be found in the ancient fables before Nietzsche was born. Surprisingly, in our mind, superman is always a male. Why? I guess the reason might be that the superman's civilization is more advanced than ours, which is the male civilization... (Chang, 2003a, p. 64)

From here, we can get a clear view of Eileen Chang's notion of superman being a male. Therefore, her implicit emphasis is that the old man's heroic spirit did not belong to superman alone, but to all human beings, as she firmly believed in the equality of both man and woman since her childhood. In *Whisper* (私语), Chang recalled the experiences concerning the unequal status of being a boy and a girl in her childhood. Her brother's maid was called “张干”, who was very clear and aggressive. Eileen Chang's own maid “何干” always tolerated and gave in to “张干”, the own reason being that her own master Eileen Chang was a girl. Therefore, as a maid, “何干” believed that she herself was inferior to the other one who attended to the boy. Eileen Chang could not endure her brother's bossy maid “张干” anymore and often got into argument with her over the biased viewpoint that values sons and belittles daughters. She stated very clearly that “张干 makes me think over the unequal status of men and women. I was determined to strive for the better and to surpass my brother” (Chang, 2003b, p. 103).

Eileen Chang further explains her own translating purpose in the preface: “Nevertheless, I hope that all of us will read this book, which will boost confidence in our time. Such great work was created in our time, which can match any other representative works born in other ages” (Chang, 2003b, p. 103).

In Eileen Chang's time, there existed many social problems. However, seen from Chang's own novels and essays, it is safe to assert that her attention mostly was focused on those women suffering in the patriarchal society. From the time of Plato and Aristotle afterwards, men held the power to create and utilize languages. Languages described man's life, man's world and upheld the patriarchal consciousness. Therefore, the patriarchal language came into being to strengthen the patriarchy. While women's inner world, experiences, social or personal found no one, no language to describe. Because of this, feminists called for the females to create their own distinctive language to show their specialty and difference, which can add women's voice to the existing world (Ge, 2003, p. 35). Chang hopes women combat with the patriarchal society and make their voice heard in the world. She implies the purpose of her translation—women need to learn from the heroic spirit of the old man so that they can see more hope of their miserable existence. The preface of Eileen Chang reveals Chang's gender as a female writer and her own feminist views to a certain degree.

### **Hijacking—The Female Voice Between the Lines**

Hijacking touches upon the more controversial and problematic aspects of translation. According to Flotow, it is meant to manipulate with feminism the original texts that are not necessarily feminist (Simon, 1996, p. 14). Even though Eileen Chang did not proclaim as a feminist, her treatment of certain elements in the original texts reflects her feminist tendency to a certain extent.

**Man's image.** Hemingway's works are permeated with a series of tough guys as bullfighters, fishermen, or hunters who represent power and strength. Of course, there are still beer, violence, sex, loneliness, and death, reflecting a masculine strength and perseverance. In the original text, the hero uses “he” to address the boat, his own hand, and the fish, and emphasizes the power of men. In the following discussion, the two translator's translations will be brought to comparison to find out the differences caused by the different genders of the translators.

Example 1. Let him think I am more man than I am and I will be so. (p. 106)

海译：让它把我当做比现在的我更有男子汉气概些吧，事实上我一定会那样的。(p. 47)

张译：让他想着我是个胜过我的人，我就也会超过我自己。(p. 47)

For the clause “I am more man than I am”, Hai Guan translated it as “更有男子汉气概”, which reflects his unconscious belief that the quality of “being a man” can only exist in a man. In contrast, Aileen Chang gave a generic word “人” to interpret the original. In *Oxford Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary*, there are 10 references given under the entry “man”, of which the first one refers to adult male human being and only two interpreted as human being of either sex or mankind. However, in Chinese “man” includes both man and woman. In *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, under the signifier “人”, there exists eight references, of which no one refers to adult male human being. Chang's translation of “人” reveals to a certain extent her unconscious belief that the qualities of courage, toughness, etc., are also possessed by a woman. Chang's identity as a female translator with distinctive and independent feminist thoughts has been revealed here.

Example 2. “Qué va,” the boy said. “It is what a man must do.” (p. 80)

海译：“怎么，”孩子说。“男子汉就该这样。”(p. 15)

张译：“那有什么呢？”孩子说。“活总是要干的。”(p. 16)

The sentence “It is what a man must do”, Chang and Hai translated it differently. Hai pays attention to the word “man”, and consequently he translated it into “男子汉”. Chang's focus is put on the whole clause “It is what a man must do”, and emphasizes on the work itself. Thus, she provides the translation “活总是要干的”.

It is interesting to notice that their focus is put differently. Here gender plays a role. For the male writer, he inevitably notices the words describing the features supposedly attributed to a man. For the female translator Aileen Chang, she focuses on the job. She believes that work comes first and there is no need bragging about the identity of the doer.

Consciously or unconsciously, to Aileen Chang, the word “man” refers to either man or woman. Thus, she did not point out the gender of the person. No matter what are the qualities supposedly owned by men or what is the work mostly done by man, she would not emphasize the word “male adult”. To her, man refers to human beings, those qualities or abilities can also be possessed by a man. Here, Chang's treatment to Hemingway's too emphasis on manliness is that she uses the generic terms to replace the words “man”, or diverts the attention to the whole sentence.

**Female images.** Hemingway's hero is often a man's man, while Hemingway's approach to women in his works is particularly masculine. They are seen and valued in relation to the men in the stories insofar as they are absolutely feminine. Hemingway does not go into their inner world except as this world is related to the men with whom they are involved. In the following discussion, the difference in the treatments of the female images will be analyzed to reveal Chang's feminist tendency in the translation of the source text.

Example 1. “Hail Mary full of Grace the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.” Then he added,

“Blessed Virgin, pray for the death of this fish. Wonderful though he is.” (p. 106)

海译：“万分恩典的圣母，上帝与你同在。你在妇女中间是有福的，你的儿子耶稣也是有福的。圣洁的圣母玛利亚，现在以及在我们死亡的时刻替我们有罪的人祈祷吧。阿们。”然后他又加上一句：“蒙恩的圣母，祈祷这条鱼死去吧。虽然它是了不起的。” (p. 48)

张译：“万福玛利亚，满披圣宠者，主与尔偕焉。女中尔为赞美，尔胎子耶稣，并为赞美。天主圣母玛利亚，为我等罪人，今祈天主，及我等死候。亚门。”然后他加上了两句：“童贞圣母，请你祈祷叫这鱼死，虽然他这么好。” (p. 47)

In the above passage, Aileen Chang and Hai Guan gave different interpretation for the word “blessed”, which according to *Oxford Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary*, there are five explanations as follow:

- (1) holy, sacred;
- (2) fortunate;
- (3) giving pleasure, enjoyable;
- (4) (in the Roman Catholic Church) (of a person) beatified by the Pope;
- (5) (euph. infml) (used to express anger, surprise, etc.).

From the above, it is obvious that the word “blessed” does not carry the meaning of “praised or complimented”. From the traditional perspective of “faithfulness”, it seems that Hai's translation is closer to the original text. However, to the feminist translators, translation is a highly manipulative activity that involves all kinds of stages in that process of transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Translation is not an innocent, transparent activity. Author and translator are operating in a frame of contemporaneity, their work engaging in a dialogue of reciprocal influence. In this dialogue, the translator is an all-powerful reader and a free agent as a writer. Translators are necessarily involved in a politics of transmission, in perpetuating or contesting the values which sustain our literary culture. “For feminist translation, fidelity is to be directed neither the author nor the reader, but toward the writing project—a project in which both writer and translator participate” (Simon, 1996, p. 2).

Chang's betrayal of the original text shows her manipulation of the original. As a blessed woman, Mary is a passive receiver, she enjoys people's compliment only because she is fortunate. But Chang changes it to “赞美”, which equals to “compliment” and implies Mary has truly performed certain tasks deserving to be praised.

The following is another example describing female image from the text.

Example 2. But the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favors, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. (p. 82)

海译：但是老头儿总是把海当作一个女性，当做施宠或者不施宠的一个女人，要是她做出了鲁莽的或者顽皮的事情呢，那是因为她情不自禁。(p. 19)

张译：但是老人总想着她是女性的，她可以给人以很大的恩宠，也可以不给；假使她做出野蛮的恶毒的事情，那是因为她无法控制自己。(p. 19)

The sea here is an image featured by the hero the old man as a female. He also describes his own impression of the sea. The key phrases here are underlined: “gave or withheld great favors”, and “did wild or wicked things”. The word “favor” means “act of kindness beyond what is due or usual”. The two translators interpret it basically the same in term of the designative meaning. However, the associative meanings of the two interpretations differ greatly. Chang gave the version like “给人以很大的恩惠”, which shows the female sea bestows a lot of things to

the fishermen. Hai Guan uses a single word “施宠” without any modifiers to give the impression how much the fishermen obtain from the sea. Furthermore, Hai used a short clause “施宠或不施宠” to interpret “that gave or withheld great favors”. Chang extends the clause into two coordinative clauses “她可以给人以很大的恩宠，也可以不给”. Chang’s version strengthens “her” (the sea’s) power and her own independent will.

The other key phrase “did wild or wicked things” are translated by the two translator respectively as “做出了鲁莽的或者顽皮的事情” (Hai’s) and “做出野蛮的恶毒的事情” (Chang’s). “Wild” can be interpreted as either: “鲁莽” or “野蛮”. Chang’s “野蛮” gives the impression that the force of the sea might be hard to be brought under control, while Hai’s “鲁莽” implies the shortcomings in its nature.

As for the word “wicked”, Hai Guan provides the Chinese interpretation “顽皮的”. What deserves the attention is that Chang’s version uses “恶毒的” to translate the original word “wicked”, which implies the force and power of the feminine sea, and consequently that of women.

Zhou Fenling once talked about Chang’s creation of female images which often disrupts the patriarchal value. At the beginning of *The Red Rose and the White Rose* (红玫瑰与白玫瑰), Chang used the traditional dichotomy to divide women into two categories: the red rose and the white rose, i.e., whore/chaste women, mistress/wife. Yet, as the story develops, the original whore became a chaste wife, meanwhile, the chaste wife turned into a whore. Women are neither red rose or white rose, but a chameleon rose which changes the color, or essentially a myth (Zhou, 2003, p. 274). Hai’s interpretation reflects his male perspective, regarding the female images as “鲁莽的” or “顽皮的”, while Chang’s interpretation “野蛮的”, “恶毒的” clearly imply the power and force of the feminine, including the female image “the sea” and women as a whole. As in her novel, her interpretation disrupts and breaks the mischievous female images with several amiable shortcomings in men’s mind. It may sound reasonable to argue that the reason why the two translators interpreted differently lies in the translators’ gender. Chang breaks away from the general expectation of women being tame and docile in the man’s perspective, adding her own understanding of women here, expressing her love and appreciation for Mary, and subsequently all women.

**The appellation.** In the original text, the boy calls the old man “old man”. As for “the old man”, Hai always translated it into “老大爷”, while Chang either translates it into “老爷子” or “老头子”. In Chinese, “老大爷” carries more respect and politeness than “老爷子”. As a writer-translator who had proficiency in both Chinese and English, it is almost impossible that Eileen Chang did not know that the difference between the two words and that the latter carries the intonation of being impolite.

From Chang’s truly memory of her father’s deprivation and ill-treatment he imposed on her by locking her up. Eileen Chang really has negative thought on men. Therefore, in her translation of *The Old Man and the Sea*, Eileen Chang could not help translation the “old man” as “Lao touzi”.

Here again, the translator’s gender influenced the choice of word. To the male translator Hai Guan, the old man is senior to the little boy. Therefore, the boy must be polite and respectful to him. However, Chang’s belief in the equal status of both man and woman influences her belief in the equal position of the senior and the junior. “Meaning” is a feature of a specific time, construed for a special purpose, by a specific individual working within a specific context (Flotow, 1997, p. 96). Therefore, there is no point arguing whose translation is more correct.

Another prominent feature of Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* in the aspect of the use of pronoun is that he invariably uses “he” or “his” to refer to “the fish he hooked up”, his boat, and even his own hand. Hai

Guan's treatment to such items is the invariable choice “它”, but Chang's treatment to such words is a little bit complicated. Sometimes she chooses to follow the gender of the original. For example:

Example 1. “God let him jump,” the old man said. “I have enough line to handle him”. (p. 98)

张译: “上帝让它跳吧,” 老人说。“我的钓丝够长的, 可以对付它。” (p. 37)

海译: “让它跳起来吧,” 老头儿说。“我有足够的钓丝可以对付它。” (p. 38)

Example 2. “I wonder why he jumped, the old man thought. He jumped almost as though to show me how big he was. I know now, anyway, he thought. I wish I could show him what sort of man I am.” (p. 106)

张译: 到底不知道他刚才为什么跳起来, 老人想。简直好像他跳起来是为了给我看看它多么大。无论如何, 我现在知道了, 他想。但愿我能够给他看看我是怎样一个人。 (p. 46)

海译: 老头儿想: 我不知道它为什么要跳。大概它是跳一跳让我看看它有多大吧。横竖我现在是知道了, 他想。我希望我能够让它看看我是什么样的人。 (p. 47)

The above examples are distracted from the texts. In the first example, Hai and Chang both used “它” to translate “he”, which is hard to detect their standpoint to changing. But in the second example, their treatment to “he” differs a lot. Hai still invariably uses “它” to replace “he”, while Chang's treatment is rather confusing. In her translation, she uses “他” and “它” under the same circumstances. It is safe to claim that Hai's translation reflects his intention to conform to Chinese standard and Chang's complication reflects her inner dilemma of changing these words, and her feminist tendency in changing the word “he” into “it”.

### Summary

As stated earlier, Chang is most successful in depicting the life of traditional Chinese extended family and she has very clear and strong female consciousness and somewhat feminist views of her own. Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is a novella short of woman images and abundant in masculine discourse and wording. When her feminist ideology gets conflicted with the original author, she began to negotiate with the original author, setting out her talk with him to find a compromise which suits both well. She expresses her feminist ideology very implicitly, trying hard to achieve a balance between the original author Hemingway's simple and short language and her own style. She consciously preserves her own unique style and female discourse. Levine once said that “deferral, diffuseness, plurality, openness are some of the terms used to define uniquely feminine (subversive) writing” (Levine, 1992, p. 80). Chang's dissident and obscure female voice still can be observed in the translating of *The Old Man and the Sea*. Her feminist poetics are a kind of compromise and negotiation, carried out under the belief of being faithful to the content at large, yet seeking a place to utter her own voice, preserving her own identity as a female and her unique writing style of her own.

Translators can use language as cultural intervention to alter expressions of domination, whether at the level of concepts, of syntax or of terminology (Simon, 1996, p. 9). Simon's words can serve as a footnote to illustrate Chang's feminist strategies. However, Chang's feminism is still moderate, uttering women's voices between the lines, not as subversive as that of the western feminists. In such a process, she seeks a dialogue with the original text, trying to compromise and strike a balance between the author and the translator. Venuti points out that “translating is a largely unreflective process, where the grounds for the translator's choices remain not merely unarticulated, but unknown to him, ‘unconscious’, with decisions taken ‘in some corner of his mind’” (Venuti, 2002, p. 214).



Venuti believes that attention also needs to be drawn to the idea that the unconscious, a universal category in psychoanalytic theory, might operate somehow in the translator's choices and be visible in the translated text, available for reconstruction, whether it is being the translatorly or personal, the cultural or the political. Venuti's statement provided convincing proof to resolve the contradiction. During the translating of *The Old Man and the Sea*, Eileen Chang consciously tries hard to preserve the meaning and style of the original text, while her strong feminist tendency leads her to unconsciously (the latter may be more possible) utter women's voices to a certain degree, not very explicitly and boldly, but implicitly and moderately.

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