

On Eileen Chang's Chinese Cultural Ontological Self-translation, Take Her Self-translated Novel *The Golden Cangue* as An Example

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Abstract

In recent years, Eileen Chang's identity as a translator, especially a self-translator, has attracted much attention. While researchers highly recognized her achievements, they also questioned the political overtones in her translations. This article takes her classical *The Golden Cangue* and its self-translated version as an example, through the analysis of Eileen Chang's foreignization strategy of sticking to the Chinese cultural context and the translation art of preserving the tradition of Chinese classical literature to certify that the Chinese cultural ontology is what she insists during self-translation.

Keywords

Eileen Chang's self-translation; *The Golden Cangue*; Foreignization strategy; Chinese cultural ontology.

1. Introduction

Eileen Chang is a legendary bilingual writer in the history of Modern Chinese literature. However, in the research tide of Eileen Chang, there are few systematic studies on her translation, especially her self-translation achievements. At present, most of the researchers (Zhang, 2019; Tong & Huo, 2020; Zhang, 2020; Wang, 2021) has adopted the multi-system theory, ecological translation studies, feminist translation poetics to focus on her translation. Although Lin, Liu and others think that "Eileen Chang's translation is excellent" and "the English is elegant and unique" (Yang, 2010), many scholars are still accustomed to criticizing the "political color" in her translations when conducting related research. Does Eileen Chang's translation, especially the unique self-translation, simply cater to Western culture or stick to the Chinese cultural ontology? The following takes her acclaimed masterpiece *The Golden Cangue* as an example to briefly analyze her self-translation from the above aspect.

2. Self-translation of *The Golden Cangue* based on Chinese Culture

No matter from the title to the content, from the chapter structure to the detailed description, or from the names of people, the names of things to the onomatopoeia, the English translation of this text all reflects the skillful literal translation technique. This foreignization strategy adds an obvious foreign culture to the text that is the Chinese cultural color, let's take a look at her translation below.

2.1. Adhere to the Alienation Strategy of Chinese Cultural Context

First of all, the literal translation of the title—"The Golden Cangue" has a strong oriental complex and some legends born out of Chinese traditional novels. This literal translation is Eileen Chang's effort to preserve the literary characteristics and cultural atmosphere of the original

text. The translation of characters also conveys the phonological features of Chinese names, such as Ch'i-ch'iao (七巧), Ch'ang-pai (长白), Ch'ang-an (长安), Ch'iang-yun (祥云). There are also titles with specific Chinese culture, which often come from a certain character in a certain context. Chang's translation conveys cultural information about the character's identity, generation, relationship, age, etc. For example, when Ch'i-ch'iao meets her brother and sister-in-law, her sister-in-law calls her aunt and her husband uncle, translated as "Ku-nai-nai", "Ku-yeh", adding a note outside the text to further explain the implied appellation culture: honorific for the married daughter of the house, honorific for the son-in-law of the family. There are also subtle onomatopoeias with specific Chinese cultural characteristics, which Chang faithfully created according to the Chinese pronunciation in his self-translation:

街上小贩遥遥摇着拨浪鼓，那聾聾的“不楞登……不楞登”里面有着无数老去的孩子们的回忆。 Far away in the street a peddler shook a rattle-drum whose sleepy beat, bu lung dung……bu lung dung, held the memory of many children now grown old (Chang, 1967).

This vivid translation of the sound of the rattle-drum and the use of italics on the self-created onomatopoeic words highlights the distinctive Chinese language and culture. Although this translation would objectively make a bit of auditory shock to English readers, it really makes them think about the cultural context---the alleyways, a unique form of dwelling in old Shanghai, China.

For the translation of idioms, Eileen Chang emphasizes the faithful translation of the semantics and form of the original text, and pays attention to maintaining the national and local characteristic of the metaphors and images, for example, “龙生龙，凤生凤” is translated into "Dragons breed dragons, phoenixes breed phoenixes", “三媒六聘” is translated into "with three matchmakers and six wedding gifts" and “三茶六饭” is translated into "three teas and six meals". Such direct translations may have caused some confusion to the readers of the time, but they still succeeded in spreading Chinese dragon culture, marriage customs and food culture. This foreignization strategy is indicative of Chang's attempt to enter the Western literary with a confidently oriental cultural stance, as Lawrence Venuti advocates in *The Translator's Invisibility* when he states that “logging the linguistic and cultural differences of foreign texts sends the reader abroad” and “providing the reader with an extra-territorial reading experience” (Venuti, 2004). The overseas colour and extra-territorial that Chang retains in this text is precisely a way to adhere to Chinese cultural ontology, which is a feasible way to enter the culture of the translated language and promote cultural exchange.

2.2. Preserving the Art of Translation in the Tradition of Classical Chinese Literature

In Chinese classical novels, color word is a symbol which is a sign of status and position and conveys information about the aesthetics, temperament and interests of the dresser. Eileen Chang's love of painting had a subtle influence on her novels. In the creation of *The Golden Cangue*, she also pursued a sense of colour, image and the resulting artistic tension in many places. In her own translations, the colour words are used to convey the creative and aesthetic characteristics of the original work, so that the translation also creates a contrast in the minds of Western readers. For example, “佛青” is translated as “Buddha blue” and “青布面、梅红签的账簿” as “the account books with blue cloth covers and plum-red labels”. Another example:

2. 曹七巧……一只手撑着门，一只手撑住腰，窄窄的袖口里垂下一条雪青洋绉手帕，下身上穿着银红衫子，葱白线镶滚，雪青闪蓝如意小脚裤子，瘦骨脸儿，朱口细牙，三角眼，小山眉，四下里一看，笑道……

Ch'i-ch'iao……with one hand on the doorway and the other on her waist, she first looked around. On her thin face were a vermilion mouth, triangular eyes, and eyebrows curved like little hills.

She wore a pale pink blouse over narrow mauve trousers with a flickering blue scroll design and greenish-white incense-stick binding, A lavender silk crepe handkerchief was half tucked around the wrist in She smiled, showing her small fine teeth, and said..... (Chang,1967)

This is the first appearance of the main character, Ch'i-ch'iao, and in this short passage alone, six colour words are used, all of which are painstakingly translated, especially as Chang is heavily influenced by the Chinese 'green culture', a colour that occupies an important place in the national aesthetic appreciation. "青色" has a high frequency in her works, which is not only because she is influenced by traditional aesthetic, but also because it is easier to achieve her aesthetic ideal of a "distinctive contrast" with other colours. There are two "雪青" in this sentence, but the translation is mauve and lavender respectively, which shows that Chang tries to make the English reader feel the dominance and vulgarity of Ch'i-ch'iao through her translation.

Another example is the expression "笑道", a common form of dialogue in Chinese classical novels, which is not overlooked in the translation, and she spares no pains to use "said, smiling" for 55 times to correspond to the recurring set of words in the original text. This translation strategy shows that she is greatly respected to the traditional Chinese literature. In her work there is an invisible Chinese stage, with classical and dramatic action and dialogue, and the translation accordingly retains a certain proportion of traditional Chinese literature and culture for Western readers, that is, spreading Chinese culture while retaining an exotic atmosphere.

In addition, the translation of the text retains the beauty of image of Chinese classical novels, the following is how she conveys the image in the self-translation.

3.三十年前的月亮该是铜钱大的一个红黄的湿晕，像朵云轩信笺上落了一滴泪珠，陈旧而迷糊。

The moon of thirty years ago should be a reddish yellow wet stain the size of a copper coin, like a teardrop on letter paper by To-yun Hsuan, wore and blurred(Chang,1967).

From the language to the image conveyed, the translation is not only similar in form, but also in spirit. The letter paper by To-yun Hsuan is unique to Chinese culture, and English readers who could appreciate the image upon exploration. It is a letter paper made of rice especially for writing with brushes, where teardrops fall and immediately emanate like "a wet stain", truly "wore and blurred".

3. Conclusion

Although Eileen Chang has always loved writing in English and insisted on self-translation, her self-translated works, especially the masterpiece of her classic *The Golden Cangue*, is a concentrated expression of her insistence on Chinese cultural ontology. Her writing in English is rooted in Chinese traditional culture, just like the cycle of her life back to her native culture--taking the beautiful and elegant Chinese as the starting point of success, she goes through the ups and downs in English and finally returns to the native culture. The self translation of this book is an excellent illustration of Eileen Chang's literary career.

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