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Translating, Rewriting, and Rejecting: A Medio-Translatological Study of Eileen Chang's *The Golden Cangue*

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Abstract: Eileen Chang's *The Golden Cangue* is widely recognized as a masterpiece of modern Chinese literature. From the perspective of medio-translatology, this paper provides a comprehensive examination of its English translation and reception. By tracing the work's complex, twenty-eight-year translational journey, analyzing the strategies and characteristics of its different self-translated versions, and exploring its differential reception across cultural fields, this study seeks to illuminate the cultural identity and sense of predicament embodied in Eileen Chang's self-translation practice, as well as the profound influence of field on literary translation and reception. This research not only offers a new academic perspective for the study of Eileen Chang's self-translation but also provides useful insights for the translation of Chinese literature into foreign languages.

Keywords: *The Golden Cangue*; Eileen Chang; Medio-Translatology; Self-Translation Strategies

1. Introduction

Eileen Chang is an essential author in twentieth-century Chinese literary history, and her literary achievements are partly attributable to her bilingual practice. Within her literary oeuvre, self-translation occupies a considerable place. Her rewriting of *The Golden Cangue* particularly reveals the author's translation choices and creative adjustments under a dual cultural identity. As Chang's most celebrated work, *The Golden Cangue* has been hailed as "one of the finest harvests of our literary field," with C. T. Hsia calling it "the greatest novella in China since ancient times."

The work occupies a significant position in Chang's literary career, as evidenced by the repeated translations between Chinese and English. From the perspective of medio-translatology, this study examines the complicated translational history of *The Golden Cangue*, analyzes its self-translation strategies and characteristics, and investigates its differential reception across cultural fields. It aims to reveal the cultural identity and sense of predicament manifested in Chang's self-translation practice, as well as the profound impact of power fields on literary translation and reception, thereby providing a new academic perspective for the study of Eileen Chang's translations.

2. Translational History and Textual Genesis of *The Golden Cangue*

The translational history of *The Golden Cangue* is highly complex. Between 1943 and 1971, Chang rewrote this particular story at least seven times—a phenomenon unparalleled in the history of twentieth-century Chinese literary translation. Its translational journey comprises several major phases.

In 1956, while at the McDowell Colony in the United States, Chang rewrote the story based on the characters and plot of *The Golden Cangue*, titling it *Pink Tears* in hopes of entering the American literary scene. However, her English writing career did not go smoothly. After completing the rewrite, she could not find a publisher. Zhang then revised *Pink Tears* again, renaming it *The Rouge of the North*, but it still remained unpublished (Duan, 2021)[1].

In 1966, Chang translated *The Rouge of the North* back into Chinese, titled it "yuan nv", serialized it in Hong Kong's Sing Tao Evening News, and later published it through Crown Publishing in Taiwan. In 1967, Chang retranslated "yuan nv"into English, again under the title *The Rouge of the North*, and had it published by Cassell in London. In 1971, Chang self-translated the 1943 Chinese version into *The Golden Cangue*, which was included in C. T. Hsia's edited volume Twentieth-Century Chinese Stories and published by Columbia University Press.

Table 1. Major Versions of The Golden Cangue and Their Characteristics

Version	Year	Language	Publication	Key Features
Jin suo ji	1943	Chinese	Magazine(Shanghai)	Original version;Chang's breakthrough work
Pink Tears	1956	English	Unpublished	First English rewriting;continuation of original plot
Yuan nü	1966	Chinese	Serialized in Sing Tao Evening News(Hong Kong)	Chinese back-translation of The Rouge of the North
The Rouge of the North	1967	English	Cassell(UK)	Expanded length;character reduction
The Golden Cangue	1971	English	Columbia University Press	Relatively faithful self-translation

3. Analysis of Translation Strategies and Characteristics

3.1 Treatment of Culture-Specific Items: Tension between Foreignization and Domestication

Regarding culture-specific items, Ma (2024) finds that Chang's self-translation strategy exhibits a tension between foreignization and domestication[5]. On the one hand, she uses foreignizing strategies to retain numerous Chinese-specific expressions; on the other hand, to cater to Western readers, she must resort to certain domesticating treatments. In The Golden Cangu*e*, Chang extensively employs foreignizing strategies to render Chinese idioms and expressions.

Example 1:
ST: "sheng mi zhu cheng shu fan"
TT: " the rice was already cooked"
Example 2:
ST:"nv da bu zhong liu"
TT: "A grown girl would not keep"
Example 3:
ST:"gou yan kan ren di"
TT:"Man stand low in dog's eye"
Example 4:
ST: "long sheng long, feng sheng feng"
TT: "Dragons breed dragons, phoenixes breed phoenixes"
Example 5:
ST : "qu le xi fu wang le niang"
TT: "Take a wife and the mother is forgotten"

This translation strategy deliberately highlights a "Oriental" flavor, preserving the distinctive quality of Chinese expressions. However, faced with potential comprehension obstacles for Western readers, Chang also adopts necessary domesticating strategies, manifest as appropriate additions to certain scenes. As part of the English novel, these additions both explain the background of events and serve to polish the text and connect different sections. In particular, at the beginning of the novel and at scene transitions, Chang adds descriptions and explanations to help Western readers understand the setting and the specific character relationships.

For the translation of idioms and proverbs, Chang adopts a free translation to facilitate Western readers' understanding, which prevents cultural, customary, and historical differences from impeding comprehension by making implicit elements explicit in the target text. It converts Chinese-specific expressions into forms more easily understood by English readers (Li, 2022) [3].

3.2 Shifts in Narrative Style: Clash Between Classical and Modern

Chang's modern literary language bears traces of classical Chinese fiction, giving it an archaic and elegant quality. Critics have observed that her fiction uses the shell of classical narrative to express modern themes. Writer Pai Hsien-yung comments: "Eileen Chang is a genius beyond comparison. Her style is very interesting; it seems to bypass May Fourth literature and descend directly from *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *The Plum* in the Golden Vase."

This classical stylistic quality is difficult to preserve fully in English translation. For example, the original Chinese text uses expressions typical of classical vernacular fiction, such as "Dazhen responded indifferently." and "Lan Xian laughed.", whereas the English translation uniformly uses "said," losing the original's classical flavor. Other expressions with classical vernacular characteristics, such as "There must be a reason behind this," "There's nothing we can do," "Filial piety," "Yesterday," "I just thought..." "You've caused me so much trouble", are mostly rendered in modern colloquial English ("there is a reason," "don't know what to do," etc.), becoming indistinguishable from everyday spoken language.

Regarding the title, the translation "*The Golden Cangue*" also involves a simplification of imagery. In traditional Chinese families, a "golden lock" (jin suo) could be an ornament worn by young girls. For example, in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the golden lock worn by Xue Baochai symbolizes her marriage to Jia Baoyu, a union in name only. Liu (2011) argues that the golden lock in the title Jin suo ji can be understood as an ornament of only superficial splendor [4]. By contrast, the English title "*The Golden Cangue*" (golden cangue—a heavy, yoke-like punishment device) is direct and explicit, hitting the theme bluntly, but it fails to convey the rich, subtle, and ornate beauty that Chinese readers associate with the "golden lock" imagery.

3.3 "Licensed Fidelity": A Special Phenomenon in Self-Translation

Chang's self-translation practice exhibits a characteristic of "licensed fidelity" that is, adhering closely to Chinese while preserving the author's distinctive feminine, lingering tone and traditional Chinese cultural imagery. This strategy represents an experiment with the expressive and rhetorical patterns of the target language: "a strong, powerful translation that values experimentation, plays with usage, and tries through its own creative means to coordinate the original's polyvalence, polyphony, or expressive focus."

Fidelity is a resistant mode of translation: it refuses domestication, avoids hackneyed target-language expressions, and breaks with conventionalized, routinized everyday language, thereby defamiliarizing the ordinary (Li, 2009) [2]. Defamiliarization removes the object from its normal sensory field and, through creative means, reconstructs perception of it, expanding the difficulty and breadth of cognition and generating aesthetic pleasure in the process. In her self-translation of *The Golden Cangue*, Chang adopts a literal method, aiming to preserve the novel's Chinese characteristics, especially the author's nuanced, personal linguistic style. Chang's source-oriented translation philosophy also contribute to her use of literal methods. However, this strict literalism to some extent hinders the transmission of the original's meaning and makes it difficult for Chang's English versions to surpass the original Chinese or to gain favor in the English-speaking world.

4. Reception and Dissemination Effects

4.1 "Cold Reception" in the West

The self-translated versions of *The Golden Cangue* encountered coldness and rejection in the English-speaking world. This reception disparity is closely related to the socio-historical context of the time. From 1950 to 1971, the translation of modern Chinese fiction in the United States was at a low ebb. Few Chinese literary works were translated during this period, and those that were often served as texts for observing modern Chinese society, carrying certain political biases. After World War II, the United States pursued a "containment policy" to suppress the spread of communism, accompanied by a pronounced "anti-communist research school" orientation. Although Chang's *The Golden Cangue* possesses high artistic merit, its dark, pessimistic narrative tone did not align with the politicized expectations that American society held toward China at the time. *The Rouge of the North*, published in 1967, managed to appear in the UK, but its critical reception was disappointing.

In the 1960s, as a rising world power, America's growing economic strength and international influence engendered a cultural mentality of expansionism, which created difficulties for Chang's self-translation efforts and her literary career more broadly. Although the translation was published in London, the entire Western world in the 1960s was influenced by movements such as the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Movement, and anti-Vietnam War protests, resulting in an atmosphere of anti-tradition and anti-authority. Chang deliberately highlighted "a woman's story of struggle" in her self-translations, but this failed to resonate strongly with readers, and the books soon disappeared amidst the turbulent mainstream ideologies.

4.2 "Enthusiastic Reception" in the East

In stark contrast to its cold reception in the West, *The Golden Cangue* and its derivative texts were highly esteemed in Eastern contexts. In 1966, after the Chinese version of Yuan nü was published in Taiwan, Chang established a long-term, stable cooperative relationship with Crown Publishing, which alleviated her previously precarious financial situation. The recognition of Yuan nü in Taiwan also helped

restore Chang's confidence [6].

Within Chinese-speaking literary circles, Chang's writing which combines techniques inherited from *Dream of the Red Chamber* with Western psychological methods—received enthusiastic support. The environment she depicted was that of a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society undergoing the rise of a nascent capitalism in its great metropolises. Her focus was on women's marginality and positioning within such a society: newly educated urban women and their struggles with career and marriage. Consequently, as urbanization grew in China and the number of educated women increased, Chang became their spokesperson and a social symbol of the "petite bourgeoisie".

This uneven reception reflects the asymmetrical power relations inherent in translation activities. Western-centric cultural attitudes and publishing mechanisms largely determine which works are accepted and how they are accepted. Orientalist reading expectations tend to pigeonhole Chinese literature as either political allegory or exotic charm, thereby failing to appreciate Chang's profound revelations of universal human predicaments.

4.3 A Socio-Translationology Perspective on Reception Disparities

From a socio-translationology perspective, the reception disparities can be explained using the concepts of "habitus" and "field." You and Zhu (2011) suggest that Chang's habitus is an internal, consistent force that guides the translator to make choices in what she considers the most reasonable manner of writing [7]. This habitus made Zhang more faithful to the cultural essence and expressive habits of the source language.

Chang's educational background and dual identity reinforced her fidelity to the source language's cultural core and its modes of expression. Her work is particularly drawn to the background of Shanghai during colonization, a setting of which she had intimate knowledge, including the survival histories of the colonized and the descent of aristocratic families from wealth and privilege to commoner status. Within such a context, she creates a rich variety of characters, from young to old, male to female, but the overarching theme is always "desolation" or "bleakness" . As a translator, Chang insisted on preserving this cultural essence, and her subsequent "failures" in the target-language social system were hardly unforeseeable.

The influence of "field" on Chang can be seen in two aspects: the "literary field" (especially its patrons) and the "power field" (i.e., the target-language social environment that determines the reception of her translated works). C. T. Hsia greatly appreciated Chang, repeatedly encouraging her to self-translate *The Golden Cangue*, personally bridging social connections for her, and even helping her revise and polish the translations. However, he was powerless to change the repeated rejections of Chang's works in the United States. This exemplifies how, in this period, the "literary field" had become an appendage of the "power field."

5. Conclusions and Implications

The translational trajectory of Eileen Chang's *The Golden Cangue* constitutes a complex intertextual network, illustrating the author's translational choices and creative adjustments under a dual cultural identity. From this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

First, Chang adopted a self-translation strategy that combines domestication and foreignization. On the one hand, she used foreignization to retain numerous Chinese-specific expressions; on the other, she made some domesticating adjustments to appeal to Western readers. This choice precisely reflects Chang's cultural identity predicament as a self-translator.

Second, the differential reception of *The Golden Cangue* in the East and West reveals the asymmetrical power relations in translation activity. Western-centric cultural attitudes and publishing mechanisms largely determine which works are accepted and how they are accepted. Orientalist reading expectations reduce Chinese literature to political allegory or exotic spectacle, thereby failing to embrace Chang's profound expositions of universal human predicaments.

Finally, Chang's fidelity strategy constitutes a form of resistant translation. Although this strategy to some extent hindered the reception of her translations in the target culture, it preserved the original text's cultural value and artistic quality, demonstrating the translator's respect for and insistence on the source culture.

The study of *The Golden Cangue*'s translation and reception offers valuable lessons. For the ongoing strategy of "Chinese literature going global," we should respect the artistic essence of literary works, avoiding over-emphasis on political ideology and preserve cultural

specificity, using appropriate foreignizing strategies to retain distinctive Chinese flavors; fully understand the receiving environment of the target culture, selecting suitable translation strategies and dissemination channels.

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