

# On the Construction of Gender Discourse in Eileen Chang's Translation of *The Old Man and the Sea*

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**Abstract**—Western feminist translation theory has gained increasing attention, influenced by the “cultural turn” in translation studies and the feminist movement. However, due to differences in social, cultural and historical contexts, feminist translation strategies and practices in the West and in non-Western contexts, such as China, exhibit distinct characteristics. What requires further exploration is how these distinctions reflect the sociocultural realities of their respective contexts. This study adopts the product-oriented descriptive translation approach to examine the construction of gender discourse in Eileen Chang's Chinese translation of *The Old Man and the Sea*. Using House's (2015) translation quality assessment model, this research systematically examines, collects and analyses elements related to gender within the source text (ST) and target text (TT), focusing on their Field, Tenor and Mode. Through a comparative analysis of these linguistic dimensions, this study uncovers both the differences and similarities in the construction of gender discourse between the original work and its Chinese translation. Furthermore, by investigating these differences and similarities, the study explores the relationship between lexico-grammatical choices and the broader sociocultural context in shaping gender discourse. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how gender discourse is reconstructed in translation and how sociocultural factors influence the translator's linguistic and discursive decisions, thereby advancing discussions of feminist translation in non-Western contexts and global translation studies.

**Index Terms**—Chinese practice, feminist translation strategies, feminist translation theories, gender discourse, language manipulation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Wittgenstein (1953, 2009) observes “the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (p. 43), a view extended by Austin (1962), who shows that utterances are performative, not merely descriptive (p. 6). Building on this, Butler (1999, 2002) contends that “gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (p. 33), thus framing gender as a discursive construct. These insights laid the groundwork for the emergence of language and gender studies in the 1970s and 1980s (Coates, 2013), a field that remains vibrant in examining representations of gender across poetry, theatre, and narrative (Haraj & Yousif, 2025; Algaryouti et al., 2025; Qasas, 2025; Zarkan & Orabi, 2024). As Bucholtz (2003) emphasizes, the analysis of context, power, and agency is central to understanding how gender identities are produced through discourse.

Since feminist translation theory was introduced into China, it has generated sustained scholarly interest, though notable contrasts remain between Western and Chinese approaches. In the West, the focus has been on dismantling patriarchal discourse and reclaiming women's voices, with some radical feminists even creating new lexicons, grammatical structures, and imagery to challenge dominant norms (Von Flotow, 1997, pp. 14–17). By contrast, Chinese feminism is often described as “sharp but not aggressive” (Yu, 2015), emphasizing harmony between genders and a broader humanistic vision (Schaffer & Song, 2007, p. 20). The divergent connotations of Chinese terms for feminism, politicized during the May Fourth era yet increasingly depoliticized in contemporary usage, illustrate a plural and complex landscape that resists the international feminist notion of “difference within commonality” (Spakowski, 2011, p. 47). This divergence highlights distinct cultural understandings of gender and offers a crucial lens for exploring how gender discourse is constructed in translation. While feminist translation studies in China remain a relatively young branch of translation research, their current trajectory suggests a critical juncture with potential to contribute meaningfully to global debates (Yu, 2015, p. 190).

Therefore, although feminist translation has played a significant role in global translation studies, research on this topic in China remains relatively limited. This paper focuses on Eileen Chang's Chinese translation of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, a version that has maintained its popularity despite the existence of more than 300 Chinese translations (Gao, 2016, p. 69). Chang's translation stands out not only for its literary style, but also for the critical attention it has

received from scholars interested in feminist translation. However, most existing studies tend to focus on her use of feminist strategies (Zeng, 2019; Lv, 2022; Chen, 2023), while insufficient attention has been paid to how her translation reconstructs gender discourse. Therefore, the present study adopts House's (2015) model, where the classic Hallidayan contextual concepts of Field, Tenor and Mode are taken over and modified for the purpose of constructing a re-contextualization theory of translation (House, 2006). This framework offers a systematic approach to investigating how gender discourse is reshaped in translation through both linguistic choices and contextual reconfiguration.

The present study aims to:

1. To analyse how Eileen Chang reconstructs gender discourse through lexical choices in the Field dimension of her translation.
2. To examine how shifts in modality and the addition of paratextual elements in the Tenor dimension articulate Chang's feminist stance and reshape the interpersonal relationships depicted in the translation.
3. To evaluate how the use of consultative sentence patterns in the Mode dimension contributes to a transformation of the narrative into a more inclusive and dialogic discourse.
4. To determine whether Chang's translation is overt or covert from a feminist perspective, and what insights it offers into the localized adaptation of feminist translation strategies in non-Western contexts in comparison with Western practices.

Through this detailed analysis, the study not only seeks to uncover how gender discourse is reconstructed in Chang's translation but also to contribute to the broader understanding of feminist translation. By comparing these findings with Western feminist translation practices, the research will highlight the unique localization of feminist translation in the Chinese context and its implications for the shaping and transmission of gender discourse in non-Western countries.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Feminist Translation Theory

Feminine gender presence can be affected in translation due to social patriarchal factors, which can affect male translators and female translators (Moindjie & Salmah, 2024). Feminism is "a recognition of the historical and cultural subordination of women", and a resolve to do something about it (Goodman, 1999, p. x). In Western discourse, the progression of feminist thought is typically delineated into three waves (Rampton, 2008): First wave (late 19th–early 20th century) focused on political rights (e.g., suffrage). Second wave (1960s–1980s) expanded to issues like sexuality, reproductive rights, family, and minority rights; eco-feminism emerged in the 1970s, linking women's biology to environmental advocacy (Rampton, 2008). Third wave (1990s onward) embraces diversity and ambiguity in women's lives, challenging a universal definition of womanhood while addressing issues such as trafficking and violence (Snyder, 2008, p. 180). Meanwhile, Chinese feminist thought is typically divided into three stages: the 1980s, the 1990s, and the 21st century (Yu, 2015), reflecting a shift from an initial focus on theoretical research to a growing emphasis on empirical studies, with both approaches now prioritized by scholars (Sun et al., 2023).

Like many Western nations, China pursues gender equality, yet feminist translation theories differ due to distinct social foundations. In the West, mid-to-late 1960s feminist movements, amid protests in Europe and North America, spurred women's rights struggles in arts, music, philosophy, and medicine (Von Flotow, 1997). Conversely, China's unique historical and cultural evolution has limited theoretical discourse on gender, ideology, and development, favouring contextual analyses of their intersections (Zein-Elabdin, 1996). Leung (2003) contends that Chinese feminism regressed from the Mao to post-Mao era while fostering a unique individualism, evident in the contested, ambiguous, and fragmented women's sexual identities. Despite enduring patriarchy, Chinese women celebrate their rising social prominence and growing individualism. Tani Barlow notes that Maoism inverted the traditional "woman within, man outside" norm, envisioning a national woman engaged in state processes during social revolution and modernization, who would reform family practices as a state subject (Sarachild, 1975). By the 1970s and 1990s, U.S. and Chinese feminist discourses converged on gender, culture, and women's liberation (Van Houten, 2015).

When feminist translation theory was introduced in China, it underwent a unique process of localization shaped by the country's specific cultural and historical contexts. Western feminist translation theory is closely linked to Western feminist movements and emphasizes dismantling patriarchal discourse and reconstructing women's voices through translation (Castro & Ergun, 2018). In contrast, in China, feminist translation perspectives did not emerge directly from a liberation movement. Early efforts in the 2000s to introduce feminist translation theory gradually matured, and by the 2020s, research in this field had shifted primarily toward empirical studies with relatively fewer theoretical explorations (Sun et al., 2023).

### B. Chinese Translation of *The Old Man and the Sea*

China has traditionally placed great importance on the translation and introduction of foreign literary works, recognizing their crucial role in fostering cross-cultural understanding. A typical example is Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, which received wide acclaim in the Soviet Union (Zha & Xie, 2007, p. 637). This novella was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954, and it was equally celebrated Western critics and readers, securing Hemingway's distinguished position in world literature. When first introduced into China, the work carried a particular aura, enhanced not only by Hemingway's legendary life and his tough-guy ethos but also by the

recommendation of the Chinese Ministry of Education (Gao, 2016). These factors contributed to the widespread attention it has continued to receive in China.

Since Eileen Chang first introduced her translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* to China, there are more than 500 existing Chinese translations. The author conducted a title search using the Online Public Access Catalogue of the National Library of China/National Digital Library of China, searching for *The Old Man and the Sea*. As of September 2024, the search revealed 505 distinct Chinese editions of the work, including reprints, retranlations, adaptations, rewrites, and revised translations. These editions were produced by 321 translators and institutions and published by 285 different publishers. The form of translation, it is mainly divided into two categories: children's literature and classic literature; while the completeness of the translation is mainly divided into two forms: compiled version and full translation. The main research perspectives are: translator's type (Gao & Shih, 2022), translating style (Ng, 2009), translation comparison (Zhong, 2021; He, 2024), translator's feminism (Zeng, 2019; Lv, 2022), and ecological ethics (Ma, 2015), etc.

Given the widespread and positive influence of *The Old Man and the Sea* in China, numerous scholars have explored its feminist aspects, particularly in relation to Eileen Chang's translation. These studies have primarily focused on the application of feminist translation strategies in Chang's work. For instance, Chen (2023) analyses the fusion and collision of feminist ideas and heroic epic elements by examining Chang's use of translation strategies. Lv (2022) explores how specific intervention strategies were applied in Chang's translation of *The Old Man and the Sea*, highlighting the differences between her approach and traditional Western feminist translation theories. Zeng (2019) observes how Eileen Chang's feminist perspective was expressed through her unique literary style, revealing her feminist voice between the lines of the translated text. Additionally, Chen and Zhang (2016) examine the manifestation of translator subjectivity from the perspective of feminist translation in Chang's work.

Even though these studies contribute to a deeper understanding of how Chang's translation reflects feminist ideologies, they predominantly focus on translation strategies rather than a comprehensive analysis of gender discourse reconstruction. Irshad and Yasmin (2022), for example, in *Feminism and literary translation: A systematic review*, identify the need for future research to compare Eastern and Western translation perspectives. This study, therefore, aims to build on these existing insights by employing House's (2015) model to provide a more structured and detailed examination of how Chang reconstructs gender discourse at various textual levels, highlighting distinctive features shaped by Chinese cultural characteristics.

### III. METHODS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study investigates Hemingway's English version of *The Old Man and the Sea* and its Eileen Chang's Chinese translation, analysing them in the form of qualitative analysis. This study adopts House's (2015) Translation Quality Assessment model to evaluate Eileen Chang's Chinese translation, focusing on key aspects such as Field, Tenor and Mode. Through this framework, the research aims to objectively analyse Chang's approach to reconstructing gender discourse, highlighting distinctive features shaped by Chinese cultural characteristics.

This study adopts House's (2015) revised Translation Quality Assessment model, which integrates Halliday's contextual variables, Field, Tenor and Mode, into a comprehensive framework. The model evaluates the degree of equivalence between source and target texts by analysing both linguistic features and contextual factors. As shown in the following figure: Field concerns subject matter and social action; Tenor involves participant relationships, author stance, and social roles; and Mode refers to medium and textual connectivity. The model also incorporates genre as a macro-level dimension linking text to cultural context. It enables systematic analysis of how translation choices reshape meaning and interpersonal relations, offering a robust tool for examining gender discourse reconstruction.

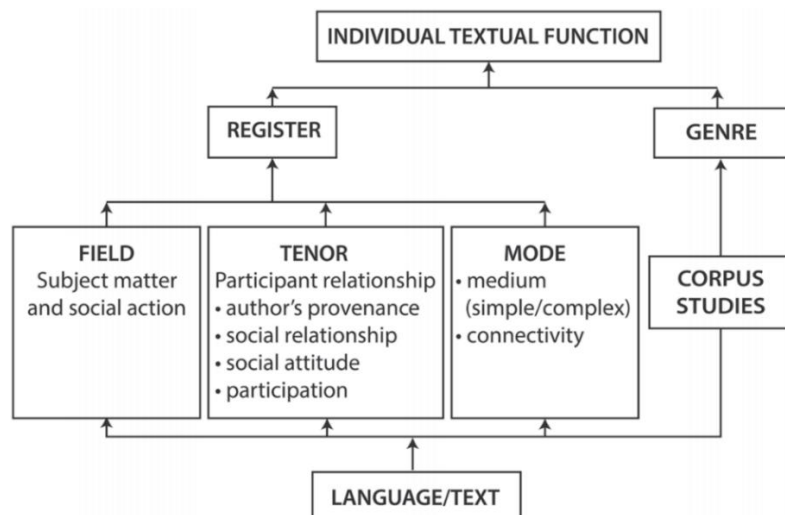


Figure 1. A Scheme for Analysing and Comparing Original and Translation Texts (House, 2015, p. 127)

This study employs qualitative analysis within House's (2015) translation quality assessment framework to examine gender discourse reconstruction in a parallel corpus comprising Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (ST) and Eileen Chang's Chinese translation (TT). The selection of this text is motivated not only by its Nobel laureate status but also by its rich gendered implications, making it an ideal subject for feminist translation analysis. Data collection is conducted mainly manually. That is because "the use of semantic and discourse tagging is also becoming more common, but it is still done mainly manually" (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014, p. 78). Parallel texts are aligned and annotated for gender-related phenomena across three dimensions: (1) field (reduplication and translation of gendered lexical items), (2) tenor (translator-supplied paratext), and (3) mode (tag questions). Tenor data (modality) is processed using BFSU HanLP Chinese Tokenizer and POS Tagger 1.0 for word segmentation and part-of-speech tagging on Chinese text, and AntConc 4.3.1 for data statistics. These data are then processed through thematic and discourse analysis to identify translation strategies and assess their impact on the construction of gender discourse.

#### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Through the application of House's (2015) translation quality assessment model to analyse Eileen Chang's translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* from the perspective of gender discourse construction, the study draws the following key findings:

In the Field dimension, a comparison of Hemingway's original text and Eileen Chang's Chinese translation reveals deliberate lexical strategies that reshape the subject matter. First, Chang employs a total of 114 instances of reduplicated words (e.g., "轻轻地", "慢慢地"), a stark departure from Hemingway's minimalist and terse style. And these additions amplify emotional resonance. Second, while the English term "man" can denote either a male individual or humanity at large, Chang uses explicitly male-specific terms (e.g., "老头子", "男子汉") in only 26 instances, approximately 10% of occurrences, opting for neutral or omitted versions in the remaining 90%. This choice diminishes the original's male-centric focus and reframes "man" as a universal human spirit. Overall, through prolific reduplication and diversified renderings of "man", Chang successfully expands the novel's subject matter from a singular celebration of stoic masculinity to a richer narrative that embraces both human complexity and gender equality.

In the Tenor dimension, this study examines how Eileen Chang reconstructs interpersonal relationships through two strategies: modality adjustment and prefacing. First, regarding modality, Chang reduces modal verb frequency overall and shifts toward extremes, increasing high-value modals for necessity while decreasing low-value ones like possibility and permission. This intensifies obligations, compulsions, and prohibitions through authoritative language, showcasing stronger translational agency. Though lacking overt gender markers, it contrasts the original's restrained tone, adopting a more explicit, assertive, and self-aware expression that highlights the translator's discursive positioning. Second, via prefacing, a translator-supplied paratext (Genette, 1997), Chang articulates her interpretive stance, exemplifying feminist strategy by foregrounding her feminist orientation and reframing the protagonist's perseverance as a universal human trait, inviting broader, inclusive readings. Overall, her rebalanced modality and paratextual additions reshape the text's interpersonal tenor, reflecting feminist translation ethics that equalize power relations, foster dialogic reading, and assert translator agency in meaning-making.

In the Mode dimension, this study focuses on tag questions which enhance a text's interactivity and warmth. Hemingway's original employs only one instance: "Haven't we?", as a standalone sentence, not like a regular structure of tag questions (anchor+tag). In contrast, Eileen Chang uses ten tag questions in her translation, such as "可爱不可爱?" (Is it lovely or not?), "行不行?" (Will that work or not?), and "乐意不乐意?" (Are you willing or not?). These repetitive, echo-like structures enrich the dialogue's rhythm and create an ongoing space for affirmation and response, shifting character speech from unidirectional information delivery to egalitarian interaction. Through these consultative prompts, Chang effectively softens the original's authoritative tone, crafting an open, empathetic narrative atmosphere that highlights feminist values of inclusivity and engagement.

Overall, the analysis across the dimensions of Field, Tenor and Mode demonstrates that Eileen Chang's translation adopts a series of coordinated interventions: gender-sensitive lexical choices and additions, a restructured modality marked by reduced frequency but heightened authority, the addition of prefacing, and syntactic transformations such as tag questions, to reconstruct the novel's gender discourse. These strategies not only dilute the original male-centred narrative in Hemingway's text but also explicitly highlight Chang's feminist stance. This intentional and visible translation approach exemplifies the "overt translation" paradigm within feminist translation theory.

In order to stress the theme of man's struggle against nature and the persistence of individual will in *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway employs the "iceberg theory" and minimalist narrative techniques, using terse yet profoundly resonant language to depict the resilient and solitary tough man figure of the protagonist (Neloy & Islam, 2025; Rauf, 2023). In sharp contrast, Eileen Chang's translation exhibits a distinct feminist translational approach.

##### A. Field Comparison Between the Original Text and Eileen Chang's Translation

The dimension of field captures the topic, the content of the text or its subject matter, with differentiations of degrees of generality, specificity or 'granularity' in lexical items according to rubrics of specialized, general and popular (House, 2015, p. 64). In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago serves as the protagonist, with young Manolin as his companion, a rare giant marlin as his adversary, and the vast sea as the fishing setting. Hemingway structures the plot chronologically

over four days, featuring clear storylines, a prominent centre, concise and vivid narration, and focused, lifelike scenes, mainly the fisherman's daily life and offshore voyages. He creates a classic "tough guy" image, infused with strong masculinity and male-cantered gender roles.

At this level, Eileen Chang subtly introduces a feminine perspective through her translation by filling in the gaps in the gender discourse of the original. For instance, through lexical adjustments, she makes the characters' emotional expressions more nuanced and richer, softening the overly masculine depictions and increasing the complexity of the characters' inner worlds. This supplementing strategy helps break the original's singular gender narrative, offering a more diverse representation of gender in the translation.

TABLE 1  
REDUPLICATION IN EILEEN CHANG'S TRANSLATION OF *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

Parts of Speech	Frequency	Category	Examples
verb	38	AA/AAB/AABB/ABAB/ABAC/ A了A/A了一A/A—A/—A— A	擦擦/团团转/心心念念/研究研究/不慌不忙/望了望/ 歪了一歪/歪一歪/一动一动
adjective	20	AA/AABB/ABB/AA的/ABAC的 /ABB的	寥寥/许许多多/血淋淋/甜甜的/不大不小的/呆木木 的
adverb	35	AA/AABB/ABAB/AA地/AABB 地/ABB地	徐徐/结结实实/一点一点/滚滚地/结结实实地/急急 地
numeral	21	AA/—A—A/—AA/—A又— A/—A接—A	样样/一次一次/一块块/一次又一次/一条接一条

Based on the table above, Eileen Chang used a total of 114 reduplicated words, which include adjectives, verbs, numerals and nouns. Among them, 38 were verbs, 20 were adjectives, 35 were adverbs, and 21 were numerals. Verbs had the highest number of reduplicated forms, followed by adverbs, while adjectives were used the least.

The old man carried the mast on his shoulder and the boy carried the wooden boat with the coiled, hard-braided brown lines, the gaff and the harpoon with its shaft.

(Hemingway, 2011, p. 4)

老人扛着桅杆，孩子拿着木箱，箱子里装着一卷卷编得硬硬的棕色钓丝，还有鱼钩，鱼叉，和鱼叉的柄。

(Hemingway, trans. Chang, 2020, p. 9)

"I'll get another knife and have the spring ground."

(Hemingway, 2011, p. 74)

"我再去弄把小刀来，把那弹簧也磨磨快。"

(Hemingway, trans. Chang, 2020, p. 78)

"You study it and tell me when I come back."

(Hemingway, 2011, p. 6)

"你研究研究它，等我回来的时候告诉我。"

(Hemingway, trans. Chang, 2020, p. 10)

In the above examples, reduplication is employed for different effects. In the first instance, the reduplication functions as a quantifier, whereas the original text lacks one. Its addition enhances the vividness of the "brown lines" it modifies, making them more visually striking. In the second and third examples, reduplication is used in the dialogue between the old man and the boy, softening the tone and making it more cordial and childlike. This subtle linguistic choice adds tenderness to the otherwise tough image of the old man.

As studies advance, different theoretical approaches, ranging from structuralism and functionalism to generative and cognitive paradigms, have been adopted in the study of reduplication (Fang & Wang, 2024). At the field level, reduplication exerts a significant influence on the shaping of the subject matter. As illustrated by the examples above, the phenomenon of reduplication appears not only in the dialogue between the male protagonist and his young partner Manolin but also sporadically in other narrative descriptions. From a semantic perspective, reduplication does not alter the original meaning; however, stylistically, it diverges sharply from Hemingway's minimalist style and economy of language. It is precisely this difference that adds a touch of soft feminine colour to the originally tough male image.

TABLE 2  
RENDERINGS OF “MAN” IN EILEEN CHANG’S CHINESE TRANSLATION OF *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

English	Form Type	Chinese	Frequency	Gender	Percentage (of total)
man	old man	老人	198	Neutral	77.04%
man	old man	老头子	24	Male	9.34%
man	old man	None	2	None	0.78%
man	a/the/no/more/any man	人	21	Neutral	8.17%
man	a/the/no/more/any man	男子汉	2	Male	0.78%
man	a/the/no/more/any man	None	8	None	3.11%
man	man-of-war	军舰	1	None	0.39%
man	man-of-war	大水母	1	None	0.39%
Total number			257		100%

According to the table above, the term “man” appears 257 times, with seven distinct translations. In terms of gender representation, the translations can be categorized as neutral, male-specific, and omitted. Neutral translations (老人/人) account for 219 instances, making up 85% of the total. Male-specific translations (老头子/男子汉) appear 26 times, comprising 10%. Omitted translations occur 12 times, representing 5%. This category includes compound words such as man-of-war, where the translation is unrelated to the meaning of “man”.

“You are already a man.”

(Hemingway, 2011, p. 3)

“你已经是个大人了。”

(Hemingway, trans. Chang, 2020, p. 7)

He cannot know that it is only one man against him, nor that it is an old man.

(Hemingway, 2011, p. 26)

他当然不知道他的敌人只是一个人，而且是一个老头子。

(Hemingway, trans. Chang, 2020, p. 30)

Now everything is cleared away that might make trouble and I have a big reserve of line; all that a man can ask.

(Hemingway, 2011, p. 28)

现在凡是可能引起麻烦的东西全都清除掉了，我又预备下了极长的钓丝；此外还要什么呢？

(Hemingway, trans. Chang, 2020, p. 32)

But I will show him what a man can do and what a man endures.

(Hemingway, 2011, p. 37)

但是我要给他看看人有多大能力，人能够忍受多少痛苦。

(Hemingway, trans. Chang, 2020, p. 41)

In the above examples, there are two types of the word “man” in the original text, which bear distinct male connotations. One refers specifically to the protagonist in the narrative, while the other suggests a broader reference to all men. However, Eileen Chang omits some of the instances of “man” and translates most of them into “人” (person), which is gender-neutral in Chinese and encompasses both men and women. Especially in the final example, the narrative presents the male protagonist’s inner monologue during his struggle at sea: he wants the boy to demonstrate his own capability and endure pain, which most vividly showcases his tough, heroic spirit. However, Eileen Chang still translates the word “man” using neutral terminology.

As the above statistics reveal, when “man” can denote not only a male character but also entire humanity, Eileen Chang uses explicitly masculine terms in only about 26 instances (nearly 10%), while in the remaining approximately 90% of cases, she opts for neutral or omitted translations. Consequently, from the perspective of subject matter, the rugged masculine image that Hemingway constructs is elevated to a universal, human dimension, and expands the meaning of “man” to encompass all of humankind, thereby broadening the scope of the novel’s thematic concerns.

#### B. Tenor Comparison Between the Original Text and Eileen Chang’s Translation

According to House (2015), Tenor concerns the relationship between participants—the speaker/writer and audience—shaped by social power, distance, and emotional involvement, as well as the producer’s background and stance toward the content and task (p. 64). In this study, the classification of modal values in English follows Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2014) tripartite system of low, median and high value modal operators (p. 145). For the Chinese modal system, this study draws on Peng’s (2000) corresponding categorization of Chinese modal verbs (p. 123). Based on these frameworks, this study conducts a comparative analysis of modality in the Tenor dimension of both Hemingway’s original *The Old Man and the Sea* and Eileen Chang’s Chinese translation. The focus is on how Chang manipulates modal frequency and strength to reshape interpersonal relationships, power structures, and emotional tones in a way that reflects her interpretive stance.

TABLE 3  
MODAL VERB DISTRIBUTION IN HEMINGWAY'S *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

Modal value	Modal verbs	Number	Proportion
High	must, could not, have to, need, had to, can't, must not, ought to, has to, mustn't, may not, might not	141	17.56%
Median	will, would, should, would not, was to, should not, shouldn't, is to, will not, won't	291	36.24%
Low	could, can, did not, do not, don't, might, have to, may, does not, didn't, need to, doesn't	371	46.20%
Total number		803	100%

TABLE 4  
MODAL VERB DISTRIBUTION IN EILEEN CHANG'S CHINESE TRANSLATION OF *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

Modal value	Modal verbs	Number	Proportion
High	得, 该, 应该, 应当, 必须, 要, 须要, 不可, 不能, 不该	237	41.15%
Median	乐意, 愿意, 情愿, 想要, 要想, 希望, 高兴, 敢, 值得, 不乐意, 不愿意, 不想, 不肯	26	4.51%
Low	可能, 会, 可, 可以, 能, 能够, 好, 容易, 来得及, 不会, 不必, 不能够, 不容易, 来不及	313	54.34%
Total number		576	100%

From the above distribution of modal verbs, Eileen Chang's translation shows a significantly higher proportion of high value modals (41.15%) compared to Hemingway's original text (17.56%). The median value modals drop sharply from 36.24% in the source text to 4.51%, while low value modals increase moderately from 46.20% to 54.34%. To determine whether this divergence stems from systemic English-Chinese differences rather than translator intervention, this study examines translations by two male translators: Wu Lao's version (High: 35.61% / Median: 3.60% / Low: 60.80%) and Sun Zhili's version (High: 37.57% / Median: 3.36% / Low: 59.07%). Although all three translations exhibit reduced median value modals relative to the source text, Chang's usage of high value modals (41.15%) substantially exceeds that of her male counterparts (Wu: 35.61%; Sun: 37.57%). This suggests Chang intentionally intensified obligations, compulsions, and prohibitions through authoritative language, demonstrating stronger translational agency.

In Chang's translation, frequent high-value modal verbs create a more assertive and directive tone, diminishing the original's hesitation and internal struggle, particularly in the protagonist's moral or emotional ambiguities, and substituting a firmer, decisive voice. From an interpersonal language perspective, this emphasizes control and clarity, reflecting the translator's preference for a self-assured, less ambivalent stance. Though lacking overt gender markers, it contrasts with the original's restrained tone, adopting an explicit, assertive, and self-aware expression that highlights the translator's discursive positioning.

Beyond modality, the interpersonal dimension also refers to the relationship between the translator and the target readership. Translator-provided paratexts (Genette, 1997), particularly prefaces are regarded as key manifestations of the translator's voice and their "ontological narrative" (Somers & Gibson, 1993, p. 30). And Hermans (1996) further contends that translators possess a "second voice", a voice that, while often not present in the translation, becomes audible through paratexts.

Eileen Chang added a preface to her translation of *The Old Man and the Sea*, establishing a direct dialogue with her readers and articulating both her interpretation of the original text and her feminist stance. While adding a preface is a common translation practice, as Von Flotow (1991, p. 76) points out, it has become almost routine for feminist translators to include prefaces as a way to reflect on their translation strategies and ideological positions. In her preface, Eileen Chang not only introduces the background and artistic features of the original work but also clearly states her unique reading of its message.

In her preface, she writes: "The old fisherman has shown amazing perseverance in his fight with the ocean—not superman, but a kind of demeanour, a kind of spirit that all human beings should have" (Hemingway, trans. Chang, 2020, p. 3). Traditionally, the notion of "superman" tends to be associated with a male figure. However, as a female translator, Chang interprets the protagonist's perseverance not as a celebration of masculine heroism, but as a universal human spirit. Her feminist awareness leads her to shift the thematic focus from a stereotypical "tough guy" image to a more inclusive representation of human resilience. This reinterpretation reflects a distinct feminist perspective and broadens the scope of the novel's subject matter to encompass universal human.

### C. Mode Comparison Between the Original Text and Eileen Chang's Translation

In House's (2015) model of translation quality assessment, Mode encompasses not only the channel of communication, whether spoken or written, ranging from "simple" formats like "written to be read" to "complex" ones like "written to be spoken as if not written", but also the degree of real or potential participation between writer and reader (p. 64). Within this framework, tag questions function as elliptical yes/no questions, reduced to an auxiliary verb plus a subject pronoun, that attach to declarative, imperative, or exclamative clauses to invite confirmation of an assertion (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005). Because their form and meaning derive almost entirely from the main clause they follow, tag questions typically invert its polarity and rely on its structure and semantics to supply their own (Achiri-Taboh, 2015). By softening statements into invitations for agreement, tag questions enhance the interactive potential of a text, making them a

particularly salient feature in analyses of translation Mode.

TABLE 5  
TAG QUESTIONS IN HEMINGWAY'S ORIGINAL *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

English	Type	Chinese	Context	Frequency
Haven't we?	Tag question	是不是?	Conversation (the old man)	1

TABLE 6  
TAG QUESTIONS IN EILEEN CHANG'S TRANSLATION OF *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

English	Type	Chinese	Context	Frequency
Are... enough?	yes/no question	够不够?	Conversation (boy)	1
Will...?	yes/no question	好不好?	Conversation (boy)	1
Aren't...lovely?	yes/no question	可爱不可爱?	Monologue (the old man)	1
How would...like to...?	WH-question	乐意不乐意?	Conversation (boy)	1
Can...?/May...?	yes/no question	行不行?	Conversation (boy)	3
Haven't...?/ Is...?/ Were...?	Tag question/ yes/no question	是不是?	Conversation (the old man)/ conversation (boy) / Monologue (the old man)	3

From the above two tables, a comparison reveals differences in the use of tag questions between the original text and Eileen Chang's Chinese translation. In terms of variety of forms, the translation employs three distinct question formats (yes/no question, WH-question and tag question) whereas the original text contains only one instance of a pure confirmatory tag question ("Haven't we?"). Moreover, Chang's version embeds tag questions primarily within dialogues (8 out of 10 occurrences between the boy and the old man) and occasionally within the old man's monologues (2 occurrences), enhancing reader engagement and co-participation, while Hemingway's original uses its single tag question in a conversation by the old man only once, maintaining a more controlled, authorial tone.

Just smell them. Aren't they lovely?

(Hemingway, 2011, p. 22)

你闻闻看。这沙汀鱼可爱不可爱?

(Hemingway, trans. Chang, 2020, p. 26)

"May I take the cast net?"

(Hemingway, 2011, p. 5)

"我把网带回去，行不行?"

(Hemingway, trans. Chang, 2020, p. 9)

"How would you like to see me bring one in that dressed out over a thousand pound?"

(Hemingway, 2011, p. 6)

"我明天要是钓到一个一千多磅重的，你乐意不乐意?"

(Hemingway, trans. Chang, 2020, p. 10)

In the three examples above, the tag questions occur within the dialogue between the boy and the old man, with both speakers alternating roles. The translator converted what were originally yes/no question or WH-questions into Chinese tag questions, "可爱不可爱?", "行不行?", "乐意不乐意?" a structure that is ubiquitous in daily Mandarin conversation and projects a relaxed, participatory tone. By embedding these repetitive, echo-like tag questions into ordinary exchanges, Chang not only intensifies the characters' emotional intimacy, each party continually checking the other's feelings and willingness, but also softens and negotiates their voices. This shift contrasts sharply with Hemingway's terse, assertive style and instead creates a gentle and caring atmosphere.

By replacing Hemingway's direct, function-driven interrogatives with "consultative" and "co-creative" tag questions (可爱不可爱? 行不行? 乐意不乐意?), Chang shifts the dialogue from simple information exchange to a more collaborative, co-constructive interaction. This adjustment softens the conversational register, inviting responsive feedback and mutual negotiation of meaning. In doing so, the text's pragmatic environment becomes less hierarchical and more dialogic, reflecting a mode of discourse that aligns with values of inclusivity and shared understanding.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study employs House's (2015) translation quality assessment model to examine how gender discourse is restructured in Eileen Chang's Chinese translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* across the three dimensions of Field, Tenor, and Mode. The analysis revealed that Chang's translation involves a series of deliberate interventions at the lexical, modal, syntactic and paratext (Genette, 1997) levels. These include 114 instances of lexical reduplication, diversified translations of the word "man", reduced use of modality and intensified authoritative expressions, explicit feminist prefacing, and ten consultative tag questions. Collectively, these strategies transform Hemingway's original male-centred narrative into a more inclusive, emotionally resonant discourse. From the perspective of feminist translation, such interventions reflect a conscious overt translation strategy in which the translator's ideological position is clearly articulated.

Beyond its reconstruction of gender discourse, the study highlights distinctions between Chang's approach and that of

mainstream Western feminist translation theory. While Western feminist translators often rely on overt strategies such as supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and “hijacking” (Von Flotow, 1991, p. 74), Chang’s practice not only adopts similar explicit interventions, but also integrates implicit expression methods with the characteristics of Eastern culture. For example, in the Tenor dimension, she attenuates the male authoritative tone on the whole, making the language gentler and more approachable, while in the Mode dimension, she creates an empathetic and interactive narrative atmosphere through consultative sentence structures. This combination of explicit feminist intervention and implicit cultural adaptation forms a hybrid translation paradigm that not only charts a unique practical course for feminist translation in the Chinese context but also inspires new perspectives for feminist translators in non-Western cultures.

From a practical perspective, this study offers significant implications for translators engaging with texts that articulate gender awareness. It illustrates how strategic manipulation of lexis, grammatical structures, and discourse patterns can reconfigure the narrative voice while maintaining fidelity to the source text. More importantly, the findings contribute to the broader cross-cultural negotiation of feminist discourse, particularly in non-Western contexts where feminist movements have not historically emerged. In such settings, translation can function as a vital cultural mediator, facilitating the transmission, adaptation, and localization of feminist perspectives within diverse literary and socio-cultural traditions.

Inevitably, this study is constrained by its limited scope, focusing on a single translator and text and engaging only partially with House’s (2015) model, leaving out dimensions such as genre, function, and cultural filtering. To move forward, future research should explore broader corpora across translators, languages, and genres, and engage with reception studies to assess the impact of feminist strategies on readers. Against the backdrop of Chinese translation practices, which have long been governed by norms such as “faithfulness”, “expressiveness”, and “elegance” (Qin et al., 2023), where feminist translation remains relatively marginalized, analysing Chang’s translation highlights the potential of feminist approaches to intervene in gender discourse. This provides a foundation for rethinking its role in non-Western contexts and in global translation studies.

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