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Explorations of Feminist Translation Theory by Chinese and Foreign Translators

Ling Le*

School of Foreign Languages, Southwest Petroleum University, 610500, Chengdu, China
* **Corresponding author:** Ling Le (Email: luvsic1989@163.com)

Abstract: This paper, Explorations of Feminist Translation Theory by Chinese and Western Translators, aims to compare and analyze the research achievements and practical applications of feminist translation theory by Chinese and Western translators. It first outlines the developmental context and core tenets of feminist translation theory, emphasizing its crucial role in challenging traditional translation concepts and revealing gender inequality. Subsequently, it examines the major contributions and representative perspectives of Chinese and Western translators in the field of feminist translation theory, analyzing their similarities and differences in theoretical research and translation practice. Through case studies, the paper further demonstrates the concrete application of feminist translation theory in literary texts, revealing the manifestation and role of gender consciousness in the translation process. Finally, this paper summarizes the current state and developmental trends of feminist translation theory research in both Chinese and Western contexts, proposing potential directions for future studies. It aims to offer new perspectives and insights for translation research and practice.

Keywords: Feminist Translation Theory, Chinese and Foreign Translators, Gender Awareness, Translation Practice, Theoretical Research.

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, issues of gender equality and women's rights are receiving increasing attention. As a vital component of cultural transmission, translation is also influenced by gender and power dynamics. Feminist translation theory, as a significant theoretical framework, examines the role of gender in translation and strives to challenge and resolve gender inequality issues. However, the research and application of feminist translation theory by Chinese and foreign translators warrant greater attention and comprehensive comparative analysis. Therefore, this thesis aims to explore the investigations and practices of feminist translation theory by Chinese and foreign translators, seeking to provide new perspectives and insights for research on cross-cultural translation and gender awareness.

The objective of this study is to compare and analyze the research outcomes and practical applications of feminist translation theory by Chinese and Western translators. By comprehensively comparing their contributions in this field, we can gain deeper insights into the characteristics and similarities/differences of feminist translation theory across diverse cultural contexts. This research employs literature review and case analysis methods to examine and contrast the research findings and practical cases of Chinese and Western translators, thereby drawing conclusions and proposing directions for future research.

This paper will be divided into six main sections. The introduction will outline the research background and significance, as well as the objectives and methodology. First, we will provide an overview of the development and core tenets of feminist translation theory. Next, we will examine and analyze the contributions of Chinese and Western scholars to feminist translation theory. Subsequently, through specific case studies, we will demonstrate the application of feminist translation theory in literary texts and explore its implications for translation practice. Finally, we will summarize the current state of feminist translation theory research and project future research directions and trends. Through this study, we aim to offer new perspectives and approaches for cross-cultural translation and gender-conscious practice, thereby advancing gender equality and cultural inclusivity in translation studies and practice.

2. Historical Development and Core Perspectives of Feminist Translation Theory

The section headings are in boldface capital and lowercase letters. Second level headings are typed as part of the succeeding paragraph (like the subsection heading of this paragraph). All manuscripts must be in English, also the table and figure texts, otherwise we cannot publish your paper. Please keep a second copy of your manuscript in your office. When receiving the paper, we assume that the corresponding authors grant us the copyright to use the paper for the book or journal in question. When receiving the paper, we assume that the corresponding authors grant us the copyright to use the paper for the book or journal in question. When receiving the paper, we assume that the corresponding authors grant us the copyright to use.Discussing the historical development of feminist translation theory requires examining its origins, evolution, and current state. The concept of feminist translation is constructed around feminism as its core. It represents a translation methodology that adopts a feminist perspective and employs corresponding approaches to embody women's rights. Its essence lies in translation practices executed to secure women's rights and status (Qu, 2019)[1]. Thus, its origins are inextricably linked to the feminist movement.

In its early stages, feminists drew inspiration from the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen born during the French Revolution. Combining this with their long-endured injustices across all facets of social life, they

transformed grievances into a courageous spirit of resistance. They rallied their fellow women, thereby advancing the entire female population's political demands for gender equality. It can be said that the struggle for human rights effectively spurred feminists to deeply reflect on gender discrimination and disrespect towards women, leading to subsequent resistance. Consequently, women's pursuit of rights became more purposeful and gained clearer conceptual underpinnings, preventing them from losing sight of their core principles or straying from the path of the liberation movement.

From the 18th century to the late 20th century, the second and third waves of feminist movements unfolded. These liberation movements were largely guided by the framework established in Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex. The intellectual wisdom contained within this work continues to hold educational and guiding significance for contemporary feminist movements. Yet, amidst the long and arduous struggle, feminist activists inevitably began to reflect on the limitations of the feminist movement. Why, despite women gaining more equal rights than ever before, does discrimination remain pervasive in social life? Even under the long-term oppression of male-dominated discourse, some women developed self-deprecation and low self-esteem, automatically diminishing their own gender identity. In other words, women have not achieved true liberation, and the equality movement has even undergone a detrimental qualitative change in certain respects.

Subsequently, feminists turned their attention to the cultural sphere, striving to propel women's liberation to its zenith. They then recognized that countless patriarchal classics had defined women's social status as appendages to men. These works further solidified and deepened the patriarchal oppression of women through translation across languages, subtly conditioning most women to believe they inherently possessed such attributes and were destined to remain lifelong appendages to men[1]. Thus, the feminist liberation movement must correct this flawed cultural orientation and deconstruct patriarchal cultural institutions. This necessity gave rise to feminist translation. Feminist translators joined the ranks of the women's liberation movement, extending its reach into the field of translation. They dedicated themselves to eliminating linguistic gender discrimination, thereby pioneering gender studies in translation.

Research reveals that women, like translation itself, occupy subordinate and easily overlooked positions. For instance, French translator Gilles Mange likened translations to "unfaithful beauties"[2]; scholars have compared translation-perceived as flawed-to "women". To counteract patriarchal society and transform the oppressed status of women and translation, feminist translation advocates for translators to exercise agency. By highlighting feminist consciousness in translations, it seeks to eliminate gender discrimination in translation practice. This constitutes a unique practice where translators utilize feminist translation as an interventionist tool to achieve cultural creation. Grounded in this translation theory, feminist translation studies have exposed how traditional translation research both feminizes and marginalizes translation[3].

Thus, through the efforts of feminist activists, feminism-as the core of feminist translation theory-evolved from opposing patriarchy to challenging all forms of cultural hegemony. They gave rise to numerous contemporary theories such as postcolonialism and cultural studies, which sought to subvert or at least reevaluate traditional value systems across various domains including politics, religion, culture, and language[4]. Ultimately, research into these theories has yielded new developments in translation studies, crystallizing into a distinct system known as feminist translation theory. Today, this systematic guiding framework is applied by numerous translators in literary translation practice. Moreover, the maturation of feminist translation theory has amplified feminism's influence, advancing the cause of women's genuine liberation. Moving forward, feminist translation theory will continue to propel the evolution of civilization and foster social equity and justice.

3. Western Translators' Exploration of Feminist Translation Theory

Feminist translation theory constitutes a significant branch within translation studies, emphasizing the role of gender and power dynamics in the translation process. Key figures include Luise von Flotow, Sherry Simon, Barbara Godard, and Susan Bassnett. Their perspectives and contributions are elaborated below.

Luise von Flotow stands as a pivotal scholar in feminist translation studies. Her work Translation and Gender: Translating in the "Era of Feminism" made significant contributions to feminist translation theory. Werner emphasizes the importance of gender awareness in the translation process, advocating that translators should be mindful of gender biases in the source text and make appropriate adjustments during translation to reflect a feminist perspective.

Sheila Smon's Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission is a seminal work in feminist translation studies. Smon explores the complexity of gender issues in translation, arguing that translation is not merely linguistic conversion but also an interaction of culture and power. She contends that translators should incorporate feminist perspectives into their work to challenge and transform traditional gender norms.

Barbara Govey, a Canadian translation scholar, focuses her research on feminist approaches to translation. Govey proposes that feminist translators should adopt an "interventionist translation" methodology-actively intervening during the translation process to highlight female voices and perspectives, thereby challenging male-centered cultural narratives.

Susan Bassnett, a pioneer in translation studies, explored the relationship between translation and gender in Translation Studies: Theory and Practice. Bassnett contends that translation is not merely linguistic conversion but the transmission of culture and power. She emphasizes the need to consider gender factors during translation to avoid reproducing gender inequality.

Through their research and publications, these scholars have advanced feminist translation theory. They stress that translators must maintain gender awareness during the translation process, oppose gender discrimination, and actively promote gender equality. These contributions not only enrich the theoretical framework of translation studies but also provide guidance for practical translation work.

4. Chinese Translators' Exploration of Feminist Translation Theory

Although feminist translation studies emerged later in

China than in Western countries, it has nonetheless achieved distinctive accomplishments and broad perspectives-both theoretically and practically-while building upon Western research.

In the 1990s, Western feminist theory entered China and achieved widespread dissemination. After reading translated works, some local scholars attempted to connect these ideas with the existing cultural and social contexts of the time, thereby establishing the field of feminist literature in China. In this process, scholars inevitably began to pay attention to Western feminist translation theory. It can be said that feminist translation studies in China benefited from numerous translators serving as mediators in disseminating translation theory.

Mu Lei, one of the leading figures in this theoretical research, was among the first to combine the concepts of women and translation, reflecting on how gender factors influence translation practice. The true pioneer of feminist translation studies in China was Liao Qiyi, who translated and provided a comprehensive introduction to the theory. In her work on Western translation theory, she was the first to highlight the guiding significance of feminist theory for translation studies. Subsequently, related research by other scholars proliferated rapidly[5]. Liao Qi-yi further argued that employing critical feminist translation studies enables a deeper understanding of the symbiotic relationship between source and target texts, thereby enriching textual meaning[6]. At this stage, the theory remained in its nascent dissemination phase. While scholars like Ge Xiaoqin and Liu Yaru offered additional perspectives, these contributions were still exploratory in nature. Liu Yaru introduced the feminist translation methodology and perspectives of Canadian scholar Susanna, emphasizing that translators should employ linguistic techniques to highlight female figures within texts[7]. Ge Xiaoqin examined the historical context and motivations behind feminist translation theory, discussing its conceptual foundations, practical applications, methodological approaches, and connections to deconstruction theory[3]. She further clarified the essence of feminist translation and extended its significance. In summary, from 1999 to 2003, feminist translation theory research in China remained in an introductory phase. Beginning with the initial emergence of gender awareness, it later saw a rush to introduce feminist translation theory from theoretical, practical, and translator perspectives. Thus, feminist translation theory quietly took root in China[8].

The year 2004 marked the first watershed moment for indigenous feminist translation studies. Since then, an increasing number of scholars have shared diverse research perspectives, leading to significant progress in scholarly achievements. Following the introduction of Flotow's Translation and Gender: Translation in the Feminist Era, scholars represented by Liu Junping and Jiang Xiaohua developed a deeper and more comprehensive understanding and exposition of feminist translation studies. Their analyses primarily centered on translator subjectivity and the impact of this theory on traditional translation theory. Xu Lai contends that feminist scholarship has opened new perspectives in translator subjectivity studies[9]. Translation is viewed as an act of "rewriting," where female discourse gains enhanced agency within the translated text. Zhang Jinghua offers a fresh approach, arguing that feminist translation theory remains limited and that translators should critically examine the relationship between translation and source text[10]. While feminist translation theory partially addresses the limitations of traditional approaches, overemphasizing linguistic dominance or translator subjectivity risks producing biased translations. By 2007, the field saw increased scholarly engagement, with researchers systematically synthesizing and summarizing prior theoretical contributions.

The period after 2008 primarily marked a phase of interdisciplinary research within feminist translation theory. Li Wenjing and Mu Lei were the first to introduce the concept of androgyny into this field, thereby mitigating the potential for extremism in feminist translation studies[11]. As a sociological concept, the application of androgyny to feminist translation research offered scholars a fresh perspective. This demonstrates that research on feminist translation theory, whether in its promotion or critique, requires objective and reasonable approaches.

However, the advancement of this theoretical research has been slow within China's deeply patriarchal society, where its influence remains limited. The path toward local women's liberation remains long. Since its introduction to China, discussions on this theory have been scarce, and research examples are few. Most practical case studies focus on translations of Western literary classics. From 2002 to 2022, the total number of feminist translation studies papers in China has steadily increased, with a significantly higher proportion appearing in core journals than before. This indicates that research on translation from a gender perspective is gradually gaining prominence in China. Overall, domestic research on feminist translation has primarily focused on theoretical reviews, lacking practical studies with Chinese characteristics. However, as theoretical research deepens, the translation studies community has made significant progress in examining translation practices guided by feminist principles. A remaining shortcoming is the limited range of texts studied[12].

In summary, over more than two decades of development, domestic feminist translation theory research has yielded relatively substantial outcomes, yet deficiencies in depth and comprehensiveness persist. On one hand, influenced by societal factors, the acceptance and dissemination of feminist translation theory still require enhancement. On the other hand, while domestic researchers have adopted Western theories in translation practice, they have also developed a unique translation system suited to China's national conditions, significantly elevating the research's value.

5. Case Analysis

The following will conduct a specific case analysis of the English translation of Qian Zhongshu's Fortress Besieged based on feminist translation theory. Feminist translation theory focuses on gender consciousness and power relations, so we will explore gender issues in both the original text and the English translation from this perspective.

Example 1.

ST: 柔嘉总是沉默寡言，但心中却有很多苦楚。

TT: She was always quiet and reserved, yet her heart was filled with unspoken sorrows.

Analysis: As Fang Hongjian's wife, Sun Roujia is a complex character. She is not merely a "model wife and mother"; her inner repression and discontent are also depicted in the novel. How Jenny Kelly handles Sun Roujia's portrayal in the English translation is a point worthy of attention. If she were translated solely as a stereotypical "good wife and

mother," overlooking her inner complexity, it could reinforce traditional gender roles. This translation not only preserves Sun Rougia's outward appearance but also highlights her inner complexity. If the English translation captures this inner complexity, the translator has successfully emphasized the multifaceted nature of the female character.

Example 2.

ST: 女人就是麻烦。

TT: Women can sometimes be challenging to deal with.

Analysis: In the original text, Fang Hongjian's conversations with colleagues often carry a male-centered bias, reflecting contemporary prejudices against women. How Jenny Kelly and Mao Guoquan handle these gendered prejudices in the English translation is crucial. A direct translation of such biased dialogue risks unintentionally reproducing these biases. Feminist translation theory suggests translators can mitigate such biases by selecting more neutral vocabulary and tone. This approach preserves the original meaning while avoiding direct denigration of women. Additionally, translators may include critical annotations explaining these biases, helping readers understand the gender issues within the historical context.

Example 3.

ST: 方鸿渐觉得婚姻如同围城。

TT: While Fang Hongjian felt trapped in the marriage, Sun Roujia's silent suffering was equally profound.

Analysis: The original text primarily adopts a male perspective, narrating Fang Hongjian's life and experiences, with female characters often portrayed through his lens. Balancing this male-centric viewpoint is a crucial challenge in the English translation. Whether Jenny Kelly and Mao Guoquan attempted to supplement female perspectives in their translation is key to assessing its alignment with feminist translation theory. Translators can supplement female perspectives through translator's prefaces, marginal notes, or afterwords. For instance, when describing Fang Hongjian and Sun Roujia's marriage, the example above discusses Sun Roujia's feelings and perspectives within the marriage in the translator's afterword. Such additions help readers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the gender dynamics within the story.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we have examined the contributions and influence of Chinese and foreign translators on feminist translation theory. By analyzing the development of feminist translation theory, its key figures and their contributions, as well as its application in translation practice, we have gained a deeper understanding of the significant impact of gender consciousness on translation.

Overall, feminist translation theory has introduced vital perspectives and theoretical frameworks to the field of translation studies. It emphasizes the representation of gender roles and attention to cultural differences during translation, offering crucial pathways for re-examining power relations and cultural identity within translation practice. Through feminist translation theory, we can more comprehensively understand the gender politics and cultural factors at play in translation activities, thereby promoting diversity and inclusivity in translation practice.

However, we also recognize that feminist translation theory faces certain challenges and controversies, such as balancing gender consciousness with cultural differences in practice, and translating theoretical concepts into concrete translation methods. Future research could further explore the applicability of feminist translation theory across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, while strengthening the integration of gender consciousness with translation practice to make deeper contributions to cultural inclusivity and equality in the field.

Therefore, we maintain a positive stance toward feminist translation theory, believing it will continue to play a significant role in translation studies, offering valuable insights for achieving cultural diversity and gender equality. We hope future research will further expand the application domains of feminist translation theory and propel translation practice toward greater inclusivity and equality.

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