

Gender and Feminism in Pearson's English Translation of I Ching

Qiyao Zhang

*The School of Education and English, The University of Nottingham Ningbo China, Ningbo, China
qiyao.zhang@nottingham.edu.cn*

Abstract. I Ching is one of the oldest and most significant texts in Chinese culture. For thousands of years, it has served not only as a system of divination but also as an embodiment of wisdom, philosophy, and cosmology. Through its translation into numerous languages, I Ching has garnered worldwide recognition, establishing itself as a cornerstone text for worldwide studies in sinology, philosophy, and comparative religion. I Ching, in translation, remains a subject of intense scholarly interest. Its journey into world languages consistently sparks vibrant discussions regarding cross-cultural interpretation, philosophical fidelity, and the evolving role of the translator. However, little scholarly attention has been devoted to specifically investigating the role of gender awareness in the translation of I Ching. Drawing on Flotow's feminist translation theory, this paper examines how Margaret J. Pearson employs feminist translation strategies such as supplementing, prefacing, footnoting, and hijacking to mitigate the inherent gender discrimination in her English translation of I Ching. It finds out that Pearson's magnifies the active roles of female figures. Through analysis of five selected examples, this paper aims to illuminate Pearson's distinctive gender consciousness and her contribution to interpreting ancient classics from a feminist perspective.

Keywords: gender, translation strategies, literary translation, I Ching, female translator

1. Introduction

Feminist translation theory, which emerged against the backdrop of the "cultural turn" from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, can be considered a product of the convergence between translation studies and feminism [1]. It stresses the translator's subjectivity and endeavors to eradicate gender bias in the process of translation. Feminist scholars have argued that translation has traditionally been considered subordinate to the original text, a hierarchy that complies with the stereotype of women tending to rely on men. To achieve "faithfulness," translators were expected to render themselves invisible. As [1] notes, both 'woman' and 'translation' have been relegated to a position of discursive inferiority. This shared position provides a rationale for linking feminism with translation. According to [2], exploring the gendered metaphor that aligns "the female" with "translation" is one of the main aims of feminist translation theory. To advance this goal, feminist translators have adopted specific strategies such as supplementing, hijacking, prefacing, and footnoting. In her seminal work, [3] first systematized the feminist interventions within Canadian translation by

identifying key strategies: supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and hijacking. Among these, supplementing involves compensating for differences between languages. Prefacing and footnoting, another frequently used set of tactics, serve to illustrate a source text's background and challenge the rigid dichotomy between translators and authors. The strategy of hijacking, meanwhile, grants feminist translators the right to interfere with texts to instill a gender consciousness. As [3] outlines, these strategies often overlap in practice, collectively manifesting the potential to 'womanhandle' texts.

I Ching, an ancient text of profound wisdom, is considered the oldest classic in China. Its extensive and profound influence has played an instrumental role in Chinese history and culture. The Western translation of the I Ching originated with Western missionaries in the 16th and 17th centuries [4]. By the late 20th century, a multitude of English translations had emerged, reflecting trends such as structuralism, practicalism, and feminism [5]. A noteworthy development after the 1980s was the attention some feminist translators paid to its English translations. A prominent recent English translation is the one by Margaret J. Pearson [6], in which gender consciousness is embodied [7]. [7] identified it as an English translation of I Ching produced with distinct gender consciousness.

Based on Flotow's feminist translation theory, this paper employs a case study approach to probe into Pearson's gender consciousness and her specific translation strategies as embodied in her translation of the I Ching. Through this analysis, the study aims to explore how a woman translator's gender consciousness manifests in the translation of such a classic, thereby enhancing the understanding of both the source text and Pearson's version. To facilitate comprehension for non-Chinese speakers, this paper provides literal English translations for the Chinese source text examples. In the following analysis, ST stands for source text, LT for literal translation, and TT for target text.

2. Supplementing

Supplementing is a feminist translation strategy aimed at compensating for differences between two languages. At times, translators may intervene by querying the source text and adding information not present in the original, thereby making their beliefs manifest in the translation. Given the highly succinct nature of I Ching, Pearson widely adopts supplementing in her translation to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps and to foreground the active roles of female figures. Pearson's use of supplementing falls into two categories: the addition of personal pronouns and the addition of full sentences. This section will demonstrate how the translator employs supplementing to convey gender consciousness.

Example 1:

ST: 以杞包瓜, 含章, 有陨自天.

LT: Using willow twigs to contain gourds, the beauty is contained, auspiciousness naturally descends from heaven.

TT: She protects things within, just as a gourd is protected by being wrapped in flexible willow twigs. You hold great beauty within you. Auspiciousness naturally descends from heaven.

This excerpt from the Gou chapter serves to compliment female benevolence. The source text implies that heaven bestows auspiciousness upon good-hearted people, employing the metaphorical meanings of the gourd and willow twigs. In her translation, Pearson adds the clause "She protects things within" at the beginning. This supplement transforms a sentence with an unclear referent and no explicit subject into one that uses "she" as its subject. This use of personal pronoun supplementation creates a positive impression of the female figure for the reader and subtly

highlights the chapter's unique woman-centered perspective. Furthermore, in this added sentence, Pearson's choice of the word "protect" is significant. Defined as a protective action typically provided by someone capable, the word effectively conveys female competence. Through this supplementary sentence, Pearson successfully foregrounds the active roles of women.

Example 2:

ST: 《象》曰:天下有风, 姤. 后以施命诰四方.

LT: Image: Below the sky, a wind, a royal bride. The queen gives orders to the four corners of the world.

TT: Below the sky, a wind: the image of the royal bride. [As gentle and persistent as the wind] the queen spreads her influence and makes proclamations which reach the four corners of the world.

In this example, the Chinese character "姤" (gòu) refers to a royal bride in ancient China. The source text suggests that the influence of a figure such as a royal bride can be compared to the image of "wind." In her translation, Pearson considers this context and adds the sentence, "As gentle and persistent as the wind." This addition serves as a tribute to women by eulogizing qualities associated with the wind. Through this comparison, women are portrayed as both gentle and persistent: the word "gentle" conveys their tenderness, while "persistent" underscores their fortitude. By employing this supplementary strategy, Pearson conveys the idea that women can be both gentle and resolute. The use of these two adjectives helps to concretize the active roles of female figures.

3. Prefacing and footnoting

Prefaces and footnotes are commonly employed by feminist translators to clarify the intentions of the source text and to elaborate on the corresponding strategies used in their translations. Pearson's translation is also characterized by a preface and numerous footnotes. In the preface, she explains the context of the original text, her reasons for undertaking the translation, and her intention in introducing it to target readers. Furthermore, she also stresses that the character yin was considered a categorical symbol for a hill, rather than a radical denoting women. All of this reflects her gender consciousness. As for the substantial footnotes, they primarily serve two functions: making language speak for women and disseminating Chinese culture. These functions are illustrated below with one of the many examples from Pearson's translation:

Example 3:

ST: 天行健,君子以自强不息.

LT: Heaven moves unceasingly, a gentleman should strive unceasingly.

TT: As Heaven keeps vigor through movement, one worthy of power unremittingly practice self-improvement.

Translator's Note: Junzi was originally an allusion to a person's high social status, mainly referring to a person exercising government or dominion. In the Confucian tradition, the term acquired an additional moral dimension and referred to someone who was above a scholar and below a sage in terms of moral influence. In the footnote, Pearson provides an explanation regarding the term "君子" (noble person; gentleman). This translational approach serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it clarifies the connection between the source and target texts, facilitating reader comprehension. As indicated in her footnote, Junzi originally alluded to an individual of high social status, which explains her translation as "one worthy of power." Secondly, while "君子" is a familiar concept to Chinese readers, its connotations have evolved with social development. Its original meaning referred solely to rulers and men of aristocratic birth, generally excluding women. However, as times progressed, the term has come to describe a person of noble character, irrespective of gender. In her translation and footnote, Pearson employs neutral terms such as "one,"

"person," and "someone" to demonstrate that this positive concept is not exclusively for men but applies to women as well, thereby making language speak for women.

4. Hijacking

Hijacking is regarded as the most contentious feminist translation strategy, precisely because it fully epitomizes the translator's subjectivity. This strategy is the most frequently employed in Pearson's translation of I Ching, manifested primarily in her rewriting of content that exhibits discrimination against women.

Example 4:

ST: 系遁之厉, 有疾惫也. 畜臣妾吉.

LT: Attached to a retreat: there is illness and danger. Raising concubines: good fortune.

TT: Attached to a retreat: there is illness and danger. If you support helpers and intimates: good fortune.

In this example, the original text implies that when a man should retreat from something that exhausts him, hesitation due to nostalgia will lead to illness and danger. In such a situation, keeping concubines around is considered auspicious because of their obedience. In ancient China, "妾" (concubine) referred to a woman who cohabited with a man but held a status lower than his wife. In her translation, Pearson transformed "妾" into "intimates," a replacement that eliminates the subordinate status of women implied in the original text. Meanwhile, the Chinese character "畜" (raising) is typically used in the context of livestock. The source text employs this word as if the female intimate were a form of livestock raised by a person of power, thus humiliating the female image. However, in her translation, Pearson replaced this word with "support," thereby removing the gender discrimination.

5. Conclusion

Feminist translation theory has profoundly reshaped the translation field by elevating translators' status and redefining fidelity, emphasizing gender consciousness. This paper examines how Margaret J. Pearson applied strategies like supplementing and hijacking in translating I Ching to amplify women's voices, as seen in her use of gender-neutral language. Furthermore, existing feminist analyses of I Ching in translation are scarce. Future research could explore androgynous approaches in the translation of such classical texts.

References

- [1] Simon, Sherry (1996). *Gender in Translation: Cultural identity and the Politics of Transmission*. London: Routledge.
- [2] Chamberlain, Lori (2001). *Gender and the Metaphoric of Translation*. New York: Harper.
- [3] Flotow, Luise V (1991). "Feminist Translation: Contexts, Practices and Theories." *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, 4, 2, 69-84. doi: 10.7202/037094ar.-(2004). *Translation and Gender: Translating in the "Era of Feminism"*.
- [4] Huang Delu (2003). The Present Situation and Some Suggestions of the Translation of Yijing into English. *Journal of Anyang University*, 14 (8), 6-8.
- [5] Legge James (trans) (1964). *I Ching Book of Changes*. NJ: Citadel Press.
- [6] Pearson, M. J (trans) (2011). *The Original I Ching: An Authentic Translation of the Book of Changes*. Rutland: Tuttle Publishing.
- [7] Wang Xiaonong (2016). Study on the Semiotics of the English Translations of Yijing. *Social Sciences Weekly*, 15 October, 5.