

## Original Paper

# Comparative Study of Two Chinese Versions of *To the Lighthouse* from Eco-feminism's View

Ziyuan Li

School of Foreign Languages, Hubei University of Technology, Wuhan, China

Received: December 16, 2024      Accepted: January 20, 2025      Online Published: February 7, 2025

doi:10.22158/jetss.v7n1p53

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jetss.v7n1p53>

### **Abstract**

*With the advancement of ecological theory, ecological crises have become a major problem on a worldwide scale. Eco-feminism, as a new branch of theory, is a theory produced by the interaction between the feminism movement and Ecologism in the process of development. Eco-feminism believes that in a patriarchal society, both nature and women are oppressed by human beings, so women have a natural connection with nature. In addition to being one of the forerunners of feminist literature, Virginia Woolf is regarded as the most gifted female author in the annals of English literature. Her feminist literature "To the Lighthouse" has been deeply studied by scholars and interpreted from the perspective of Eco-feminism. They found that this work embodied the ideas of anti-anthropocentrism, anti-androcentrism and creating a harmonious environment, which are all core elements of Eco-feminists. There are a lot of scenes describing women and nature, man and nature in the *To the Lighthouse*, which reflects the author's Eco-feminism thought. This paper chooses Ma Ainong's translation and Qu Shijing's translation as the research object, aiming to explore the embodiment of Eco-feminism in the two translations, as well as the selection and application of translation strategies and techniques.*

### **Keywords**

*Eco-feminism translation, To the Lighthouse, Translation tragedies, Translation study*

## **1. Introduction**

*To the Lighthouse* is a stream-of-consciousness novel by Virginia Woolf. It was published in modern times, but because of Chinese social restrictions at the time and China's prolonged isolation from the rest of the world, its introduction into China was challenging. Since the work was handed to China, the translation methodology in China is still deficient.

Feminist translation theory is a product of combination of feminism and translation studies, however,

its development in China is still primarily theoretical because there are little research on the basis of application studies. At the same time, environment and nature were considered to be relevant to women from the perspective of Eco-feminism. This theory was originated in the late 20 century, and provided a new way for scholars to interpret the internal meaning of the western novels. Because it is a relevantly new theory in China, it is necessary to conduct more researches in this field.

### *1.1 Research Background*

Virginia Woolf wrote *To the Lighthouse* in 1927, a period in which the patriarchal system predominated and women's status was awkward and subservient. Women writers at the time were even prohibited from publishing works in their own names. In light of the prohibition policy, they either borrow or invent a male pen-name so as to publish their works. Virginia Woolf is the exact author who serve as example.

*To the Lighthouse* has enjoyed tremendous success since its release. The primary technique used in the work is stream of consciousness, sometimes referred to interior monologue, which is a narrative mode or device that describes the numerous ideas and sensations that go through the mind. Its application in the novel makes reading extremely challenging. That can only be understood by many readers with the aid of Chinese translations. There have only sometimes appeared a few Chinese copies of *To the Lighthouse* at this time due to the difficulty of stream of consciousness itself and the restriction policy to its works.

At first, there were only three translations respectively by Chen Xu (1987), Xie Qingyao (1988), and Kong Fanyun (1988). Then, some female translators came to existence, Such as Wang Jiexiang (2001), Ma Ainong (2003) and Chen Dedong (2010). Meanwhile, more male translators join the work of translation of *To the Lighthouse*. According to the historical order in which different translation of *To the Lighthouse* appear, female translator began working on the translation later than male translators, and as a result, their translations received less attention than those of man. With the development of Eco-feminism movement in countries all over the world, the feminist translation theory, which is offered by female translators, offers a fresh viewpoint for the version analysis of *To the Lighthouse*. Since its inception coincides with the "cultural turn" in translation studies, the theory has collaborated with other non-linguistic fields like deconstruction, post-colonialism, new criticism, and cultural studies and so on (Baker, 2000). Many feminist translators have gained public recognition in this period, and they have made significant contributions to the growth of the theory and have advanced many translation techniques, including supplementing, prefacing, footnoting, and hijacking.

### *1.2 Significance and Objectives of the Research*

A thorough analysis of feminist translation theory will be presented in the thesis. According to studies on Chinese feminist translation, it is clear that these translators nevertheless adhere to the conventional translation ideal of integrity, even though their work appears to be more moderate. The realm of translation practice has not seen any substantial advancements for Chinese feminist translation theory, which is also remains locked at the theoretical level. Hence a comparative examination of the Chinese

versions of *To the Lighthouse* is conducted in the hope that it can help to advance the theory in the field of feminist translation practice.

In order to conduct a comparison analysis, the thesis chooses translations done by male translator Qu Shijing and female translator Ma Ainong, who each have different opinions on language use and translation methods. Qu Shijing is representative of patriarchal system, so he harbors deep prejudice towards women and displays the greater male consciousness in his work. The renowned female translator Ma Ainong makes an effort to make her female consciousness evident. She tries to emphasize the subjectivity of the female.

Finally, the research of this paper shows that Ma Ainong's translation is more faithful to the ecofeminists characteristics of the original work, because his translation effectively captures the spirit of the original work, namely, the rejection of anthropocentrism and androcentrism, and the appeal for a harmonious state.

## **2. Eco-feminism and Translation**

It was the French scholar Françoise d'Eaubonne (1974) who first fused feminism with ecology. She posited that the societal mindset that fosters oppression and dominance of women is intricately tied to the one that results in the mistreatment of the global environment. Consequently, a novel branch of feminism emerged. Charlene Spretnak (1997), a leading figure in eco-feminism, asserts that the central tenet of eco-feminism is that "in Western culture, there exists a historical, symbolic, and political connection between the degradation of nature and the devaluation of women." This relationship stems from a patriarchal worldview characterized by three key aspects: dualistic thinking, hierarchical values, and a logic of domination. According to ecological feminism, both gender oppression and ecological crises have their roots in this worldview.

Transforming patriarchal society is the first objective of ecofeminism. In order to create a new community headed by women and promote women's freedom of speech, feminist translation theory places an emphasis on serving women and using translation as their tool (Flotow, 1991). As a result, they all make an effort to offer solutions and address problems in order to create a world that is both balanced and peaceful. The second goal of ecofeminism, which is also unique from feminism translation, is to and reject anthropocentrism. According to the definition of ecofeminism, all forms of oppression are interconnected and need to be entirely overthrown. Humans can influence nature, but they must do so with humanity. Otherwise, they will destroy the environment and eventually devour the living environment of human beings, and eventually go to ruin. Federici (2022) hold the view that Ecofeminisms are many and varied, they have fertilized each other through translations and intersectional dialogues. So the combination of translation ecology and ecofeminism will add more novel ideas to translation theory. First, translation from an ecofeminist perspective is also seen as a political act. The 16th century saw the emergence of female translators who began to incorporate their political opinions into their work. Several well-known feminist translators advocated for translation to

be political in nature, serving as a vehicle for their political ideologies. Second, Eco-feminism translation argues that when translating, translators should have the subjectivity to interact with the original text. Feminist translators contend that the traditional definition of fidelity places too much emphasis on the translator's loyalty to the author and implies the ideological construction of the male discourse's hegemony in order to demonstrate men's desire to maintain their dominant position.

With the progress of globalization, ecological translation provides a basis for the sustainable development of translation. It analyzes and forecasts the evolution of translation from the viewpoint of the harmony between people and nature as well as the interpersonal relationships, and it makes translation advance steadily.

### **3. A Brief Introduction to Virginia Woolf and *To the Lighthouse***

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) has long been considered one of the most prominent modernist writers in English literature. This remarkable figure, with her prolific output, has been recognized as a novelist, essayist, publisher, critic, and more. The outstanding English woman writer has left us a great legacy in literature. Her works were written more than half a century ago; For her readers and followers, there is always something new to learn from her work. Virginia Woolf is probably the best female writer in the world in every respect.

One of Virginia Woolf's most well-known books, *To the Lighthouse*, is a classic example of a stream-of-consciousness book. There are three parts to this novel. The part one, the son James dreamed about going to the lighthouse but his request was invariably refused by his father. The part two describes the broken family after the World War I. Both Mrs. Ramsey and two of her children passed away. Without his wife, Mr. Ramsey was left in a lost state. Given that he had grown accustomed to hearing praise from his wife throughout his entire life, Mr. Ramsay always had a superior attitude toward and looked down upon his wife. That gave readers the opportunity to get the feminism-related information. In the third chapter, Mr. Ramsay, who had initially opposed taking his family to the lighthouse, has now taken his family there, which was this wife unfulfilled dream.

*To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf had a significant and lasting influence on the growth of ecofeminism, even though it was published many years before the movement's inception in the 1970s. For example, *An Ecofeminist Interpretation to Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse* by Yang Xiaoxia explores the relationship between men, nature, and women from an ecofeminist perspective to reveal the novel's realistic meaning.

### **4. Comparative Study of Two Chinese Translation**

In this chapter, excerpts from Ma Ainong's version and Qu Shijing's version will be carefully analyzed.

#### *4.1 Supplementing*

In actuality, the supplementing translation strategy can be found in other translation strategies as well as feminist translation theory. Adding content outside of the original text based on the corresponding

translation is what is meant by the supplement. The distinction between regional culture, language culture, etc., is the cause. Translators must therefore create corresponding supplements in accordance with reader acceptance in order for readers to comprehend the text's content. Compared with other theories, supplementing in feminist translation theory is characterized by the emphasis on feminist consciousness.

The original text: And to which did she yield, she thought, sitting between them, gazing at the shore whose points were all unknown to her, and thinking how the lawn and the terrace and the house were smoothed away now and peace dwelt there.

**Qu:** 她坐在他们两人中间，凝视着景色陌生的海岸，一面想着那些草坪、平台、房屋已被平静的遗留在远方而在视野里消失了，一面在考虑她应该向这两者中的哪一个让步。

**Ma:** 她该向谁屈服，她坐在这两人中间举棋不定；她凝望着海岸——她对它在罗盘上的方位一无所知；她在想现在的草坪、平台和房子摆脱了纷扰，该是多么安宁。

Western patriarchy emphasizes that men are the representatives of reason and women are the representatives of sense, and gives men a higher status over women and children. The context of this selection is that Cam do not know much about the compass and cares more about their abandoned house; she is mocked by her father for having no sense of direction. Then her father try to seek forgiveness. Her brother James, also ruled by this arrogant man, does not want Cam to give in to their father. In this case, Ma Ainong used the supplementing strategy. She added “举棋不定” that is not present in the original text to express Cam’s reluctance to yield to either side. Because ecofeminists seek to achieve amity among people with different genders and races as well as harmony between man and nature, which is well reflected in Ma’s addition here. Cam do not want to take sides and produce contradiction. Expect that, Ma also add the meaning “摆脱了纷扰”. By this means, readers can realize that women and nature are interrelated, and the natural world will be peaceful without excessive interference from human.

To sum up, two translators applied different ways when dealing with this part. But Qu’s translation is more like an exposition of a fact without any subjective feelings whereas Ma’s translation is a good embodiment of the ecological translation view.

The original text: The autumn trees, ravaged as they are, take on the flash of tattered flags kindling in the gloom of cool cathedral caves.

**Qu:** 秋天的树木尽管已经枝叶凋零，它们像破烂的旗帜，在幽暗阴冷的教堂……

**Ma:** 秋天的树木枯槁萧条，披挂着破碎飘零的旗帜，他们在洞穴般凄冷阴暗的教堂……

Ecofeminist points out that woman in patriarchal societies are marginalized, isolated, repressed and bullied. The imperialist war caused indelible physical and mental damage to women. In the text, Woolf wrote that with the change of the age, a new generation of women no longer worshiped imperial aggression and expansion as in the past, but questioned war and imperialism. The scene of the selection depicts the devastation of nature brought on by the war that humans began and their ability to manipulate it. According to ecofeminists, this scene illustrates how nature is oppressed by human

power and greed, just as women are by men's authority, the author compares humans to the male and nature to the female. As a result, the translated version must portray a nature that is severely damaged. Ma's version used the expression “枯槁萧条”, “破碎凋零” and “凄冷阴暗”. This is her unique translation style; she is fond of using four-character-idioms in translation. All of these unfold a picture before reader's eyes a broken and isolated environment destroyed by man. So, Ma's version created a more vivid situation comparing with Qu's. At the same time, it accords with the resentment and criticism of the war implied in the original text.

#### 4.2 Hijacking

Supplementing refers to the translator's appropriate addition to the translated content according to various situations to obtain better reading effect. However, hijacking can be regarded as the intensified “addition”, which will modify the text, no matter to reflect the feminist ideology or change the content with deviation from the description of women in the text. Therefore, it can be seen that feminist translation theory embodies strong translation subjectivity in its practical application.

The original text: She sighed; there was too much work for one woman..... It was too much for one woman, too much, too much.

Qu: 她叹了口气; 这么多活儿, 叫一个女人来干可实在太多了。一个女人可受不了, 受不了, 实在受不了。

Ma: 她叹息着; 对一个女人家来说, 要干的活儿实在是太多了。一个女人家, 怎么受得了, 怎么干的完。

Although the original sentence is a sentence with inanimate subject, the subject of Ma's translation is “woman”, while the main body of Qu's translation is “work”. Seen from the whole text, it is obvious that two translators have different understandings of original text. Ma Ainong believes that women are born to undertake heavy housework and translate sentences from the perspective of women, thus highlighting the oppression brought about by patriarchy. At the same time, the original text uses the repetition technique to emphasize the onerous tasks. But Ma translated “too much, too much” into two rhetorical questions “怎么受得了, 怎么干的完”, which can better express the intonation compared with the literal translation of Qu Shijing. All in all, Ma's version is not only more faithful to the original text but also more prominent in female conscientiousness.

The original text: But what remained intolerable....was that crass blindness and tyranny of his which had poisoned her childhood and raised bitter storms, so that even now she woke in the night trembling with rage and remembered some command of his; some insolence: ‘Do this,’ ‘Do that;’ his dominance: his, ‘Submit to me.’

Qu:...然而, 叫人难以忍受的是他那种极端的盲目和横暴, 它损害了她美好的童年生活, 掀起了痛苦的风暴, 甚至到现在, 她还会在半夜惊醒, 气得直哆嗦, 并且回忆起他蛮横无理的强迫命令: “干这个, ”“干那个, ”回忆起他支配一切的欲望和他那种“绝对服从我”的要求。

Ma:...最难让人忍受的是他的蒙昧无知和粗暴专横, 摧残了她的童年, 害得她心惊肉跳, 甚至现在还常常从梦中惊醒, 瑟瑟发抖地想起他在发号施令: “这么做!” “那么做!” 还有他

的盛气凌人，他那“服从我”的表情。

This selection is a typical example that reflects the translator's feminist thought. In stream of consciousness novels, the actions and plots are less important than the reaction and inner self of character, so the description of action is relatively few. Just like what Erich Auerbach says in his work *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*: "In Woolf's work, external events have lost their dominant position. They are used to release and explain internal events." (6) Woolf writes in detail about how Macalister's son take the hook, which somehow reminding Ramsay's daughter of the psychological shadow brought about by Mr. Ramsay. The implication is that the nature have been persecuted by the human in the same way that women and children have been threatened by men. Apparently, Ma got the point of the original text. She translated "crass blindness and tyranny" into two four-character-idioms "蒙昧无知、粗暴专横". It is well-known that Si-zi-ge is characteristic of profound implications, powerful expression, and smooth reading and speaking. This pattern is frequently used by Ma to strengthen the feminist thoughts. But Qu only translated the sentence in literal meaning, which lack of a little bit charm. What's more, in the translation of the phrase "trembling with rage", "rage" was omitted by Ma. She applied "瑟瑟发抖" instead. In Chinese dictionary, this word refers to someone who is constantly trembling out of fear. It's not hard to understand that Ma purposefully chose not to translate the word "rage" in order to emphasize woman's fear of tyranny from man. Finally, Ma translated the noun in English "command" into verb in Chinese "发号施令". It also reflects men's inviolable control over the vulnerable group, such as, children, women, and nature.

#### 4.3 Prefacing and Footnoting

Ma Ainong's translation has prefacing, which introduces the general content of the book, the thoughts she wants to express and her views on the content of the text before the beginning of the text. She shares her ideas about the characteristics of the character in the origin, of the writing techniques and the meaning symbolized by the title in prefacing.

Footnoting, on the other hand, is usually arranged in order at the bottom of each page, with the aim to annotate the words with obscure or special foreign cultural meanings. By this means, readers can better understand the content of the article and the author's thoughts. Qu Shijing does not have annotations except for some terminology explanation. In addition to that, he also provides an explanation for the unclear passages by adding an extra bracket after the translated sentence, but this type of explanation is not common in his version. Unlike Qu, Ma has footnotes in her translation.

The original text: so that she had only strength enough to move her finger, in exquisite abandonment to exhaustion, across the page of Grimm's fairy story.

In the translation of Ma Ainong, there is a footnote after this selection, "指格林兄弟的童话《渔夫和他的妻子》，这里暗示拉姆齐夫妇之间潜在的差异和分歧。" In her translation, adding footnotes often provides a tone or an emotional attitude toward the story and the character depicted. This method will subtly influence the readers to think about the story from the perspective of feminism.

## 5. Conclusion

From the research conducted above, it is simple to discover that Ma is enthusiastic about using a feminist translation strategy. Instead of adding footnotes, she would rather offer explanations or rewrite the text. With her language skills, she frequently hijacks the original text and adds her own interpretation, which embodies her subjectivity and feminist consciousness. Her translation occasionally leaves out too much information, which could confuse readers. Regarding Qu, he adopted a cautious approach with fewer interventions in the source text. They typically present the accurate translation while leaving some imagined space for readers by speaking with a neutral attitude and emotionless language. In comparison, Ma Ainong's translation does a much better job of capturing the essence of the original text than Qu Shijing's did. The unconquerable nature, the male chauvinism represented by Mr. Ramsay, the greed of humankind in trying to dominate nature, and the harmony between men and women, nature and humankind, can all be seen in Ma Ainong's version.

There might be some limitations and errors because of the lack of knowledge. First, there might not be enough examples, which could lead to arbitrary judgments. Second, even though these examples were chosen for their typicality and distinctive qualities, they might also contain errors and flaws. Third, the authors need to do more research on the two translators, such as finding out why they chose certain translation techniques. Hence, translation study still needs a lot of work in this area.

The quality of the translation is closely related to the readers' ability to understand the original text, which influences each other. The author and the reader will both suffer from a translator's failure to reveal the work's hidden feminine consciousness. If the works of a female writer are permeated with feminism, an excellent female translator should not only adhere to the principle of loyalty, but also strive to express the feminist consciousness contained in the original text. We must admit that feminist translation studies in China are still in its infancy. Government funding and policy encouragement, ongoing opposition to gender discrimination, and the unceasing efforts from translation community are all necessary for it to develop. Any theory needs to experience the test of time, and feminist translation theory is no exception. The advantages of Western feminist translation theories should be absorbed by Chinese translators, which should then make daring discoveries based on accurate and faithful interpretations of the original texts. Future development of Chinese feminist translation theory is highly anticipated, and it offers female translators a fresh viewpoint.

## References

- Baker, M. (2000). Towards a methodology for investigating the style of a literary translator. *Target. International Journal of Translation Studies*, 12(2), 241-266.
- Charlene Spretnak. (1997). *Critical and Constructive Contributions of Ecofeminism*. Worldviews and Ecology, Ed. by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim, Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1993.



- Federici, E. (2022). Why Ecofeminism Matters: Narrating/translating ecofeminism (s) around the world. *Iperstoria*, (20).
- Françoise d' Eaubonne. (1974). *Feminism or Death appeared, anthology New French Feminisms*.
- Lakoff, R. (1973). Language and woman's place. *Language in society*, 2(1), 45-79.
- Morini, M. (2014). Translation, stylistics and To the Lighthouse: a deictic shift theory analysis. Target. *International Journal of Translation Studies*, 26(1), 128-145.
- Virginia Woolf. (2014). *To the lighthouse* (Ma Ainong). People's Literature Publishing House.
- Virginia Woolf. (2015). *To the lighthouse* (Qu Shijing). Shanghai Translation Publishing House.
- Von Flotow, L. (1991). Feminist translation: contexts, practices and theories. *TTR: traduction, terminologie, r áaction*, 4(2), 69-84.
- Wang P. (2007). An ecofeminists interpretation of To the Lighthouse. *Journal of Tianjin Foreign Languages University*, 14(1), 69-74.