

# *Ideology in Translation: The Comparative Study of Chinese Translation of The Second Sex*

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the translators' ideology and the impact of their translation strategies and stylistic styles. There is a comparative analysis of the two latest Chinese translations of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*: Zheng Kelu's and Qiu Ruilian's versions. The research finds out that due to two translators' different ideologies, there are different preferences for employed translation strategies and stylistic styles. Zheng, a male scholar, chooses to employ literal translation, emphasising fidelity to the original text and scholarly precision, whereas Qiu, a female translator, adopt a more flexible translation choice due to the context, prioritizing the representation of feminine thoughts and the readability of the translated text. The findings reveal a significant interaction between translators' identities and their translation approaches, offering valuable insights into how gender and social identity impact the translation of feminist work in the Chinese context.

**Keywords:** *The Second Sex*, The translator's identity, Translation Strategy, Feminist work

## 1. Introduction

In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir [1]'s *The Second Sex (Le Deuxième Sexe)* was published in Europe. The book paints a detailed picture of women and analyses the deep-seated reasons why women are masculinised as "the other". Subsequently translated into several languages, *The Second Sex* has inspired countless women and feminist movements with its depth of thoughts, unique insights, and incisive analysis, provoking a strong reaction around the world.

Chinese research on the Chinese translations of *The Second Sex* is relatively weak. A search of the CNKI database using the keyword *The Second Sex* and translation found only four relevant papers, most focusing on the translation history and its influence in China. Of these, only Cheng Hongwu [2] briefly mentions one of the subjects of this study, Zheng Kelu's translation. Over the past decade, there has been insufficient research in China, and rare Chinese academics have conducted a detailed analysis of any of these translations.

This research chooses the first complete French translation of *The Second Sex* by the mainland male scholar and translator Zheng Kelu [3] (the following refers to Zheng) in 2011 and the translation by the Taiwanese female translator Qiu Ruilian [4] (the following refers to Qiu) in 2013 as the subjects of analysis. These two translations are the most recent translations of *The Second Sex* in China, published close to each other, with typicality and comparability.

This study fills the research gap by conducting systematic research on two Chinese translations of *The Second Sex*. The study explores the translation methods and behaviours employed by the two

translators and compares the similarities and differences between their translations. Since the two translators have no obvious ideological leanings, this study looks at the translators' ideology and the impact of their different preferences for translation strategies and stylistic styles.

## 2. Textual Analysis

### 2.1. Translation Strategies

“From selecting the source text to choosing how to translate it, translation is a choice process. Thus, the translator's choice is crucial and determines the text's quality and impact [5].” The choice of translation strategies is also an art that involves balancing at the cultural and ideological levels and considers the reader's acceptance of the translated text. In the case of two Chinese-translated versions of *The Second Sex*, the significant differences in translation strategies between the two translators, Zheng and Qiu, directly impact the style and reader experience of their translations.

Zheng employs fewer translation strategies than Qiu. Zheng generally employs a literal translation, preserving the philosophical tone, as well as the structure and diction of the original French text (e.g., Example 1). Zheng [6] stated in an interview that among the three translation criteria outlined by Yan Fu, ‘Xin (Faithfulness)’ holds the utmost importance. “The authors express their viewpoints in their books, so the translator must convey them accurately and adequately. I have consistently adhered to the principle that the literal translation method should come first.” This literal translation, adhering closely to the original text, ensures accuracy and scholarly integrity. However, it sacrifices the fluency of the translated text, obscuring the content and leading to a poor reader experience.

Qiu, on the other hand, flexibly adjusts her translation strategies according to the content and even manipulates the original text (e.g., Example 2) to enhance the fluency of the translation. The flexible translation choice allows Qiu to preserve the original work's depth while catering to the target audience (TA)'s need for readability. When it comes to philosophical concepts or social criticism, Qiu helps the audience to better comprehend Beauvoir's ideas and core arguments by adding annotations (e.g., Example 3).

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#### Example 1

English Translation: No group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the Other opposite itself (p. 26).

Zheng's Translation: 任何群体都绝不会不直接面对自身提出他者而将自身确定为一个群体 (p. 11)。

Back Translation: Any group could never not directly confront itself with the other as a group and identify itself.

Analysis: The sentence discusses how the group defines its identity in relation to “the other”. Zheng's translation preserves the philosophical depth of the original text by retaining key terminology so that the sociological concepts are clearly presented. Although faithful to the original text, the overly complex sentence structure makes the translation confusing, and the double negative of “绝不会不直接 (never not directly)” makes the whole sentence difficult for the TA. The phrase “面对自身提出他者 (to present the ‘other’ before itself)” is grammatically awkward, complicating the sentence further.

#### Example 2

English Translation: The wife is an animal neither reliable nor stable (p. 31).

Qiu's Translation: 女人是既没有农场又没有栏舍的牲畜 (p. 136)。

Back Translation: Women are livestock with neither farms nor stall.

Analysis: In this case, Beauvoir's use of animal metaphor is a scathing critique of the way that women are seen as inferior to men and reduced to property. Qiu intensifies the criticism, for instance, using the term “牲畜(livestock)”, which carries a more humiliating and dehumanising connotation in Chinese than “动物(animal)”. This translated text also transforms the abstract terms “reliable” and “stable” into the more concrete terms “农场(farm)” and “栏舍(stall)”, aiming to resonate more strongly with readers and better highlight the marginalisation of females in society.

Unlike a literal translation, Qiu's translation strategies allow her to remain faithful to the key messages of the original text while ensuring that the philosophical depth is conveyed in a way that is appropriate to the cultural background of the TA.

#### Example 3

Footnote from Qiu: (译注) 在亚里斯多德的哲学中,「物质」是被动的实现,「形式」是主动的潜能,而且他主张,男人是主动本原,女人是被动本原;但要是依他所说:「所有的生成变化都要有物质和形式一起作用。」那便如波娃指出的,将女人归为被动本原,显然只是亚里斯多德对女人的偏见与歧视 (p. 41)。

Analysis: For Chinese readers who are unfamiliar with Aristotle, the note first explains his views on “matter” and “form” and his world perspective about two genders to help the TA understand Aristotle's thought. It links the critical view with Beauvoir's feminist perspective, demonstrating that the idea of the female as the passive, inferior recipient is not an objective philosophical truth but a product of patriarchal ideology. The notes can connect Western philosophy to Chinese readers, providing context for those less familiar with the historical or philosophical references in the original text. By providing this information, Qiu ensures that readers are not just passive recipients of the translation but that they actively engage with the ideas and critiques, making the translation more engaging and influential.

These two translators use different translation strategies, which differently affect the effectiveness of the translations in presenting feminist ideas in the original text. Zheng Kelu chooses to avoid actively intervening in gender discussions, using neutral language and depending on the original text to express Beauvoir's ideas, potentially diminishing some feminist connotations. Qiu, on the other hand, strengthens Beauvoir's feminist opinions through linguistic adjustment and cultural adaptation, which is more awakening.

#### Example 4

English Translation: she is thus called “the sex (p. 26)”.

Zheng's Translation: 人们把女人称为“le sexe (p. 11)”。

Back Translation: People call women ‘le sexe’.

Qiu's Translation: 因此在法文中,往往会以 le sexe 这个字来代称女人 (p. 24)。

Back Translation: Therefore, in French, the word le sexe is often used to refer to a woman.

Analysis: Zheng's translation adds the subject “人们 (people)”, possibly to emphasise societal views on females. However, this expression may also suggest a specific gender perspective: how “men” or male groups perceive women. Such translations may unintentionally reinforce gender power dynamics, particularly historically or culturally, where men have tended to dominate society and the use of language. Qiu directly removes the subject, conveying the same meaning with the phrase “在法文中 (in French)”. This approach emphasises “le sexe” as a pronoun rather than the user of the expression.

#### Example 5

English Translation: It is much easier to accuse one sex than to excuse the other (p. 31).

Zheng's Translation: 指责一个性别比原谅另一性别更容易 (p. 16)。

Back Translation: It's easier to blame one gender than to forgive the other.

Qiu's Translation: 指出女人的种种不是,比为男人辩解容易多了 (p. 30)。

Back Translation: It's much easier to point out all the things women are not than to defend men.

Analysis: Zheng's translation is concise and retains the general meaning of the original text. He uses the neutral word “性别 (gender)” without specifying which gender, maintaining a neutral expression and avoiding direct reference to male and female, which could make the gender contrasts seem less pronounced, which may reduce the critical and deeply gendered meanings of the original text. While Qiu's translation is more nuanced, using “女人 (woman)” and “男人 (man)” to clearly distinguish between “one sex” and “the other”. Qiu enhances gender awareness in the translation by adding specific gender, revealing the critical tone of the original text that highlights gender differences and social prejudices.

## 2.2. Translation Stylistics

Zheng tends to use more formal academic language in his translation, and he [3][7] has repeatedly emphasised the interdisciplinary value of *The Second Sex* in his post-translation preface as well as in related interviews, suggesting that he presupposes that the TA of his translation may be mainly academics. However, this overly academic style of translation, although helpful for in-depth research, and hinder the text's ability to connect with a broader audience, limiting its effectiveness in promoting feminist ideas. Qiu focuses on integrating Beauvoir's thoughts with the Chinese cultural context, making the text more relatable to the TA and enhancing the communication effect. This female translator presents Beauvoir's reflections on women's issues in a clearer and more natural way. She avoids the ambiguity in Zheng Kelu's translation and makes the text's ideological meanings more accessible to general readers with appropriate wording.

### Example 6

English Translation: it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine (p. 330).

Zheng's Translation: 是整个文明设计出这种介于男性和被去势者之间的、被称为女性的中介产物 (p. 602)。

Back Translation: It's a whole civilisation that has devised this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch, called the female.

Qiu's Translation: 铸造出这种介于男人和阉人之间的奇异生物的,也就是说铸造出这种被我们划归为女人的,是整个文明 (p. 338)。

Back Translation: It was a whole civilisation that forged this singular creature between man and the eunuch, that is to say, that forged this strange creature that we classify as a woman.

Analysis: Zheng's translation is accurate, but the relatively complex sentence structure and adjunct words may make it difficult for the general reader to understand, and terms such as “被去势者 (the eunuch)” and “中介产物 (intermediary product)” may be overly formal, making the translation difficult to understand. While suitable for an academic audience, this formal language and lack of fluency may undermine the impact of Beauvoir's views on feminism for a wider audience. However, Qiu prefers a fluency that makes the text more accessible. Qiu's use of the word “阉人 (the eunuch)” brings the translation closer to the reader's cultural and cognitive background. She also chooses the term “奇异生物 (strange creature)”, emphasising the ironic tone Beauvoir aimed to express in the original text. This makes philosophical concepts more accessible and emotionally appealing to the

TA, making the text more impactful. In addition, Qiu reconstructs the sentence structure to enhance fluency and readability.

#### Example 7

English Translation: He is economically the head of the community, and he thus embodies it in society's eyes (p. 506).

Zheng's Translation: 在经济上,这个共同体的首脑是他,因此,在社会看来,体现这个共同体的是他 (p. 942)。

Back Translation: It is he who is the head of this community economically, and therefore it is he who embodies this community in the society.

Qiu's Translation: 他是一家的经济之主,因此在社会眼中,他即代表这个家庭 (p. 490)。

Back Translation: He is the economic head of the family and therefore represents the family in the society.

Analysis: The example is from Chapter 5 of Part 2 of Volume 2 of *The Second Sex*, which explores women's roles in marriage, social positioning, and gender inequality. Zheng still maintains a formal, scholarly translation tone, reflecting his tendency to prioritise faithfulness to the original text and academic rigour in his translation to ensure the accuracy and academic applicability of the translation. However, this also results in reducing the emotional resonance and readability of the text for non-specialist readers. In addition, Zheng often uses the abstract term “共同体(community)”; for instance, in this example, it is used to refer to “family”, whereas in the previous text it was used to refer to “social group”. Although this usage of the word may seem rigorous and conceptually clear in academic contexts, the lack of concrete explanations in different contexts can blur the specific references for the TA, hindering their understanding and creating reading barriers.

In contrast, the language of Qiu's translation is more concise and natural, and the sentence structure is more fluent, which makes the translation easier to understand and more acceptable to the TA. Also, the language is adapted to the cultural and social background of the TA. For instance, in the phrase “一家之主 (the head of a family)”, specifying “共同体(community)” in Zheng's translation as “家(family)”, which makes the concept of male leadership in the family more concrete and immediately evokes the culturally embedded image of “men usually playing the role of those who lead the whole family” for Chinese readers. It helps to emphasise the patriarchal structure that the original text is meant to criticise.

### 3. Paratexts

“A paratext is a consciously crafted threshold [8].” In addition to “communicating a piece of sheer information”, a paratextual element could also “make known an intention, or an interpretation by the author and/or the publisher”, and “convey a genuine decision”. Or it can “involve a commitment [9].”

Paratexts significantly mediate the relationship between the text and the reader, with peritext shaping the reader's interpretation, comprehension, and acceptance of the translated text more profoundly [10]. As a form of peritext, a translator's preface or epilogue of the translation highlights his or her viewpoints and the factors influencing the translation process, including the view of the original work, motives and purposes, translation strategies, and methods [11] to help the reader accurately understand the content of the translated text. Thus, they are also regarded as “the most important part in the paratext to elucidate the main body part [12].”

In the paratextual content by Zheng and Qiu, both express their views of the original work. Only Zheng highlights his motive, aiming for a faithful representation of the original French work. Both explain their translation strategies: Zheng emphasises academic depth, and Qiu focuses on cultural adaptation. Both also acknowledge potential inaccuracies.

As can be seen, Zheng focuses more on introducing the work and showing his motivation for the translation. Zheng notes that previous Chinese translations have mostly relied on the English-translated version, potentially causing distortion or incompleteness in the original content. Therefore, he hopes to present the fully original work to Chinese readers by directly translating the original French work, which shows that he attaches considerable importance to the faithfulness and scholarly accuracy of the translation. Also, he thoroughly analyses Beauvoir's feminist thoughts based on existentialist philosophy and praises her expertise in biology as well as her profound knowledge reserve, which demonstrates the theoretical depth of the work. Rather than only giving a general overview of *The Second Sex*, Qiu begins with the background to its publication, analysing the controversies and impact of the work at different historical periods, offering readers a socio-historical context for the work. Rather than simply praising Beauvoir, Qiu highlights biased or controversial views in Beauvoir's work, thus helping readers to understand Beauvoir's position more fully. Finally, Qiu also mentions her own translation strategies to help readers understand the details of her translation.

It is worth mentioning that in Zheng's translation, this kind of paratext is presented after the main body of the text, whereas Qiu includes it as a preface before the content. Zheng prefers to provide a summary analysis after the reader has finished reading, while the preface is more guiding, providing the background of the work and information about the author, which helps establish a certain basis for understanding the text.

#### 4. Conclusion

A comparative analysis of the Chinese translations of *The Second Sex* by the male translator, Zheng, and the female translator, Qiu, highlights their different translation strategies and stylistic characteristics.

Although gender and social identities cannot be seen as the only determining factors in the translators' translation strategies, they did influence their approaches in this study. Zheng Kelu, as a scholar, opts for literal translation to maintain scholarly integrity, emphasising academic rigour and fidelity to the original text's philosophical depth. However, this approach somewhat compromises readability for the reader and the cultural adaptability of the text. He prioritises a faithful reproduction of the original text, resulting in a dilution of Beauvoir's feminist thoughts in his translation from the masculine perspective. While Qiu, whose job is a translator, adheres to the market rules as well as the readers' reading needs, employing adaptive translation strategies to make Beauvoir's feminist ideas more accessible and understandable, is also more sensitive to the feminist critique implied in *The Second Sex*, effectively conveying the feminist thoughts in the source text more clearly from a feminine perspective.

However, this study has certain limitations. First, the study concentrates only on the comparative analysis of the two Chinese translations of *The Second Sex*, using the English translation as the reference text and not directly using the original French text as the base text, which may affect the rigour and comprehensiveness of the study to some extent. Secondly, the study focuses on just two translators, resulting in a narrow sampling range that may not adequately represent the wider impact of gender differences on translation strategies. Moreover, the analyses of the translations are somewhat subjective, and personal interpretations may affect the objectivity of the results. Finally, the study does not adequately explore how translators' cultural backgrounds influence their strategies, limiting a deeper understanding of both translators and their translations. These limitations provide directions for improvement in future related studies.

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