

**The translation of the excerpt from *Love in a Fallen City* (《倾城之恋》) by Eileen Chang**

In between each artillery shot, the silver fog of the winter morning gradually dispersed, and the residents of the entire island, from the mountain peaks to the valleys, all looked towards the sea, saying, "The war has begun, the war has begun." No one could believe it, but the war had indeed started. Liu Su, who was alone on Batington Road, had no idea what was happening. By the time Ali had learned the news from the neighbors and hurriedly woke her, the battle had already entered its fierce stage. Nearby, there was a scientific research building with anti-aircraft guns on its roof. Stray bullets flew over, making a sharp whistling sound, "Zhi yo uh uh uh uh..." and then a loud "Bang," falling to the ground. The whistling sounds tore through the air, shredding the nerves. The pale blue sky was torn into strips, fluttering in the cold wind. The wind carried countless severed nerve endings.

Liu Su's house was empty, her heart was empty, and since she had not stocked up on rice or food, her stomach was empty too. Where there is emptiness, fear creeps in, and she felt the terror of the attack all the more strongly. She dialed the Xu family's number in Happy Valley, but the line was busy for a long time because everyone with a phone in the city was making calls, trying to find out which areas were safer and planning where to seek refuge. It wasn't until the afternoon that Liu Su managed to get through, but although the phone rang, no one answered, and the Xu family must have hurriedly left for a safer area. Liu Su was lost in thought, and the artillery fire became increasingly intense. The nearby anti-aircraft guns became the target of enemy planes. The planes flew around above them, buzzing "Zzi zzi zzi..." as they circled, "Zzi..." painfully, like a dentist's drill drilling into the soul. Ali was sitting on the doorstep of the living room, holding her crying child, her body swaying as if in a trance, singing softly and rocking the child. Outside, the whistling sound of a bullet tore through the air, followed by a "Bang," which knocked off a corner of the roof, and sand and stones fell down. Ali screamed, jumped up, and ran outside with the child. Liu Su caught up with her at the door and grabbed her, asking, "Where are you going?" Ali replied, "This place isn't safe anymore! I'll take her to the gutter to hide for a while." Liu Su said, "You're crazy! You'll be sending yourself to die!" Ali repeatedly said, "Let me go! I have only one child, I can't let her die... I'll just hide in the gutter..." Liu Su desperately held on to her, but Ali pushed her away, causing her to fall. Ali rushed out the

door. At that moment, there was a deafening explosion, and the entire world went black, like a huge box being slammed shut. Countless feelings of sorrow and resentment were locked inside.

Liu Su thought she was dead, but who would have thought she was still alive? When she opened her eyes, she saw shattered glass all over the ground and the shadow of the sun scattered everywhere. Struggling, she got up to find Ali, but Ali was sitting on the ground, holding her child tightly, her head resting against the cement wall at the door, dazed. Liu Su pulled her inside and heard the commotion outside. A bomb had fallen next door, creating a large crater in the garden. Another deafening blast made the world shake, and everything was still far from calm. The explosions continued, pounding like nails being hammered into the lid of a box. The pounding went on from dawn to dusk, and from dusk to dawn.

The next day, Liu Su and Ali shared a few biscuits from a can. Gradually, their spirits weakened, and each bullet fragment that whistled through the air felt like a slap in the face. A military truck unexpectedly stopped in front of their door. The bell rang, and Liu Su went to open it. It was Liu Yuan. She grabbed his hand and tightly clung to his arm, just like Ali clung to her child. She stumbled forward, hitting her head against the cement wall at the door. Liu Yuan supported her head with his other hand and quickly said, "You're still in shock, aren't you? Don't worry, don't worry. Go pack your things. We're going to Repulse Bay. Hurry, hurry!" Liu Su rushed inside, asking, "Is it safe over there?" Liu Yuan replied, "They said the boats won't dock there. And the hotel has plenty of food. They've got everything stocked up." Liu Su asked, "What about your ship..." Liu Yuan answered, "The ship didn't leave. They've already taken the first-class passengers to the hotel at Repulse Bay. I wanted to pick you up yesterday, but the car couldn't be reached, and the buses were all too full. Finally, I managed to get this truck today." Liu Su didn't have the heart to pack properly and hastily wrapped up a small bundle. Liu Yuan gave Ali two months' wages and told her to keep the house, then they both got in the truck, lying side by side in the cargo area, covered with a yellow-green tarpaulin. The truck jolted along, and the skin on their elbows and knees was rubbed raw.

Liu Yuan sighed, "This explosion has cut off so many endings to stories!" Liu Su felt a pang of sadness and after a long pause said, "If the explosion killed you, my story would end. If it killed me, your story would go on." Liu Yuan smiled and said, "Are you going to keep

your vows for me?" Both of them seemed a little out of their minds and laughed for no reason. Once they started laughing, they couldn't stop. After the laughter, they were trembling all over.

The truck reached Repulse Bay amidst the whizzing bullets. Soldiers were stationed downstairs in the hotel, and they stayed in the old rooms upstairs. Once they settled, they discovered that the hotel's stockpile, though plentiful, was reserved for the soldiers. Apart from canned milk, beef, lamb, and fruits, there were sacks and sacks of white bread and bran bread. For the guests, they only got two crackers or two lumps of sugar per meal, and everyone was starving.

For the first two days, Repulse Bay was relatively calm, but soon the situation changed. The intensity of the fighting escalated. The upper floors had no shelter, so everyone gathered downstairs in the dining hall, where the large glass doors were wide open, and sandbags were piled up in front. British soldiers set up artillery to fire outward. The warships in the bay pinpointed the source of the artillery fire and returned the fire. Bullets whizzed back and forth across the palm trees and fountains. Liu Yuan and Liu Su, along with the others, pressed their backs against the walls of the hall. The dim background seemed like an ancient Persian carpet, with colorful figures of nobles, princesses, talented men, and beautiful women woven into it. The carpet hung from a bamboo pole, fluttering in the wind, shaking off dust as it went, relentlessly pounding the figures, driving them into helplessness. The artillery shells came their way, and they would dash to the other side. When the shells came from that side, they would run back to the other side. Eventually, the open hall was riddled with holes, the walls collapsed, and there was nowhere to run, so they could only sit down, leaving everything to fate.

At this point, Liu Su regretted having Liu Yuan by her side, as it felt like having two bodies, doubling the danger. If a bullet didn't hit her, it might hit him. If he died or was maimed, her situation would be even more unbearable. If she were wounded, in order not to burden him, she could only resolutely choose death. Even if she died, she wouldn't die cleanly or decisively alone. She suspected that Liu Yuan was thinking the same thing. At that moment, she didn't know anything else. All that mattered was that she had him, and he had her.

## Commentary

### *1. Why I Chose This Text for Translation*

There are reasons why I chose this text for translation. First of all, the excerpt from 倾城之恋 (Love in a Fallen City) due to personal familiarity with the content and story. The story is rich and emotionally charged, which aligns with my interest in exploring the depth of human experiences in times of war. Besides the rich plots, it also focused on psychological endurance amidst the horror of war. For me, it provides a more poignant juxtaposition to the starkly practical narratives of conflicts. Through translation, I can get to a more in-depth understanding of the emotional and physical toll of the war. In particular, when the story proceeds, I feel astonished by Liu Su's internal world, such as her fear and longing. Translating this Chinese text to the target language of English offers some rich layers that are compelling for an English-speaking audience.

Besides, Zhang Ailing's literacy is rather beautiful with rather rich cultural iconic, filled with rich cultural capital. This work by Zhang Ailing is renowned for its exploration of relationships during times of turmoil, which was a unique historical time of China, forming an integral part of Chinese culture and history. Besides, the way it intertwines the personal with the political makes it not only a cultural treasure but also a narrative that resonates globally. To me, the work is not just a story with engaging plots, but also a literary piece and reflection of historical events, which makes it an excellent choice for translation. In this way, I translate it into English, aiming to bridge Eastern and Western perspectives on love, survival, and memory.

The third reason comes from its poetics. Zhang Ailing had used a wide range of vivid and almost lyrical imagery words in the story. For example, "whistling bullets tearing through the air" and "the sky shredded into strips" intrigued me from a translation perspective. The challenge of maintaining the poetic beauty while ensuring the accuracy of the tone and sentiment for an English audience was a key factor in selecting this passage.

Last but not least, I am attracted by the story and want to dig into the complicated relationships between Bai Liusu and Fan Liuyuan in that age filled with turmoil. There exists a peculiar and complex relationship between Zhang Ailing and *Love in a Fallen City*. Like Bai Liusu and Fan Liuyuan, Zhang herself was cast adrift by fate and family, caught in

the “in-between” of East and West, the old and the new. This positioning compelled her to seek a more complete and mature sense of “self,” which was both a subjective need and an objective inevitability. Zhang Ailing consciously or unconsciously projected her own pursuit of selfhood onto Liusu and Liuyuan. However, the relative sense of fulfillment and self-completeness they achieve by the story’s conclusion eluded Zhang in real life. She was deeply attached to her established self, as well as the colonial city and distorted era in which she lived, choosing to remain “confined” within it. As a result, her sense of self was imbued with fragmentation, contradictions, stubbornness, and nihilism. While her work dazzled with intricate brilliance in its details, it often appeared fractured and aimless on a broader scale.

## *2. Translation Strategies*

In order to translate the text, I have applied a range of translation strategies. The first is to adhere to faithfulness following Jerome model. The Jerome Model, rooted in the works of Saint Jerome, emerged around the fifth century BC and remained influential in Western translation practices until the nineteenth century. Initially devised for translating the Bible, this approach prioritized strict fidelity to the original text (Zheng, 2014), advocating for “word-for-word translation” (Zheng, 2014). Faithfulness was regarded as the utmost priority, often overshadowing other considerations. Relying heavily on dictionaries, it aimed to achieve equivalence in meaning and form, though modern translation theory recognizes that perfect equivalence is unattainable (Jerome, 2012). Saint Jerome emphasized adherence to the original text and the word-for-word approach. In translating this text, I employed faithfulness strategy to try to stay faithful to Zhang's poetic style (Jerome model), ensuring that the emotional intensity of the original text was preserved. The very example of the translation is “吱呦呃呃呃呃” (a shrill, high-pitched sound) as “Zhi yo uh uh uh uh...”—aiming to capture the sound while making it comprehensible and evocative for an English audience. Similarly, I translated the gunfire sounds and their psychological effects to create a vivid auditory experience for readers, as “Bang!” These are word-for-word translation, trying to send the readers of target language some vivid representation of the scene and situation.

However, word-for-word translation cannot resolve all translation issues, so I have to rely on other techniques. For example, I have followed the strategy of cultural context accommodation. According to Shi (2004), accommodation in translation is regarded as

synonymous with adaptation, referring to modifications made to ensure the target text aligns with the essence of the original work considering cultural suitability and appropriateness. This approach results in a text that does not immediately appear to be a traditional translation (Shi, 2004). Accommodation represents a freer form of translation rather than a literal one. In practice, such adjustments are often necessary to preserve the core message, emotional resonance, and overall effect of the source material (Majeed & Janjua, 2019). In translating this excerpts, I have followed the strategy of cultural accommodation and adaptation. For example, when I translate Liu Su's desperate attempts to contact the Xu family, and their departure to a safer area, reflecting the immediate concerns of civilians during war. Some culturally specific references, like "跑马地徐家" (the Xu family in Happy Valley), were kept as is but explained within the context, providing an immersive sense of place without alienating readers unfamiliar with Hong Kong's geography.

### *3. Translating the Poetics and Themes of the Text*

Further, I would like to comment on the translation process concerning translating the poetics themes of the texts. As can be found in the literary, the poetics of the text revolve around fragmentation, both literally (as in the physical destruction) and emotionally (as in Liu Su's emotional breakdowns and internal conflicts), so it is crucial to maintain a balance between the literal and metaphorical destruction was key to preserving the tone. I will analyze this perspective from two angles: sound and visuality and thematic exploration.

First for sound and visuality, I have worked to keep the deliberate vivid and striking scenes and sound effects of the original word texture and scene. For example, the sound of the artillery ("Zzi zzi zzi...") and the visual impact of destruction (e.g., "the entire world went black") were deliberately kept vivid and striking, to amplify the traumatic atmosphere and make the conflict immediate and tangible. To a great extent, I worked to reflect the sense of unreality Liu Su and the other characters experience, trying to reveal the surreal and fragmented nature of their surroundings.

Second for thematic exploration, in the translation, I have paid particular attention on how to reveal and emphasize the themes of survival and selflessness, which came through prominently in the passage. Such is reflected in the translation of the internal battle between Liu Su and Liu Yuan, trying to protect each other in an unpredictable and violent

environment. The internal battle was translated well into a universal concern about human resilience and love during calamity. Besides, the themes of devotion, self-sacrifice, and trauma resonate universally, also make the story both culturally specific and globally relatable.

#### *4.Challenges in Translating this Piece of Excerpt*

While I have tried to apply series translation techniques and strategies, there are some challenges I have encountered. For example, I felt struggled in dealing with the different syntax and sentence structure. Chinese sentences, as reflected in Zhang Ailing's story, flow a more flexible pattern, combining descriptive details, embedded clauses, and complicated tones into a single flowing sentence. But differently, in English, the language patterns emphasize more on the clarity of the delineation of ideas. I have to transit between the two language patterns flexibly, which is challenging.

Besides, it is challenging to translate Zhang Ailing's tone into English. Zhang Ailing's tone is delicate blend of poignancy and irony, and it is hard for me to find the right words and sentence structure to present such irony in English language. For example, focusing on the Chinese sentence of “流苏的屋子是空的，心里是空的，家里没有置办米粮，因此肚子里也是空的。空穴来风，所以她感受恐怖的袭击分外强烈”，I literally translated it into “Liu Su's house was empty, her heart was empty, and since she had not stocked up on rice or food, her stomach was empty too. Where there is emptiness, fear creeps in, and she felt the terror of the attack all the more strongly.” Although the general meaning has been translated, I did not think that the tone has been carried out fully. The readers of the target texts may not get the beauty of Zhang Ailing's original piece of work of her tone in writing. Hence, I felt that the translation process was rather challenging.

## References

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