

## Review on the Research of Eileen Chang's the Golden Cangue From 2013 to 2023

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### Abstract

**Eileen Chang is a female writer who cannot be ignored Chinese literary circle in the 20th century. Her novella The Golden Cangue, published in 1944, is regarded as one of her most important masterpieces. This paper systematically sorts out and analyzes and summarizes the current research status of The Golden Cangue. By reviewing and analyzing the literature related to The Golden Cangue from 2013 to 2023, and on the basis of the data of the issued articles, it reviews respectively the novel from three parts: text research, adaptation research and translation research. Scholars' researches on Eileen Chang's The Golden Cangue mainly focus on the novel's themes, characterization, and self-translations, but there are still deficiencies in linguistic research and research methods.**

### Keywords

**The Golden Cangue; Eileen Chang; Review.**

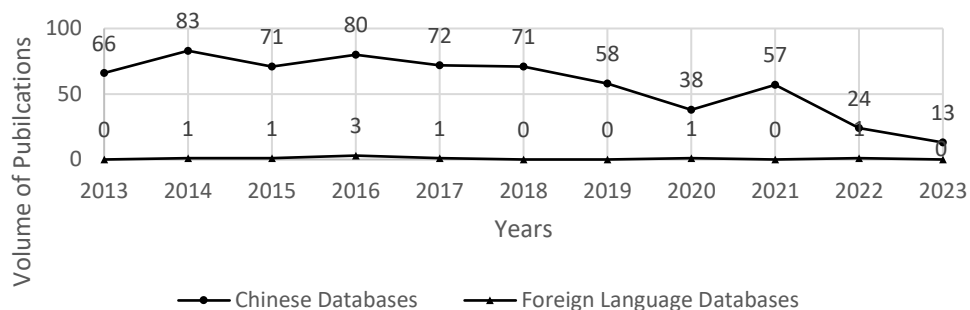
### 1. Introduction

The Golden Cangue is a middle grade novel published by Eileen Chang in 1944, and is widely regarded as one of her most important masterpieces. Taking the unique perspective of female as a starting point, the work shows the author's profound thoughts on human nature, love and fate through the story of the heroine Cao Qixiao, whose mind is gradually distorted under the oppression of the old society, and who ultimately brings tragedy to her own son and daughter. As soon as The Golden Cangue was published, the famous translator Fu Lei gave this work a very high evaluation, considering it "one of the most beautiful harvests in the literary world"[1]. In the 21st century, the study of The Golden Cangue has gradually deepened and diversified. This paper chooses the literature review from 2013-2023 because its research results are more in line with the current issues and academic hotspots. In the past decade, globalisation and information technology have accelerated, and people's knowledge and understanding of literature have been changing. As a work with profound connotations and wide influence, the study of The Golden Cangue needs to keep abreast of the times.

### 2. Literature sources and analysis

In this paper, China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), VIP Information and Wanfang Data are used as Chinese literature search sources, Web of Science and EBSCO are used as foreign literature search sources. The literature containing the words "Jinsuoji" and "The Golden Cangue" in the theme was searched respectively, and the time span of the search was from 2013 to 2023, and the search time was up to December 31, 2023, and a total of 1,357 pieces of literature were obtained from the search. The 1357 documents were manually read for screening and filtering, eliminating duplicates and documents inconsistent with the theme, and finally obtaining 641 valid documents, including 633 pieces of Chinese literature and 8

pieces of foreign language literature, and the chronological distribution of the documents is shown in Figure 1. Since the articles that use other concepts in the theme but still belong to the scope of the research of the topic are not counted, the above data does not represent the total number of literature on the research of the topic.



**Figure 1** Chronological Distribution of Literature Related to the Study of The Golden Cangue at Home and Abroad

In terms of the number of documents, the number of documents published on The Golden Cangue in Chinese databases is much higher than that in foreign databases. In the past decade, Chinese databases published an average of 63 pieces of literature on The Golden Cangue per year, while foreign databases published an average of only 0.8 pieces of related literature per year. This huge difference in quantity clearly shows that domestic scholars are more enthusiastic and concerned about this work. This may be related to the limited influence of The Golden Cangue as a Chinese literary work overseas, the lack of research resources and the language and cultural barriers. Although the number of articles published in Chinese databases maintains a high level, the overall decreasing trend suggests that we need to explore new academic growth points and expand research topics and perspectives in order to optimise and improve the research system of The Golden Cangue.

**Table 1** Funded projects related to the study of The Golden Cangue in the country (partially)

Serial number	Sources of funds	Project category	Project name	Relevant research results
1	The National Social Science Fund of China	General items	A Study of Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature in Self-Translation as Interlingual Writing and Cultural Construction	Identity, Trauma, and Dilemma : Re-exploring Eileen Chang' Self-translation and Rewriting of The Golden Cangue
2	The National Social Science Fund of China	General items	Research on Modern Literature of the Two Lakes in the Perspective of Regional Culture	The Unbreakable "Cangue": From The Golden Cangue to The Sentimental Swordsman--And the Problem of the Historical View of Chinese Modern and Contemporary Literature
3	The National Social Science Fund of China	General items	Aesthetic History of Rhetoric	A Pragmatic comparison of the combination of Border Town and The Golden Cangue
4	The National Social Science Fund of China	General items	Literary Narrative and Spatial Representation: An Example from Chinese Modernist Novels	A Test of the Succession of The Golden Cangue to Madman's Diary
5	The National Social Science Fund of China	General items	Studies on Chinese-English Bilingual Writers in Modern China	The Sexual Sense of Characters in The Golden Cangue and Its Derivative Works
6	The National Social Science Fund of China	Subsequent funding	A Study of the Thirty Varieties of Miscellaneous Plays Published by the Yuan	The Intertextual Relationship Between Eileen Chang's The Golden Cangue and The Injustice to Dou E
7	The National Social Science Fund of China	major project	Research on Chinese Female's Literature Series and History of Female's Literature	Between "Male and Female" and "Time"-Revisiting The Golden Cangue
8	The National Social Science Fund of China	major project	A Semiotic Study of the Present Situation and Development of Chinese Culture Today	Misplaced Self and Identity: A Semiotic Interpretation of Cao Qixiao's Image
9	The Ministry of Education in Philosophy and Social Science Research	Major Projects	Translation and Research of Chinese Literature in the English-speaking World	Compromise and Perseverance: Rewriting and Self-Translation of The Golden Cangue in the Context of Western Culture

The Golden Cangue research project has received high national attention and has the support of several funds, including 8 projects of The National Social Science Fund of China, 1 The Ministry of Education in Philosophy and Social Science Research, in addition to 21 provincial and ministerial level fund projects. These projects cover a wide range of disciplines such as literary translation, cultural studies, female's literature, linguistics, etc., reflecting the wide influence of The Golden Cangue and the plurality of research fields. In order to study The Golden Cangue comprehensively and deeply, interdisciplinary cooperation and communication are needed to integrate research resources, improve research quality, and promote innovation and development in academia.

In this paper, we review The Golden Cangue from the perspective of text, adaptation and translation, with a view to providing insights, improving the literary research system, and contributing to the development of literature.

### **3. A fictional textual study of The Book of Golden Locks**

#### **3.1. Thematic studies**

Eileen Chang, as a female writer active in the period of change between the old and the new ideologies, analysed the contradictions of the society at that time with her unique literary talent and keen insight. In *The Golden Cangue*, she uses sharp strokes to reveal the oppression and bondage of women in the old society, and shows the helplessness and struggles that women face in the traditional society. Scholars' studies on the theme of the novel also mainly focus on feminism and the tragedy of the times.

In terms of feminist thinking, Li Ying[2] believes that Eileen Chang's Cao Qixiao presents the image of a "mad woman" full of desire, bitterness, rebellion and resistance. This kind of madness originates from the male domination and feudalism in the old society, which makes women lose their economic power and depend on men for survival. But at the same time, Cao Qixiao is extremely eager for money, and ultimately, she still falls into the complicity of the patriarchal system, unable to get rid of her tragic fate. This social structure and the ideological concepts of "three subordinates and four virtues" and "male outside and female inside" lead to women's subordinate position in social life and their inability to fully participate in political, economic and cultural activities. Drawing on the views of French feminist researcher Hélène Cissou, Ma Bing[3] analyses the "ghostly aura" emanating from Cao Qixiao. He argues that this "ghostly" writing contains a great potential for positive action, breaking the male-dominated historical and moral order. Through this dialectical approach, Eileen Chang's thoughts and reflections on the possible alienation of life during the evolution of the great era are also shown. From the perspective of the tragedy of the times, Song Shengquan[4] in his article argues that the "problems of male and female" expressed in *The Golden Cangue* are only superficial, and that Eileen Chang's real intention is to reveal "the nightmare of the times" through "problems of male and female", and that the family is the medium to connect the two. Eileen Chang[5] once said that, except for Cao Qixiao in *The Golden Cangue*, all the characters are not clear-cut, they are not heroes, but they are the majority of the load of this era. Song Shengquan analyzes Cao Qixiao's "clarity" and concludes that Cao Qixiao's "clarity" is her obsession with "truth", while the "nightmare of The Times" is the "the majority of the load of this era" who do not think deeply and spend their lives hypocritically. In the end, even though she is as "clear as the bottom" as Qixiao, the ego that she has maintained all her life is squeezed by the environment of the times and leads to the tragedy of sinking.

#### **3.2. Narrative studies**

In *The Golden Cangue*, Eileen Chang demonstrates a unique narrative technique. She adopts a non-focused perspective, subtle plotting and action meta-analysis to closely link Cao Qixiao's

life with her inner world, which endows the novel with profound thoughts and rich emotions. In addition, Eileen Chang's skilful use of time treatment and aesthetic principles makes the narrative dimension of this work uniquely artistic. Therefore, numerous researchers have explored the narrative perspective of *The Golden Cangue* and its significance in depth.

Wang Ying [6] focuses on analysing the characteristics of narrative time in *The Golden Cangue*, pointing out that the narrative time of the novel presents the characteristics of personalisation and circularity. The *Golden Cangue's* narrative time is centred on the psychological state and life experience of the main character Cao Qixiao, which presents personalised characteristics and is different from the concept of time in mainstream discourse. Eileen Chang's delicate depiction of Cao Qixiao's psychological changes and their impact on cognition, emotion and behaviour makes time the key to interpreting the character. The cyclical nature of the novel's narrative time is reflected in the closing line "The story of thirty years ago is not yet finished - it can't be finished", which implies the close connection between the future, the present and the past, reflecting Eileen Chang's deep concern about the fate of mankind and her belief that history repeats itself in tragedy.

### 3.3. Imagery studies

Imagery in literature can visualise abstract emotions, triggering readers' empathy, helping them to understand the characters' character and destiny, and grasping the theme of the work. In *The Golden Cangue*, Eileen Chang uses imagery such as golden locks and the moon to connect the inner world of the characters with the outer world, which not only sets a bleak tone for the novel, but also gives the text a deep emotional meaning and strengthens its artistic expression. In addition, the diversity and richness of imagery also make *The Golden Cangue* more widely spread and influential, so that it can have far-reaching effects in different cultural and historical contexts. Among them, the "golden lock" as a key image not only symbolises Cao Qixiao's shackles of fate, but also reflects Eileen Chang's profound thoughts on human nature, love and destiny.

Liu Baochang [7] suggests that the core imagery of *The Golden Cangue* is the "golden yoke", and he believes that Cao Qixiao sacrificed herself to marry a cripple suffering from bone consumption for the sake of life, and this is the golden yoke put on Cao Qixiao by marriage. Cao Qixiao is initially disdainful of the golden yoke, and hopes to be freed by love, falling in love with her brother-in-law. However, after frustration, she despaired of love and indulged in the golden shackles. Liu Baochang's analysis of the imagery of "golden locks" reveals the influence of desire on women and their helpless struggle under oppression.

"The moon is a key image in *The Golden Cangue*. The moonlight at the beginning of the book, thirty years ago, not only opens the story, but also serves as a metaphor for the changes of the times, and its bleak and clear colours match the novel's thematic atmosphere.

In Li Tingting[8] 's study "An Analysis of Moon Imagery in *The Golden Cangue* ", she believes that the moon dominates all the rest of the imagery in *The Golden Cangue*, and that Eileen Chang, through the moon changes of waxing and waning and bleak emotional color, successively brings out the tragic coloring and helplessness of the story. Miao Junyan[9] compares the moon imagery in different cultural contexts of China and the West in her study, and she believes that in *The Golden Cangue*, the moon is not only a passive witness and expression tool of human emotions, but also there exists a subtle interactive relationship with desires, especially female's lust. This relationship foretells that the main character Cao Qixiao, a woman with a twisted psyche, will be overcome by desire and ultimately lead to madness and destruction.

### 3.4. Characterization studies

Eileen Chang is unique in the Chinese literary world with her unique writing style, which is good at capturing the complex weaknesses of human nature. In *The Golden Cangue*, she

profoundly demonstrates her characters' inner struggles, desires and pains through delicate psychological descriptions and characterisation, embodying the characteristics of psychological realism. With Cao Qixiao as the core, the work constructs a group portrait of characters in a feudal family, revealing the oppression and destruction of women in the feudal society. Through this work, Eileen Chang expresses her deep concern and thinking about human nature.

In studying the characterization of *The Golden Cangue*, most scholars focus on the heroine Cao Qiqiao. Du Yuji[10] stands on the basis of previous studies and, with the help of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, discusses Qixiao's love, hatred and resistance in depth. She believes that Qixiao's power of resistance stems from the primitive longing that erupted when she used to live in the lower class society. This longing makes her struggle for survival and seek a breakthrough in her predicament. However, the long-term oppression leads to the collapse of her mental state, and her love, hatred and resistance become extreme. This unfulfilled desire leads her into a vicious cycle of extreme attitudes towards society, her family and herself. Du Yuji further points out that Qixiao's extreme "resistance" is not well thought out, but a desperate act under the pressure of survival, which leads to her own destruction. This reflects the oppression and struggle of women in the feudal society, as well as their sadness and helplessness to survive in the difficult situation.

Chang'an is an important character in Eileen Chang's novel *The Golden Cangue*, whose image construction and character function have significant research value. As the daughter of Cao Qixiao, Chang'an is in a repressive family environment and is the victim of a tragic fate. In the second half of the novel, she becomes a key character that drives the plot. Chang'an faces female dilemmas, but Qixiao's indifference to her and lack of motherly love and sympathy cause Chang'an to suffer great psychological pressure in her growth, always shrouded in her mother's shadow.

Chen Cangue's[11] study points out that in *The Golden Cangue*, Chang'an's fate is closely linked to her mother, Cao Qixiao. This connection is manifested in the fact that Cao Qixiao turns her own repression and pain into shackles and puts them on her daughter Chang'an. Chang'an tries to resist, but fearing her mother's authority, she gradually loses herself and accepts her mother's life experience, becoming like her mother. This reveals the complexity of the feudal mother-daughter relationship and the plight of women in a patriarchal society. Chang'an is not free from the shadow of her predecessor, and suffers similar pain and repression. She is caught in a circle of destiny, unable to break away from the bondage of feudal rites, and in a vicious circle in a patriarchal society. This phenomenon indicates that the story of "thirty years ago" is still continuing, reflecting the oppression and struggle of women in the feudal society.

### 3.5. Comparative studies

*The Golden Cangue* is a work of great importance left by Eileen Chang in the history of literature, and its unique literary value and profound ideological connotation have attracted extensive attention in the academic world. As a result, comparative research results on *The Golden Cangue* are also quite abundant.

Du Ruihua and Liu Fengjie[12] compare *The Golden Cangue* with *The Diary of a Madman*, and from the narrative of the novel, they put forward the differences and similarities between the two in terms of narrative ontology, narrative subject and narrative meaning. They argue that the narrative of *Diary of a Madman* is allegorical and symbolic, criticising society, awakening the people and embodying idealism. *The Golden Cangue*, on the other hand, inherits its allegorical nature and combines it with complex storytelling to realistically depict the dark society from a citizen's perspective. Despite their different perspectives, both of them share the same narrative meaning of "the beloved".



Wang Huanhuan[13] compares Mukoda Kuniko's masterpiece *The Woman Next Door* with *The Golden Cangue*, and analyses the influence of life experiences on the style of their works from the perspective of the two writers' family environments. Sachiko and Cao Qiqiao are both repressed women in a patriarchal society. While the former briefly escapes from her life as a housewife to pursue love, the latter gives vent to her loneliness by messing up her children's happiness, and even on her deathbed, she still aspires to mediocrity. The heroines of both novels eventually choose to return to the ordinary, which reflects the projection of the two authors' inner expectations under similar experiences.

#### 4. A Study of the Adaptation of The Golden Cangue

Adaptations of *The Golden Cangue* have diversified with the cultural development of the times. Comparing and analysing different adaptations helps to understand the dissemination and artistic expression of literary works in different media, and promotes the integration of literature and art. This work contains a deep cultural heritage and historical background, and its interpretation and expression vary in different times and cultures. Comparative study of adaptations from different periods and regions can help us to grasp its cultural connotation and social value.

Wang Anyi, as a representative figure of the "Zhang School of Literature", naturally attracted much attention from the very beginning of her adaptation of the theatre version of *The Golden Cangue*. Xu Shengjie[14] pointed out in her study that Wang Anyi integrated and reconstructed the plot of *The Golden Cangue*, adapting the originally subtle and introspective novel into a play with distinctive action language. Although there are the disadvantages of repetitive scenes and incomplete thematic clues, the plot changes make the characters more three-dimensional and the dramatic conflicts more intense, which enhances the viewability. Wang Anyi deleted the story line between Qixiao and her son, highlighting the conflict between mother and daughter and deepening the idea of "reincarnation of two generations". This cutting and processing innovation surpasses the original, and easily triggers the audience's empathy. The theatre version of *The Golden Cangue* is a work of art, with independent artistic life.

In the film and television adaptation, Fu Shouxiang and Chen Xiaoqing[15] conducted an in-depth discussion on the presentation of *The Golden Cangue's* TV drama filming. They believe that the play uses colour and light, progressive narrative, profoundly portrays the image of Cao Qixiao, shows the rise and fall of female life, and expresses the female will to survive, predestination and the spirit of resistance, which enhances the audience's feelings and understanding, and provides a new way of thinking and methods for film and television artistic expression.

In the context of the modernisation of opera, Wu Ximei[16] takes the Chongqing Peking Opera version of *The Golden Cangue* as the object of her study, and researches the way of adapting the Peking Opera. She argues that the Peking Opera version of *The Golden Cangue* adopts the "Red Mansion" style of writing, reconstructing the original plot in a selective manner, retaining key events and eliminating the roles of the brother and sister-in-law, so as to make it more adapted to the stage and easier for the audience to understand and accept. In terms of the characters' pre-history, the play starts with Qixiao's marriage, and visually shows the whole process of her psychological alienation from being a young girl longing for love to being oppressed by the patriarchal system of law and order, which not only presents the characters' development in its entirety, but also makes the play compact and full of tension.

#### 5. A study of the self-translated version of The Golden Cangue

Eileen Chang is a modern literary giant whose works have had a far-reaching impact, with *The Golden Cangue* being particularly prominent, having been translated into many languages.

Eileen Chang personally translated *The Golden Cangue* into English, naming it *The Golden Cangue*[17], a process that lasted 28 years, with many rewrites and translations, and was finally published in 1971. Such works translated by the author herself are rare in the history of translation, and therefore have attracted extensive attention from scholars. Eileen Chang's translation and rewriting not only preserved the essence of the original work, but also gave it new connotations, which made the work shine in different cultural contexts.

In discussing the translation language style of *The Golden Cangue*, Xu Xiaomei[18] argues that Eileen Chang adhered to the principle of faithfulness to the original when she translated *The Golden Cangue*. She blended Chinese and Western language styles, retained the traditional Chinese novel language, and used the pinyin structure of sentences for translation, which promoted the exchange of Chinese and Western cultures, broke the cultural dichotomy, and shook the position of the strong culture. This kind of translation enriches the readers' aesthetic concepts, promotes the formation of new literary aesthetic styles and rules, and is in line with the strategy of "seeking common ground while reserving differences" in world culture. Zhang Heyao[19], on the other hand, from the perspective of ecology, takes the translator as the core, and bases on the translation concept of selection and adaptation, and makes an in-depth analysis of the content of the translated text. She believes that in the process of self-translation, Eileen Chang highlights the characteristics of translation, such as personality as style, the pursuit of the old and the new, and the importance of cultural information "fidelity", which plays a pivotal role in the communication between the East and the West and the wide dissemination of Chinese culture in the West, which is in a disadvantageous position.

Regarding the phenomenon of *The Golden Cangue* being translated and re-translated by Eileen Chang, Wang Weiping and Wang Ying[20] argued that after Eileen Chang went to the United States, she adapted *The Golden Cangue* into the English-language long novel *The Rouge of the North* in order to expand the market for American readers, and that the work appealed to the curiosity of Western readers about ancient China and demonstrated a tendency towards self-colonisation of the writing. However, due to the high tide of the American feminist movement, the backward and feudalistic image of the Orient portrayed in the book was rejected by the readers, and the market response was lukewarm. Eileen Chang reflected on this and returned to the truth in her own translation of *The Golden Cangue*, presenting the story of a Chinese feudal family in an objective and concise manner, thus reducing her self-colonising tendency.

## 6. Conclusion

This article synthesises research findings on the text, adaptation and self-translation of Eileen Chang's novel *The Golden Cangue* between 2013 and 2023. Over the past ten years, significant progress has been made in the study of *The Golden Cangue*, which has become more in-depth, systematic, theorised and diversified, and has pushed forward the academic development of the field.

Despite the remarkable achievements in the study of *The Golden Cangue*, linguistic research is still weak. Language is a key part of the novel, and its analysis is crucial to a comprehensive understanding of the novel's creative features and artistic achievements. Scholars should strike a balance between literary and linguistic studies and pay attention to the role of language in the development of plot, characterisation and thematic expression. By analysing language in detail, scholars should reveal the author's skills in presenting the psychology of the characters, the social background and the cultural connotations, with a view to making greater breakthroughs on the basis of the existing foundation.

In the study of *The Golden Cangue*, a qualitative approach dominates, exploring its themes, meanings and values through textual, cultural and historical analyses. However, this method is highly subjective and may affect the objectivity of the results. In contrast, quantitative methods



emphasise data collection and analysis, and rigorous examination of plot, characters, and themes, which helps to accurately grasp the structure and content of the novel. However, there are still few quantitative studies on *The Golden Cangue*, which may be related to the immaturity of the methodology and theoretical framework. At the same time, quantitative methods may be difficult to fully capture the rich connotations of the work. Therefore, future research should synthesise qualitative and quantitative methods in order to study *The Golden Cangue* in depth and comprehensively.

Besides, we expect more researchers to apply interdisciplinary approaches, combining literary studies with other disciplines, in order to enrich the knowledge of *The Golden Cangue* and contribute new theories and concepts to the study of Chinese literature.

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