



Translating Queerness: A Comparative Study of Two Thai Translations of Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café*

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This study explores how queerness is translated and reimagined in Thai literary contexts through a comparative analysis of two Thai versions of Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. Drawing on queer theory and Marc Démont's (2017) framework of translation strategies—misrecognizing, minoritizing, and queering—the research examines 209 queer-relevant instances in Nuankham Chanpa's 1986 translation and Juthamat Anion's 2017 version. The findings reveal a significant shift: Nuankham predominantly used minoritizing (73.52%) and misrecognizing (19.1%) strategies, while queering appeared in just 7.38% of cases. By contrast, Juthamat employed queering strategies in 95.08% of instances, with minimal use of the other two. The study also analyzes paratextual and institutional contexts to understand how broader cultural forces shaped each translation. These results highlight translation as a culturally situated act that influences the visibility of queer identities. This research contributes to queer translation studies by demonstrating how shifting ideologies and publishing norms impact the representation of queerness across time.

Research Article

Abstract

Keywords

queer translation strategies;
Thai literary translation;
ideology and rewriting

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การแปลควีร์: การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบ

ผลงานแปลไทยสองฉบับของนวนิยาย

The Ballad of the Sad Café โดยคาร์สัน แม็กคัลเลอร์ส

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งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาว่าความเป็นควีร์ถูกถ่ายทอดและตีความใหม่
อย่างไรในบริบทวรรณกรรมไทย โดยวิเคราะห์เปรียบเทียบผลงานแปลไทย
สองฉบับของ *The Ballad of the Sad Café* ซึ่งเป็นผลงานของคาร์สัน
แม็กคัลเลอร์ส (Carson McCullers) ใช้การวิเคราะห์ข้อความที่เกี่ยวข้อง
กับความเป็นควีร์จำนวน 209 ข้อความจากฉบับแปลของนวลคำ จันภา
(พ.ศ. 2529) และจุฑามาศ แอนเนี่ยน (พ.ศ. 2560) โดยอิงจากทฤษฎีควีร์
ร่วมกับกรอบกลวิธีการแปลสามรูปแบบที่เสนอโดยมาร์ก เดอมง (Marc
Démont, 2017) ได้แก่ misrecognizing, minoritizing และ queering ผลการศึกษา
พบความเปลี่ยนแปลงอย่างชัดเจน โดยนวลคำ จันภา ใช้กลวิธี minoritizing
73.52% และ misrecognizing 19.1% ขณะที่ queering ปรากฏเพียง 7.38%
ในขณะที่จุฑามาศ แอนเนี่ยน ใช้กลวิธี queering สูงถึง 95.08% และใช้กลวิธีอื่น
เพียงเล็กน้อย นอกจากนี้ งานวิจัยนี้ยังวิเคราะห์บริบทของพาราเทกซ์และ
บริบทเชิงสถาบันเพื่อทำความเข้าใจว่าแรงขับเคลื่อนทางวัฒนธรรมในวงกว้าง
มีอิทธิพลต่อการแปลแต่ละฉบับอย่างไร ผลลัพธ์เหล่านี้ชี้ให้เห็นว่าการแปล
เป็นการกระทำที่ฝังอยู่ในบริบททางวัฒนธรรม ซึ่งส่งผลต่อการทำให้ความเป็น
ควีร์ปรากฏหรือเลือนหายไป งานวิจัยนี้มีส่วนช่วยเสริมองค์ความรู้ด้าน
การแปลควีร์ โดยแสดงให้เห็นว่าอุดมการณ์และบรรทัดฐานของวงการ
สำนักพิมพ์ที่เปลี่ยนแปลงไปส่งผลต่อการถ่ายทอดความเป็นควีร์ในช่วงเวลา
ต่างๆ

บทความวิจัย

บทคัดย่อ

คำสำคัญ

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1. Introduction

Translation has long played a vital role in cross-cultural literary exchange, not merely as a process of converting words from one language to another, but as an act deeply rooted in cultural and ideological contexts. In recent decades, the field of translation studies has shifted its focus beyond the pursuit of linguistic equivalence to examine how texts are shaped, circulated, and interpreted within particular social and political environments. Pioneering scholars like André Lefevere (1992) have reconceptualized literary translation as a form of rewriting, influenced by factors such as poetics, ideology, and systems of patronage. Within this framework, translators are seen not as neutral transmitters of meaning but as active cultural participants whose decisions help shape how identities, values, and desires are represented.

This shift in theoretical focus has paved the way for the emergence of queer translation studies, an interdisciplinary field that examines how non-normative sexualities and gender identities are rendered across languages, cultures, and historical contexts. Scholars such as Baer & Kaindl (2018) have highlighted how translation has often been complicit in erasing or distorting queer voices, shaped by the influence of heteronormative cultural expectations. In response, newer approaches advocate for queering translation, a practice that challenges binary thinking and embraces ambiguity, fluidity, and subversion (Baer & Liu, 2022; Epstein & Gillett, 2017). These approaches reimagine translation not just as a site of linguistic transfer, but as a space for queer expression, critique, and resistance.

Globally, there has been increasing attention to how queerness is represented or rendered invisible in translated literature (Rossi, 2022), particularly through frameworks such as Lefevere's concept of rewriting and Marc Démont's (2017) typology of translation strategies: misrecognizing, minoritizing, and queering. However, much of this scholarship remains focused on Western and European contexts. In Thailand, academic engagement with queer translation is still relatively limited. One important exception is Paibulkulsiri's (2014) comparative study of two Thai translations of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which shows how the legibility of queerness shifted between the 1974 and 2009 editions, differences shaped by both the translators' ideological positions and the expectations of their publishers.

Building on this body of scholarship, the present study explores how queerness is represented in two Thai translations of Carson McCullers's *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, published in 1986 and 2017. By comparing these two versions, the research aims to deepen our understanding of how cultural, ideological, and institutional forces influence the translation of queer literature in Thailand across different historical periods. *The Ballad of the Sad Café* offers a particularly rich case for such analysis—not only because of its canonical status in queer American literature, but also due to its nuanced depictions of gender nonconformity, emotional ambiguity, and its layered narrative style, all of which open up a wide range of interpretive and translational possibilities.

Unlike many earlier studies, this research takes a more structured approach by combining clear analytical categories with close, qualitative readings of queer-relevant passages. Although frequency counts are used to show overall trends, the primary focus is on interpretation—how queerness is expressed, softened, or changed through language, tone, and narration. This method addresses a gap in both Thai and international research, which often relies on impressionistic comparisons without clear criteria. By offering a detailed, non-Western case study, this research contributes to queer translation studies and sheds light on how ideas about gender and sexuality have changed in Thai literary translation over time.

2. Research Questions

This study sets out to examine how queer elements in Carson McCullers's *The Ballad of the Sad Café* are rendered in two Thai translations published decades apart, and how the translators' choices reflect broader cultural, ideological, and institutional forces. Using Marc Démont's (2017) three-part framework of queer translation strategies—misrecognizing, minoritizing, and queering—the research looks not only at how often and in what ways these strategies appear, but also at the external influences that may have shaped them. With this aim in mind, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What translation strategies does each translator employ in rendering queer representations in their translation of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*?
2. How do ideological, institutional, and paratextual factors influence each translator's approach to queer representation in the Thai translations of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*?

3. Literature Review

The intersection of queer theory and translation studies opens up new possibilities for understanding how queerness is conveyed across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Queer elements in literature often emerge through subtle cues—coded language, gender-nonconforming bodies, ambiguous relationships, and characters who exist outside social norms. Translation plays a key role in shaping how these elements are received, with the power to preserve, transform, or erase queerness depending on the surrounding cultural, ideological, and institutional forces (Baer & Kaindl, 2018; Epstein & Gillett, 2017).

3.1 Queer Elements in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*

Carson McCullers's *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1951) is a haunting and emotionally rich novella centered on Miss Amelia, a solitary and strong-willed woman in a quiet Southern town. Her life takes an unexpected turn when she develops an intense and unusual connection with Cousin Lymon, a hunchbacked stranger whose presence disrupts the fragile balance of the community. Things become even more complicated with the return of her ex-husband, Marvin Macy, sparking a strange and painful love triangle filled with betrayal and emotional tension. The story explores themes of unrequited love, emotional dependence, and deep loneliness, pushing against conventional ideas of romance, gender, and belonging. At its core, it is a quiet but powerful meditation on the fragility of human connections and the subtle entanglement of love and control in unsettling ways.

The novella has gained significant attention in queer literary studies for its portrayal of gender nonconformity, homoerotic longing, and characters who exist outside social norms. Scholars like Gleeson-White (2003) and Adams (2009) have explored Miss Amelia's masculine appearance and her emotionally charged, non-heteronormative bond with Cousin Lymon, reading these elements as key markers of queerness. The story's use of the grotesque—both in its characters and their relationships—further underscores alternative expressions of gender and unconventional emotional attachments.

To analyze how such queer features are rendered in translation, this study employs three literary typologies:

Gender Nonconformity refers to how a character departs from socially expected gender roles, appearances, or behaviors. Building on Judith Butler's (1990) idea of gender as performance, this category includes characters who resist binary norms or embody a mix of traditionally masculine and feminine traits. In *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Miss Amelia stands out as a clear example: her tall, angular build, preference for men's clothing, and rejection of conventional femininity all mark her as gender nonconforming.

Homoerotic desire refers to emotionally intense, often ambiguous attachments that deviate from heteronormative romance, typically—but not solely—between characters of the same sex. Such desire often operates beneath the surface, expressed through feelings like loyalty, jealousy, or heartbreak rather than overt sexuality (Sedgwick, 1990). In this study, the term is used more broadly to include non-normative affective ties that challenge binary gender roles or romantic conventions (Butler, 1990; Love, 2007). In *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Miss Amelia's devotion to Cousin Lymon—despite their cross-sex pairing—is marked by emotional intensity and gender ambiguity, forming a queer bond that unsettles normative models of love and desire.

Social Deviance and Abjection refers to characters portrayed as grotesque, marginal, or unsettling—those outside or threatening society's norms. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection, this category helps us understand how certain figures embody queerness through their disruptive

presence. In *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Cousin Lymon—marked by his physical disability, manipulative behavior, and social isolation—serves as a striking example. His presence unsettles the community, blurring the lines between attraction and repulsion, care and control.

These categories provide a foundation for assessing how queerness appears in the source text and how it is transformed or retained across translations.

3.2 Translation as Rewriting: Ideology, Poetics, and Patronage

This study draws on André Lefevere's (1992) concept of translation as rewriting, which frames translation as a culturally and ideologically embedded act rather than a neutral transfer of meaning. Translators operate within systems of ideology, poetics, and patronage, making decisions that are shaped by dominant aesthetic values, political pressures, and institutional structures.

In this context, ideology refers to the beliefs and values that shape the selection and representation of texts. Translators may align, consciously or unconsciously, with dominant ideologies such as nationalism, heteronormativity, or moral conservatism, often suppressing or distorting marginalized voices, including queer identities (Lefevere, 1992; Tymoczko, 2003).

Poetics involves culturally specific norms around style, genre, and expression. In Thai literary translation, this may include preferences for euphemism, emotional restraint, or narrative decorum, which can influence how queerness is expressed or concealed (Chan, 2020).

Patronage refers to the institutional and commercial forces—publishers, editors, critics, and state bodies—that influence which texts are selected for translation and how they are shaped, often in line with dominant ideological norms (Lefevere, 1992). In Thailand, where publishing frequently aligns with conservative or educational agendas, queer content may be moderated or reinterpreted to fit prevailing expectations (Paibulkulsiri, 2014).

As Baer & Kaindl (2018) and Spurlin (2014) argue, translation can either serve as a tool of heteronormative containment or as a space for queer resistance, depending on how these forces are negotiated. For queer literature, decisions regarding visibility and ambiguity are never just textual; they reflect deeper ideological currents.

Focusing on *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, a text rich in gender nonconformity and emotional ambiguity, this study applies Lefevere's concept to examine how Thai translations reflect the cultural climates and publishing practices of their time. This framework highlights translation not merely as a purely aesthetic act, but as a sociopolitical act that mediates identity, power, and queer expression across languages and eras.

3.3 Translation Strategies Used for this Study

To implement the comparative analysis, this study adopts Démont's (2017) three-part framework of queer translation strategies:

Misrecognizing refers to the erasure or neutralization of queer content. This often manifests as euphemism, heteronormative substitution, or desexualization. A typical example includes rendering a term like "lover" into a platonic or gender-neutral alternative that strips away queer connotation.

Minoritizing acknowledges queer identities but frames them as deviant, marginal, or exotic. Translators may use marked or stigmatizing language, added commentary, or exaggerated metaphors that emphasize difference rather than inclusion.

Queering affirms or enhances queer ambiguity, fluidity, and resistance to binary norms. This approach often involves poetic stylization, creative linguistic choices, or paratextual additions that preserve the original's subversive potential.

These strategies have been widely used in queer translation scholarship (e.g., Baer & Kaindl, 2018; Epstein & Gillett, 2017) and provide a clear methodology for analyzing how translators negotiate queer content. In applying them to the Thai translations of McCullers's novella, this study not only categorizes stylistic shifts but also links them to broader institutional and cultural forces, consistent with Lefevere's emphasis on translation as rewriting.

3.4 Previous Studies

Research on queer translation has grown significantly in recent years, both in the global and Thai contexts. This body of work builds on foundational theories such as Lefevere's concept of ideological rewriting and has been expanded by scholars like Baer & Kaindl (2018), Epstein & Gillett (2017), and Démont (2017). These studies show how queerness may be erased, distorted, or amplified depending on the socio-political environment.

Feminist and gender-fair translation studies also inform this field. Irshad & Yasmin's (2022) review of feminist translation highlights the role of translator ideology in shaping the representation of gender and sexuality. Lardelli's (2024) study of gender-fair translation practices from English to German illustrates the cognitive and strategic challenges of representing non-binary identities. Meanwhile, Hostová (2022) calls for historically grounded approaches to queer translation that consider regional differences and evolving social values.

In Thailand, Paibulkulsiri's (2014) analysis of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* illustrates how translation choices have evolved across historical periods in response to changing cultural and editorial

ideologies. While her study provides valuable interpretive insights through its impressionistic approach, future research could build upon this by employing a more systematic framework to classify translation strategies and track textual patterns across the text.

Marc Démont's (2017) three-part framework—misrecognizing, minoritizing, and queering—was chosen for its concreteness and analytical precision. Although it offers only three strategies, it provides a more structured and applicable approach than broader models like Venuti's translator invisibility, which underpinned Paibulkulsiri's (2014) study. Given the relative newness of queer translation studies, few established frameworks exist for systematically analyzing how queerness is rendered in translation. Démont's model fills this gap by offering clear criteria for identifying shifts in representation, making it well suited to the study's goal of comparing how ideological and institutional forces shape queer visibility across Thai translations.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach to examine how queerness is translated in two Thai versions of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*—one published in 1986 by Nuankham Chanpa and the other in 2017 by Juthamat Anion. The goal is to address two central research questions: (1) what translation strategies each translator employs in rendering queer representations in their translation of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, and (2) how ideological, institutional, and paratextual factors influence each translator's approach to queer representation in the Thai translations of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. To answer the first question, the study systematically analyzes 209 queer-relevant textual instances using Démont's (2017) framework of three queer translation strategies: misrecognizing, minoritizing, and queering. To answer the second research question, the study analyzes paratextual elements, such as translators' prefaces, authors' bibliographies, publication details, and editorial framing, and situates each Thai translation within its broader cultural and historical context. This helps reveal how external factors, including publishing norms and societal attitudes toward queerness, may have influenced the translation strategies used.

4.2 Data Collection

The source material consists of McCullers's novella and its two Thai translations. Using purposive sampling, 209 queer-relevant excerpts were identified through close reading of the original text, based on three literary typologies: gender nonconformity, homoerotic desire, and social deviance and abjection.

These excerpts, drawn from across the novella, reflect key moments of queer expression and were selected for their thematic significance. Corresponding translations were then extracted to create a parallel dataset. In cases where an excerpt could not be clearly categorized under Démont's (2017) strategies, it was excluded from the analysis.

4.3 Data Analysis

To address Research Question 1, each textual instance was coded according to Démont's (2017) three strategies: misrecognizing (e.g., erasing or normalizing queerness), minoritizing (e.g., framing queerness as deviance or eccentricity), and queering (e.g., preserving ambiguity, resisting binary logic). The classification was based on a close, interpretive reading of how each instance was rendered in translation, focusing on shifts in meaning, emphasis, or representation. The quantitative analysis through frequency counts assessed the varying degrees and recurring patterns of queer translation strategies employed in the two Thai translations (RQ1). In contrast, the qualitative component of the study (RQ2) involved a paratextual analysis, aimed at interpreting how queerness was rendered or reframed through editorial, institutional, and contextual framing.

To answer Research Question 2, the study examined paratextual elements (e.g., introductions and critical essays) alongside the broader historical and institutional contexts of publication. These were analyzed through Lefevere's (1992) concept of translation as rewriting, with attention to how ideology, poetics, and patronage may have shaped each translator's approach to queer representation.

4.4 Validation

To ensure consistency and reduce potential bias, the author analyzed the data in two separate sessions, with a planned break in between to allow for a refreshed and more objective perspective during the second round. After that, a second coder—an expert with over ten years of experience teaching translation at the university level—independently reviewed 30% of the dataset (63 out of 209 excerpts). Initial agreement between the two coders was high (93%). In cases of disagreement, definitions from Démont's framework were revisited, and final decisions were reached through discussion. The second coder's extensive teaching background and familiarity with translation theory ensured an informed and reliable review process.

5. Findings

5.1 Translation strategies each translator employs in rendering queer representations in their translation of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*

The comparative analysis of translation strategies applied to Carson McCullers's *The Ballad of the Sad Café* in the Thai translations by Nuankham Chanpa (1986) and Juthamat Anion (2017) reveals a significant evolution in how queerness is treated across time. Using Marc Démont's framework—misrecognizing, minoritizing, and queering—the study identifies distinct patterns in each translator's approach across three typologies of queerness: gender nonconformity, social deviance/abjection, and homoerotic desire as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Comparative Frequency of Translation Strategies Across Three Queer Typologies in Two Thai Translations of The Ballad of the Sad Café

Queerness Category	Nuankham (1986)			Juthamat (2017)		
	Misrecognizing	Minoritizing	Queering	Misrecognizing	Minoritizing	Queering
1. Gender Nonconformity	21.84%	66.67%	11.49%	0%	5.75%	94.25%
2. Social Deviance/Abjection	29.58%	67.61%	2.82%	1.41%	5.63%	92.96%
3. Homoerotic Desire	5.88%	86.27%	7.84%	0%	1.96%	98.04%
Average	19.1%	73.52%	7.38%	0.47%	4.45%	95.08%

5.1.1 Gender Nonconformity

In the domain of gender nonconformity, Nuankham's translation shows 66.67% of instances using minoritizing strategies, 21.84% using misrecognizing, and only 11.49% reflecting queering. In contrast, Juthamat uses queering strategies in 94.25% of instances, avoids misrecognizing entirely, and employs minoritizing in only 5.75% of cases.

Example 1

Source text: Her hands, though very large and bony, ...

Nuankham's translation (Minoritizing): มือของเธอแม้จะใหญ่และผอมจนเห็นกระดูก

This version softens Amelia's gender nonconformity by highlighting her thinness with the phrase “ผอมจนเห็นกระดูก” (so thin that the bones were visible), subtly steering the image toward a more traditionally feminine portrayal.

Juthamat 's translation (Queering): สองมือของเธอหนังนั้นแม้จะใหญ่โตและมีแต่กระดูก

By keeping the description of Amelia's large, bony hands intact, the translation allows her masculine presence to stand out clearly, without softening or explaining it away.

Example 2

Source text: They remembered that Miss Amelia had been born dark and somewhat queer of face, raised motherless by her father who was a solitary man, that early in youth she had grown to be six feet two inches tall **which in itself is not natural for a woman.**

Nuankham's translation (Minoritizing): พวกเขาจำได้ว่ามีสอมมีเลียเกิดมาเป็นเด็กผิวคล้ำและหน้าตาออกจะแปลก พ่อของเธอเลี้ยงมาจนโตโดยไม่มีแม่ เขาเป็นชายผู้โดดเดี่ยว เมื่อเธอเริ่มย่างเข้าสู่วัยรุ่นและสูงถึงหกฟุตสองนิ้ว **ซึ่งไม่ปกตินักสำหรับเด็กผู้หญิง**

The phrase “ไม่ปกตินัก” (not quite normal) softens the original's sense of unnaturalness, using more cautious, less confrontational language. Choosing “เด็กผู้หญิง” (young girl) over “สตรี” (woman) further downplays Amelia's gender transgression by framing her in a less disruptive light. Together, these choices present her queerness as merely unusual rather than socially subversive.

Juthamat's translation (Queering): คนเหล่านี้จำได้ว่ามีสอมมีเลียเธอถือกำเนิดมาเป็นคนผิวคล้ำหน้าตาก็ดูออกจะประหลาดพิกล ได้รับการเลี้ยงดูจากบิดาผู้รักสันโดษโดยไร้มารดา ในช่วงวัยเยาว์เธอเติบโตจนสูงหกฟุตสองนิ้ว **อันเป็นขนาดที่ผิดธรรมชาติของสตรีทั่วไปอยู่แล้ว**

The phrase “ผิดธรรมชาติ” (unnatural) does not just preserve the original judgment; it sharpens it, highlighting Amelia's break from gender norms. Referring to “สตรีทั่วไป” (typical woman) reinforces her queerness as a challenge to societal expectations, not just an oddity. This choice keeps the critical tone of the original and affirms Amelia as a distinctly queer figure.

5.1.2 Social Deviance and Abjection

For this category, Nuankham predominantly employs minoritizing strategies in 67.61% of cases, followed by misrecognizing strategies in 29.58%, while queering appears in only 2.82% of instances. In contrast, Juthamat adopts a queering approach in 92.96% of cases, with significantly lower use of minoritizing (5.63%) and minimal application of misrecognizing strategies (1.41%).

Example 1

Source text: ... with two gray crossed eyes **which are turned inward so sharply** that they seem to be exchanging with each other one long and secret gaze of grief.

Nuankham's translation (Misrecognizing): พร้อมดวงตาเหล่สีเทาสองข้าง **ลูกตาข้างหนึ่งอยู่เกือบชิดหัวตา** เหมือนมันแอบจ้องลูกตาอีกข้างมาเป็นเวลานานด้วยความเศร้าโศก

The phrase “ลูกตาข้างหนึ่งอยู่เกือบชิดหัวตา” (One eye was positioned almost next to the inner corner) reduces the strangeness of the original by describing only one eye, creating an asymmetry that was not there before. This misrecognizing strategy makes the character’s unusual appearance seem less strange and easier to accept.

Juthamat’s translation (Queering): ดวงตาเหล่สี่เทาที่ลูกตาบิดเข้เข้าข้างใน จนดูราวกับว่าตาสองข้างนั้นมองสบกันเองด้วยสายตาแห่งความเศร้าสร้อยอันลึลับและยาวนาน

“บิดเข้เข้าข้างใน” (Twisted inward) captures both eyes twisting inward in a striking, unnatural way, preserving the grotesque and unsettling feel of the original. This queering strategy keeps the character’s strange and different presence clearly visible.

Example 2

Source text: Also, **the creature** was not at all as had been pictured to them -- not a pitiful and dirty little chatterer, alone and beggared in this world.

Nuankham’s translation (Misrecognizing): ทั้งลักษณะของชายหลังค่อมก็ไม่เหมือนกับที่รำลึกกัน ไม่ใช่คนขี้คุยตัวเตี้ยๆ สกปรกและน่าสมเพช อยู่อย่างโดดเดี่ยว ขอทานไปเรื่อยๆ

Translating “the creature” as “ชายหลังค่อม” (hunchbacked man) removes the original’s gender ambiguity. While “creature” in English feels neutral and otherworldly, “ชาย” (man) anchors the figure firmly within binary gender norms. This choice erases the character’s queer ambiguity, making it a clear example of a misrecognizing strategy.

Juthamat’s translation (Queering): มิน่าซ้ำ สิ่งมีชีวิตนี้ไม่ได้เป็นดังที่มีการสร้างภาพให้พวกเขารับรู้ ไม่ใช่เจ้าคนพุดพลาบร่างเล็กสกปรกน่าเวทนาโดดเดี่ยวและยากไร้อยู่ในโลกนี้

The phrase preserves the non-human, gender-ambiguous quality of “creature,” keeping the character outside typical human categories. This aligns with queer theory’s focus on disrupting fixed identities and allows space for open, flexible interpretation of the character’s queerness.

5.1.3 Homoerotic Desire

In the category of homoerotic desire, Nuankham’s translation predominantly utilizes minoritizing strategies in 86.27% of instances, with misrecognizing strategies applied in 5.88% and queering strategies appearing in only 7.84%. In contrast, Juthamat’s translation demonstrates a strong preference for queering strategies, employed in 98.04% of cases, with minimal use of minoritizing (1.96%) and no instances of misrecognizing.

Example 1

Source text: Her look that night, then, was the lonesome look of **the lover**.

Nuanchan's translation (Minoritizing): สีน้าของเธอในคินนั้นเป็นสีน้าอันเปล่าเปลี่ยวของซู้รัก

The Thai word “ซู้รัก” (paramour or illicit lover) adds a heterosexual and morally loaded layer to the term “lover.” This choice reduces the emotional openness of the original, making it feel more like a secret or a scandal. As a result, the translation makes the moment feel more ordinary and less queer by putting it into familiar and limited ideas of desire.

Juthamat's translation (Queering): สีหน้าเธอในคินนั้นจึงเป็นสีหน้าเปลี่ยวเหงาของคนที่อยู่ในห้วงรัก

The phrase “คนที่อยู่ในห้วงรัก” (a person in the depths of love) stays gender-neutral and avoids romantic clichés. Its poetic tone lets readers imagine the lover in any way, keeping the emotional depth and ambiguity of the original. This queering strategy helps keep love open and free from fixed rules.

Example 2

Source text: He fluttered his eyelids, so that they were like pale, **trapped moths in his sockets**.

Nuanchan's translation (Minoritizing): เขากะพริบเปลือกตาดำ ๆ จนเหมือนกับแมลงตัวซิด ๆ ที่ถูกจับกำลังขยับอยู่ในเบ้าตาทั้งคู่

This version makes the metaphor more literal and insect-like by using “แมลง” (insect) instead of the more poetic “ผีเสื้อกลางคืน” (moth). The added phrase “ที่ถูกจับกำลังขยับ” (caught and moving) gives it a mechanical feel, shifting the focus from emotion to action. Although the image is still strange, it loses its dreamlike and emotional impact, making the queerness feel just odd instead of deeply different or meaningful.

Juthamat's translation (Queering): เขากะพริบขนตาจนดูเหมือนมีผีเสื้อกลางคืนตัวซิดถูกขังอยู่ในเบ้าตานั้น

This version preserves the original's poetic and surreal tone by translating “moths” as “ผีเสื้อกลางคืน” (night moths), evoking delicacy and mystery. Using “ขนตา” (eyelashes) instead of “เปลือกตา” (eyelids) makes the image feel softer and more emotional, adding to its queer feel. It keeps the image vivid and shows both the character's vulnerability and differences.

5.2 Ideological, institutional, or paratextual factors influencing each translator's approach to queer representation in their translation of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*

To answer Research Question 2 on how ideological, institutional, and paratextual factors influence each translator's approach to queer representation in the Thai translations of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, this study examined the paratextual framing, historical context, and institutional environment in which each translation was produced. The comparison between Nuankham Chanpa's 1986 translation and Juthamat Anion's 2017 edition reveals how shifting cultural discourses and ideological climates in Thailand have influenced the treatment of queerness in literary translation.

5.2.1 Ideological Factors

The ideological climate in Thailand during the two translation periods—1986 and 2017—provides significant insight into the translators' choices. In 1986, Thai society remained largely conservative with respect to gender and sexual diversity. Queerness was often equated with deviance or eccentricity, and same-sex desire or gender nonconformity was rarely addressed in literature without euphemism or metaphor (Jackson, 2003). Consequently, the dominant ideology favored assimilation, emotional restraint, and silence surrounding non-normative identities. Nuankham Chanpa's translation reflects this ideological orientation by rendering queer features through minoritizing and misrecognizing strategies, framing gender ambiguity as emotional eccentricity and downplaying homoerotic tension.

In contrast, the 2017 translation by Juthamat Anion reflects the impact of a shifting ideological landscape in which LGBTQ+ visibility had increased significantly. Public discourse on sexual and gender diversity had expanded, influenced by global media, activism, and academic engagement with queer theory (Boellstorff & Leap, 2004; Sinnott, 2004). Within this more open cultural context, queerness could be acknowledged, explored, and even celebrated. Juthamat's translation adopts queering strategies, preserving ambiguity, gender transgression, and emotional subversion. The translator's approach aligns with the ideological openness of the time and with contemporary scholarly efforts to resist heteronormative translation practices (Baer & Kaindl, 2018).

5.2.2 Institutional Factors

The Thai publishing industry during these two periods further illustrates the contrast in translation approaches. Nuankham's edition was published by Korpha Publishing, a press known for translating classic Western literature in a polished, culturally familiar style. At the time, Korpha was part of a literary environment that valued clarity, emotional depth, and broad appeal. Within this context, themes such as queerness, eroticism, or social deviance were sometimes softened or presented in more conventional ways, in line with dominant cultural expectations. In contrast, Juthamat's 2017 translation came out during a time when Thai publishers—especially those with academic or progressive leanings—were more open to exploring ideas about identity, marginality, and social critique. Library House Publishing, which published this version, is known for supporting literature that engages with social issues and diverse perspectives. This shift in publishing attitudes may have allowed the translator more freedom to keep the story's ambiguity and highlight its non-normative themes in a more open and nuanced way.

5.2.3 Paratextual Factors

Paratextual framing plays a decisive role in mediating how readers are guided to interpret queerness in each edition. In Nuankham's 1986 edition, the introduction presents McCullers as a writer of emotional alienation and psychological depth, emphasizing her characters' internal suffering rather than social or gendered deviance. The focus on disability, trauma, and existential loneliness avoids any direct

mention of sexuality or gender identity. One notable line characterizes McCullers's figures as “disabled emotionally or physically... symbols of the inability to give or receive love” (Nuankham, 1986). This framing aligns with misrecognizing strategies, in which queer desire is rendered as a universal emotional condition rather than a political or embodied one. Notably, the edition provides no biographical information about the translator, leaving her ideological stance and interpretive background entirely opaque. Without added context, the translator feels more removed from the meaning, creating a sense of neutrality and emotional distance that matches the edition's overall tone of avoiding political issues.

Conversely, the 2017 edition includes two critical essays at the end of the book that actively foreground queerness as a central theme. Pawin Malaiwong writes that McCullers's characters are queer not just in sexual orientation, but in bodily difference and social displacement, noting that “ความไม่พอดีของเสื้อผ้าเป็นสัญลักษณ์บ่งบอกความแปลกแยกของตัวละครที่เข้ากับสังคมไม่ได้” (The ill-fitting clothes symbolize the character's sense of alienation and inability to fit into society). He sees McCullers as a queer writer before the term “queer theory” even existed. Likewise, Nalut Tangpornpipat emphasizes that the emotional core of the story lies in characters' inability to express their inner desires or to be fully themselves, writing that “ความเหงา... มาจากความว่างโหวงในจิตใจยามอยู่ในสภาพแวดล้อมที่ไม่อาจเป็นตัวของตัวเอง” (“Loneliness... arises from the emptiness one feels when living in an environment where they cannot be their true self”). These paratexts not only support but also invite queer interpretations, shaping the ideological environment in which the translator operates.

Juthamat's biographical note also gives readers a clearer sense of where she's coming from—and it reinforces her approach to translation as one that embraces queer visibility. With a background in applied linguistics and formal translation training, along with a strong portfolio of feminist and queer literary works by authors such as Margaret Atwood, Virginia Woolf, and Toni Morrison, her experience suggests a deep and thoughtful engagement with questions of gender and representation. Her shift from nursing to language teaching and literary translation suggests an intentional, reflective journey—one that values the power of words to shape identity. Juthamat's openness, along with the critical essays in the edition, creates a space where queerness, through gender, feelings, or same-sex desire, is not only seen but treated with care and meaning.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

6.1 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that queer translation in Thailand reflects not merely stylistic or lexical choices, but broader ideological, institutional, and cultural dynamics. Through a comparative analysis of Nuankham Chanpa's (1986) and Juthamat Anion's (2017) Thai translations of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*,

it becomes evident that translation strategies toward queerness have shifted significantly over time. While Nuankham predominantly employed minoritizing and misrecognizing strategies—framing queerness as eccentricity or deviance—Juthamat’s version overwhelmingly adopted queering strategies, highlighting ambiguity, fluidity, and subversive potential. These findings confirm that translation functions as a culturally situated act of rewriting, one that either obscures or affirms queer identities depending on the translator’s agency and the socio-political climate in which the translation occurs.

6.2 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the translation of queerness is deeply shaped by cultural ideology and institutional norms, substantiating the claim that translation is a form of ideological rewriting (Lefevere, 1992). The differing strategies employed in the 1986 and 2017 Thai translations of *The Ballad of the Sad Café* demonstrate how the legibility of queer identities has evolved within Thai literary culture. This could be influenced by shifts in socio-political climate and scholarly engagement with queer theory (Baer & Kaindl, 2018; Epstein & Gillett, 2017).

First, the stark contrast in the use of queering strategies across the two translations reflects changing norms of cultural acceptability and queer visibility. In Nuankham’s 1986 translation, queerness was frequently minoritized or misrecognized—especially in the portrayal of gender nonconformity and homoerotic desire—consistent with Baer & Kaindl’s (2018) observation that translation in heteronormative cultures often functions to suppress or normalize non-normative identities. These strategies align with the ideological climate of 1980s Thailand, where representations of same-sex intimacy or gender variance were considered taboo (Jackson, 2003). In contrast, Juthamat’s 2017 translation predominantly employed queering strategies, especially in depictions of bodily deviance and ambiguous affection. This shift toward preserving ambiguity and fluidity confirms Démont’s (2017) view that queering strategies enable subversive or non-binary identities to remain legible within the target culture.

Second, the way each translation handles different forms of queerness—like gender nonconformity, social deviance, and homoerotic desire—shows how unevenly queerness is understood or accepted in cultural terms. The data reveal that Nuankham was more likely to tone down or erase homoerotic desire than gender nonconformity, hinting at a cultural hierarchy where some forms of queerness are more acceptable than others. This pattern echoes Sedgwick’s (1990) and Halberstam’s (2005) insights on how different queer expressions carry different levels of visibility and disruption. In contrast, Juthamat treats all three types with a consistently queering approach, suggesting a broader embrace of queer aesthetics and bodies. Her translation aligns with Butler’s (1990) and Kristeva’s (1982) ideas about how non-normative gender and emotion can serve as powerful forms of resistance.

Third, the translation strategies in each version are shaped by institutional and paratextual influences, consistent with Lefevere’s (1992) notion of translation as rewriting shaped by poetics and

patronage. Nuankham's translation, published by Korphai Press, reflects 1980s Thai values by favoring emotional realism and downplaying queer content—evident in the absence of a translator biography and the framing of McCullers as a writer of emotional isolation—aligning with misrecognizing or minoritizing strategies (Démont, 2017). In contrast, Juthamat's 2017 translation, released by Library House, embraces queerness through supportive paratexts, including academic essays and a translator biography highlighting her background in feminist and queer studies. These elements enable a more subversive, ambiguous reading aligned with queering strategies (Démont, 2017; Baer & Kaindl, 2018; Epstein & Gillett, 2017), showing how publishing contexts shape not only what is translated but also how queerness is rendered visible within Thai literary culture.

Ultimately, this comparative study demonstrates that translation does not merely reflect cultural meaning—it actively contributes to its creation. As Rossi (2022) and Baer & Liu (2022) point out, translators play an active role in shaping how queerness is understood and valued. In Nuankham's version, queerness is translated into emotional eccentricity or inner pain, which strips it of its political edge. In contrast, Juthamat's approach allows for queer desire, embodiment, and social deviance to be viewed as meaningful aspects of the story. Her work reflects what Spurlin (2014) calls the “poetics of queer translation,” where language becomes a way to push back against norms and make room for other ways of being.

In sum, this study shows that translating queerness is never a neutral act. It requires navigating questions of power, visibility, and ideology, and the results often depend on the time, place, and cultural context in which the translation happens. By bringing together close textual analysis with insights from paratextual and institutional contexts, this research offers a more nuanced understanding of how queerness moves across languages—and how translators play a key role in shaping what can be seen, felt, and understood in different cultural moments.

7. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study focuses on two Thai translations of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, allowing for detailed comparison but limiting generalizability across genres, authors, or contexts. While Démont's three-part framework—misrecognizing, minoritizing, and queering—proved useful, it may oversimplify the complexity of queer translation, as some instances could fit multiple categories. The analysis is also limited to textual and paratextual data, without direct input from translators or reader reception, making interpretations of intent and impact necessarily speculative. Substrategies such as euphemization or poetic stylization were not analyzed, which could have offered deeper stylistic insights.

Future research should broaden the scope to include diverse genres, such as poetry, children's books, and audiovisual texts, to test the framework's applicability. Expanding the corpus would support broader generalizations about queer translation practices. Scholars might also refine the framework by

incorporating more granular analysis of stylistic choices. Interviews with translators could offer insight into their decision-making, while empirical studies on reader reception would help assess how translation strategies shape queer legibility. Finally, comparative studies across languages, regions, or time periods could illuminate how cultural and ideological shifts influence translation norms and strategies.

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