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***Womanhandling* Gender-based Violence and Female
Sexuality: A Case Study of Feminist Approaches to
Translating Yu Xiuhua**

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Abstract

Informed by existing theoretical outcomes at the intersection of gender and translation studies, this dissertation analyses the ways in which gender-based violence and female sexuality discourses present in the poems “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu” and “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You” by Yu Xiuhua were rendered in different English translations. I argue that Fiona Sze-Lorrain’s translations are an example of feminist translation, as she *womanhandles* the text from a feminist perspective, retaining and reinforcing the feminist elements of the Chinese source text. Feminist translators have often been accused of mistranslation. However, textual and paratextual analysis suggest that translations tend to reproduce and perpetuate hegemonic and patriarchal norms and values, unless translators consciously aim to subvert them. Thus, I argue that if translators do not subscribe to a particular ideology, then they are (consciously, unconsciously, or sub-consciously) translating according to the dominant (patriarchal) one.

Keywords: Feminist translation, translation strategies, poetry translation, gender-based violence, female sexuality

Resumo

Este trabalho pretende contribuir para um diálogo académico em torno da intersecção entre os Estudos da Tradução e os Estudos de Género, através de uma abordagem comparativa que confronta um conjunto de traduções para o inglês de dois poemas de Yu Xiuhua de acordo com dois vetores de comparação, nomeadamente a representação de discursos de violência de género contra as mulheres e de sexualidade feminina na tradução de “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu” e “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You”. Como o título deste trabalho indica, a análise realizada parte dos poemas seleccionados na tentativa de observar como estas questões feministas se refletem nos textos de chegada, através de uma leitura feminista das estratégias usadas pelos diferentes tradutores. Defendo que ambos os poemas de Yu Xiuhua, pelo seu conteúdo feminista, devem ser lidos à luz da perspectiva do Feminismo e das Políticas de Género e, como tal, as ferramentas metodológicas utilizadas na análise dos textos traduzidos enquadram-se na Teoria da Tradução Feminista. Além disso, defendo que as traduções de Fiona Sze-Lorrain constituem um exemplo de tradução feminista, uma vez que a mesma manipula deliberadamente o texto de partida através de uma abordagem feminista, por forma a preservar e reforçar as questões feministas representadas no original chinês.

O capítulo 2, intitulado “Feminist translation: Theory and practices”, aborda, em primeiro lugar, o aparecimento e o desenvolvimento dos estudos da tradução feminista. Segue-se uma revisão das estratégias feministas sob a perspectiva de três teóricas da tradução, Luise von Flotow (1991), Françoise Massardier-Kenney (1997) e Carol Maier (1998). Estas estratégias servem como ponto de referência na análise das estratégias adotadas pelos tradutores de Yu Xiuhua, bem como na demonstração de como as traduções em inglês de Fiona Sze-Lorrain constituem um exemplo

de tradução feminista. Além disso, este capítulo explora algumas das críticas à prática da tradução feminista, sobretudo no que diz respeito aos conceitos de (in)fidelidade e fluência na tradução e de invisibilidade do tradutor. Para Rosemary Arrojo (1994), as “manipulações radicais” postas em prática pelas tradutoras feministas não são menos violentas nem mais “nobres” do que aquelas executadas segundo valores patriarcais, tal como o modelo de Thomas Drant que utiliza metáforas relacionadas com colonialismo e violação para justificar as suas intervenções no texto de partida. Rosemary Arrojo afirma também que um dos maiores entraves à legitimação da prática da tradução feminista está na relação entre o tradutor e o público-alvo. Isto é, as intervenções feministas no texto de partida quebram essa relação precisamente porque os leitores, que não compreendem a língua de partida, depositam a sua confiança no tradutor para que este transmita o significado do original e a voz do autor. Do mesmo modo, nos nossos dias, críticos e académicos da tradução continuam a utilizar termos como “fidelidade” e “equivalência” para denunciar intervenções mais radicais no texto de partida, como acontece com as intervenções feministas de Deborah Smith em *A Vegetariana*, vistas por vários defensores de práticas de tradução literal como um “ato de traição”. Contudo, as abordagens convencionais à prática da tradução e à teoria da tradução (como a tradução literal) defendem ideais de fidelidade, fluência e invisibilidade do tradutor que têm origem nos valores imperialistas e patriarcais que dominam as sociedades ocidentais. Como demonstrado por Lori Chamberlain, a tradução sempre esteve envolvida em questões que relacionam passividade e produtividade com estereótipos de género, estabelecendo-se, assim, uma autoridade hierárquica do trabalho original sobre a reprodução (tradução), bem como o seu valor e o lugar que ocupam na sociedade.

O desenvolvimento do Capítulo 3, “Womanhandling Yu Xiuhua”, faz-se a partir de uma leitura feminista dos poemas “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu” e “Crossing Half of China to

Sleep with You” de Yu Xiuhua e respectivas traduções para o inglês. Em primeiro lugar, e a título de contextualização dos poemas escolhidos, este capítulo dá-nos a conhecer a autora, conjugando detalhes da sua vida pessoal com excertos de poemas que ilustram o cariz autobiográfico de grande parte da sua obra. Yu Xiuhua viveu uma vida de pobreza e carência emocional, a par das dificuldades motoras causadas pela paralisia cerebral que sofreu à nascença e que a impedem de participar na vida rural, além de se encarregar de simples tarefas no campo. Além disso, Yu Xiuhua sofreu de violência doméstica enquanto confinada a um casamento arranjado pelos pais durante cerca de 20 anos. O poema “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu” apresenta-se como um retrato íntimo, ao mesmo tempo envolvente e inquietante, do seu dia-a-dia com uma deficiência física e como vítima de violência doméstica. Através de uma linguagem simples e desprovida de subterfúgios, Yu Xiuhua combina a presença imagística da natureza rural de Hengdian com as atividades triviais da vida diária. O poema tem início com um cenário de violência: a voz poética feminina caminha pelos campos até à casa da avó materna, cai e magoa-se. No segundo cenário de violência, o cão lambe-lhe a mão ensanguentada. Em seguida, o leitor é transportado para o terceiro cenário de violência que mostra uma situação de abuso verbal e físico da mulher pelo marido. Deste modo, é criada uma cadeia de violência. Ambas as tradutoras feministas revelam consciência feminista e empatia pela voz poética, ainda que, por vezes, recorrendo a estratégias diferentes para a mesma preocupação global: uma maior conscientização para as questões feministas presentes no poema. Jenn Marie Nunes intervém visivelmente no texto de partida, sobretudo de modo a destacar o carácter violento e machista do marido através de paratextos que aparecem diretamente abaixo do verso que a tradutora pretende comentar. Por outro lado, a manipulação deliberada do texto de partida por Fiona Sze-Lorrain pretende colocar em primeiro plano a solidariedade feminina entre a mulher e Little Wu. Contudo, ao contrário do que acontece

com a tradução de Jenn Marie Nunes, as intervenções feministas na tradução de Fiona Sze-Lorrain só podem ser detetadas através de uma análise bilingue. As traduções que não recorrem a estratégias feministas demonstram uma interpretação diferente do texto de partida por parte dos tradutores, resultando numa representação mais amenizada da violência de género sofrida pela voz poética no que diz respeito à sua recorrência. Além disso, é traçado um retrato mais favorável do marido, ainda que ligeiramente, em comparação com as traduções feministas e com o texto de partida.

O poema “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You”, que se tornou viral na China em 2014 e transformou a poeta num fenómeno literário, apresenta-se como uma celebração desinibida de desejo sexual num corpo feminino e com uma debilitação física. Neste poema, a voz poética feminina encontra a sua agência e rejeita todas as noções de passividade, assumindo-se como um ser sexual com os seus próprios desejos e as suas próprias necessidades. No primeiro verso, a voz poética feminina exerce o seu livre-arbítrio e toma iniciativa na atividade sexual com “you”, contrariando os estereótipos de género que confinam a mulher a uma posição de passividade e submissão nas sociedades patriarcais. No caso de mulheres portadoras de deficiência, como Yu Xiuhua, a percepção de submissão acentua-se, uma vez que existe uma associação forte entre passividade e deficiência. À exceção da tradução feminista de Fiona Sze-Lorrain, ocorre autocensura em todas as traduções em inglês do poema e em maior grau na única tradução produzida pelo tradutor do sexo masculino. Isto demonstra que os tradutores que não adotaram uma abordagem feminista na tradução são, de um modo geral, mais conservadores na tradução de sexualidade feminina e de linguagem sexualmente explícita, estando mais limitados pelas normas e valores da sociedade patriarcal na qual se inserem. A tradutora feminista, determinada a ouvir a voz de Yu Xiuhua e a combater a perpetuação de valores patriarcais, intervém no texto de partida

de forma a assegurar uma representação de sexualidade feminina que reflita a imagem da mulher como participante ativa, colocando-a numa posição de igualdade em relações heterossexuais. Por fim, este capítulo apresenta uma comparação das estratégias utilizadas pelas duas tradutoras feministas de Yu Xiuhua, atentando nas semelhanças e diferenças no modo como estas estratégias são aplicadas e nos efeitos que produzem no texto de chegada. Uma leitura atenta das diferentes traduções feministas revela que, de um modo geral, ambas chamam a atenção para as mesmas questões feministas, nomeadamente a violência contra as mulheres, o sexismo e a sexualidade feminina, produzindo os mesmos efeitos mesmo quando as estratégias feministas são aplicadas em diferentes versos do texto de partida. Em última análise, e ainda que não seja possível determinar se existe realmente uma tendência para os tradutores do sexo masculino autocensurarem conteúdos relacionados com sexualidade feminina mais do que os seus homólogos do sexo feminino, este estudo indica que, a menos que o tradutor, independentemente da sua identidade de género, se proponha de forma consciente a contestar e subverter as normas e os valores da cultura patriarcal, é altamente provável que as suas traduções reproduzam e perpetuem normas e valores hegemónicos através de práticas linguísticas sexistas, tais como a autocensura deliberada ou inconsciente.

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1. Introduction

Yu Xiuhua 余秀华, a Chinese poet from the rural village of Hengdian, has emerged as a major reference in contemporary Chinese poetry after becoming an internet sensation overnight when her poem “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You” (穿过大半个中国去睡你 *chuān guo dà bàn gè zhōngguó qù shuì nǐ*) went viral in November 2014, reporting over one million shares on the Chinese messaging app WeChat.¹ Among several labels, Yu, who was born with cerebral palsy and did not graduate from high school, has been named “the cerebral palsy poet”, directly linking her work to her disability. Her poetry has captivated both the attention and the hearts of a mainstream readership, as many sympathise and relate to the themes of loneliness, love, and sexual desire Yu explores in her poems.

As I see it, Yu’s writings are notably feminist, even if the author herself has shied away from that label, the same way she has done so from other labels she has received. To address the feminist aspects of Yu’s writing, I chose to focus on the poems “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu” (我养的狗，叫小巫 *wǒ yǎng de gǒu, jiào xiǎowū*) and “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You”. “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu” discusses Yu’s experience with living with a disability and suffering from intimate partner violence, while “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You”, Yu’s most popular poem, is a candid and unreserved celebration of sexual desire in a female and disabled body. I believe that these texts constitute a relevant object of analysis, as they are imbued with pressing feminist concerns.

¹ Chu, “The Raw and Unabashed Poetry of Yu Xiuhua,” *The World of Chinese*, accessible online at: bit.ly/3prCf6B

As the title of this dissertation suggests, I depart from these poems to speculate how feminist concerns show up in the target texts, by examining how the elements of gender-based violence and female sexuality are rendered from a feminist perspective. As such, it is important to, first, define what I mean by “feminism”, as there have been various feminisms at different times and in different cultures. In this dissertation, I adopt the Third-wave Feminism’s intersectional stance on women, gender, and sex that go beyond a heteronormative framework, as well as their understanding on the intertwined operations of gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, geopolitics, and ability as inseparable categories in the social worlds we inhabit. For the poet, the term ‘feminism’ might not hold the same meaning I employ here, as well as the scholarly meanings used in the research and theory that support this study. Nevertheless, I believe that Third-wave Feminism provides a helpful framing in reading Yu’s essays and poems. For this reason, the methodological tools used to carry out this analysis are provided by the framework of Feminist Translation Studies.

1.1 General Background

As a cross-lingual and a cross-cultural activity inserted in specific historical, geopolitical, and sociocultural contexts, all translations inevitably carry traces of identity markers, such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, education, and socioeconomical class, as well as traces of the various operational power structures. As such, translation involves more than just linguistic concerns, as pointed out by translation theorists of the ‘cultural turn’ such as Susan Bassnett and André

Lefevre, who prepared the terrain for a fruitful encounter between translation and feminist thought.²

Interest in the intersection of Gender, Sexuality, and Translation has grown steadily in recent decades. Studies regarding gender issues in translation which dealt with gender as a concept and analytical category came to light in the late 1980s, and since then a substantial number of works (Simon 1996, Flotow 1997, Messner and Wolf 2001, Santaemillia 2005) has been written on the topic.³ In the following years, the attention progressively shifted to include sexuality and queer issues.

Both feminist linguists and feminist writers of the late 1980s and early 1990s argued that language is a social practice that involves not only the individual making language negotiations and choices, but also “the constraints, institutional and ideological, that frame (but do not completely determine) those individual actions.”⁴ In a patriarchal society, language often fails to sufficiently represent women’s experiences, as language is created by men and for men. Thus, it can be said that both language and translation are embedded in sexist societal structures. Moreover, translation as a praxis is viewed as an archetypically feminine and reproductive activity and often sexualised as ‘woman’, while the original work is viewed as ‘male’ and writing is regarded as a productive activity (Simon 1996, Flotow 1997, Godayol 2000). Naturally, this double inferiority encouraged new approaches to translation practice as an effort to dismantle and transcend the metaphorical boundaries set by tradition on women and translation. In short, feminist translators use language as a cultural intervention and as a part of an effort to subvert discourses of domination

² Simon, *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*, 8

³ Flotow, “Gender and sexuality,” 122

⁴ Eckert and McConell-Ginet, *Language and Gender*, 5

in the patriarchal society by *womanhandling* the source text with the purpose of making women and feminist concerns more visible in the target text.

Both feminist translation theory and practice have been met with strong resistance, as many do not find it appropriate to manipulate texts to further a feminist agenda (Arrojo 1994). However, in fact, few modern translation theorists today would dispute the fact that “all translation implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose.”⁵ Thus, and given that manipulation is intrinsically linked to power and to a desire to reshape reality, identities, and behaviours, feminist translation appears as a means to fight against the dominant imperialist and patriarchal truth, while giving voice to the invisible and the marginalized who have been deemed unworthy by society.

Today, translation by translators of different gender identities and sexual orientations, as well as translation of feminist writings, continues to be a fertile area of study, as much remains to be done.⁶ For instance, Santaemilia (2014) has affirmed that gender and sexuality in translation are still productive areas of research “into the complexities of gender identity, and into questions of power and authority, of legitimation and intervention, of (self)censorship and ethics.”⁷ Moreover, it is only recently that intersectionality is being openly claimed in feminist translation studies scholarship (Flotow 2009, Castro and Ergun 2017, Ergun 2013b). In the last decade, mainly because of the rise of transnational feminist theories and critical border studies, “a significant volume of innovative theory and research has been produced on translation beyond translation

⁵ Hermans, *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Translation*, 11

⁶ Yu, *Translating Feminism in China: Gender, sexuality and censorship*, 193-194

⁷ Santaemilia, “Sex and Translation: On Women, Men and Identities,” 106

studies, especially in the larger context of women's and gender studies."⁸ It is perhaps safe to say that the future of feminist translation studies will highly likely be intersectional and transnational.

1.2 Specific Background

Research on the translation of gender-based violence is still relatively uncategorised and unknown, with only very few studies published in the last few decades. The most comprehensive academic research in this field today belongs to Charlotte Bosseaux, who is leading the conversation on the ethic demands of translating gender-based violence, particularly in documentaries, through a practice-based research project that she is currently developing at the University of Edinburgh. Bosseaux claims that translation of gender-based violence material should be encouraged since sharing the stories, or voices, of women who have survived abuse can be seen as an attempt to break the circle of isolation experienced by victims of gender-based violence.⁹ However, according to Bosseaux, the status of language professionals is often precarious, with interpreters called on rape cases being given no background information while being expected to act as neutral conduits, which ultimately results in charities not being able to trust certain interpreters.¹⁰ As such, Bosseaux calls for the imperative need to make sure that a survivor's vulnerability is not propagated in the translation, thus requiring additional guidance to assist the translators when translating sensitive materials.¹¹

⁸ Castro and Ergun, "Translation and Feminism," 136

⁹ Bosseaux, "Translating gender-based violence documentaries: Listening ethically to the voices of survivors," 85

¹⁰ Bosseaux, "The ethical demands of translating Gender-Based Violence: a practice-based research project."

Available online at: <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FW000199%2F1>

¹¹ Ibid.

With respect to literary representations of violence against women in translation, however, no previous research or scholarly materials have been found¹², indicating that not much attention has been given to the way these sensitive materials are translated and to the moral and ethical consequences of a translated text that does not fully engage and listen to the voice of victims and survivors. This dissertation is an effort to contributing, even if slightly, to filling this lacuna. In my study, I observe how the different renditions differ in their treatment of the female poetic voice (victim of violence), the perpetrator, and the descriptive scenes of violence. Through my analyses, I attempt to demonstrate how translating these sensitive materials requires additional awareness and education of the translators so as not to minimise the severity of the issue and, thus, propagate discourses of male-dominance that downplay the victim's oppression.

As I mentioned above, the second part of this dissertation focuses on the translation of female sexuality discourses in Yu's poem "Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You". Sexuality in translation studies appears as a developing analytical category, addressing issues such as forms of censorship (e.g., self-censorship by the translator or censorship enforced by an editor or institution) imposed on representations of sexuality in translation¹³ (Flotow 2000a and 2009b, Linder 2004, and Santaemilia 2008b). In the last decade, more publications have begun to address what happens when sexuality is translated and why the translated text is more polite and less descriptive than its original.¹⁴ Studies on sexuality in translation in the twenty-first century have

¹² It is worth noting that I have conducted research only in the languages I am able to read and understand, therefore, and considering the vastness of languages around the globe, it is not my intention to claim that no studies about this topic were ever conducted or published. That said, and given that English is almost universally the lingua franca for academic research, I believe that the lack of English materials relating literary translation and gender-based violence in itself is a valuable indicator of the current state of research in this field.

¹³ Flotow, "Gender and sexuality," 122

¹⁴ Santaemilia, "Sexuality and Translation as Intimate Partners? Toward a Queer Turn in Rewriting Identities and Desires," 11

covered a panoply of topics, such as the English translation of sex in Beauvoir's works (Flotow 2000a), sexual poetics and the politics of translation (Campbell 2003), sexual language and gender in translation (Santaemilia 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2014), the relationship between translation and sexuality (Larkosh 2007), the (hetero)sexualisation of the process of translation (Chamberlain 1988), and so forth.

Previously conducted research on the translation of sexuality (Santaemilia 2008, Yu 2015) and sexual-related language (Santaemilia 2008) revealed that, in some cases, the female translators are more conservative in translating the female body and female sexuality in comparison to other feminist interests, such as lesbianism.¹⁵ Moreover, their male counterparts frequently seem to be detached when translating the female body and female sexuality, while their translations often reveal male judgment and patriarchal view on those topics.¹⁶ These studies also conclude that, in both women and men's translations, their own views on sexuality frequently result in mistranslations or self-censorship, and hence, the message is either lost or reduced (Santaemilia 2008, Yu 2015). As such, I intend to examine the way the materials of sexuality in a female and disabled body as well as sexually explicit language are translated, and how the feminist message in Yu's poem is conveyed in the target text, in the hope of adding knowledge to existing discussions at the intersection of sexuality and translation. Alongside that goal, I am also interested in exploring how feminist translation theory provides a methodology that itself works to dismantle patriarchal notions on female sexuality and gender norms, and thus, equips the politically engaged feminist translator with a mode of translation for foregrounding Yu's feminist message.

¹⁵ Yu, *Translating Feminism in China*, 186

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Feminist translation studies involving Chinese as a source or target language is still a practically unknown and unexplored area.¹⁷ In recent years, more publications have shed light on the topic, such as Li Hongyu's "Gender and the Chinese Context: The 1956 and 1999 Versions of Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*" (2017), which examines how the two different renditions differ in their treatment of women and women's issues; Yuying Li and Yuming Zhang's comparative study of Chinese translations of *Persuasion* from the perspective of feminist translation theory (2019); and Lingzi Meng's article "Translating Gender from Chinese into English: A Case Study of *Leaden Wings* from Feminist Perspective" (2020) which investigates the particular ways in which the translator (re-)constructs gender in English translation of the Chinese novel 沉重的翅膀 (*Leaden Wings*). Zhongli Yu's *Translating Feminism in China: Gender, sexuality and censorship* (2015), which analyses Chinese translations of *The Second Sex* and *The Vagina Monologues* pertaining to translating the female body, female sexuality, and lesbianism from the perspective of feminist translation, is still the most thorough academic work on the topic, inasmuch as it incorporates an overview of feminist translation studies in the Chinese context, from its emergence in the 1990s to its development in the twenty-first century.

These research projects share a common ground on gender as an integral factor in textual production: women and men do, in fact, translate differently. They reveal a tendency for female translators to politically intervene in the source text more than their male counterparts. Moreover, all study cases show that, in their translations, women translators frequently reveal feminist awareness and sympathy towards women and women's issues (Yu 2015, Li 2017, Li and Zhang 2019, Meng 2020). Conversely, in this study, more than the binary dichotomy between how

¹⁷ Santaemilia, "Gender, Sex and Translation: Preface," 24

women and men translate, I intend to observe how the translators engage with the feminist message in the source text. I hope to prove that, if the translator is conscious of and is able to empathise with the feminist message, then they will be able to bring that into their translations and produce a text that does not conform nor perpetuate hegemonic values (racism, capitalism, colonialism, heteronormativity, ableism and so forth), regardless of their biological sex or gender identity.

Although a considerable number of journal articles, book chapters, and academic papers have been produced on Yu's life and work, only a small number of master's dissertations or full-length studies about the author seem to have been published in recent years.¹⁸ The second part of Ying Tang's dissertation entitled "Swallowing an Iron Moon and Eating a Persimmon: Chinese Subaltern Poets in Documentary Films" (2020) focuses on Fan Jian's documentary film about Yu Xiuhua, *Still Tomorrow* (2016). Looking at visual evidence from close examination of cinematic scenes, Ying Tang analyses both the intentions and effects of filmmaking arrangements to show how they reinforce the poet's powerlessness. Apart from a few translators' own reflections regarding their attempts to translating Yu's poetry, such as Jenn Marie Nunes' 2017 Master's thesis (which served as the base for the article that comprises one of the translations examined in Chapter 3), no previous research which analyses the English translations of her work has been found. As such, the present dissertation is the first study devoted to investigating the role of the feminist translators as mediators of the representations of gender-based violence and female sexuality in Yu's poetry. As such, and by providing new insights that could possibly also interest students and researchers of Chinese literature and culture along with translators working with the Chinese

¹⁸ Research in the Chinese language was conducted to assess the status of academic research related to Yu Xiuhua both in China and Chinese speaking countries. However, it was not possible to get access to reliable sources thus making it impossible to verify the authenticity of the found materials. For this reason, I will not be considering these studies in this dissertation.

language, this research will be a useful addition in developing the field of critical Translation Studies in a Chinese context.

1.3 Research Goals

The general goals that guide my research are: i) Examining from a feminist perspective how the representations of gender-based violence and female sexuality in the selected poems were rendered in English. ii) Identifying and assessing if there are deliberate interventions in the source text with the purpose of retaining and emphasising its feminist elements. iii) Evaluating how feminist translation theory provides the politically engaged feminist translator with a mode of translation for foregrounding the representations of gender-based violence and female sexuality in the source text, operating on the premise that, if the translator does not subscribe to feminist ideology and values, then they are (consciously, unconsciously, or sub-consciously) translating according to the dominant (patriarchal and western-centric) one.

1.4 Research Methodology

This study employs a bottom-up approach that focuses its analysis on the specific characteristics and attributes of each text to infer a higher level of meaning from possible observations. The ten texts examined in this dissertation correspond to the majority of the English translations of “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu” and “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You”, all of which have been published to date in scholarly articles and magazines, with the

exception of Sze-Lorrain's translations, which have been published by Astra House in 2021 in a collection of Yu's poems and essays entitled *Moonlight Rests on My Left Palm*. It is worth noting that, in "Sitting with Discomfort: A Queer-Feminist Approach to Translating Yu Xiuhua", Jenn Marie Nunes presents a total of three different renderings of "The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu". My study considers only the version entitled "I Keep a Dog, Called Xiao Wu", given that examining the three versions would surpass the allowed space for this dissertation. Additionally, I believe that the version I chose to closely examine here provides a good departure point for looking at Nunes' feminist approach to translation as a whole. Moreover, Nunes' reasons for her multiple attempts at translating the poem directly relate to "the queer theory of radical failure" (see chapter 3.4) and, thus, cannot be justified under the lens of feminist translation theory alone, which is the scope of this study. That said, the translators' performance is examined with the support of many examples from within all ten texts to analyse the intentions and the effects of the translators' choices on the translated poem in its entirety. Therefore, all conclusions and assessments in this research are solidly based on real translation practice. This study is mindful of both language and culture, while in particular it delineates the social and political background behind the representations of gender-based violence and female sexuality in the selected poems.

1.5 Structure

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is this introduction. In Chapter 2, "Feminist Translation: Theories, Strategies and Practices", I first investigate the emergence and development of feminist translation studies. Then, I review the major feminist translation strategies discussed from the perspective of three theorists and researchers, namely

Luise von Flotow (1991), Françoise Massardier-Kenney (1997), and Carol Maier (1998). These strategies serve as a point of reference in my examining of the strategies adopted by the translators, as well as in my demonstrating of how Fiona Sze-Lorrain's English renderings of the Chinese source text are an example of feminist translation. Next, I address the main criticism made to feminist translation practices. Lastly, I demonstrate how the conventional approaches to translation and translation theory, particularly the notions of fidelity, fluency, and the invisibility of the translator stem from patriarchal and imperialistic values that dominate white western societies.

In Chapter 3, "*Womanhandling* Yu Xiuhua", and given that the poems in analysis are highly autobiographical, the first part of this chapter explores Yu's personal life as it lays ground for contextualising her work. Then, I introduce the Chinese source texts and their English translations, which are divided into two sub-topics: "Translating sexual and domestic violence" and "Translating female sexuality and desire in a disabled body". In the latter, and immediately following my analysis, I briefly discuss previous research on the self-censorship in translation of sexuality and sexually explicit language and how it correlates to my findings. Among the examined texts, there are two feminist translators: Jenn Marie Nunes, who has admittedly taken a queer-feminist approach to translation¹⁹; and Fiona Sze-Lorrain, who has, I believe, deliberately *womanhandled* the source text to emphasise the poems' existing feminist traits. Although Sze-Lorrain herself has not explicitly revealed having taken a feminist approach to her translations in the preface of *Moonlight Rests on My Left Palm*, I claim that Sze-Lorrain's way of doing feminist translation implied consciously intervening in the text by making feminist concerns more visible in the target text. I argue that Sze-Lorrain's feminist interventions in the source text aim to

¹⁹ See Jenn Marie Nunes "Sitting with Discomfort: A Queer-Feminist Approach to Translating Yu Xiuhua" (23-43) in *Chinese Poetry and Translation: Rights and Wrongs* (2019)

foreground female solidarity and reinforce female sexual agency to avoid perpetuating patriarchal gender norms and stereotypes. Hence, I make use of instances of translation strategies that can be considered feminist in both Nunes and Sze-Lorrain's translations at textual and paratextual levels to demonstrate that these strategies indicate that there is a deliberate intention to the interventions made by the translators. Moreover, I argue that these interventions were carried out with a specific purpose, which are allied with the translators' own interpretation of the source text.

My analysis is also interrogated for instances of linguistic sexism, while inviting for a reflection on what feminist elements are not raised due to the translator having performed an unconscious interpretation of the source text according to the dominant ideology. The analysis of the selected examples presented in this chapter indicates that the translator's gender does seem to relate to their word choices, but most importantly, it supports the claim that if the translator does not consciously subscribe to feminist values, then they will likely (consciously, unconsciously, or even sub-consciously) translate in accordance with hegemonic ones.

The last part of Chapter 3 scrutinises the strategies adopted by Yu's feminist translators, namely Nunes and Sze-Lorrain, in dealing with the themes of intimate partner violence and the descriptions of female (hetero)sexuality. I compare their methods of translation and discuss the effects of their approach in the target text, by drawing on the feminist translation strategies outlined by Flotow, Maier, and Massardier-Kenny.

In the fourth and final chapter, I explain my conclusions based on the analysis in previous chapters, summarising the overall differences and similarities between the translators' response to the source texts and its implications. The chapter also points out possible further research and ends

with a brief discussion on the contribution of this dissertation to the prospects of feminist translation studies.

It is important to note that it is not my intention to provide an extensive view in this dissertation of the topics outlined above. That is, in the vastness of Yu's body of work, it is possible to encounter other explorations of her sexuality and, even more so, as a victim of gender-based violence. However, there are not enough English translations to date of these other poems to substantiate my analysis. Therefore, I have chosen to limit the scope of my work to "The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu" and "Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You", aiming to read both the original Chinese texts and the selected translations closely, always in articulation with a cultural and historical context, as well as relevant scholarship. Nevertheless, limiting the object of study to these two poems allowed for a more intimate approach and close perspective on the poems themselves and their translations. As such, I aim to substantiate my arguments by providing comprehensive evidence from within the selected poems and respective translations, as well as by drawing on similar efforts of relevant scholarship materials.

2. Feminist Translation: Theory and Practices

Throughout history, writing was considered as a masculine and productive activity, preventing many women from entering the literary world as authors.⁹⁶ Translation, however, regarded as a reproductive and feminine activity, became a steppingstone for women to access the literary circles.⁹⁷ In fact, a parallel between the status of the translated text and women was established many centuries ago and has persisted through time: translation is inferior to the original work, and women are inferior to men.⁹⁸ Women were, therefore, victims of double inferiority. Naturally, this forced partnership⁹⁹ (as Sherry Simon calls it in the opening paragraph of *Gender in Translation*) and the development of feminist thought encouraged the appearance of new approaches to translation practice.

Feminist Translation Studies emerged from the translation of radical feminist texts in the 1970s by French Canadian feminist writers in Quebec. These texts were highly experimental and constituted efforts to deconstruct conventional language and conventional grammar constructions that writers (such as Nicole Brossard, Madeleine Gagnon, and Denise Boucher) perceived as “inherently misogynist.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, feminist writers argued that conventional language reflects and perpetuates patriarchal structures of power, gender constructs, and gender-based stereotypes. Thus, they sought to create a new idiom by inventing neologisms, changing the spellings of certain words, creating new images and metaphors, and deconstructing conventional

⁹⁶ Castro, “(Re-)examining Horizons in Feminist Translation Studies: Towards a Third Wave?” 7

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Simon, *Gender in Translation*, 1

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Flotow, “Feminist Translation: Contexts, Practices and Theories,” 72

grammar constructions, in the hopes that these linguistic innovations would ultimately bear fruit and bring about social changes. In response, a group of feminist translators in Quebec, including Barbara Godard and Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, developed a method of translation that focused on dismantling this patriarchal language and disrupting epistemic mechanisms of marginalisation, thus giving birth to what is known as the Canadian School. The development of feminist translation was, therefore, “a phenomenon intimately connected to a specific writing practice in a specific ideological and cultural environment, the result of a specific social conjuncture.”¹⁰¹

At the same time, however, the ‘rethinking’ of translation through the ‘Cultural Turn’ was taking place. Translation theorists such as André Lefevere, Susan Bassnett, and Lawrence Venuti questioned the binary concept of equivalence as faithfulness, stressing that equivalence should not be approached as a search for sameness. Moreover, they advocated for the active role of the translator, viewing translation as re-writing.¹⁰² These translation theorists argued that the first step to translation was reading the original text and that its author should be aware of the existence of multiple interpretations and possible ways of reading the source text.¹⁰³ Therefore, producing a text that is equivalent and faithful to the original revealed itself as an impossible task. Instead of translating words, these new approaches to translation focussed on the translation of meanings, which could not be found in the source text or in the author’s intention.¹⁰⁴ In addition, these theorists brought attention to the importance of the cultural and political context in which translation occurs. For instance, Bassnett argued that “if we accept that the translator is not, and

¹⁰¹ Flotow, “Feminist Translation,” 74

¹⁰² Bassnett and Lefevere, *Translation, History and Culture*, 10

¹⁰³ Castro, “Re-examining Horizons in Feminist Translation Studies: Towards a Third Wave?” 3

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

never could be, a transparent filter through which a text passes, but is rather a very powerful source of creative transitional energy (...), then thinking in terms of gender serves to heighten awareness of textual complexities in the roles of both writer and reader.”¹⁰⁵ This discussion on the translator as a translating subject and its identity is also an essential concern of feminist translation.

Another scholar that greatly influenced the feminist translation practices of the Canadian School was Jacques Derrida. His ‘deconstructionist’ approach to understanding the relationship between text and meaning is particularly relevant to Quebec feminist writers and provided these writers’ feminist translators with the necessary vocabulary to redefine and legitimise their practice.¹⁰⁶ Derrida argues that the “original text is an unstable object subject to different interpretations and that languages are different from one another”, therefore, “meaning can never be stable nor ‘original’ as it cannot ever be free from the context within which it is produced.”¹⁰⁷ Within this framework, translation cannot simply be a transfer of meaning, as meaning is not reproduced but recreated. Hence, the translated text is always a form of the original. In line with the translation theorists mentioned above and Derrida’s deconstructionism, feminist translation views translation practice as a creative activity, regarding it as a production instead of reproduction. However, differently, the Canadian feminist translators “quite willingly acknowledge their interventionism.”¹⁰⁸ They exercise their agency and creativity in the translation process to serve their feminist agenda, challenging faithfulness and *womanhandling* the source text according to feminist values and charging translation practice with feminist consciousness.

¹⁰⁵ Bassnett, “Writing in No Man’s Land: Questions of Gender and Translation,” 70-71

¹⁰⁶ Simon, *Gender in Translation*, 89

¹⁰⁷ Bervet, “A Critical Overview of Feminism and/in Translation: Constructing Cultures and Identities Through an Interdisciplinary Exchange,” 12

¹⁰⁸ Simon, *Gender in Translation*, 29

The translation strategies and theories developed by the Canadian School during the first wave of feminist translation were strongly related to the Second-wave Feminism, which provided both Quebec feminist writers and their translators with the means to disregard authority and demystify the patriarchal language. Luise von Flotow defines this era as the “first paradigm”, which she describes as having the ‘conventional’ assumption that all human beings in each society/culture can be identified either as women or men.¹⁰⁹ Here, gender is viewed as a set of characteristics and behaviours that are learned or imposed by society, thus forming an individual, and that can be overcome or subverted.¹¹⁰ Most publications produced during the first paradigm often explored misrepresentation in translation of women authors, the invisibility of women translators, and the patriarchal aspects of translation theory and translation discourse.¹¹¹ However, in the late 1990s to early 2000s, research on feminist translation was moving towards third-wave feminism in terms of ideas regarding gender, inclusivity, diversity, and intersectionality. Feminist translation theorists and feminist translators started questioning feminist translation through the lens of intersectionality, challenging the earlier approaches to feminist translation who almost exclusively framed their praxis within binary, western-centric, and essentialist terms.

The question of gender has been essential to feminism and feminist writing. However, criticisms to the binary approach to gender were gaining force and being called into question by black feminists, who felt excluded from the second-wave feminist movement, rejecting the idea that all women are united because they share the same gender. In 1997, Massardier-Kenney suggested a redefinition of feminist translation practice that implied acknowledging that terms

¹⁰⁹ Flotow, “Genders and the Translated Text: Developments in ‘Transformance,’” 275

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 276

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

such as ‘feminine’ and the category of ‘women’ are both complex and unstable. Since the 2000s, feminist translation work falls mostly under Flotow’s “second paradigm”. The second paradigm acknowledges that the diversity of sexual orientation and gender, class, ethnicity, race, and other socio-political factors come together to form one’s identity.¹¹² Furthermore, it focuses on gender as a discursive and performative act, and, consequently, on the performative aspects of translation.¹¹³ According to Flotow, feminist translators and feminist translation theorists’ discussions on gender issues under the second paradigm are often aligned with queer identities and interests, while looking at works that challenge traditional notions of gender.¹¹⁴ For instance, their views derive from some of Judith Butler’s ideas, which they subsequently apply to translation, such as her critics on the conventional male/female gender identity as an “illusion discursively maintained for the purpose of regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality.”¹¹⁵

Another common area of research within feminist translation practice, which gained strength during the second paradigm and has been recently registering increasing growth, is the unearthing of contributions by women authors, translators, and theorists, aiming to subvert the common tendency of excluding women from the theoretical and historiographical canon. For instance, Castro and Ergun argue that “literary values have been traditionally assigned by the norms of patriarchal canons”, as various studies reveal that there is an obvious tendency in translating fewer literary works written by women despite the growing number of prestigious

¹¹² Flotow, “Genders and the Translated Text: Developments in ‘Transformance,’” 275

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Butler, “Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions,” 417

literary awards being assigned to female authors.¹¹⁶ In the same vein, other studies have explored the gender-bias and sexist selection criteria used in publishing. In the past decade, this research has been considerably influenced by scholars of postcolonial, queer, and transnational feminism, resulting in a more intersectional and critical approach to feminist translation studies.¹¹⁷ This work is particularly urgent and relevant precisely because what matters *today* is not only whether women writers get translated or not, but which stories and truths are considered worthy of translation and are, consequently, being published. In other words, and from the perspective of intersectional feminism, feminist translation studies today seek to bring to light voices from a variety of geopolitical, cultural, and linguistic realities in order to subvert the tendencies in perpetuating and enforcing male-centric and western-centric values through western supremacist narratives.

Although feminist translation studies have moved beyond their essentialist agenda to become more inclusive throughout the years, feminist interventions in translation have, inevitably, attracted criticism (see chapter 2.2). But first, the following chapter looks into three major perspectives on feminist translation practices put forward by Flotow, Massardier-Kenney, and Maier. These three sets of strategies will later be used as a point of reference in my analysis of the English translations of Yu's poems in chapter 3, particularly the strategies adopted by the feminist translators.

¹¹⁶ Castro and Ergun, "Translation and Feminism," 140

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

2.1 Feminist Translation Strategies

Feminist translation has been a growing discipline in Translation Studies in the last few decades. Feminist translation strategies have been defined as intentional choices “from a socio-critical standpoint”.¹¹⁸ Initially popularised by Flotow’s summary in 1991, which analysed the work of Canadian feminist writers and translators, feminist translation strategies were later redefined by Massardier-Kenney in 1997, and outlined by Maier in 1998, in addition to many other discussions that have directly or indirectly contributed to Feminist Translation Studies.

2.1.1 Luise von Flotow’s Summary

In her article “Feminist Translation: Context, Practices and Theories” (1991), Flotow summarised three now widely known strategies in feminist translation theory: supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and hijacking. Supplementing is a strategy that consists in compensating for the difference between languages, calling for the intervention of the translator. For instance, because the English language lacks the gender agreement that exists in French, the feminist translator would compensate for this linguistic deficiency by manipulating the source text in order to give visibility to women and women issues. One example given by Flotow¹¹⁹ refers to Scott’s English translation of Louky Bersianik’s *L’Eugélonne*, where the following sentence involving the politics of abortion occurs: “Le ou la coupable doit être punie” (He or she who is guilty will be punished). In French, the “e” in “punie” (punish) clearly indicates that it is the women who is

¹¹⁸ Flotow, *Translating Women: From Recent Histories and Re-translations to «Queering» Translation, and Metamorphosis*, 7

¹¹⁹ Flotow, “Feminist Translation,” 75

punished for abortion and not the man. Thus, the feminist translator intervenes and supplements the original text to compensate for the lack of gender agreement in the target language as follows: "The guilty one must be punished, whether she is a man or a woman."¹²⁰

Another form of feminist intervention identified by Flotow is prefacing and footnoting. The feminist translator uses this strategy to explain their intentions and reflect on their work in a preface, often outlining their own strategies, and to emphasize their active presence in the text in footnotes.¹²¹ According to Flotow, "the modest, self-effacing translator, who produces a smooth, readable target language version of the original has become a thing of the past."¹²² Prefacing and footnoting are not exclusively used in feminist translation and are often used by translators to explain anything they deem necessary. However, in feminist translation, this strategy is a form of intervention in the text that has become "almost routine" for the feminist translator to make their presence visible.¹²³ These extra textual materials are called metatexts or paratexts.¹²⁴

The last strategy identified by Flotow is hijacking. This translation strategy is a process by which the feminist translator appropriates the source text, applying "corrective measures" with the purpose of constructing feminist meaning in the target text.¹²⁵ Flotow gives the example of de Lotbinière-Harwood's translation of Lisa Gauvin's *Lettres d'une autre*, where she hijacks the text contravening the author's conventional use of language. For instance, in her translation, Lotbinière-Harwood avoids male generic terms even when they appear in the source text, she puts the female element first in expressions such as "women and men" and "her or his" and uses

¹²⁰ Flotow, "Feminist Translation," 75

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 76

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, 1-2

¹²⁵ Flotow, "Feminist Translation," 78-79

inverted quotation marks to emphasize some absurd expressions in the conventional English language such as referring to women as “masters” of the kitchen.¹²⁶ Flotow calls Lotbinière-Harwood’s translation practice as “deliberate feminizing of the target text”, which makes clear the translator’s political intentions.¹²⁷ In *Gender in Translation*, Sherry Simon argues that there is some overlap between supplementing and hijacking, seeing that both are “a very visible and explicit form of interventionism, not necessarily demanded by the text itself, but rendered pertinent by the dissonance between the value and intention of the text in its time and contemporary perceptions.”¹²⁸

As Massardier-Kenney rightly observes, and based on Flotow’s explanations of each strategy, except for hijacking, it is not the strategies themselves that are feminist, but rather the use to which these strategies are put.¹²⁹

2.1.2 Massardier-Kenney’s Redefinition

In her essay “Towards a Redefinition of Feminist Translation Practice” (1997), Françoise Massardier-Kenney categorises feminist translation strategies into two general dimensions: author-centred strategies and translator-centred strategies. Massardier-Kenney recognises that translation strategies could be categorized in several different ways. However, she argues that author-centred and translator-centred “are particularly useful within a feminist framework because

¹²⁶ Flotow, “Feminist Translation,” 79

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Simon, *Gender in Translation*, 33

¹²⁹ Massardier-Kenney, “Towards a Redefinition of Feminist Translation Practice,” 57

they highlight the importance of women as producers of texts” both as authors or translators.¹³⁰

Author-centred strategies include recovery, commentary, and resistancy, and they intend to make the reader understand the source text. Recovery consists in contributing to a rethinking of the canon by finding, translating, and publishing texts by women authors whose experiences have been previously excluded.¹³¹ Commentary involves using the meta-discourse accompanying the translation (being prefaces, afterwords, footnotes, etc) to make the importance of the feminine or of woman/women (either in terms of structural constraints or in terms of women's agency) explicit in the target text.¹³² Resistancy refers to making the labour of translation visible through linguistic means that have a de-familiarising effect and work against easy fluency.¹³³ Resistancy as a translation strategy was initially identified by Lawrence Venuti (1992/1995). However, Massardier-Kenney argues that resistancy can also be fruitfully adapted to serve the objectives of feminist translators, claiming that it works well with experimental feminist texts, for instance, texts who challenge patriarchal linguistic conventions by rewriting grammatical gender such as subject pronouns and male/female endings of substantives.¹³⁴

Translator-centred strategies include commentary, use of parallel texts and collaboration, and aim to bring the target text closer to the reader while preserving its difference. The first strategy, commentary, is essentially the same as discussed above, however, with a different purpose. Here, the feminist translator describes their motives and the way they affect the translator text so as to avoid reproducing a textual power structure which genders the translator as the male confessor of

¹³⁰ Massardier-Kenney, “Towards a Redefinition of Feminist Translation Practice,” 58

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 59

¹³² *Ibid.*, 60

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 61

the text.¹³⁵ Another strategy that could apply as a form of feminist intervention is the use of parallel texts, which Massardier-Kenney defines as texts in the target language which have been produced in a similar situation or that belong to the same genre as that of the source text.¹³⁶ According to Lotbinière-Harwood, “feminist intertextual knowledge is indispensable for translating feminist writers and for rewriting texts in the feminine.”¹³⁷ For instance, Richard Philcox explains in his preface of *Crossing the Mangrove* (1995) by Maryse Condé that he turned to writers such as Faulkner, Naipul, and Garcia Marquez in the hopes of finding a parallel voice in the English language, however, within the framework of a feminist approach, Philcox found Virginia Woolf to be the most compatible to the voice of the original author. Even though the two writers seem, at first, too far apart, not unexpectedly the importance of gender in their work serves to bridge the distance between them.¹³⁸ The last strategy, collaboration, involves working with one or more translators and/or with the author of a given text.¹³⁹ Although this strategy is not exclusive to feminist translation, according to Massardier-Kenney, collaboration within the context of feminist translation means that the translator claims their agency in the meta-discourse surrounding the translation and the awareness of creating a tradition, while at the same time avoiding the traditional dichotomy between author and translator which seeks the control of meaning.¹⁴⁰

Massardier-Kenney concludes that, whether the translator relies on author-centred strategies or translator-centred strategies to bring out the importance of the feminine, it allows for a reconsideration of the object of translation as a cultural *re-presentation* instead of a text to serve

¹³⁵ Massardier-Kenney, “Towards a Redefinition of Feminist Translation Practice,” 63

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 64

¹³⁷ Lotbinière-Harwood. “Re-belle et Infidèle/The Body Bilingual,” 126

¹³⁸ Massardier-Kenney, “Towards a Redefinition of Feminist Translation Practice,” 64

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 64-65

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 65

or to master. She argues that the gains of a feminist approach to translation are clear and significant as it can bring out aspects of a text that had been overlooked or even suppressed; it can change literary history by bringing to light authors that were inaccessible before; it can lead to crucial points of interaction with other factors such as race and class and allow translators to engage fruitfully in work with the 'feminine' without getting lost in the essentialist debate.¹⁴¹

2.1.3 Carol Maier's Outline

In "Issues in the Practice of Translating Women's Fiction" (1998), Carol Maier outlines four categories of individual translation approaches that she regards as not fixed, but rather as elements in a continuum: no deliberate approach, feminist approach to woman, women-identified approach, and women interrogated approach. This proposal rejects a mainstream feminism framework, as it would be "problematic for anyone wanting to interrogate the very category of gender."¹⁴² A no deliberate approach refers to a 'null' strategy or 'literal' translation, meaning there is an absence of a deliberately formulated method or an acknowledge approach to translation. Maier regards this approach as the approach chosen by many translators, both to translating women's fiction and to translation in general.¹⁴³ These translators often refuse to work analytically, affirming instead spontaneity or creativity, and they do not question the definition of 'woman', as the translators would feel no need for it.¹⁴⁴ On the opposite end of the continuum to a 'no deliberate approach' lies what Maier defines as a 'feminist approach to women'. According to Maier, this

¹⁴¹ Massardier-Kenney, "Towards a Redefinition of Feminist Translation Practice," 65

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 55

¹⁴³ Maier, "Issues in the Practice of Translating Women's Fiction," 98

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 98

approach resembles ‘no deliberate approach’ in two ways: firstly, feminist translation is usually not concerned with the definition of ‘woman’ and feminist translators generally employ ‘woman’ without question¹⁴⁵; secondly, the work of feminist translators also stems from a simultaneous affirmation and refusal, for instance, affirming women writers through a refusal to translate work written by men and often choosing to translate only explicitly feminist texts.¹⁴⁶ The third approach outlined by Maier is a ‘women-identified approach, and is related to a translator’s identification or definition of their own work. In other words, the translators either identify themselves as women or work with authors identified as such. This approach, then, makes it possible for a translator to identify with women authors, but not necessarily as women. Lastly, a ‘woman-interrogated approach’ means one who works not as a woman-identified translator but as one who questions and even interrogates definitions of gender. Maier argues that “thinking about gender interrogatively promotes a fuller appreciation of the translator’s responsibility not only with respect to the identity of an author but also to the task of representing that author’s work in a more informed and deliberate manner.”¹⁴⁷ A translator who takes upon a ‘woman-interrogated approach’ to translation shows their will in participating in re-definitions, in opposing gender-based restrictions by questioning gender “as the most effective or the most appropriate point of departure for a translator’s practice.”¹⁴⁸

Maier states that despite the lack of recognition the translators constantly receive, they are

¹⁴⁵ Although Maier recognises in this essay (1998) that feminist translators and other feminist theorists have begun to use the terms ‘feminism’ and ‘woman’ in a less general sense, it is important to note that the feminist movement has evolved since the time this essay was published. Today, intersectionality is an integral part of feminism, which advocates for trans rights and affirms that trans women and trans girls are also women and girls, rejecting the definition of ‘woman’ as exclusively cisgender. In addition, the movement views gender as a social construct and recognises all gender identities.

¹⁴⁶ Maier, “Issues in the Practice of Translating Women’s Fiction,” 99

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

often very powerful, as they decide which works to translate and how responsibly they carry out their own work. According to Maier, a translator's understanding of gender-related issues greatly determines the author's appearance in a particular language.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Maier, "Issues in the Practice of Translating Women's Fiction," 103-104

2.2 Criticism of Feminist Translation

In the 1970s, feminist translators claimed to employ translation strategies that challenged conventional views on translation. It is precisely because of their expressed rejection of traditional views on fidelity, their advocacy for the creative nature of translation, and their claimed authorial role in the production of meaning that feminist translation work is perceived as a threat to mainstream translation discourse. In “Fidelity and the Gendered Translation”, Rosemary Arrojo explores feminist thought on the fidelity in translation by questioning Suzanne Jill Levine’s feminist rendering of Cabrera Infante’s novel *La Habana para un Infante Difunto* (1979), who boldly hijacks the source text to make language speak for women by subverting the sexism in the original.

Levine suggests that translation functions as a form of subversion and that, therefore, the translator is necessarily a “betrayor” or “an author of the text she translates.”¹⁵⁰ However, through her subversions, Levine argues that her interventions in the source text allow her to express her own criticism of the original, while claiming a form of ‘faithfully unfaithfulness’ in her betrayal, which she further supports “by her alleged ‘collaboration’ with Cabrera Infante.”¹⁵¹ Considering that Derrida’s deconstructionism applied to Translation Studies already excludes the possibility of achieving the conventional notion of fidelity, Arrojo attempts to answer the following questions: “What kind of ethics could we envision for the consciously gendered translation? What kind of ‘fidelity’ can the politically minded, feminist translator claim to offer to the authors or texts she

¹⁵⁰ Arrojo, “Fidelity and The Gendered Translation,” 152

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

translates and deconstructs?”¹⁵²

For Arrojo, one of feminist translation’s major limits to the legitimisation of their practice is related to the relationship with the target audience. On one hand, from the perspective of modern translation theories that recognise the productive nature of any act of translation, “we can say that the feminist translators’ explicitly authorial strategies to take over the texts they translate are perfectly legitimate within the political context they are so bravely fighting to construct.”¹⁵³ On the other hand, however, such translation theories do not, according to Arrojo, validate the feminist translator’s radical manipulations. Levine’s interventions on the source text, therefore, break the link between the translator and the target readers, who do not understand the source language and are counting on the translator to convey the meaning of the original and the voice of the author. Therefore, Arrojo argues that translations such as Levine’s rendering of *La Habana para un Infante Difunto* can only be legitimised within “the communities that are ready to accept or absorb ‘the emerging women’s culture’ and which share or sympathize with the same values and political interests.”¹⁵⁴

Furthermore, Arrojo accuses Levine (and other feminist translators and theorists) of falling into a double standard and contradictory ethics, arguing that these translations are not “absolutely more ‘noble’, or more justifiable than the patriarchal translations and notions they are trying to deconstruct.”¹⁵⁵ Arrojo therefore uses the example of Thomas Drant’s model, which has been denounced by the feminist translation theorist Lori Chamberlain for being associated with colonialism and rape (see chapter 2.3), to demonstrate how Levine’s manipulation of Infante’s text

¹⁵² Arrojo, “Fidelity and The Gendered Translation,” 149

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 159

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

could be perceived as “an act of ‘castration’”¹⁵⁶ that implies the same degree of violence. In other words, different translators can intervene in the source text according to their own ideological interests to serve opposite political purposes. Therefore, Arrojo argues that feminist translators’ claims on the “violence” of translation present in the approaches followed by certain male translators and in patriarchal translation theories are based on their own “feminist ‘bias’”, as they fail to see that *womanhandling* and hijacking are equally violent approaches to translation.¹⁵⁷ In conclusion, Arrojo suggests that the double standard on which some feminist translators base their practice and theoretical statements can actually undermine their most valuable insights, as they seem to adopt the same essentialist strategies they vehemently reject and attack.

Despite Arrojo’s criticism being mostly directed at feminist translators influenced by the Canadian School and first-wave feminism, certain critics and scholars, especially those who advocate for literal methods of translation, continue to denounce any form of intervention, feminist or otherwise, in translation today. For instance, Deborah Smith, the co-winner of the Man Booker International Prize in 2016 and translator of *The Vegetarian*, was accused of mistranslation by many critics and academics in South Korea, who contested the quality and value of her English translation. According to Sun Kyoung Yoon, these critics strongly oppose any kind of textual intervention, including omissions and additions.¹⁵⁸ Yoon observed that their articles often employ terms such as fidelity and accuracy to criticise Smith’s translation, which stems from literal translation being the dominant method of translation practiced in South Korea today. Smith’s feminist interventions, which I will be further discussing in chapter 3.2.1, are perceived as an “act

¹⁵⁶ Arrojo, “Fidelity and The Gendered Translation,” 154

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Yoon, “Deborah Smith’s infidelity: The Vegetarian as feminist translation,” 2

of betrayal”, not “an act of creation”, saying that “her translation betrayed the English-speaking readers as well as the original.”¹⁵⁹ To some extent, their criticism seems to go towards what Arrojo argued in 1994.

It is worth noting that *The Vegetarian* is an eco-feminist novel whose main character asserts her identity and freedom in the Korean patriarchal society by deciding to stop eating meat. The book depicts the protagonist’s struggles against patriarchal oppression, thus requiring a critical reading through the lens of gender politics. Indeed, Yoon notes that two critics do attend to gender politics in their discussion of the English rendering of *The Vegetarian* mainly to disapprove its unfaithfulness. According to Yoon, their “seemingly gendered approaches also originate from the dominant concept of literal translation, advocating the gendered hierarchies between the superior original and the inferior translation.”¹⁶⁰ This goes to show that many translation theorists and academics are still attached to the conventional notion of fidelity in translation today, possibly even more so in deeply conservative patriarchal societies. Significantly, the prestigious Man Booker International Prize recognised Smith as providing a creative role, as the award was given equally to both writer and translator.

The following chapter traces the nature of these conventional notions of fidelity and fluency in translation, as well as the invisibility of the translator that are still being used as reference for good practices in Translation, despite their hegemonic roots.

¹⁵⁹ Yoon, “Deborah Smith’s infidelity,” 2

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

2.3 Invisibility, Fidelity, and Fluency in Translation: A Product of White Supremacy, Imperialism, and Patriarchy

Feminist research in a variety of disciplines has shown that the opposition between productive and reproductive work reflects the way a certain culture values work.¹⁶¹ Historically, original work and creative work have been often associated with paternity, authority, and masculinity, while the female figure has been relegated to a variety of secondary roles and a position of discursive inferiority.¹⁶² Thus, it is not surprising that metaphors based on traditional gender constructions and gender roles made their way into theoretical discourses of writing and translation. For instance, in 1603, the writer and linguist John Florio articulated that because translations are necessarily “defective”, all translations are “reputed females”¹⁶³, showing how both translators and women are perceived as inferior in their respective categories.¹⁶⁴

In her influential essay “Gender and the Metaphors of Translation” (1988), Lori Chamberlain examines the gender-based paradigm within metaphorical representations of translation, demonstrating how the hierarchal authority of the original over the reproduction is associated with imagery of masculine and feminine. The first one is original and male, while the latter is derivative and female.¹⁶⁵ Chamberlain, then, discloses and examines a variety of misogynist and imperialist metaphors utilized in translation theory over the centuries, including the widely known, and perhaps the most famous expression, “*les belles infidèles*”. This expression was coined by the French philosopher Gilles Ménage in the seventeenth century, to mean that

¹⁶¹ Chamberlain, “Gender Metaphors in Translation,” 455

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Simon, *Gender in Translation*, 1

¹⁶⁴ Castro, “Re-examining Horizons in Feminist Translation Studies,” 6

¹⁶⁵ Chamberlain, “Gender Metaphors in Translation,” 455

translations, like women, can be either faithful or beautiful, but not both. The meaning of the term “fidelity” in translation varies according to the purpose of the translation. However, Chamberlain argues that, in its gendered version, “fidelity” is used to define the (female) translation’s relation to the (male) original.¹⁶⁶ “*Les belles infidèles*”, therefore, encourages and perpetuates an attitude of suspicion towards the translated text: if the (female) translation is beautiful, it must be unfaithful to both the author (male) and the source text (male).

Besides the issues of fidelity and the discussions on the dichotomy reproductive/passive work versus productive/active work used to represent women and translation, other common sexist tropes include the sexualised metaphors used to justify the hierarchy between original and translation, and between author and translator. For instance, in *After Babel* (1975), George Steiner proposes a four-step strategy that compares the translation process to penetration or rape of a woman. Steiner uses terms such as “initiative trust”, “appropriate penetration”, “naturalisation”, and “appropriate rapture” to describe the act of translation. His model, he says, is “that of Levi-Strauss’s *Antropologie structurale* which regards social structures as attempts at dynamic equilibrium achieved through an exchange of words, women, and material goods.”¹⁶⁷ As Chamberlain suggests, “Steiner thereby makes the connection explicit between the exchange of women, for example, and the exchange of words in one language for words in another.”¹⁶⁸

Then, the politics of gender overlap with the politics of colonialism. For instance, Chamberlain refers to a highly violent imagery used by the English translator Thomas Drant in the sixteenth century. Drant says, referring to his method of translation, “first I have now done as the

¹⁶⁶ Chamberlain, “Gender Metaphors in Translation,” 461

¹⁶⁷ Steiner, *After Babel*, 302

¹⁶⁸ Chamberlain, “Gender Metaphors in Translation,” 463

people of God were commanded to do with their captive women that were handsome and beautiful: I have shaved off his hair and pared off his nails, that is, I have wiped away all his vanity and superfluity of matter.”¹⁶⁹ Chamberlain argues that Drant’s paraphrase in his description of the translation process also alludes to sexual violence (captors often did more than shaving the heads of captive women and men), and thus, constitutes a parallel between translation and the political and economic rapes in the form of a colonializing metaphor.¹⁷⁰ Chamberlain writes:

What proclaims itself to be an aesthetic problem is represented in terms of sex, family, and the state, and what is consistently at issue is power (...). I would further argue that the reason translation is so overcoded, so overregulated, is that it threatens to erase the difference between production and reproduction which is essential to the establishment of power.¹⁷¹

Both Steiner and Drant’s figurations of translation clearly demonstrate how gendered hierarchies between original and translation are directly related to major issues of white supremacy and male dominance present in Western culture. They make clear that behind the demands for fidelity, invisibility, and fluency in translation are the patriarchal and imperialist values and norms of western society. Therefore, the feminist translator’s rejection of word for word fidelity and the traditional idea of translation as a copy of the original is linked to their active objection and condemnation of those values and norms.

¹⁶⁹ Chamberlain, “Gender Metaphors in Translation,” 460

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

It is also worth noting that a considerable number of interdisciplinary comparative studies in the fields of feminist linguistics, translation, and gender consisting in the analysis of linguistic representations in translated texts of women, and more recently of gender-queer and trans people, have revealed the systematic ways in which patriarchal ideologies pervade in the translation process. These studies demonstrate that women are generally rendered textually invisible or confined to stereotypical and normative representations.¹⁷² For instance, some texts follow the principle of male as norm by replacing all neutral pronouns in the source text with masculine ones. All the more serious are the instances produced from explicitly feminist texts, such as the patriarchal English translation of the *Le deuxième sexe*, whose translator “left out almost fifteen per cent of the first French volume and removed around sixty pages from the second one to omit ‘uncomfortable’ materials transgressing hetero/patriarchal conventions of gender.”¹⁷³ The outcomes of these studies go towards what many feminists translators have been arguing from the beginning, that is, “failing to consciously subscribe to one particular ideology in translation implies unconsciously adhering to the dominant (patriarchal) ideology.”¹⁷⁴ That is to say, unless translators “consciously and critically reflect on their location as situated political agents, they will in all likelihood be translating (unconsciously or not) in accordance with hegemonic (patriarchal, heterosexist, racist) values.”¹⁷⁵ That is precisely what I will attempt to demonstrate in my analysis of various English renderings of “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu” and “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You” in the following chapter.

¹⁷² Castro and Ergun, “Translation and Feminism,” 143

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 141

¹⁷⁴ Castro, “Re-examining Horizons in Feminist Translation Studies,” 3

¹⁷⁵ Castro and Ergun, “Translation and Feminism,” 143

3. *Womanhandling* Yu Xiuhua

Yu Xiuhua's identity as a woman with a disability and her background as a farmer served to initially popularize her poetry online as the work of a "brain paralyzed peasant woman poet"¹⁷⁷ (脑瘫诗人, nǎotān shīrén). These derogatory and discriminatory labels were undoubtedly a commercial strategy used by the media platforms to sensationalize the fact that someone like Yu could write poetry. The themes of sexual desire, loneliness, and longing for love explored in Yu's poems, as well as her unique yet simple use of language appealed to a mainstream readership. At the same time, Yu's work was also quickly noticed by scholars, receiving praises for her piercing poetic voice and unconventional use of language.¹⁷⁸

Most of Yu's work was first published online through her WeChat account or Sina blog before being printed by a traditional press.¹⁷⁹ In early 2015, her blog had already accumulated more than 1.6 million views.¹⁸⁰ Since the online spread of "Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You", Yu has published three books of poetry that have sold over 400,000 copies, a personal essay collection and an autobiographical novella.¹⁸¹ Her first poetry collection 月光落在左手上 (yuèguāng luò zài zuǒshǒu shàng, *Moonlight Rests on My Left Hand*) sold out overnight and became the best-selling poetry book in China in thirty years.¹⁸² Yu's third book 我们爱过又忘记 (wǒmen àiguò yòu wàngjì, *We Have Loved Forgotten*), published in 2016, was awarded the special

¹⁷⁷ Huerta and Xu, "Yu Xiuhua," 5

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Huerta and Xu, "Twelve Poems," 6

¹⁸⁰ Zhou, "The poetry of suffering," *Global Times*, accessible online at: bit.ly/3IxDdWk

¹⁸¹ Huerta and Xu, "Twelve Poems," 6

¹⁸² Zhao, "A Chinese Poet's Unusual Path From Isolated Farm Life to Celebrity," *New York Times*, accessible online at: nyti.ms/3KchMe5

Peasant Literature Award and granted Yu a 100,000 yuan cash prize.¹⁸³ Despite Yu's immense popularity in China and Taiwan, her work was only first published in English in 2021 by Astra House, in an anthology of poems and essays entitled *Moonlight Rests on My Left Palm*, translated from Chinese by Fiona Sze-Lorrain.

In 2016, 摇摇晃晃的人间 (yáoyáo huànguàng de rénjiān, *Still Tomorrow*), a documentary that tells Yu's remarkable story, was published and received four awards, including the Feature-Length Documentary award at the Amsterdam International Documentary Film Festival (2016) and Documentary Panorama award at the Belfast Film Festival (2018). In the Chinese mainland, *Still Tomorrow* was awarded Best Documentary at the Beijing Film Festival in 2018. The documentary produced by the filmmaker Fan Jian 范俭 chronicles Yu's rise to literary fame, her many distressing family altercations and her struggle for the right to divorce.

In 2018, Yu was nominated for the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature alongside great names in contemporary Chinese poetry such as Bei Dao, Xi Chuan and Xi Xi.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, Yu has received a total of eight literary awards in China to date.¹⁸⁵ However, Yu's poetry has been the target of less favourable criticism by both critics and writers of "avant-garde" (先锋) poetry, who are predominantly educated, urban, and male. They constitute a small literary circle that, according to Rui Shen, "mostly read and praise each other's poetry" while looking down on poetry written by women, to the extent of completely ignoring women's literary achievements.¹⁸⁶ They describe

¹⁸³ Xu, Yaping; Xu, Min, "Di san jie 'nongmin wenxue jiang' banfa yu xiuhua deng nongmin shiren huojing," NetEase, accessible online at: bit.ly/3hrjvj8

¹⁸⁴ Huerta and Xu, "Yu Xiuhua," 5

¹⁸⁵ As of March 1, 2022. All the references and information related to these awards can be found here: bit.ly/3vum6Ru (33-38)

¹⁸⁶ Sang and Shen, "The Body as a Room of Her Own: A Dialog on Yu Xiuhua," 28

Yu as someone who “has a relatively shallow understanding of poetry” and generally produces “lightweight” poems full of “sentimental clichés” and instances of “the author’s real-life situation”.¹⁸⁷ Guo Lusheng 郭路生, pen name Shi Zhi 食指, for instance, criticised Yu for not considering the “fate of humanity” or the “future of the nation” in her work.¹⁸⁸ In addition, Guo asked “How can a poet from the countryside not speak of the miseries of rural life or their dreams of prosperity?” For him, Yu was “abandoning her obligation to history”.¹⁸⁹ Yu soon retaliated on her social media accounts in the following terms: “Shizhi said I don’t mention the miseries of rural life, but I’ve never felt rural life was all that miserable.”¹⁹⁰ Then, a few days later, she added: “My fault lies in being on the bottom rung of society and yet still insisting on holding my head up high. My other fault lies in my inability to expose those idiots who think they’re superior to me.”¹⁹¹ Guo’s commentary shows how many Chinese male poets fail to recognize the value of literary work that touches upon personal experiences, especially from the perspective of women. They consider Yu’s poetry to be inferior to literary works that grapple with questions of human condition and envisage a responsibility to Chinese nation and society as a whole. Poets such as Guo seem to be unable to understand what it means for voices such as Yu’s, which have been marginalized, dismissed in society, and poorly represented in literature and media for many years, to have a space (such as their social media platforms) where they can be heard and appreciated.

As I mentioned earlier, Yu has lived a life of poverty, disability, and emotional deprivation. Moreover, she has suffered from intimate partner violence while trapped in an unhappy marriage

¹⁸⁷ Sang and Shen, “The Body as a Room of Her Own,” 28

¹⁸⁸ Xu, “Two Poets’ War of Words Shows China’s Yawning Generation Gap”, Six Thone, accessible online at: bit.ly/35FJyAl

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

for almost 20 years. Considering how her poems are highly autobiographical, I believe that prior knowledge regarding Yu's life is necessary to further contextualize her work. Therefore, in the first part of this chapter, I will be delving into Yu's personal life, her multiple identities, and how they reflect in her poetry.

In the second part of this chapter, I will analyse how elements of sexual coercion, domestic abuse, female sexuality, and desire in a disabled body in Yu's poems are handled by different translators and how the feminist translators' dismissal of "faithfulness" to words or syntax is an essential element for a creative and political translation. The texts here in analysis are: "The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu" and four English translations by Xinlu Yan, Xiaoqin Shi, Jenn Marie Nunes and Fiona Sze-Lorrain; and "Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You" and four English translations by Xinlu Yan, Fiona Sze-Lorrain, Ming Di and Dian Li.

3.1 Yu Xiuhua: The Poet and ‘Internet Sensation’

Yu Xiuhua was born in 1976 in Hengdian village in rural Zhongxian County, Hubei Province, as the only child of subsistence farmers. Her small village in the remote rural China is an isolated place surrounded by hills, ponds, and fields where it is possible to walk for hours without seeing another person. Because of the cerebral palsy she suffered at birth, Yu could neither work in the fields nor leave her village to China’s flourishing urban centres to work in a factory, which is often the fate of many people living in impoverished rural areas.

Yu learned to walk with the help of crutches at the age of six and had difficulty speaking and writing. Despite the adversities, Yu demonstrated that she had talent for writing at a young age and won her first award for poetry while in middle school. Growing up with a disability in a rural Chinese village meant that Yu’s experience with learning and communicating was quite challenging, which led to her dropping out of high school before graduating. In a society that favours men and able-bodied individuals, disabled women in China are doubly marginalized, having less educational and social mobility than their male counterparts.¹⁹² This impacts not only their access to education and employment, but also lessens their dating and marriage opportunities.¹⁹³ Hence, Yu’s parents worried that, because of her disability, Yu would not be able to find a husband and get married: “What local villager would want to marry her? I was just hoping she could have a man who was honest and hard-working,” Yu’s father told Tencent News.¹⁹⁴ At the age of nineteen, her parents forced Yu into an arranged marriage with a migrant worker from

¹⁹² Hu, “Gender and Disability in Chinese Higher Ed,” *The World View*, accessible online at: bit.ly/343Yqs7

¹⁹³ Riep, “Disability and Mobility in Contemporary Chinese-Language Cinema,” 20-22

¹⁹⁴ Zhou, “The poetry of suffering,” *Global Times*, accessible online at: bit.ly/3lxDdWk

Sichuan Province who was thirteen years older than her.¹⁹⁵ However, Yu was deeply unhappy in her marriage: “There is no love in it. This is not the kind of life I want. We used to quarrel frequently. Now we don’t talk with each other,” Yu told Southern Metropolis Daily.¹⁹⁶ But her unhappiness did not stem exclusively from the frequent quarrelling. In her poem entitled 《婚姻》 (hūnyīn, “Marriage”), Yu compares her marriage to a poisonous persimmon. She writes:

Why do I have a persimmon, why do I have a persimmon (...)

“What the hell are you in this world, you can’t speak clearly or walk steadily

You shit of a woman, why

Why won’t you bow down to me”

Mother, you never told me why I have a persimmon

When I was little, I ate a persimmon and almost died because I was allergic

How I enjoy solitude, enjoy being alone by the dusky river

washing the wounds on my body

the things I can’t do in this lifetime, I will write them down in a tombstone

— Let me leave, give me freedom ¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Zhou, “The poetry of suffering,” bit.ly/3IxDdWk

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Yu Xiuhua, *Yueguang luo zai zuoshou shang*, 157 (my translation from the original Chinese)

In this poem, the poetic subject confronts her mother and asks why she had to force her into a loveless and abusive relationship that might kill her just like the persimmon she was allergic to and ate as a child. Yu then expresses her painful struggle with this arranged marriage whilst exposing her husband's abuse. He considers her to be inferior to him ("You shit of a woman"), not only because she is a woman, but also because of her disability ("you can't speak clearly or walk steadily"). Therefore, it is expected of her to be submissive and obey him ("why won't you bow down to me"), however, when she does not, he results to violence ("How I (...) enjoy being alone by the dusky river/ washing the wounds on my body"). The poem ends with her wish for escaping this poisonous marriage ("Let me leave, give me freedom"). This is a wish for freedom that perhaps only death can make possible ("the things I can't do in this lifetime, I will write them down in a tombstone").

Her natural talent and outbursts of creativity intersected with a physical impulse for writing, which led Yu to look for a more meaningful life and start living as a poet, in addition to her roles as a daughter, a wife, and mother. Because of her physical impairment, Yu could not perform arduous farm work and all the household chores expected of rural Chinese women, which lent her time to write. At the same time, Yu realized she could not rely on either her son or her husband. Moreover, her parents were sick and at a stage where they needed her help more than she needed theirs. However, Yu did not know how to perform other tasks outside simple farm work, and thus she turned to poetry "to learn it as a skill".¹⁹⁸ "I wanted to learn a skill to survive,"¹⁹⁹ Yu said. Nonetheless, she did not receive the support from those around her, especially her husband.

¹⁹⁸ Zhang, "Poetic Documentation — Yu Xiuhua," ABILITY Magazine, <http://abilitymagazine.com/poetic-documentation-yu-xiuhua/>.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

In the documentary *Still Tomorrow*, Yu reveals that her husband “finds it annoying when I write poems.”²⁰⁰

When Yu first thought about expressing her feelings through language, it was not on a whim that she chose to do so in poetry form. Because of her disability, writing is a strenuous task: “I must exert all my strength to balance my body, pressing to get a word out. Among all literary genres, poetry uses the least amount of words,”²⁰¹ she writes. For Yu, writing poetry makes her feel “complete, calm, and happy”, it is “a cane for one who staggers in a swaying mortal world.”²⁰²

Yu started building her presence on the internet by posting and discussing poetry online in 2008.²⁰³ Now her blog constitutes a hybrid and dynamic platform for all sorts of texts apart from her poems, including “her contributions to critical discourse, discussions of her own poems in response to their circulation and critique, personal entries about her life and experiences, and responses from readers”.²⁰⁴ Drawing inspiration from her rural village of Hengdian, Yu’s verses transform seemingly mundane motifs of quotidian life in the countryside into vivid imagery embedded with her most intimate, and often ambiguous, emotions. In the poem “All You Need Is to Be Alive” she writes:

Every day I clean the house for a clean sun to enter
I grow Chinese roses, let them blossom again and again
I keep a rabbit, give it a den

²⁰⁰ Directly transcribed from the official embedded subtitles from Fan Jian’s produced documentary “Still Tomorrow”.

²⁰¹ Yu, *Moonlight Rests on My Left Palm*, 48

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 48-49

²⁰³ Zhou, “The poetry of suffering,” bit.ly/3IxDdWk

²⁰⁴ Nunes, “Sitting with Discomfort,” 33

She can't turn her back on life even when she is unhappy (I'm her life, in which tenderness and cruelty coexist)²⁰⁵

A persistent topic in Yu's poetry is love. In fact, most of Yu's poems are love poems. She does not shy away from the word, using it freely and without disguise. In Dian Li's essay "Yu Xiuhua: A Life Lived in Poetry", he wrote:

"It is nothing out of the ordinary for Yu Xiuhua to speak of love as a poet, but quite unusual the way she speaks of it: rugged language and bombastic howling that bear down on naked desire and wanton longing."²⁰⁶

Zhang Simon, a journalist for ABILITY Magazine, notes that the word "love" appeared more than a hundred and forty times in Yu's poems published between 2014 and 2015.²⁰⁷ When a television host revealed this information and asked Yu about her interest in love as a subject, Yu responded "love is so far away from me. Precisely because it is far away, I can't give up."²⁰⁸ Yu's lack of love constitutes, therefore, the context for her numerous love poems, while the search for love is the force that drives her life: "I desperately longed for love, or some proof of my own existence. There are enough reasons for my existence, but without love, I'm doubtful", she writes

²⁰⁵ Yu, *Moonlight Rests on My Left Palm*, 71

²⁰⁶ Dian, "Yu Xiuhua," 28

²⁰⁷ Zhang, "Poetic Documentation — Yu Xiuhua," ABILITY Magazine, <http://abilitymagazine.com/poetic-documentation-yu-xiuhua/>.

²⁰⁸ Directly transcribed from the official embedded subtitles from Fan Jian's produced documentary "Still Tomorrow".

in the essay “My Crazy Love Feels More Like Despair.”²⁰⁹ When the man she loved fell in love with another woman, Yu was deeply hurt: “I didn’t know who to blame, so I ended up hating myself for my ugliness and disability. (...) if not even an ‘average’ man can love me, what kind of failure am I?”²¹⁰ And so, for her, a life without love is an embodiment of failure, a deep sorrow that threatens the affirmation of her whole existence.

Yu’s poems often feature references to the body, its feelings, and desires, while offering insights into her experience in a disabled female body and the challenges that come with it. For instance, in “Leading a Dog’s Life”, Yu writes:

These days I see a man opposite us harvesting wheat
He yells “Miss Xiuhua” at me with a flattering smile
I mow faster
And cut my finger a few times²¹¹

Sometimes Yu’s references to the body and disability take the form of sympathetic observations, other times they reveal a profound sense of alienation, incorporating confessions of pain, darkness, fear, and despair. In 《手（致父亲）》(shǒu (zhì fùqīn), ‘Hands: To Father’) Yu writes:

²⁰⁹ Yu, *Moonlight Rests on My Left Palm*, 6

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 40

I will stand before you, welcoming death
I will avenge you, the artist from the village
the master of playing with mud
when you made me,
you moulded a figurine with crooked feet
Even if you would cut off your ribs to remake my legs
I could never walk properly
(...)
In my next life, I will not be your daughter
Even if I must be
a guard dog for the Yu family²¹²

However, more often than not, Yu balances the adversities of disability with uninhibited joy. For instance, the second and third stanzas of the poem 《我只是死皮赖脸地活着》(wǒ zhǐ shì sǐpí làiliǎn de huózhe, "I'm just living shamelessly") are a prime example of this:

A worthless life, a worthless love
A marriage that no medicine can cure,
a body that, even with medicine is hard to cure
In a thousand moments where I should die

²¹² My translation from the original Chinese. The poem was published a second time by Yu Xiuhua in 2011 on her Sina blog here: bit.ly/34bL1hy1. The original post could not be found.

I seize a chance to live
and with this only chance,
I sing, I twirl with my dance steps
(....)
sometimes I am life's dog
but more often, life is my dog²¹³

Here, the poetic subject transforms a hopeless life into one worth living. At first, life seems to be devoid of purpose due to a marriage that is damaged beyond repair and a broken body that even medicine cannot fix. However, the poetic subject's yearning for life gives her strength to grasp the chance to keep living, despite all the challenges and difficulties. She chooses to take control over her life, and she sings and dances with joy. In the last two verses, Yu shows that, at times, there are hardships outside of her control, and inevitably this passiveness makes her feel like she is "life's dog". But "more often", life is *her* dog, for her disabled body is not a limitation and does not affect her ability to find happiness and live a fulfilling life. This juxtaposition draws upon Daoism and the *yinyang* philosophy of balancing opposite forces,²¹⁴ which can be seen in many of Yu's poems. According to Steven L. Riep, "Daoism also provides a unique and positive view of disability and the disabled body, which resonates with Yu Xiuhua's views of her own experiences."²¹⁵ For instance, the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi 庄子 depicts disability as a quality that enables the individual to be in harmony with the universal force known as the *dao* 道.²¹⁶ The

²¹³ Yu, *Women aiguo you wangji*, 116 (my translation from the original Chinese)

²¹⁴ Riep, "Body, Disability, and Creativity in the Poetry of Yu Xiuhua," 34

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Lewis, "Use of the Useless: Assessing Depictions of Disability in the Zhuangzi," 2

practice of the *dao* is intended to help one understand that illnesses and misfortunes are an inevitable part of life.²¹⁷ Zhuangzi declares that people with disabilities are equipped with greater insight and perceptivity as opposed to able-bodied individuals.²¹⁸ Because of the limitations on movement and work, individuals with disabilities such as mobility impairments, have more time for mediation and contemplation, which facilitates the practice of the *dao*.²¹⁹

Despite often discussing her experience with disability on her blog and interviews, Yu herself does not wish her disability to be linked to her writing. For Yu, her disability has nothing to do with her poetry. In fact, Yu has rightfully rejected the many labels used to describe her, including that of “cerebral palsy poet” by saying that “labelling is wrong and discriminatory”.²²⁰ Regardless of Yu’s effort to simply be seen as a person or a poet rather than a woman poet, a peasant poet or a poet with cerebral palsy, these identities come together to form a distinctive character in the public eye, determining the way her poetry is consumed and making it impossible to separate from these labels. Moreover, Yu has also addressed being called a ‘role-model’ by voicing her scepticism towards the title: “I don’t believe in the power of a ‘role-model’, and I don’t wish to be one. (...) The idea of a ‘role-model’ sounds poetic, but life is a tangible abyss of suffering. Sometimes we do not even know what to do with ourselves, let alone how to influence others.”²²¹ In the same vein, Yu has also spoken up about how people often use the word “strong” to describe her and how it is “not flattering when used regarding a woman or a disabled woman,”²²² considering that “one’s experience can’t serve as a role model for others, nor should it exist as a

²¹⁷ Lewis, “Use of the Useless,” 6

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7

²¹⁹ Riep, Body, “Disability, and Creativity in the Poetry of Yu Xiuhua,” 35

²²⁰ Directly transcribed from the official embedded subtitles from Fan Jian’s produced documentary “Still Tomorrow”.

²²¹ Yu, *Moonlight Rests on My Left Palm*, 66-67

²²² *Ibid.*, 63

subject for others to lament”.²²³ In other words, Yu rejects all pity-seeking narratives, while refusing to let her struggle with living in a disabled body define how others perceive her and her work. Thus, she believes that she is but a peasant woman unable to serve as an inspiration for anyone. However, from a feminist perspective, Yu’s poems cannot break off from her multiple identities. As Rui Shen notes, “the fact is that without feminism one cannot thoroughly appreciate her poetry. She is a woman, a peasant, and a physically challenged person. All these things— her gender, class disadvantage, and disability—make her extremely fascinating for feminists. (...) She could have been an exemplary feminist subject because she is a living example of the courage to overcome the intersectionality of marginalizing forces.”²²⁴

Through her poetry, Yu provides a voice for women with disabilities, poor and lower-class women, women of colour, women with low education, and women who suffer from intimate partner violence, not only in China but around the globe. And thus, I believe that, in a world dominated by middle-class white men, Yu’s experience constitutes a voice that should be heard louder than ever.

²²³ Yu, *Moonlight Rests on My Left Palm*, 65

²²⁴ Sang and Shen, “The Body as a Room of Her Own,” 30-31

3.2 Translating Gender-based Violence in “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu”

In the poem 《我养的狗，叫小巫》 (The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu), Yu talks about daily-life in the countryside, disability, and being a victim of domestic violence.

I find the poem very compelling yet unsettling, due to the simple and raw language Yu uses to make this confession about her situation as a victim of domestic abuse. On the one hand, there is the calming nature imagery of the countryside as the background, as well as the trivial activities of day-to-day life. On the other, there is blood, loss, and violence. It is precisely the combination of these elements that is so disconcerting to a reader such as myself, even though it is, as a whole, very captivating.

The poem starts with a scene of violence: the woman walks through the fields to her grandmother’s house, falls, and hurts herself. In the second scene of violence, the dog licks the woman’s bloody hand. Next, we are brought to the third scene of violence, where the woman suffers verbal and physical abuse by her drunk husband, which creates a chain of violence. Yu’s description of each moment with vivid and direct language makes it seem as if she is simply listing her daily chores, attributing the same degree of casualness and familiarity to both housework and domestic abuse. The way in which the poem quickly moves from a joyful and simple quotidian scene to an entangled and complex web of emotions and sorrow is one recurrent characteristic of Yu’s poems. Her poems often surprise the reader with unexpected twists and turns. According to Huerta and Xu, this asymmetry “gives rise to a sense of imbalance that is echoed in the disabled body, which is often described as “limping outside” (bochu 跛出), “tottering” (zoulu bu wen 走路

不稳), or “broken” (posui 破碎).”²²⁵

The intimate mode of first-person narration combined with what we know about the author, allows for an autobiographical interpretation of the poem. I suggest that “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu”, as many of Yu’s poems, should be read from the perspective of gender politics. This poem deals with patriarchal violence and what might be considered as marital rape. Passages such as “When he pulls my hair and knocks my head against the wall” (my translation) show the violent character of the man. Moreover, the unwillingness of the female narrator in engaging in sexual intercourse with the man is explicit in the stanza “He says they know how to moan in bed, that it sounds lovely. Unlike me, not a word/Always covering my face” (my translation). In my opinion, the female narrator’s response, or lack thereof, should not be perceived simply as her being sexually inhibited, as, in her poem “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You”, Yu demonstrates precisely the opposite by freely and boldly expressing her feelings and sexual desires. Instead, we should acknowledge the scene described in these two verses as one of marital rape, seen that Yu was forced to marry a much older man when she was only 19 years old and lived an unhappy marriage up to their divorce.

To further support my interpretation of this verse as one of marital rape, I would like to bring attention to the documentary produced by Fan Jian about the author, “Still Tomorrow”. When talking about their loveless marriage, Yu confesses to the producer that Yin Shiping (Yu’s then-husband) often makes fun of her for her disability: “He never came to take me on rainy days. The road was all muddy. He never came to walk with me, to hold me. On the contrary, if I fell, he

²²⁵ Huerta and Xu, “Yu Xiuhua,” 5

would laugh at me.”²²⁶ Later in a different scene, Yin is seen making fun of his wife’s disability while at dinner with friends, by saying “She can’t even speak properly” and responding ironically “What a beauty! With a crooked mouth” to a man that reveals having seen Yu on TV. Later, Yin talks about Yu suing for divorce and not knowing how to coax her into changing her mind, to which the same man says “Women are like pigs. You just cajole them”, Yin laughs and replies “That’s exactly right”. Then, when the man mentions their sex life as Yu’s reason for divorce, Yin talks about “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu”, commenting that the poem “Says I like pretty women. Women that scream in bed. But do I have to go home and do it with a corpse?”²²⁷. I believe these examples clearly illustrate Yin’s lack of respect not only for his wife but also for women in general. The metaphor he uses to describe his wife’s unresponsive behaviour reveals that he believes her to be responsible for his unfulfilled sex life, while being incapable of recognizing that he is, in fact, raping her. In the patriarchal society where the power men hold over women defines their social identity, Yin’s dominance over his wife gives him a sense of personal worth, especially considering how, as a peasant, he occupies a low position in society. Yin’s mocking of Yu’s disability shows that his desire to feel superior to his wife in front of his friends is a form of compensation for his low status. In the patriarchal Chinese society, no matter how low the status of a man, that of the woman who is attached to him, whether a girlfriend, a wife or a sister, is always lower.

Taking this into account, I argue that the feminist translators’ interpretation of the poems, in the light of gender politics and their feminist values, emphasizes Yu’s feminist elements in “The

²²⁶ Directly transcribed from the official embedded subtitles from Fan Jian’s produced documentary “Still Tomorrow”.

²²⁷ Directly transcribed from the official embedded subtitles from Fan Jian’s produced documentary “Still Tomorrow”.

Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu” and “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You”, by *womenhandling* the source text. Comparing four different translations of the source text, among which two are feminist translations, I will demonstrate how this manipulation of the source text occurs and how it impacts the translated text.

3.2.1 Foregrounding female solidarity within the chain of patriarchal violence

In “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu”, Yu uses the pronoun “它” tā (it), which in Chinese constitutes a homophone of the pronoun “他” tā (he/him) and “她” tā (she/her), referring to the dog, the husband and the grandmother, respectively, and in turn creating a parallel between the three characters that gets explored throughout the poem. I believe Yu intentionally makes use of this phonetic web to create a possibility of different readings of her poem, since, if one listens to it being read out loud in Chinese, these three phonemes overlap, allowing for multiple interpretations of the poem according to how the listener chooses to identify the pronouns. The examples below show how different translators dealt with this translation challenge:

Example 1

Chinese ST:

我跛出院子的时候，它跟着 (...) / 我跌倒在田沟里，它摇着尾巴/我伸手过去，它把我手上的血舔干净

Literal translation (word for word translation, the same strategy will be used for the examples hereafter):

I limp out courtyard time, it follows (...) / I limp fall field ditch inside, it wags tail / I stretch hand out, it my hand's blood licks clean

Yan:

When I limped out of my courtyard, it followed (...) / I tripped and fell in the field, it wagged its tail

I extended my hand, it licked the blood off

Shi:

I limp out of the yard and he follows (...) / I fall into a ditch and he wags his tail / I reach out to my dog and he licks the blood from my fingers

Nunes:

When I limp out the courtyard, it follows(...) /

Yu Xiuhua refers to the dog as 它/it and to the man as 他/he. The sound the same, the pronoun clearly different. Reading in Chinese I think of the dog as “he,” partly because of the aural overlap of 它/ta and 他/ta and partly because Americans would never refer to a pet dog as “it.” Does the Chinese 它 have the same quality of thingness? Does it indicate a more practical, less intimate relationship between woman and animal? Does it allow the dog to overlap with the “he,” implicating the dog in a lineage of patriarchal violence, or does “it” fully stand between the two, the indeterminacy of 它 also opening into a blankness of possibility, a liminality, a way out?

I fall in a field ditch, he wags his tail / I stretch out my hand, of the blood on my hand he laps clean

伸手, stretching out one's hand, is a gesture and also an asking, it moves the body and it speaks, it asks for, it might even beg

Sze-Lorrain:

When I limp out the courtyard, she tags along (...) / When I fall into the ditch, she wags her tail/
I stretch my hand out, she licks the blood off my hand

In this case, the English language does not allow for a phonematic translation, the translators being left with two different options: a literal translation with the use of “it” or with the use of gendered pronouns. However, referring to a pet as “it” is uncommon in English speaking countries (and in the West in general), where dogs and other pets are seen as family members. In her essay “Sitting with Discomfort: A Queer-Feminist Approach to Translating Yu Xiuhua”, Nunes questions if the Chinese “它” (tā) has the same quality of thingness as the English “it”, indicating a more practical and less intimate relationship between the dog and the woman²²⁸. Additionally, in English, it is common to refer to pets as “he” or “she” according to their gender. As such, the relationship between the dog and the woman in Yan’s translation does seem colder and less intimate as compared to that which is found in the other translations. I also read it as being one-sided, as the dog follows the woman, barks happily and wags their tail, but, for the woman, the dog is only a “thing”. Interestingly, Shi and Nunes opted for the masculine pronoun, while Sze-Lorrain chose the feminine pronoun. The next example explores the implications of such decision-making.

²²⁸ Nunes, “Sitting with Discomfort,” 24

Example 2

Chinese ST:

我一声不吭地吃饭 / 喊“小巫，小巫”把一些肉块丢给它 / 它摇着尾巴，快乐地叫着
他揪着我的头发，把我往墙上磕的时候 / 小巫不停地摇着尾巴 / 对于一个不怕疼的人，他无能为力

Literal translation:

I one sound not utter a sound eat meal / Call “little shaman, little shaman” grab some meat throw
give to it/ It wags tail, happily calls / He pulls my hair, me on the wall knock time / Little shaman
not stop wag tail / Regarding one not fear pain person, he can't put strength

Yan:

I ate my meal in silence / Calling “Little Wu, Little Wu” and tossing it some scraps / It wagged its
tail, barking exuberantly / When he yanked my hair, banged my head on the wall / Little Wu kept
wagging its tail / To someone who was not afraid of pain, he was powerless

Shi:

I am silent when I have my meal and call out / “Xiaowu, xiaowu,” I toss him some meat / My dog
happily barks and wags his tail / The man pulls my hair and pushes me against the wall / Xiaowu
wags his tail constantly / I am not afraid of the pain, so he is powerless

Nunes:

I eat without a word / Call “Xiao Wu, Xiao Wu” toss him a piece of meat

巫 also means “shaman” and Google translates the dog’s name as Little Shaman. One of my professors asks me why I haven’t translated it as such. She says that to her the poem is very spiritual. Again the dog’s role is contested. It stands as a vessel between

The dog wags his tail, barking happily /*

“Happily” sounds insipid in English. I don’t think this is a bad translation

Sze-Lorrain:

I eat in silence / throw meat to the dog, *Little Wu, Little Wu* / She wags her tail, yelps in joy / When he pulls my hair and knocks my head against the wall / Little Wu keeps wagging her tail / helpless before someone unafraid of pain

From this example, we can see that Yan’s translation of the pronouns results in a clear and non-ambiguous reading of the characters: “he” is the perpetrator of violence, and “it” is the bystander. When the dog witnesses the man being violent against the woman, the dog reacts by wagging the tail, but the emotion conveyed is not explicit, as it could be happiness, stress, a feeling of threat or excitement. However, in Shi’s translation of the last verse “他无能为力” (tā wú néng wéi lì), which means ‘he is powerless’ or ‘he can do nothing’, the “he” could also be referring to the dog, as both man and dog are given the same pronoun. In this case, both Shi and Nunes’ translations allow the dog to overlap with the man “he”, which according to Nunes makes it possible for an interpretation of the source text that implicates the dog in a lineage of patriarchal

violence.²²⁹

Sze-Lorrain is the only translator that uses the female pronouns she/her for the dog, overlapping the dog with the grandmother instead of the man. Her rendering of the last two verses of example 2 is particularly interesting:

ST: 他揪着我的头发，把我往墙上磕的时候 / 小巫不停地摇着尾巴 / 对于一个不怕疼的人，他无能为力

Sze-Lorrain: When he pulls my hair and knocks my head against the wall / Little Wu keeps wagging her tail / helpless before someone unafraid of pain

In the Chinese original “他无能为力” (tā wú néng wéi lì), the implication of the dog in the chain of patriarchal violence that Nunes mentions is only possible through the phonemic overlap of the pronouns, while reading it makes it clear that the pronoun “他” (tā) here refers to the man. However, Sze-Lorrain omits the pronoun “he”, so the man retains the power over his wife and Little Wu becomes the one who is helpless instead of the man. In the last two verses in Sze-Lorrain’s translation, the dog’s feelings before that situation of violence become clear and the wagging of the tail indicates stress caused by not being able to do anything to protect the woman. Through these actions, the dog in Sze-Lorrain’s translation shows compassion and sympathy towards the woman.

²²⁹ Nunes, “Sitting with Discomfort,” 25

I argue that Sze-Lorrain deliberately *womanhandles* the source text to establish and foreground female solidarity between the two characters, which is a strategy that often occurs in feminist translation. For instance, in her article “Deborah Smith’s infidelity: The Vegetarian as feminist translation”, Yoon states that the translator Deborah Smith took a feminist approach to her rendering of Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian*, causing her to be accused of mistranslation by many critics in South Korea, who regard Smith’s English translation as a “distortion of the Korean source text, and, by extension, a betrayal of the dignity of a Korean national literary tradition.”²³⁰ Yoon observes that Smith makes use of existing translation strategies such as addition and omission in her feminist treatment of the main characters, manipulating the source text, reinforcing its feminist elements, and intervening from a feminist perspective.²³¹ One example of Smith’s manipulation with the intent of foregrounding female solidarity can be seen in her rendering of In-hye (the main character’s sister) and her relationship with the main character. According to Yoon, Smith removes In-hye’s anti-feminist traits by omitting them in the translation, such as a whole paragraph where In-hye expresses her sympathy for her husband who had raped her many times and had had an affair with her sister.²³² Yoon argues that “as a result of those omissions, In-hye’s understanding of her sister (...) and the solidarity between the two sisters are foregrounded in Smith’s translation.”²³³

Similar strategies have been adopted by the Canadian feminist translators in the late 1970’s and 1980’s, such as Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood and Barbara Godard. For instance, in Lotbinière-Harwood’s translation of Lise Gauvin’s *Lettres d’une autre*, she takes upon a more

²³⁰ Yoon, “Deborah Smith’s infidelity,” 2

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 2-3

²³² *Ibid.*, 8

²³³ *Ibid.*

radical stance towards language and intervenes in the source text to foreground female visibility by avoiding the male generic terms where they appear in French and using “*Québécois-e-s*” for the original “*Québécois*.”²³⁴ In the preface of her translation, Lotbinière-Harwood explains that “My translation practice is a political activity aimed at making language speak for women. So, my signature on a translation means: this translation has used every translation strategy to make the feminine visible in language.”²³⁵ This translation technique was defined by Flotow as “hijacking” and described by critics of feminist translation as an ideological work of “correction” that goes beyond the author’s original intention.²³⁶ According to Flotow, hijacking occurs when the translator appropriates the source text and uses it for a certain purpose or to reflect their own political intentions.²³⁷

The purpose of the feminist translation is often explained in the translator’s preface, as shown above. This means of translation was defined by Flotow as “prefacing” and, even though prefacing is a common practice in translation, in Feminist Translation the preface is used to intervene in the text. The feminist translator usually explains the main idea of the source text, drawing attention to certain aspects they wish to emphasize, or which the reader might miss, and often reflects on their own work, introducing the purpose of their translation and outlining the translation process and strategies used.²³⁸

In Sze-Lorrain’s preface of *Moonlight Rests on My Left Palm*, her feminist political agenda is not as boldly expressed as in Lotbinière-Harwood’s in a sense that Sze-Lorrain never says that

²³⁴ Simon, *Gender in Translation*, 14

²³⁵ Gauvin, *Letter from an Other*, 9

²³⁶ Flotow, “Feminist Translation,” 79

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid., 76-77

she herself is a feminist nor that her translation is a “political activity”. However, we must consider the time when both translations were produced in order to contextualize what feminism and being a feminist meant at the time. That said, Lotbinière-Harwood was part of the second wave feminism when feminist ideas were adopted by feminist linguists in the 1960s and throughout the 1970s to analyse the role language played in perpetuating and reinforcing patriarchal values, male dominance, and gender inequality by constructing reality from the male perspective and, therefore, naturalizing the male as a standard through lexis, grammar, and syntax.²³⁹ Feminist linguists and scholars were concerned with the issue of (sexist) language and how it contributed to erasing women and women’s issues from texts and, by extent, from society. They believed that equal treatment of women and men must be carried out also on the level of communication and so, intervening in language and avoiding sexist language, such as male generics, could also bring about social changes and make the world a better place for women.²⁴⁰ Despite that, the second wave feminist movement failed to accommodate the concerns of women of colour and poor women. Therefore, it was not inclusive, and, in some respects, it was an ideological movement defined as a struggle for white middle-class women’s rights.

Fiona Sze-Lorrain is a woman of colour who was born in Singapore to Chinese parents and brought up in a western context (France and the United States),²⁴¹ and who has been working as both a translator and author in a time when feminist movements have embraced intersectionality — a structural intellectual and political response to the dynamics of violence, white supremacy,

²³⁹ Ergün, “Bridging Across Feminist Translation and Sociolinguistics,” 308

²⁴⁰ Hellinger and Bußmann, “The linguistic representation of women and men,” 1-25

²⁴¹ Cook, “Theme and Variations of an Afterlife: An Interview with Fiona Sze-Lorrain,” accessible online at: <https://www.triquarterly.org/interviews/theme-and-variations-afterlife-interview-fiona-sze-lorrain>

patriarchy, state power, capitalist markets, and imperial policies.²⁴² In her preface, she describes Yu as feminist and feminine,²⁴³ citing Johannes Göransson’s comment on the South Korean poet Kim Hyesoon’s “sense of feminine”: “the feminine is a state of receptivity, defined by inclusiveness. The feminine becomes a site where all voices are heard.”²⁴⁴ In my opinion, this is a very feminist interpretation of the word “feminine”, for “inclusiveness” is one of the keywords of intersectional feminism. In addition, Sze-Lorrain brings the reader’s attention to Yu’s identity as a woman, and to the fact that her disability, physical vulnerability, education level, class, and society’s stigma towards divorced and single mothers make her a woman with low to no value in the patriarchal and Confucianist Chinese society.²⁴⁵ This, again, strikes me as Sze-Lorrain’s very intersectional feminist view on Yu’s work.

We can conclude from the examples stated above that prefacing and hijacking contribute to cementing the translator’s authority over the text, which in feminist translation becomes equivalent to that of authorship through text appropriation. Considering that all translators perform a varying degree of rewriting, the feminist translator’s practices differ from those with a more conventional approach to translation in the sense that such practices reflect the feminist translator’s political views and intentions. The feminist translator often makes their interpretation of the source text explicit by manipulating and rewriting the source text in a way that reinforces its feminist message.

As we know, semantic information does not always suffice to fully comprehend the meaning of a certain communicative act as it may be determined by the context in which it was

²⁴² Davis, *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle*, 10

²⁴³ See Sze-Lorrain in Yu “Moonlight Rests on My Left Palm: Translator’s Note,” 14

²⁴⁴ Göransson, *Transgressive Circulation: Essays on Translation*, 75

²⁴⁵ See Sze-Lorrain in Yu “Moonlight Rests on My Left Palm: Translator’s Note,” 12-14

expressed. Since translation is also a communicative act, the translator is required to interpret the source text in such a way as to render it properly in the target language, allowing the target reader to draw the right conclusions from the intended context and, therefore, make the right interpretation of the text. Once again, by looking at Example 2, we can observe that the feminist translator's²⁴⁶ interpretation of the text differs from that of others. I would like to bring attention to the fourth verse on Example 2, which describes a scene of domestic abuse:

ST: 他揪着我的头发，把我往墙上磕的时候

Yan: When he yanked my hair, banged my head on the wall

Shi: The man pulls my hair and pushes me against the wall

Sze-Lorrain: When he pulls my hair and knocks my head against the wall

Here, there are two verbs that function as indicators of violence: “揪” (jiū) and “磕” (kē). According to the Oxford Chinese Dictionary, “揪” (jiū) means “to hold tight, to seize” and “磕” (kē) means “to knock (against something hard)”. Interestingly, the translators use different words to convey the meaning of the source text. Shi and Sze-Lorrain both translate “揪” as “pull”, which Collins (used hereafter for all the monolingual English definitions) defines as “to hold something firmly and use force in order to move it towards you or away from its previous position”, while

²⁴⁶ Here I refer only to Sze-Lorrain, as Nunes did not include this verse in her translation. The reason for this is unknown.

Yan uses the verb “yank”, which means “to pull something suddenly and with a lot of force”. As for “磕” (kē), Yan translates it as “bang”, which means “to hit hard, making a loud noise”, Shi uses the word “push”, meaning “to use force to make something move away from you or away from its previous position”, and, lastly, Sze-Lorraine translates it as “knock”, which means “to touch or hit something roughly, especially so that it falls or moves”. The word choices above indicate that all translators understood and recognized the scene described in the original as a violent act. Through visually rich verbs that implicate the use of force, all the translators faithfully expressed both the violent character of the man and the physical suffering of the woman. However, and very importantly, Yan and Shi failed to recognize the recurrency of the abuse. Their translations, “When he yanked my hair, banged my head on the wall” (Yan) and “The man pulls my hair and pushes me against the wall” (Shi), were both rendered as if describing a one-time, isolated occurrence of violence. As we know, domestic violence is often not just a single attack on the victim, but rather a repeated form (or forms) of aggression to exercise power and control over one’s partner.

Gender-based violence, which stems from gender inequality and institutionalized unequal power between women and men, is an inherent part of China’s patriarchal authoritarianism. According to the Chinese government, one in four married women is beaten by their husbands, but women’s rights activists believe that the real incidence of violence is likely to be much higher.²⁴⁷ A study on men and violence conducted by the United Nations in 2013 reveals that half of the men surveyed in China had used physical or sexual violence against an intimate partner.²⁴⁸ It is also

²⁴⁷ Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother: The Feminist Awakening in China*, 80

²⁴⁸ Fulu, Warner, Miedema, Jewkes, Roselli, and Lang, *Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It?: Quantitative Studies from the United Nations Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific*, 29

important to note that China approved its first nationwide law against domestic violence in December 2015 and enacted it in 2016.²⁴⁹ The anti-domestic violence law, however, does not mention sexual violence and does not consider marital rape a crime.²⁵⁰ Moreover, Chinese women who seek help by the relevant authorities are often told to return to their partners to preserve family harmony and social stability.²⁵¹ Women are, therefore, expected to suffer in silence, to obey a male figure and provide an outlet for men's violent urges, whether the man is an intimate partner or a father. This patriarchal family structure is essential to ensure political stability, which explains why the Chinese Communist Party has not been properly enforcing the anti-domestic law ever since its implementation. Furthermore, Yu's gender, class and physical disability make her vulnerable to heightened levels of patriarchal violence. In a society that perceives intimate partner violence as a "private matter", and therefore, one that is best left to be resolved between the couples themselves, Yu's poem serves to publicly expose her husband's abusive behaviour. Taking all of this into account, I believe that the translation of the verse mentioned earlier should reflect the frequency of the abuse suffered by the female narrator. Sze-Lorrain, sensitive towards feminist issues, renders the verse as "When he pulls my hair and knocks my head against the wall". I argue that, unlike Yan and Shi's translation, the feminist translator's rendering of the source text allows the reader to recognize and identify a recurring oppressive behaviour from the man. Another example that further supports my claim is found under:

²⁴⁹ Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother*, 80

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 184

Example 3

Chinese ST:

他喝醉了酒，他说在北京有一个女人/ 比我好看。

Literal translation:

He got drunk, he says in Beijing there is one woman / More than me good-looking.

Yan:

He was drunk, he said there was a woman in Beijing, / She was better looking than me.

Shi:

The man is drunk and he says that he has a lover in Beijing / She is better looking than me

Nunes:

He's drunk, he says in 北京 he has a woman / better looking than me.

As in "has"

Sze-Lorrain:

Drunk, he claims he has a woman in Beijing/ prettier than me.

In the documentary about the author "Still Tomorrow", we learn that Yu's husband is a construction worker who spends most of the year away, working in the big cities of China. According to Yu, they do not see each other often and barely communicate while he is far away

from home. When asked about communication in their relationship, Yin confirms that the married couple does not talk on the phone often, adding that he is the one making the call and that Yu never calls him first.

In the third and fourth stanzas, Yu talks about her husband's infidelity and how he compares her to the women in the city: "He's drunk/he says he has a woman in Beijing/ prettier than me./ When he has no work, they go dancing/ He likes women who dance/ Likes to watch their butts swing/ He says they know how to moan in bed, that it sounds lovely. Unlike me, not a word/ Always covering my face" (my translation). Here too, Yu exposes her husband's verbal abuse that always reverts to her disability.

In Yan's translation, "he said there was a woman in Beijing/She was better looking than me", the relationship between the man and the woman is not entirely clear, while, in addition, hinting at a one-time occurrence. This effect is produced by Yan's constant use of the past perfect tense throughout her translation. For instance, "When there was no work to do, they went dancing" also refers to one specific moment in time. In my point of view, Yan's translation of the poem, as observed in the previous example, seems to describe a particular episode, possibly because the man was drunk, and not a pattern of systematic abusive behaviour and constant extramarital affairs.

In Shi's translation of the same stanzas, however, the woman is not simply a stranger but a lover: "The man is drunk and he says that he has a lover in Beijing". In my opinion, by using the word "lover", Shi softens the degree of the husband's guilt, while allowing for an interpretation of this relationship as romantic and not purely physical. In turn, the feminist translators Nunes and Sze-Lorrain make use of expressions such as "he has a woman" and "he claims" that reflect the patriarchal and authoritarian character of the man. Nunes goes even further by emphasizing the

possessiveness in the verb “to have” through her use of paratexts.

In conclusion, I argue that both Yan and Shi’s translations fail to fully address the problems explored in the original poem, while, to some extent, showing more empathy towards the man, compared to the feminist translations. This practice is not at all uncommon and can be understood as a conscious or unconscious reflection of the way of being of the translator as an individual, resulting from their social learning, which to a certain extent conditions their attitudes, choices, behaviours, and tastes. For instance, in her article “Gender and the Chinese Context: The 1956 and 1999 Versions of Doris Lessing’s *The Grass Is Singing*”, Li Hongyu analyses two different renderings of *The Grass Is Singing* into Chinese, published in 1956 and 1999 respectively. Li shows that there are many instances where the two translations differ in terms of their treatment of women or women’s issues, particularly in their treatment of the main character Mary. The translation published in 1956 portrays Mary as mean, manipulative, and seductive, always describing her with a cold and judgmental tone.²⁵² In addition, the synopsis mentions Moses, the black servant with whom Mary has an affair, as if he were the protagonist. For instance, Li draws attention to the fact that most sentences in the synopsis start with “Moses” or “He”, for he is the man who “killed his white master, the woman, Mary”. Mary’s name only appears in relation to Moses and her story is left untold, turning the original text into a story where Moses is the victim and Mary is the perpetrator and symbol of white colonialism.²⁵³ Moreover, the translation which was published in 1999 focuses on the tragedies of Mary by showing a hardworking woman that suffers from physical hardships and struggles with her mental health, which causes the reader to

²⁵² Li, “Gender and the Chinese Context: The 1956 and 1999 Versions of Doris Lessing’s *The Grass Is Singing*,” 144-154

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 144

feel compassionate and empathetic towards her situation.²⁵⁴ Mary and Moses' relationship is also described in a more positive light.²⁵⁵ Li concludes that:

How the treatment of women and women's issues differ in these two translations (including their paratexts) show that different contexts and different gender discourses have the potential of exerting considerable influence on the outcome of the translation. A marginalized gender discourse in society produces a marginalized gender awareness in the translator; a prominent gender discourse in society produces a heightened gender awareness in the translator.²⁵⁶

I believe that Yan and Shi's renderings of "The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu", just like these two renderings of *The Grass Is Singing*, de-emphasize, to some extent, the gendered-related concerns which are present in the original text, while the feminist translators' renditions accentuate them. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how my argument also applies to the translation of other feminist issues, namely the discussions on female sexuality.

²⁵⁴ Li, "Gender and the Chinese Context," 154

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 145

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 155

3.3 Translating Female Sexuality and Desire in a Disabled Body in “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You”

In 2014, Yu’s poem “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You” went viral online and turned the poet into a literary phenomenon. Rui Shen, a professor specializing in Chinese literature and feminism, and one of the first critics who “discovered” Yu’s poetry, talks about the success of not only her poetry in general, but also this poem in particular in a dialogue with Tze-lan Sang for *Chinese Literature Today*:

First of all, Yu’s poems are amazingly moving to many people. (...) For this reason, they began to repost Yu’s poems and spread the word, which created this so-called “Yu Xiuhua Phenomenon.” Second, (...) the media needs to find “orgasmic pleasure” and present it to the public in an unpolished form. Yu’s physical condition and bold expression of sexual desire in that now famous poem “Crossing Over Half of China to Sleep with You” were two hot buttons that set off enormous media excitement.²⁵⁷

Certainly, Yu’s sudden rise to fame is also related to her physical disability, as it sparks the curiosity of many. Moreover, Yu’s bold expression of sexual desire in the patriarchal Confucianist Chinese society, which reprimands public discussions on sexuality specially from a female perspective, appears as a catalyst for the immense media attention. Furthermore, people with disabilities are often viewed as either completely deprived of sexual desire or unable to control

²⁵⁷ Sang and Shen, “The Body as a Room of Her Own,” 27

their sexual instincts. In this regard, the term “cerebral palsy poet” means that Yu’s poetry garners attention precisely because it is written by someone who is not usually associated with sexuality. In her article “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory”, Marie Garland-Thomson writes that disabled women are victims of cultural stereotypes that regard them as “asexual, unfit to reproduce, overly dependent, unattractive – as generally removed from the sphere of true womanhood and feminine beauty”.²⁵⁸ Because of this, Yu’s work has been labelled as “slut poetry” by many internet users who perceive her writing as vulgar. When confronted with this information while being interviewed on national television, Yu immediately responded “So what? So I’m a slut, so what?”,²⁵⁹ demonstrating how confident she is with discussing and expressing her own sexuality.

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the consciousness by feminists that “the personal is political” brought into public discourse various concerns, including questions on women’s sexuality. This fuelled the discussions on female sexual agency that ultimately led to the affirmation of women as sexual subjects capable of handling their sexual arrangements, and not mere objects of male desire.²⁶⁰ Sexuality as a topic in Translation Studies started to appear in the mid-1990s and has covered several aspects, such as sexual imagery in translation, sexual poetics and politics of translation, sexual language and gender in translation, homosexuality in translation, translating erotic body parts, and so on.²⁶¹ Flotow regards sexuality in translation as “a field that is notoriously difficult to translate for reasons of cultural and generational differences.”²⁶² She

²⁵⁸ Garland-Thomson, “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” 17

²⁵⁹ Directly transcribed from the official embedded subtitles from Fan Jian’s produced documentary “Still Tomorrow”.

²⁶⁰ Vance, “Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality,” 20-24

²⁶¹ Yu, *Translating Feminism in China*, 33

²⁶² Flotow, “Translation Effects: How Beauvoir Talks Sex in English”, 16

states that sexuality is everywhere in our daily lives, whether it is manifested in acts, desires, identities or discourses.²⁶³ Therefore, translating sex related language “is not a neutral affair but a political act, with important rhetorical and ideological implications, registering the translator's attitude toward existing conceptualizations of gender/sexual identities, human sexual behaviour(s) and moral norms.”²⁶⁴ In the first part of this chapter, I will be looking at how the elements of female sexuality and desire in “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You” were rendered in English. I intend to find whether the gender of the translators relates to how one interprets the source text and translates female sexuality. In my analysis, I will also identify the strategies used by the feminist translator and discuss the effects of such strategies from a feminist perspective. In the second part of this chapter, I will be discussing censorship and self-censorship of sexual content in translation.

3.3.1 Reinforcing Female Sexual Agency and Avoiding Gender Stereotypes

During my initial research on the poem “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You”, I found that different translations of the title coexisted in English. This results from Yu’s use of the expression “睡你” (shuì nǐ), literally “sleep you”, a new slang from Taiwan that has become widespread in Mainland China through Taiwan’s pop culture. The expression is mainly used by the young generation to refer to sex in a casual way.²⁶⁵ The examples below show how different translators dealt with this translation challenge:

²⁶³ Flotow, “Translation Effects”, 16

²⁶⁴ Santaemilia, “Sexuality and Translation as Intimate Partners?”, 12

²⁶⁵ Yan, “Four Poems by Yu Xiuhua,” 77

Example 4

Chinese ST: 《穿过大半个中国去睡你》

Literal translation: Cross more than half a China go sleep you

Yan: *I Crossed Half of China to Lay You*

Ming: *Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You*

Dian: *Crossing Over Half of China to Sleep with You*

Sze-Lorrain: *Crossing Half of China to Fuck You*

In Chinese, the character “睡” (shuì) is used as a verb to mean “sleep”. However, when used as a transitive verb such as in Yu’s title, “睡你” (shuì nǐ), it refers to sex. The four translations above resort to different expressions in English to presuppose sex with a varying degree of vulgarity. While Ming, Dian and Yan opted for the coy “sleep with” and “lay”, Sze-Lorrain is the only translator that used the word “fuck”. In my opinion, the word choice in the latter reflects the deliberate vulgarity imbued in Yu’s poem. While in Chinese “睡你” (shuì nǐ) is not an obscenity, the expression is associated with colloquial vulgarity and low social class,²⁶⁶ carrying a

²⁶⁶ Dian, “Yu Xiuhua: A Life Lived in Poetry,” 27

certain rudeness in a society that still has deeply conservative views on sex. This aspect, however, disappears in the first three renderings on Example 4. The next example further explores the results of such decision-making.

Example 5

Chinese ST:

其实，睡你和被你睡是差不多的，无非是/ 两具肉体碰撞的力，无非是这力催开的花朵

Literal translation:

Actually, sleep you and by you sleep is different not much, nothing but is/ two body collision of power, nothing but is this power urge open of flower

Yan:

In fact, to lay you or to get laid by you is the same, nothing but/ The force of two bodies banging against each other, nothing but flowers erupting from the force

Ming:

To sleep with you or to be slept, what's the difference if there's any?/ Two bodies collide – the force, the flower pushed open by the force

Dian:

Actually, sex is almost the same whether on top or at the bottom/ It's just the force of collision between two bodies/ the blooming of a flower propelled by this force

Sze-Lorrain:

Fucking you and being fucked by you are quite the same, no more/ than the force of two colliding bodies, a flower coaxed into blossom

In these verses, Yu finds her agency and refuses all notions of passivity. She uses a wordplay in Chinese “睡你和被你睡” (shuì nǐ hé bèi nǐ shuì), which literally translates to “sleep you and by you sleep/be slept by you”, to declare herself as a sexual being with her own needs and desires. In the first half of the sentence, the female narrator is the initiator of sex, while in the second half there is a switch in roles, and “you” becomes the initiator of sex. Due to the particularities of each language, the wordplay is difficult to convey in English. For instance, although “sleep with you” is grammatically correct, it fails to sufficiently transmit the notion of the female narrator as the initiator. Moreover, “to be slept” is grammatically incorrect, producing an odd and confusing expression, in my opinion. Yan’s rendering incorporates the slang term “to get laid”, which is somewhat less vulgar than “fuck”, but “lay you” lacks the impact of the source text. Although Sze-Lorrain’s translation may, at first sight, appear more obscene and vulgar than the source text, I argue that this feminist approach to Yu’s (already feminist) poem intends to preserve the original’s sense of agency and deliberately intensifies its feminist characteristics. To prove my claim, I would like to bring attention to Sze-Lorrain and Dian’s rendering of this first verse:

Dian: Actually, sex is almost the same whether on top or at the bottom

Sze-Lorrain: Fucking you and being fucked by you are quite the same (...)

I believe that this first verse deserves particular attention because it reveals an important feminist message. This passage gives an example of female initiative in heterosexual relationships, which is not often seen because women are majorly perceived as passive recipients rather than active participants. In patriarchal societies, women's traditional gender roles incorporate characteristics such as nurturance, emotionality, passivity, fragility, non-aggressiveness and dependence, and girls and women are encouraged to be submissive to men and fulfil their needs from a young age.²⁶⁷ Within heterosexual relationships, female sexuality is highly controlled, often reducing women to their mothering roles and reproductive abilities.²⁶⁸ Because this patriarchal construction marginalizes female sexual aspects of pleasure and desire, many women do not express their sexuality fearing they would be labelled as promiscuous.²⁶⁹ In China today, the government continues to aggressively perpetuate traditional gender norms, reducing women to their roles as dutiful wives, mothers and simply reproductive tools. Under Xi's leadership, China has brought back some sexist elements of Confucianism, with particular focus on womanly virtues and the idea of the traditional family as the foundation of the nation.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr, "Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to Theory and Research," 21

²⁶⁸ Muhanguzi, "Sex is sweet: women from low-income contexts in Uganda talk about sexual desire and pleasure," 62

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 62-65

²⁷⁰ Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother*, 166-169

In the case of disabled women, the perception of submissiveness is accentuated as there is an overwhelming association with passivity, dependency and deprivation.²⁷¹ An analysis of the portrayal of disabled women shows that they are often depicted as “‘the passive’, subjugated woman who is submissive and asexual.”²⁷² For this reason, I find it extremely important to transfer these aspects related to female sexual agency in the source text to the translation in order to give visibility to women (particularly disabled women) and avoid perpetuating patriarchal stereotypes.

Among the four different renderings, Dian is the only translator who removes the subject of the sentence (the female narrator and Yu herself) and uses the broader term “sex”. Not only is the equal position between the female narrator and “you” in the sexual activity lost, but the reversed traditional image of women as receptors, and the portrayal of women as initiators and enjoyers of sex also both disappear. I believe that it is no coincidence that Dian, as the only male translator, would make such word choices.

In Zhongli Yu’s study of different renderings by female and male translators into Chinese of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, she observes not only that female and male translators each tend to use the same translations strategies, but that, in most cases, female translators also use the same or similar words or expressions, and so do the male translators.²⁷³ To give an example, the word “deflower” appears several times in the source text when referring to heterosexual sex. In all cases, the male translators use expressions related to taking away a woman’s virginity to render the meaning of the source text. Virginity is a patriarchal social construct created to oppress women and control their sexualities. In the past, women in most societies were expected to remain

²⁷¹ Majiet, “Sexuality and Disability,” 77

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Yu, *Translating Feminism in China*, 103

virgin until their wedding night, seeing that a sexually untouched woman was perceived as priceless gift for her husband. Today, virginity and traditional values of chastity are still very important in certain cultures, including in China.²⁷⁴ In China, many people still believe in the “virgin complex”, which reverts to the Confucian “chastity cult” that defined women by their sexual purity.²⁷⁵ That said, it is not very surprising that Simone de Beauvoir’s male translators made such interpretations of the source text.

In this passage about sexual intercourse between a woman and her husband on their wedding night, “deflower” is rendered by the male translator as “make them lose their virgin’s chastity during the first night.”²⁷⁶ Interestingly, one of the female translators deliberately *womanhandles* the text, rendering this same passage as “give her happiness during the wedding night.”²⁷⁷ Here, the female translator hijacks the text, reverting the traditional image of the heterosexual woman and portraying her as someone who enjoys sex, rather than as someone who suffers a loss.

Furthermore, there is another instance of feminine initiative that Simone de Beauvoir’s Chinese male translator also fails to convey, in a similar way to what can be observed in Example 5 with Dian’s translation. In fact, he renders the sentence “she enjoys caressing him passionately” as “she enjoys his passionate caresses,”²⁷⁸ transforming this rare occurrence of female active sexuality into socially expected passive sexuality. Zhongli Yu concludes that the translations by female translators, whether consciously or unconsciously, “subvert the traditional image of

²⁷⁴ See Farrer “Opening Up: Youth Sex Culture and Market Reform in Shanghai,” 44-45

²⁷⁵ Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother*, 95

²⁷⁶ Yu, *Translating Feminism in China*, 100

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 102

heterosexual women, remove the male normative gaze and patriarchal standards of bodily acceptability, and challenge patriarchal control on women's sexuality."²⁷⁹ On the contrary, the male translators, in many cases, "retain the male gaze and a patriarchal view of the female body and female sexuality,"²⁸⁰ as can be proved by the examples above. I argue that Dian's translation, just like those of *The Second Sex* by male translators, reflects a patriarchal ideology on female sexuality. Whether consciously, sub-consciously, or even unconsciously, Dian assumes a detached stance towards translating female sexuality, using rather formal and neutral expressions such as "sleep with" and "sex is almost the same whether on top or at the bottom" that fail to sufficiently transmit the message on women's sexual agency and female sexual initiative, which are essential to Yu's poem.

As I mentioned earlier, it could be said that Sze-Lorrain's rendering of "睡你和被你睡" (shuì nǐ hé bèi nǐ shuì) as "fuck you and being fucked by you" is rather obscene compared to the source text. However, is this an unacceptable over-translation of the original? In my opinion, Sze-Lorrain's translation is not only acceptable, but desirable. I argue that Sze-Lorrain, just like the female translators of *The Second Sex*, deliberately *womenhandles* this verse to foreground sexual equality between women and men as well as the image of the woman as an active participant in heterosexual relationships. This over-translation technique is one of the three feminist translation strategies identified by Flotow and known as "supplementing". According to Flotow, supplementing occurs when the translator intervenes in the text to compensate for the difference between languages, making the target text meaningful to its native readership.²⁸¹ This translation

²⁷⁹ Yu, *Translating Feminism in China*, 103

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 104

²⁸¹ Flotow, "Feminist Translation," 74-75

strategy is hardly unique to feminist translation and is widely recognized as a legitimate process of translation. However, the difference is that the feminist translator intervenes in the text while conscious of their political role as a mediator, while others produce an apolitical text focused on its audience from a linguistic perspective.²⁸²

Another case of supplementing in feminist translation with clear political intentions, and perhaps the most famous example, is Linda Gaboriau's translation of the play *La Nef des sorcières*, particularly her translation of the following line: "Ce soir, j'entre dans l'histoire sans relever ma jupe". Conventionally translated by David Ellis as "This evening I'm entering history without pulling up my skirt", Gaboriau rendered the sentence as follows: "This evening I'm entering history without opening my legs". Godard regards Gaboriau's version as having "a great shock effect", by making "explicit a major feminist topos", that is, the exploration of the body and life as experienced by women.²⁸³ Gaboriau's *womanhandling* of the text "more forcefully frames the gender power dynamics of cultural representation than does David Ellis's version". In addition, Godard argues that male translators like Ellis often fail to comprehend the full range of women's experience and frequently demonstrate a lack of knowledge about concrete realities of female sexuality and female biology.²⁸⁴ For instance, in an English translation of Nicole Brossard's "Simulation", Larry Shouldice renders "la perte blanche" literally as "white loss" instead of "discharge", failing to recognize the textual allusions to female bodily secretions.²⁸⁵

²⁸² Flotow, "Feminist Translation," 75

²⁸³ Godard, "Language and sexual difference: the case of translation," 14

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

In this verse, we could argue that Sze-Lorrain's supplementing of the source text was in part required by the text itself, considering the difficulty in replicating the wordplay in Chinese in the target language. However, that is not always the case. An example of Sze-Lorrain's deliberate (and not necessarily demanded by the text) use of the supplementing strategy is found here:

Example 6

Chinese ST:

我是穿过枪林弹雨去睡你 / 我是把无数的黑夜摀进一个黎明去睡你 / 我是无数个我奔跑成一个我去睡你

Literal translation:

I am cross gun forest bullet rain go sleep you / I am hold innumerable of dark night press in one dawn go sleep you / I am innumerable one me run become one I go sleep you

Yan:

I have crossed gun forests and bullet showers to lay you / I have squeezed numerous nights into one dawn to lay you / I have run numerous selves into one to lay you

Ming:

I cross the hail of bullets to sleep with you / I press many nights into one morning to sleep with you / I run across many of me and many of me run into one to sleep with you

Sze-Lorrain:

I penetrate a hail of bullets to fuck you / I press countless dark nights into one dawn to fuck you /
I, as many, run as one to fuck you

These three verses could be considered as the climax of the poem. Here, Yu surrenders to her desire and transforms the poem into a story about a person seeking to affirm her existence by connecting with another, reflecting the poetic voice's deep yearning for intimacy. In her review of *Moonlight Rests on My Left Palm*, Siyu Chu perfectly describes the experience of reading these three lines as follows:

We digest Yu's imagery, and with it, discover a poet who shatters and fuses claims to sexuality in an almost self-empowering way; who embraces the possibility of promiscuity through words. We see that for Yu, poetry is not about packaging thoughts and feelings, but about stripping away pretense, leaving life naked and raw.²⁸⁶

I would like to bring attention to the translator's rendering of “穿过” (chuān guò), defined by the Oxford Chinese Dictionary as “pass through, cross”. The translation of this term does not pose a challenge per se, seeing that it is quite straightforward. In addition, “穿过” (chuān guò) had already appeared once in the title of the poem. Yan and Ming rendered it as “cross”, just like they

²⁸⁶ Chu, “The Raw and Unabashed Poetry of Yu Xiuhua,” 2021 <https://www.theworldofchinese.com/2021/10/the-raw-and-unabashed-poetry-of-yu-xiuhua-book-review/>

did in the title, while Sze-Lorrain translated it as “penetrate”. While “穿过”(chuān guò) and “cross” have no sexual connotation, “penetrate” is commonly used in describing sexual intercourse. Moreover, in heterosexual relationships, penetration is often associated with the active role of the man and male power. However, in Sze-Lorrain’s version, the female narrator is the one in charge of the act of penetration, therefore holding the power that traditionally society does not bestow upon her. Contrary to the previous case of supplementing mentioned in the example above, this supplementation seems to have been purely motivated by Sze-Lorrain’s political intentions, given that the source text did not necessarily require a linguistic intervention from the translators. I believe that, by supplementing the source text, Sze-Lorrain’s intends to resist hegemonic masculinity and subordinated femininity and foreground women’s agency once again.

Lastly, in these three verses, the slang “睡你”(shuì nǐ) is repeated at the end of each verse, functioning as a punchline. As I discussed before, the different renderings of this expression by the translators produce different effects in transmitting the feminist message in the original Chinese. In addition, the translations exhibit varying degrees of vulgarity. Ming’s “sleep with you” lacks in both vulgarity and colloquiality. Yan’s “lay you”, despite coming from the vulgar slang “to get laid”, is not commonly used (“lay you down” would be the appropriate term) and, therefore, lacks the impact of the source text. I argue that, except for the feminist translation, all the other translations analysed in this chapter have taken a bold poem about female sexual agency and desire in a disabled body and reshaped it into a rather mild and cleansed text. This correlates with the issue of self-censorship in translating sexually explicit language that I will be further discussing below.

3.3.2 Self-censorship in the Translation of Sexuality and Sexually Explicit Language

Sexuality is a discipline that offers a privileged view into different cultures, seeing that each culture establishes its own moral and ethical boundaries. What is considered a taboo in one culture is not necessarily seen as a taboo in another. Regardless, the censorship on sexuality was a reality in many societies throughout history, mainly imposed by political or religious entities (and still is). In periods of political turbulence or dictatorship, governments have enforced strict censorship measures on all forms of mass communication, specially targeting sexual morality, political orthodoxy, religion and racist concerns.²⁸⁷ For instance, in China, during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1910), sex was viewed by the government authorities as “something potentially dangerous to the rule of a strong centralizing state,”²⁸⁸ prohibiting representations of sex in literature and culture²⁸⁹. This is because of the enormous influence of Confucian values and Confucian prudery during the greater part of imperial Chinese history, which approved of sex primarily for purposes of procreation.²⁹⁰ Premarital or extramarital sexual practices, such as adultery, masturbation, and homosexuality were considered ‘abnormal’ and declared as “sexual aberrations” that threatened the unity of the empire,²⁹¹ thus justifying the regulations and policing of sex in the interests of the nation.

José Santaemilia defines censorship in translation as “a coercive and forceful act that blocks, manipulates, and controls cross-cultural interaction in various ways.”²⁹² It is, therefore, an

²⁸⁷ Santaemilia, “The Translation of Sex-Related Language: The danger(s) of self-censorship(s),” 222

²⁸⁸ Sigley and Jeffrey, “Interview: On ‘Sex’ and ‘Sexuality’ in China,” 52

²⁸⁹ Yu, *Translating Feminism in China*, 8

²⁹⁰ Bodde, “Sex in Chinese Civilization,” 165-168

²⁹¹ Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China*, 92

²⁹² Billiani, “Censorship”, 28

external limitation on what can be published or translated, suppressing or prohibiting “speech or writing that is condemned as subversive of the common good.”²⁹³ Self-censorship, however, “is an individual moral/ethical struggle between the individual and society”, which leads the translators to deliberately or unwittingly censor themselves in order to produce texts that are deemed “acceptable” from both a social and a personal point of view.²⁹⁴ In “The Translation of Sex-Related Language”, Santaemilia argues that the translators themselves often ponder their options and exercise a series of self-censorship acts they find necessary to safeguard their professional status or their socio-personal environment, whether in periods of unrest or in periods during which the translator’s autonomy is ensured.²⁹⁵ In addition, conscious or unconscious self-censorship also occurs due to the intrinsic anthropological need that we as humans feel to ban and punish, in order to impose our moral our ideological beliefs.²⁹⁶ Therefore, the analysis of self-censorship in translating sexuality and sexually explicit language can offer insights about the translator and their social background such as values, beliefs, and prejudices regarding gender and sex.

Self-censorship can occur in a variety of different forms, including deletion, partial translation, minimisation (also referred to as attenuation), and so on. For instance, Margaret A. Simons reveals that in *The Second Sex* of 1952, the first English translation of *Le deuxième sexe* (1949), Howard Parshley “deleted fully one-half of one chapter on history, a fourth of another, and eliminated the names of seventy-eight women.”²⁹⁷ It is safe to say that Parshley’s deliberate self-

²⁹³ Allan and Burrige, *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*, 13

²⁹⁴ Santaemilia, “Sexuality and Translation as Intimate Partners?”, 16

²⁹⁵ Santaemilia, “The Translation of Sex-Related Language,” 223

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 223-224

²⁹⁷ Simon, *Gender in Translation*, 85

censorship had the political and ideological intention of minimising women's significance and visibility in history. Moreover, Barbara Klaw identifies Parshley's tendency to censor and edit strong language in his 1956 English rendition of *Les Mandarins* (1954), Simone de Beauvoir's ground-breaking work on the thematic of sexuality.²⁹⁸ Klaw writes:

The 1956 English translation evidently also judged the novel as too sexually explicit: (...) the two scenes evoking oral sex are neatly omitted in the English text and several passages are changed either to attenuate the boldness of the sexual imagery or to strengthen the criticism of women who act upon their desires.²⁹⁹

However, cases of self-censorship in translation are not always as obvious and as blunt as that found in Parshley's version of *Le deuxième sexe*. For instance, Santaemilia discovered that in *Maggie ve la luz* (2003), the Spanish translation of *Angels* (2002) by Marian Keyes, there seems to be a pattern in the elimination of certain sentences that contain sexually explicit language, explicit references to lesbianism, and certain uses of fuck as an emphatic intensifier.³⁰⁰ Santaemilia argues that "this could suggest a certain self-imposed control when translating, or maybe some reservation about the explicit expression of certain sexual behaviours."³⁰¹

Much less obvious are the types of self-censorship such as partial translation or minimisation of sex-related terms, which are usually only discovered through rigorous linguistic analysis. For instance, an analysis of the 1992 English translation of Almudena Grande's erotic

²⁹⁸ Flotow, "This Time 'the Translation is Beautiful, Smooth, and True,'" 36

²⁹⁹ Klaw, "Sexuality in Beauvoir's *Les Mandarins*," 197

³⁰⁰ Santaemilia, "The Translation of Sex-Related Language," 225

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

novel *Las edades de Lulú* (1990) reveals that the English renderings of sexually explicit language in many passages are “reasonable, though milder, options for the sexually explicit Spanish terms.”³⁰² The English translator Sonia Soto rendered “Estaba caliente, cachonda en el sentido clásico del término” as “I was hot, turned on in the true sense of the word”³⁰³. Being “turned on” implies a reaction, in this case, to a man’s action or behaviour, while the less coy “horny” or “randy” would not only reflect the degree of vulgarity and colloquiality of the source text, but would also express the female character’s own feelings and desires that are not necessarily caused by a man but a product of her sexual agency. Santaemilia argues that this example shows how Soto transformed a daring book that boldly depicts woman’s sexual agency into a “a somewhat desexualized and sanitized one.”³⁰⁴ The effects of self-censorship in the English version of *Las edades de Lulú* match those produced by the minimisation of sexually explicit language previously seen in the English translations of “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You”. In Ming and Dian’s translations, sexually explicit terms were rewritten in a softer way by depriving the original of its colloquial traits. Moreover, their translations also downplay references to female sexual initiative, producing a more ‘conservative’ and formal version compared to the original, due to the neutrality of their word choices. All of this goes towards the general trend in the translation of sex-related terms and sexual innuendos identified by Santaemilia³⁰⁵ in his extensive and ground-breaking research on this topic.

By way of conclusion, minor instances of self-censorship such as the ones I identified in my analysis of the different renderings of “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You” usually go

³⁰² Santaemilia, “Sexuality and Translation as Intimate Partners?” 15

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ See Santaemilia “The Translation of Sex, The Sex of Translation: Fanny Hill in Spanish,” 117-136.

unnoticed. Due to its subtlety, self-censorship hardly threatens the existence of the entire original text. However, in Yu's poem, these self-censorship acts resulted in the downplay of significant aspects of the source text and, therefore, constitute an otherwise avoidable loss. I believe that, despite not being intentional, the self-censorship of sexually explicit language reveals the limits to Yu's translators' sexual morality. It could, perhaps, simply suggest a certain reservation in the use of sexually explicit and vulgar terms by Ming and Dian, or it could suggest their inability to recognize and empathize with the feminist message due to their pre-conceived notions on female sexuality. Sze-Lorrain's understanding of feminist concerns as well as her political ideals, allow her to identify elements of female oppression and gender stereotypes more easily in discourses. She then takes on an active role in the creation of meaning by subverting these aspects, while resisting the inherent tendency to 'correct' what society deems 'inappropriate' and the tendency to produce a polite text that conforms to patriarchal norms and expectations of her and of us as women and translators. I will discuss this further in the next chapter where I make a comparison of both Sze-Lorrain and Nunes' translations at textual and paratextual levels, looking at the strategies they used and the effects of such strategies, their similarities and differences, and how their feminist ideals came through in their texts.

3.4 Yu Xiuhua's Feminist Translators: Fiona Sze-Lorrain and Jenn

Marie Nunes

As I mentioned earlier, the translation strategies that can be considered feminist in the English renditions of “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu” by Sze-Lorrain and Nunes and “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You” by Sze-Lorrain emphasise the poems’ feminist aspects, making women and feminist concerns more visible in the target text. However, the strategies used and how they were put into practice to achieve the feminist translator’s goals differ.

In Chapters 3.2 and 3.3, I demonstrated how Sze-Lorrain mainly makes use of hijacking and supplementing to *womanhandle* the source text. Although Nunes also resorts to hijacking with her “excessive interference”³⁰⁶ in the source text, her use of this strategy is very different from Sze-Lorrain’s way of hijacking the text. As indicated priorly, hijacking occurs when the feminist translator appropriates the source text and applies “corrective measures” with the purpose of constructing feminist meaning in the target text.³⁰⁷ For instance, and as I previously showed, in “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu”, Sze-Lorrain applied the female gender to the originally genderless dog in the Chinese text, thus foregrounding female solidarity in the target text between the woman and the dog.

On the one hand, Sze-Lorrain’s hijacking, as well as all her feminist interventions, are undetectable to the target reader and can only be identified through bilingual examination. On the other hand, however, Nunes’ use of the hijacking strategy can be seen being flaunted in the form

³⁰⁶ Flotow, “Feminist Translation,” 78

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 78-79

of commentaries directly below the verses. I find that Nunes way of hijacking the text is very much in line with Lotbinière-Harwood's "excessive interference" in the translation of Lise Gauvin's *Lettres d'une autre*. For instance, Lotbinière-Harwood, as she intended to "make her presence felt", visibly intervenes in the text by frequently offering explanations on the author's real meaning, directly on the page or in footnotes.³⁰⁸

It could also be argued that, although Nunes' notes appear directly below the stanza or verse that she means to comment, instead of in footnote form, this strategy functions similarly to Flotow's footnoting strategy or Massardier-Kenney's commentary. Although footnoting and commentary are widely used even in more conventional approaches to translation to express multiple meanings in a text that may otherwise be difficult (or impossible) to convey, here I refer specifically to the employment of footnoting in feminist translation with a strong didactic purpose. For instance, in Marlene Wildeman's English translation of *La Lettre aérienne*, she inserts various footnotes throughout the text. This includes page references to works that, even though not directly cited in the source text, were found by the translator to be relevant for the reader's comprehension of the text.³⁰⁹ In addition, Wilderman explores the original's multiple meanings of certain passages and describes the strategies used in lengthy footnotes, transforming the English version into an educational tool.³¹⁰ In the same vein, Nunes adds an informative commentary to her translation of "外婆" (wàipó), while explaining that, unlike English, Chinese has a complex vocabulary to describe family relationships and that the term "外婆" refers to the maternal grandmother, and lies thus "outside the patriarchal line of descent" and outside the patriarchal chain of violence. As such,

³⁰⁸ Flotow, "Feminist Translation," 78-79

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 77

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

this information is relevant to the target reader, given that it provides additional context for an interpretation of the poem closer to the source text and culture. It is through this strategy that Nunes is able to facilitate a reading of the character of the grandmother as a figure outside the patriarchal chain of violence, who provides comfort to the female poetic voice. Sze-Lorrain also achieves the same goal by, as previously seen, gendering the dog as female, and allowing it to overlap with the character of the grandmother. Although both feminist translators *womanhandle* the source text differently, it could be argued that, in this case, their translations produce the same effect. Furthermore, Sze-Lorrain once again achieves her feminist goal through an intervention that is utterly unnoticeable to the target reader, while Nunes makes her presence visible.

I find Godard's notion of *womanhandling* highly relevant when discussing Nunes' way of manipulating the text. In her article "Theorizing Feminist Discourse/Translation", Godard writes that:

The feminist translator, affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and rewriting, flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text. *Womanhandling* the text in translation would involve the replacement of the modest, self-effacing translator. Taking her place would be an active participant in the creation of meaning, who advances a conditional analysis. Hers is a continuing provisionality, aware of process, giving self-reflexive attention to practices. The feminist translator immodestly flaunts her signature in italics, in footnotes - even in a preface.³¹¹

³¹¹ Godard, "Theorizing Feminist Discourse/Translation," 70

In the same way as Godard's feminist translator, Nunes flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text through her many notes. Nunes makes use of this technique not only to reflect on the difficulties and problems encountered, but also to contextualize certain words and expressions in Chinese, bringing out the didactic purpose mentioned by Flotow. More interestingly, Nunes addresses the reader directly with questions such as "Does the Chinese 它 have the same quality of thingness? Does it indicate a more practical, less intimate relationship between woman and animal?"³¹² Additionally, observations such as "I wonder if this word is used for the pleasure of both men and women"³¹³ compel the reader to reflect on this passage from a feminist perspective. I find that this practice is in line with Godard's own idea of the role of translation in feminist discourse as a tool used by the translator for "breaking out of silence in order to communicate new insights into women's experiences and their relation to language."³¹⁴ Nunes' translation of "The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu" thus opens a window into the translator's thoughts not only regarding the translation process, but also in terms of women's issues and experiences, which allows for a clear understanding of the translator's own political intentions and feminist values.

In the same vein, this technique used by Nunes also fits into Massardier-Kenney's description of "collaboration". As I mentioned in Chapter 2.1.2, collaboration is a translator-centred strategy put forward by Massardier-Kenney that aims to bridge the distance between the target text and the reader while preserving its differences. Through collaboration, the feminist translator claims their agency in the meta-discourse surrounding the translation.³¹⁵ In this respect,

³¹² Nunes, "Sitting with Discomfort," 25

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Godard, "Theorizing Feminist Discourse/Translation," 45

³¹⁵ This strategy is not to be confused with Chamberlain's collaboration strategy, "where author and translator are seen as working together, both in the cooperative and the subversive sense." (Chamberlain, 1988:470)

Nunes' own "subjectivities" and "lyrical responses"³¹⁶ to Yu's poem can be perceived as a collaborative activity as Massardier-Kenney defines it. In addition, these paratexts also give insights to the reader on how Nunes functions within the work she produces, while the questions she poses invite the reader into this collaborative activity towards Yu and her poetry. As Nunes puts it, her goal is "to create a textscape where the work Yu and I do becomes visible in its various entanglements and invites the reader to become entangled as well."³¹⁷

It is also worth noting that Nunes' feminist approach to translation differs from Sze-Lorrain's, as Nunes adopted a queer-feminist stance in her rendering of Yu's poem. According to Nunes, a queer-feminist approach means that she draws on "queer theory of radical failure and disruption, in conjunction with a 'politics of relationality' and women of color feminism, to suggest an approach that refuses to produce the singular, fluent translation that is the English norm, in order to contribute to a feminist translation theory of accountability, relationality, and play."³¹⁸ Nunes mainly makes use of Jack Halberstam's concepts of passivity and failure explored in *The Queer Art of Failure* as alternative forms of expression and subversion of heteronormativity. As I mentioned in Chapter 2.4, translation has long been implicated in (binary) gendered notions of passivity and productivity. As it is, by following Halberstam's perspective on radical passivity, Nunes reclaims passivity as a means of disrupting how agency and value are defined in the context of translation.³¹⁹ Moreover, the 'queer theory of failure' can be seen at play in Nunes' uncertainties (such as in her commentary "How to truly translate a proper noun? How does the speaker hear her

³¹⁶ Nunes, "Sitting with Discomfort," 36

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 40

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 35-36

dog's name?") and her multiple translation attempts.³²⁰

In "Sitting with Discomfort: A Queer-Feminist Approach to Translating Yu Xiuhua", Nunes describes her own translation method as including and putting into play diverse strategies such as multiplicity, foreignization, and heavy use of paratextual elements that destroy textual cohesion.³²¹ Regarding the latter she writes:

I am aware that while I frame my intervention as the intentional disruption of a normative mode of translation, I could also be judged to have failed as a translator. I have failed at creating a familiarized and easily consumable object that appears "natural" in English in terms of style and form. And perhaps I have thus failed to "accurately" convey the author's intentions by unmistakably inserting my own.³²²

This realisation, however valid, is influenced by the conventional (and outdated) idea that invisibility, fluency, and fidelity should be the main concerns of the translator and are, therefore, the prime indicators of a "high quality translation". Moreover, and as I mentioned in Chapter 2.3, these notions are rooted in white supremacist, imperialist, and patriarchal ideals. Although Nunes rejects these values and subscribes to feminist ethics and politics, as she is inserted in a male-centric and western-centric society and is, therefore, affected by it, she inevitably perceives her

³²⁰ In "Sitting with Discomfort: A Queer-Feminist Approach to Translating Yu Xiuhua", Nunes presents a total of three different renderings of "The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu". My study considers only the version entitled "I Keep a Dog, Called Xiao Wu", given that examining the three versions would surpass the allowed space for this dissertation.

³²¹ Nunes, "Sitting with Discomfort," 35

³²² Ibid.

“unnatural” and “unfaithful” translation as failure, for it threatens internalised normativity. Regardless, Nunes’ rendering of “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu”, much like Sze-Lorrain’s translation of “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You, resists the inherent tendency to produce a palatable and polite text that confirms to society’s patriarchal norms and expectations. Both feminist translators consciously take on an active role in creating and emphasising feminist meaning to represent the feminism of the source texts.

It is also worth noting that, in fact, even if translators advocate for feminist values, they might not be able to practice those values due to pressure or censorship from other mediators, such as publishing companies. I believe it is highly unlikely that Nunes’ rendering of Yu’s poem might be traditionally published, especially given the overall conservative nature of many Anglo-American publishers in regard to foreign literature in translation. According to Korean scholarship in Translation Studies, in-depth studies about translation strategies in the face of globalisation reveal that “naturalisation³²³ has been the primary strategy for translation from Korean into English as it seems to suit readerships in the English language.”³²⁴ As stated by Kim, Anglo-American publishers are generally reluctant to accept foreign literature in translation and the translations that are indeed accepted must present remarkably fluent readability of the target text.³²⁵ As a result, Nunes’ interventions in the target text appear as a major obstacle for fluent readability, thus failing to meet the standards and practices of the target culture. In addition, Anglo-American publishers often adopt a domesticating approach in the translation of foreign works for the purpose of

³²³ In short, naturalisation is a translation strategy identified by Antoine Berman in 1985 that implies negating “the foreign,” (Munday, 2016:230) that is, translating in a fluent and invisible style that minimises the foreignness of the target text to (ethnocentric) receiving cultural values. (Ibid.:225) Lawrence Venuti, who later referred to this same phenomenon as “domestication”, sees domestication as dominating British and American translation culture. (Ibid.)

³²⁴ Kim, “A Relevance-Theoretic Approach to Bridging Cultural Barriers in Translating Implicit Features of Korean Fiction into English,” 17

³²⁵ Ibid. 19

increasing readership and achieving commercial success. In this respect, Nunes' foreignization strategies, as can be seen in verses such as "He's drunk, he says in 北京 he has a woman", challenge the publishing norms for accessibility and marketability. From the perspective of publishers, the fault of Nunes' radical rendering of "The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu" does not lie so much with notions of equivalence or fidelity as with its commercial viability. Conversely, Sze-Lorrain's interventions do not interfere with the readability of the target text as her manipulation of the original Chinese is undetectable to target readers. However, Nunes' radical approach to translation invites for a reflection on the possible benefits of subverting the conventional ways publishing companies have been operating so far. Perhaps by allowing this type of translation work to be published outside niche scholarly spaces, the general notion of what constitutes an acceptable translation of foreign literature would consequently change, thus reshaping the perception of not only literature critics but also of the common reader.

4. Conclusion

The thorough study of the different renderings of Yu Xiuhua's "The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu" and "Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You", as well as the examination of the translation strategies used by the translators in dealing with the utterances of gender-based violence and female sexuality present in the poems have disclosed similarities and differences between the feminist translators and the translators who have not followed a feminist approach, and between the feminist translators themselves.

Overall the feminist translators and non-feminist translators each responded differently to the instances of intimate partner violence suffered by the female poetic voice in "The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu". My analysis demonstrated that both feminist translations reveal sympathy towards women and feminist awareness. However, the feminist translators' approaches to raising awareness regarding the poem's feminist issues differ. Nunes mainly emphasised the violent and sexist character of the husband through commentaries. In addition, Nunes gendering of the dog as male could be said to contribute to the portrayal of male violence as it allows for both characters to overlap, thus creating a chain of patriarchal violence. The translator's sympathy towards the female poetic voice is particularly evident in Sze-Lorrain's translation, as she deliberately *womanhandles* the source text to foreground female solidarity between the character of the dog and the woman. Unlike the original Chinese and its other English renderings, Sze-Lorrain's translation does not portray the character of the dog as a complicit bystander in the patriarchal chain of violence. Instead, the female dog shows compassion towards the woman and displays distressful emotions before the situation of abuse suffered by the woman.

Additionally, the analysis discloses that at times the feminist translators' interpretation of the text differs from that of non-feminist translators. While describing the instance of physical aggression depicted in the poem, all translators understood and recognised it as a violent act, using visually rich verbs that implicate the use of force to express the violent character of the man and the physical suffering of the woman. However, Yan and Shi fail to recognise the recurrency of the abuse represented in "The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu", resulting in the violent act being rendered by them as if describing an isolated occurrence of violence. In addition, Shi refers to the woman with whom the husband is having an affair as "lover", which in my opinion allows for an interpretation of this relationship as romantic, softening the degree of the husband's culpability. This altogether results in portraying the husband in a more, even if slightly, favourable way compared to the source text and the feminist translations by Nunes and Sze-Lorrain.

The analysis of the various English renderings of "Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You" showed that the translators who did not take a feminist approach to translation are overall more conservative in translating female sexuality and sexually explicit language and seem more constrained by patriarchal culture. My analysis clearly shows that self-censorship occurs in all the English translations of the poem, except in the translation by Sze-Lorrain.

As mentioned in 3.3.2, in Ming and Dian's translations, sexually explicit terms were rewritten in a softer way by depriving the source text of its colloquial traits, suggesting a certain reservation in the use of sexually explicit and vulgar terms. Moreover, the male translator appears to be detached when translating female sexuality by using rather formal and neutral expressions that fail to sufficiently transmit the originally bold and unconstrained message on women's sexual agency and female sexual initiative, which is the core of Yu's poem. This is particularly evident

in his rendering of the first verse where, originally, the female poetic voice appears as the initiator of sex in her relationship with “you” (the recipient of the poem). Instead, the male translator’s replacement of the subject I/me for the broader term “sex” results in the loss of the depiction of women as active initiators and enjoyers of sex, while perpetuating patriarchal notions of passivity (both female and disabled) in heterosexual relationships.

Although I believe that it is no coincidence that only the translation by a male translator shows such translation choices, whether there is a tendency for male translators to censor female sexual materials more than female translators needs to be further proved with more case studies. That said, and as Santaemilia points out, studies show that both men and women seem to move the texts they translate into their own ideological positions and their own sexual stereotypes, and any gender or sexual identity “seems inseparable from any activity or (re)writing.”³²⁶ Given that the translations by female and male translators both exhibit self-censorship (even if to varying degrees), it is safe to say that self-censorship of female sexuality and sexually explicit language in “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You” reveals a difference between consciously committing or not to the feminist message in the source text regardless of the translator’s biological sex or gender identity. Accordingly, my analysis revealed that the elements censored or diluted in the translations by Ming and Dian of “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You” are precisely the ones emphasised by Sze-Lorrain through feminist translation strategies. Sze-Lorrain’s interpretation of the source text through the lens of feminism and gender politics is reflected in her translation as she deliberately *womanhandles* the text to foreground female sexual agency represented in Yu’s poem and avoid perpetuating patriarchal notions of passivity associated with women and disability.

³²⁶ Santaemilia, “Gender, Sex and Translation,” 22

A comparison of the translation strategies employed by the feminist translators and their effects on the target text showed that both translators often resort to hijacking and supplementing to reproduce and emphasise the feminist message in the source text. However, it could be said that Nunes' way of *womanhandling* the text is very much in line with the practices of the Canadian translators of radical feminist texts in the 90s, for her presence is visible and flaunted throughout the text. Conversely, Sze-Lorrain's feminist interventions can only be detected through bilingual analysis, much like Deborah Smith's *womanhandling* of *The Vegetarian*, as demonstrated in chapter 2.3. A close reading of the poems produced by Nunes and Sze-Lorrain revealed that, on the whole, their translations bring attention to the same feminist issues, namely intimate partner violence against women, sexism, and female sexuality, producing the same effects even when they applied feminist translation strategies in different verses of the source text.

Provided that translators can never be impartial mediators, all translations involve a varying degree of manipulation. As Castro has remarked, ideology is a significant concept when it comes to translation, for it is "defined as a systematic set of values and beliefs shared by a particular community and which shape the way each person, and also each translator, interprets and represents the world."³²⁷ Therefore, "objectivity and neutrality in translation are biased fallacies."³²⁸ That said, and much like previously conducted research has shown, this case-study of English translations of two poems by Yu Xiuhua suggests that, unless the translator, regardless of their biological sex or gender identity, is consciously performed to contest and subvert patriarchal norms and values, their translations will in all likelihood produce and perpetuate hegemonic norms and values through sexist linguistic practices such as deliberate or unconscious

³²⁷ Castro, "Re-examining Horizons in Feminist Translation Studies," 3

³²⁸ Ibid.

self-censorship.

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1. “The Dog I Raise, Called Little Wu”

1.1 《我养的狗，叫小巫》余秀华

我跛出院子的时候，它跟着

我们走过菜园，走过田埂，向北，去外婆家

我跌倒在田沟里，它摇着尾巴

我伸手过去，它把我手上的血舔干净

他喝醉了酒，他说在北京有一个女人

比我好看。没有活路的时候，他们就去跳舞

他喜欢跳舞的女人

喜欢看她们的屁股摇来摇去

他说，她们会叫床，声音好听。不像我一声不吭

还总是蒙着脸

我一声不吭地吃饭

喊“小巫，小巫”把一些肉块丢给它

它摇着尾巴，快乐地叫着

他揪着我的头发，把我往墙上磕的时候

小巫不停地摇着尾巴

对于一个不怕疼的人，他无能为力

我们走到了外婆屋后

才想起，她已经死去多年

1.2 “My Dog, Little Wu” Translation by Xinlu Yan

When I limped out of my courtyard, it followed

We walked by the vegetable garden, the field ridge, toward the north, to my grandmother’s house

I tripped and fell in the field, it wagged its tail

I extended my hand, it licked the blood off

He was drunk, he said there was a woman in Beijing,

She was better looking than me. When there was no work to do, they went dancing

He liked women who danced

And liked watching their butts swinging back and forth

He said they moaned in bed, it sounded nice. Unlike me who was soundless and

Always covered her face

I ate my meal in silence Calling “Little Wu, Little Wu” and tossing it some scraps

It wagged its tail, barking exuberantly

When he yanked my hair, banged my head on the wall

Little Wu kept wagging its tail

To someone who was not afraid of pain, he was powerless

Only when we walked to the back of my grandmother’s house

Did I recall, she had passed many years ago

1.3 “My Dog, Xiao Wu” Translation by Xiaoqin Shi

I limp out of the yard and he follows

We walk by the vegetable patch,

Over the ridge to the north

To grandmother’s home

I fall into a ditch and he wags his tail

I reach out to my dog and he licks the blood from my fingers

The man is drunk and he says that he has a lover in Beijing

She is better looking than me

They go out to dancing if he has no work

He loves dancing women

Loves to watch the women sway their hips

The man says, those women moaning in bed, sound nice

Not like me, no sound, and always coving my face

I am silent when I have my meal and call out

“Xiaowu, xiaowu,” I toss him some meat

My dog happily barks and wags his tail

The man pulls my hair and pushes me against the wall

Xiaowu wags his tail constantly

I am not afraid of the pain, so he is powerless

We walk to grandmother’s home

Then I remember, she has been dead for many years

1.4 “I Keep a Dog, Called Xiao Wu” Translation by Jenn Marie Nunes

I Keep a Dog, Called Xiao Wu

Is it then important that 小 means “little” and 巫/Wu is a common Chinese surname? As a name, it is a unit of sound, a script that marks dog and has no “meaning.” How to truly translate a proper noun? How does the speaker hear her dog’s name? For me, the meaning of the name, like the meaning in the dog, somewhat inscrutable. Instead I hear her voice “Xiao Wu.” I am listening When I limp out the courtyard, it follows Yu Xiuhua refers to the dog as 它/it and to the man as 他/he. The sound the same, the pronoun clearly different. Reading in Chinese I think of the dog as “he,” partly because of the aural overlap of 它/ta and 他/ta and partly because Americans would

When I limp out the courtyard, it follows

Yu Xiuhua refers to the dog as 它/it and to the man as 他/he. The sound the same, the pronoun clearly different. Reading in Chinese I think of the dog as “he,” partly because of the aural overlap of 它/ta and 他/ta and partly because Americans would never refer to a pet dog as “it.” Does the Chinese 它 have the same quality of thingness? Does it indicate a more practical, less intimate relationship between woman and animal? Does it allow the dog to overlap with the “he,” implicating the dog in a lineage of patriarchal violence, or does “it” fully stand between the two, the indeterminacy of 它 also opening into a blankness of possibility, a liminality, a way out?

We walk the garden, walk the ridge between fields, going north,

to my grandmother’s house

Chinese, unlike English, has a complex vocabulary for articulating family relationships. The term 外婆 means maternal grandmother, literally “outside grandmother,” so this is the speaker’s mother’s mother, not her husband’s grandmother or her father’s mother, outside the patriarchal line of descent

I fall in a field ditch, he wags his tail

I stretch out my hand, of the blood on my hand he laps clean

伸手, stretching out one’s hand, is a gesture and also an asking, it moves the body and it speaks, it asks for, it might even beg

He's drunk, he says in 北京 he has a woman

As in "has"

better looking than me. When he doesn't have work, they go dancing

He likes women who dance

Inhabit their bodies in motion

Likes to watch their butts wag back and forth

Now dog and women overlap in the verb “摇”

He says, they can call out in bed, and their voices sound good. Not like me without a word

叫床, one word that means to cry out in ecstasy (during lovemaking). I wonder if this word is used for the pleasure of both men and women

Always hiding my face

I eat without a word

Call “Xiao Wu, Xiao Wu” toss him a piece of meat

巫 also means “shaman” and Google translates the dog's name as Little Shaman. One of my professors asks me why I haven't translated it as such. She says that to her the poem is very spiritual. Again the dog's role is contested. It stands as a vessel between

The dog wags his tail, barking happily

“Happily” sounds insipid in English. I don't think this is a bad translation

1.5 “My Dog Is Called Little Wu” Translation by Fiona Sze-Lorrain

When I limp out the courtyard, she tags along

We pass a vegetable garden and ditch, going north to Grandma’s

When I fall into the ditch, she wags her tail

I stretch my hand out, she licks the blood off my hand

Drunk, he claims he has a woman in Beijing

prettier than me. They go dancing when they run out of gas

He fancies dancing with women

watches them shaking their butts

He claims they know how to moan with pleasure: how lovely they sound, unlike me

not a word, my face covered

I eat in silence

throw meat to the dog, Little Wu, Little Wu

She wags her tail, yelps in joy

When he pulls my hair and knocks my head against the wall

Little Wu keeps wagging her tail

Helpless before someone unafraid of pain

We walk behind Grandma’s house

Only to realize she has been dead for years

2. “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You”

2.1 《穿过大半个中国去睡你》余秀华

其实，睡你和被你睡是差不多的，无非是
两具肉体碰撞的力，无非是这力催开的花朵
无非是这花朵虚拟出的春天让我们误以为生命被重新打开
大半个中国，什么都在发生：火山在喷，河流在枯
一些不被关心的政治犯和流民
一路在枪口的麋鹿和丹顶鹤
我是穿过枪林弹雨去睡你
我是把无数的黑夜摅进一个黎明去睡你
我是无数个我奔跑成一个我去睡你
当然我也会被一些蝴蝶带入歧途
把一些赞美当成春天
把一个和横店类似的村庄当成故乡
而它们
都是我去睡你必不可少的理由

2.2 “I Crossed Half of China to Lay You” Translation by Xinlu Yan

In fact, to lay you or to get laid by you is the same, nothing but

The force of two bodies banging against each other, nothing but flowers erupting from the force

Nothing but spring virtualized by the flowers making us believe that life has been unfolded again

In half of China, everything is happening: Volcanos erupting, rivers drying up

Some political prisoners and homeless people whom nobody cares about

Elks and red-crowned cranes always being targeted at gunpoint

I have crossed gun forests and bullet showers to lay you

I have squeezed numerous nights into one dawn to lay you

I have run numerous selves into one to lay you

Naturally, I might be sidetracked by butterflies and Regard praises as spring Regard a village that resembles Heng Dian as my hometown

And all these

Are the necessary reasons why I am going lay you

2.3 “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You” Translation by Ming Di

To sleep with you or to be slept, what’s the difference if there’s any?

Two bodies collide – the force, the flower pushed open by the force,

the virtual spring in the flowering – nothing more than this

and this we mistake as life restarting.

In half of China

things are happening: volcanoes

erupting, rivers running dry,

political prisoners and displaced workers abandoned,

elk deer and red-crowned cranes shot.

I cross the hail of bullets to sleep with you.

I press many nights into one morning to sleep with you.

I run across many of me and many of me run into one to sleep with you.

Yet I can be misled by butterflies of course

and mistake praise as spring,

a village like Hengdian as home. But all these,

all of these are absolutely indispensable

reasons that I sleep with you.

2.4 “Crossing Over Half of China to Sleep with You” Translation by Dian Li

Actually, sex is almost the same

whether on top or at the bottom

It's just the force of collision between

two bodies

the blooming of a flower propelled by

this force

the fictitious spring created by

this flower

which we mistake as life restarting

2.5 “Crossing Half of China to Fuck You” Translation by Fiona Sze-Lorrain

Fucking you and being fucked by you are quite the same, no more
than the force of two colliding bodies, a flower coaxed into blossom
No more than a flower, a fictional spring we mistake for a renewed life
Half across China, anything can happen: volcanoes erupt, rivers parch some neglected political
prisoners and refugees
an elaphure and a Manchurian crane at gunpoint
I penetrate a hail of bullets to fuck you
I press countless dark nights into one dawn to fuck you
I, as many, run as one to fuck you
Of course butterflies can lead me astray
and I think of some odes as spring