Translating Gender from Chinese into English: A Case Study of Leaden Wings from Feminist Perspective

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Abstract: Informed by feminist linguistics and feminist translation studies, the present study investigates the particular ways in which British translator Gladys Yang (re-)constructs gender in the English translation of the Chinese novel 沉重的翅膀 [Leaden Wings]. Textual and paratextual analyses show a paradox—feminist discourse and linguistic sexism—resides in the translation. Whilst feminist discourse is evident in both the paratexts, i.e. the preface, afterword and list of characters, and the text, the sexism embedded in the English language, represented in the translation by the use of male generic terms man/men and the female child term girl/girls to refer to adult women, finds its way into the translation. This suggests that, however hard translators try to subvert power structures through translation, while they are embedded in the system they may still be influenced by patriarchal traditions.

Subjects: Literature; Women's Literature

Keywords: translation; gender; Chinese; Leaden Wings; paratextual

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lingzi Meng is a lecturer who teaches English-Chinese translation in School of Foreign Languages, East China Normal University. Her research interests are in corpus-based translation studies, gender and translation studies, and Critical Discourse Analysis. She has authored several papers on gender and translation in top Chinese journals, such as Chinese Translators Journal (“Feminist translation studies or gender and translation studies?”, 2016, 5, pp. 23-31) and Journal of Foreign Languages (“Amplifiers as an index of gender construction in literary translation”, 2015, 12 (6), pp. 73-81), and also co-authored “Gender differences in Chinese-English press conference interpreting” (Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice, 2018, 26:1, 117-134). She is currently working on a project concerning how the works of several important Chinese women writers such as Zhang Ailing, Wang Anyi and Zhang Jie have been translated and introduced in the English-speaking world. The research reported in this paper relates to this project.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

A British expatriate who spent most of her life in China, a key figure in Chinese translation history, Gladys Yang (née Gladys Margaret Tayler, Chinese name 戴乃迭) enjoys great renown in China for her translation into English of a considerable number of Chinese literary works. In the last two decades of her career, she has shown a particular interest in the works written by female Chinese writers and made a substantial effort to introduce these writers into English-speaking world by translating their works into English. This paper makes a case study of her translation of 沉重的翅膀 [Leaden Wings], a prize-winning fiction by leading Chinese female writer Zhang Jie 张洁. It reveals to what extent the translation is feminized although the original is not a feminist work, and discusses the significance of the translator's strategies.

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1. Introduction

Gladys Yang (née Gladys Margaret Tayler, Chinese name 戴乃迭) is a key figure in Chinese translation history who enjoys great renown in China. Yang (1919–1999) was born in Beijing to a British Missionary family, and spent her early childhood in Beijing until she was sent back to the UK at the age of seven to receive an education in English. In the 1930s she became the first undergraduate to read Chinese at Oxford University, where she met her future husband, Yang Xianyi. After marrying, the two returned together to wartime China. When the Japanese surrendered and the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the Yangs joined the newly-established Foreign Languages Press in Beijing and embarked upon a productive period translating Chinese classics and contemporary works into English. Although their translation activity was interrupted during the Cultural Revolution, they resumed work shortly afterwards and devoted themselves to translating Chinese literature and introducing Chinese culture to the English-speaking world until Gladys's final days.

In collaboration the Yangs translated more than a hundred works, including Ming dynasty stories,红楼梦 [A Dream of Red Mansions] (the greatest Chinese classic); four volumes of selected works of Lu Xun (one of China’s best-known 20th-century writers); and many others by major modern and contemporary Chinese writers such as Lao She [老舍], Mao Dun [茅盾], and Cao Yu [曹禺]. Independently, Gladys Yang translated a considerable number of literary texts by other important Chinese writers such as Ye Shengtao [叶圣陶], Wang Meng [王蒙], Shen Congwen [沈从文], and particularly a group of women writers, among whom are Zhang Jie [张洁], Wang Anyi [王安忆], Zhang Kangkang [张抗抗], Zong Pu [宗璞], and Chen Rong [谌容].

In the 1980s, thanks to the “Reform and Opening-up policy” that started in 1979 in the Chinese mainland, foreign ideas and concepts were fervently introduced into the country as restrictions on correspondence with Western countries were relaxed. It was during this period that Yang became aware of, and interested in, the feminist movement that had mushroomed in the English-speaking countries, particularly in Europe, and purposefully began translating the works of a group of Chinese women writers, mentioned above, who were also starting to gain repute in China in the 1980s. These works by Chinese women writers present their concerns about and reflections on women's personal lives in relation to Chinese society and culture. Yang translated a number of Zhang Jie’s fictions, including 爱是不能忘记的 [Love Must Not Be Forgotten], 方舟 [The Ark], 条件尚未成熟 [The Time is Not Yet Ripe], and 沉重的翅膀 [Leaden Wings], which suggests that she was especially interested in Zhang Jie’s works. In these works, Zhang Jie explores Chinese women’s lives, inquiring after their happiness or unhappiness, while questioning the traditional concepts applied to them. Indeed, Yang herself states in her introduction to “Seven Contemporary Chinese Women Writers” (Yang, 1982) that she appreciates Zhang’s, as well as others’, initiative in reflecting upon Chinese women’s life experiences against the backdrop of Chinese patriarchal conventions. However, influenced by ideas from the Western feminist movement, she took a critical approach to their works, arguing that despite socialist society granting women a better status than before, problems concerning women remained largely ignored as compared with other “bigger” social issues, such as socialist modernization; and that this phenomenon was reflected in the Chinese women writer’s works, in which issues of gender and marriage were sometimes overshadowed by other social issues (“Seven Contemporary” 6–7). Although Yang had never publicly claimed herself to be a feminist, her active choice of the Chinese women writers’ works for translation and her critical perspective towards these works suggest a potential ideological shift in her translation.

This paper sets out to examine Yang’s translation of Zhang Jie’s fiction,沉重的翅膀 [Leaden Wings]. It explores the ways in which Yang (re-)constructed gender in her translation, especially those parts where rewriting occurs that challenges the gender ideology represented in the Chinese source text.
Up to now, there have been just a few studies on the translation and they have all concluded that the translation illustrates the translator’s feminist subjectivity (Fu, 2011; Wang, 2014; Zhang & Jiali, 2015). Zhang and Jiali (2015), for instance, examined the translation strategies adopted by the translator in lexical, syntactical and textual levels and found that the translator tends to use words and structures that show feminine features. Focusing on the paratexts and the translation methods, Wang (2014) argued that the translator’s female identity is a key factor that impacts on the features of the translation. In a similar vein, Fu (2011) explored some of the feminine aspects of the translation, the theoretical foundation that informs the linguistic analysis in these studies has been problematized by later development in gender and language studies. The present study hopes to revisit the conclusion from a perspective informed by recent work on linguistic sexism.

In the following, the novel is introduced first, followed by a discussion of the theoretical grounding upon which the study is based. The textual analysis is then carried out, and the paper concludes with a summary and critical discussion of the findings.

2. 沉重的翅膀 [Leaden Wings]
The novel was originally written in Mandarin Chinese and published in 1981 by the People’s Literature Publishing House in Beijing. Four years later in 1985, it was awarded the Mao Dun National Prize for Fiction. Widely acknowledged as one of the most successful writers in contemporary China, Zhang Jie (1937) has won a number of prizes for her literary works, which focus on critical social issues in contemporary China, particularly issues such as Chinese women’s lives and their social status. She has also gained attention from overseas, being one of the figures included in an English biography of Chinese writers (Dillard 95–100) and the research subject of important sinologists and scholars of Chinese literature (Kinkley 2000, 250).

The novel is a seminal example of the “reform literature” dominant in the early 1980s in the Chinese mainland, which takes the economic reform of China’s heavy industry as the central theme. It does not have a principle plot, but a panorama of small plots. These plots center upon the conflicts between diehard party hacks and enlightened reformers in the “Ministry of Heavy Industry” and the “Morning Light Auto Works” where the reformers try to implement their project. On the reform side are two vice ministers and their active foreman in the factory. Ranged against the reformers are the officials concerned only with clinging to power, and the ones who believe that any other way of running industry except putting politics in command are revisionists. In addition to the struggle between these officials, the novel depicts the inadequacy of the Chinese marriage system in the 1980s: out of six married couples only one is happy. For example, Vice-minister Zheng has no love for his wife who has been unfaithful to him, yet in public he plays the role of devoted husband for the sake of his political image.

Gladys Yang’s translation of the novel was published in 1987 by the London-based Virago Press, an avowed feminist institution actively engaged in publishing literary works by female writers. Established in 1973 in the heyday of the second wave women’s movement by Carmen Callil (a feminist who sought to give a voice to many excellent yet neglected women writers), the press introduces its aims on its official website as follows:

- to put women center stage; to explore the untold stories of their lives and histories; to break the silence around many women’s experiences; to publish breathtaking new fiction alongside a rich list of rediscovered classics; and above all to champion women’s talent.

There are two main reasons underlying the choice of 沉重的翅膀 as the data for this study. Firstly, the Chinese author and the translator are well-known and well-received both domestically and
internationally, and are considered the leading Chinese female writer/translator respectively. Given that the author and the translator were prominent figures of their time, and their names still resonate, their works can be said to represent the mainstream, or prevalent, values of a particular time and culture, and the aesthetic criteria of the general public within that time and place. It should be noted that in spite of their strong reputation in China, both Zhang and Yang are largely ignored by the English-speaking academic world, particularly in the field of translation studies. Second, and more importantly, the publishing house that produced the English translation of the Chinese novel is one of the most widely acknowledged feminist institutions in the UK—where gender struggles may take different forms from those of China—while the Chinese publisher for the source text (hereafter ST) was not a gender-ideology-motivated press; all of which suggests that there could be some ideological shifts produced in the translation. Although 沉重的翅膀 is not a feminist novel from any standard, Zhang Jie is the only contemporary woman writer from the Chinese mainland whose works have been published by a western feminist institution.

3. Gender, language and translation
Gender and language studies get momentum during the second wave feminism when feminist ideas were applied to the analysis and critique of the everyday language. Based on the view that language reflects, or even constructs reality, feminists working within the field of linguistics were interested in the role language plays in reflecting, creating and sustaining male dominance and social gender inequality in the hopes of demystifying language and ultimately bringing about social changes. One particular concern of the feminist linguists is the issue of sexist language, which has been debated and studied by scholars since the 1960s (cf. Hellinger and Bußmann, 2001).

According to Mills, two types of sexism can be distinguished, the “overt sexism” and the “indirect sexism” (Language and Sexism 10–12). Overt sexism refers to the usage that language materializes discriminatory opinions towards women, thus signaling that women are inferior to men. This type of linguistic sexism can usually be identified through linguistic markers such as the generic pronouns (e.g., he), generic nouns (e.g., chairman), word order (e.g., he and she), etc. Indirect sexism, on the other hand, cannot be pinned down on certain linguistic features; rather, it is sets of stereotypical beliefs about women that are embedded in the social system and become linguistic resources (Language and Sexism 124). Indirect sexism, rather than a global concept, is particular to social contexts and words only become meaningful in local communication, i.e. how gender is constructed in a specific interaction or text. One example given by Mills is the word “mum” (Language and Sexism 149). Although not sexist in itself, the word often appears in contexts when conflict over responsibility occurs, which suggests the insidious fashion sexism operates at the level of discourse. While feminist campaigns on language reform have significantly impacted on sexist language use of the overt form in the west, the indirect form of sexism is the focus of many more recent studies that take a discursive perspective (e.g., Bucholtz 1999, Sunderland 2004, Lazar 2005, Castro 2013b, Ergün 2013). Indeed, as suggested by Mills (Language and Sexism 1–3) and Castro (“Talking” 36–37), a thorough analysis of sexism in language, needs to go beyond the level of textual linguistic forms to the level of discourse. Discourse here means something productive and constitutive which “demarcate the boundaries within which we can negotiate what it means to be gendered” (Discourse 14).

Within translation studies, feminist critiques of sexist language have also made serious impact. It was second wave feminist literary practice—which questioned and challenged linguistic sexism, particularly in the specific diglossic cultural context of Canadian Quebec—that brought about feminist translation in the late 1970s, which was developed as a method of translating the French experimental works into English (“Translation and Gender” 17ff). In practice, the feminist approach to translation “has appropriated and adapted many of the techniques and theories that underlie the writing it translates” (“Feminist Translation” 74). These include the strategies of “supplementing”, “prefacing and footnoting” and “hijacking” (“Feminist Translation” 72–79) to feminize the translation, allowing translators to make themselves visible and challenge the writers they translate. One example given by von Flotow (“Feminist Translation” 78–79) is Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood’s
translation of *Lettres d’une autre* [Letters of Another] by Lise Gauvin. The example is used to illustrate feminist translators’ heavy interference with the ST. The translator’s strategies include, in addition to others, avoiding using male generic terms, such as using *men* to refer to both men and women, and putting the female element first in expressions like “women and men”, “her or his”.

More recently, a group of scholars proposes an interdisciplinary dialogue between feminist linguistic studies and gender and translation studies (Castro 2013a, 2013b, Ergün 2013, Elmiger 2013, Santaemilia 2013, Godayol 2013). These studies provide answers to questions such as how the constraints that translation involves impact on the particular features of gender representation in a specific translated text, how whether the awareness of linguistic sexism informs translators’ decisions in translating gendered expressions, and whether scholars engaged in gender and translation studies make use of linguistic studies to interpret feminist translation practices.

Nevertheless, research in these areas has been mostly focused on the Indo-European languages, which has limited the scope of the discussion to European contexts. Some of the findings and arguments cannot be fully applied to the Chinese context, particularly because Chinese is not a gender-sensitive language in the same sense as such European languages as French or German. Since it does not specify gender in almost all lexical items, when gender asymmetry is featured in Chinese, it is most often “indirect sexism”, such as expressed in the form of idiomatic phrases embedding male-dominant social attitudes. For example, the expression “从一而终” (cóng yī ér zhōng) literally means “follow one until finish”, but is an implicit social sanction targeted specifically at women that they must be devoted to one husband until they die. Therefore, the challenge faced by gender-conscious translators in doing Chinese-English translation lies in both decoding gender messages in Chinese, as well as guarding against sexist linguistic habits in English which they may have subliminally registered. This paper thus reveals whether and to what extent the translator of a Chinese novel shows her awareness of the interplay between language and gender across the linguistic and cultural boundaries between Chinese and English.

Some words regarding the methodology for the analysis of the (re)construction of gender in the translation are in order here. Paratextual features are examined first to see how the translator reveals her gender consciousness. Genette defines the paratexts of a literary work as the productions that “surround” and “extend” the text proper (1); but they are also what constitute the “translator’s voice” (Hermans 1996, 27), in that they are an important site where the identity of a translator can be presented and their presence in the text is more visible. Genette categorizes paratextual elements into two types: peritexts and epitexts. Peritexts refer to the paratextual elements that are within the same volume as the text, e.g., prefaces, notes and afterwords; epitexts, on the other hand, refer to the “distanced elements […] located outside the book” (5), e.g., magazine reviews, interviews with an author. The current study exclusively investigates the peritextual elements in the printed volume of the translation while disregarding epitexts which are hardly accessible because of temporal distance (the translation was released 29 years ago in 1987).

After the paratextual analysis, an in-depth linguistic analysis of the text proper is carried out to identify features of the translator’s gendered intervention. Accordingly, attention is paid to the names of the characters and the translation of gendered discourses. The text is also interrogated for instances of linguistic sexism, i.e. whether the translator, subconsciously or unconsciously, let patriarchally-defined linguistic forms slip into the translation. Quantitative analysis is conducted with the assistance of the software ParaConc (Barlow, 2003), a multilingual concordancer. As the first step, the ST and the TT are aligned at sentence level by using the alignment function of ParaConc. Then concordances containing the potential sexist linguistic forms, *man* (*men*) and *girl* (*girls*) which will be discussed in Section 4.2.3, are run using the searching function of the software. The concordances are read closely to see whether these forms carry sexist implications.
4. (Re)constructing gender via language

4.1. Paratextual features

According to Genette, the authorial preface—in this case, the translator’s preface—has the function of ensuring that “the text is read properly” (197–198). As such, the objectives of the preface are to hold the reader’s interest and guide them by explaining “why” and “how” they should read the text. To achieve these objectives, authors’ common practices include demonstrating the importance of the work, providing contextual information (e.g., mentioning other related works or situating the prefaced work within a whole in progress), offering an interpretation of the meaning of the text, and so on (Genette 1997, 198–229). In Leaden Wings, Gladys Yang writes a five-page-long translator’s preface containing extensive information and critical commentary on the author of the ST, Zhang Jie, such as her family background, her career as a professional writer, and her reputation in China. Yang also outlines the plot, socio-historical setting, theme and main ideas of the work, as well as its social value and reception in China.

Overall, the translator’s preface of Leaden Wings suggests Yang’s maneuver of potential readers’ perception of the thematic matter of the novel, amounting to lending a feminized tone to the novel. First, although she admits that the central theme of the novel is “the modernization of Chinese industry” (Translator’s Preface ix), and not the Chinese marriage system, she parallels the former with the latter and draws readers’ attention to it in the preface. She argues that “the inadequacy of the present marriage system is highlighted, this time mainly from the viewpoint of men” (Translator’s Preface x), and that

[In accounts like these Zhang Jie makes clear her belief that men and women must together overthrow the outdated aspects of traditional moral values and establish genuine socialist ethics if they are to find fulfillment and happiness in their personal relations’ (xi).]

In so doing she brings the Chinese marriage system, which might otherwise be overlooked, to the fore while framing readers’ interpretation of the text.

In addition, Yang gives considerable room to introducing the author’s other works that tackle the theme of gender power relations in marriage, providing contextual information in order to foreground the Chinese marriage system as a recurring theme in Zhang Jie’s oeuvre. Specifically, Yang discusses the following three works by Zhang: 爱是不能忘记的 [Love Must Not Be Forgotten], her first favorably-commented collection; 方舟 [The Ark], which is acclaimed as a feminist novella; and 条件尚未成熟 [The Time is Not Yet Ripe], which deals with a similar theme as Leaden Wings. As regards 爱是不能忘记的 [Love Must Not Be Forgotten], for example, Yang provides a brief synopsis, and interpretation of the work—a novel that describes marriage as what determines one’s (especially women’s) quality of life—explaining that “Chinese moral values today are a mixture of socialist ethics and traditional conventions. And nowhere is the influence of tradition stronger than in the field of marriage” (ix). Thus, Yang constructs the author as a writer who is particularly concerned with Chinese women’s marriage and life, but, at the same time, she also incorporates her own understanding of the issue, making her own voice explicit.

A text’s afterword is another paratextual element, labeled “postface” in Genette’s terminology, which serves as “curative, or corrective” (Genette 239) information to the preface: “placed at the end of a book and addressed to a reader who is no longer potential but actual, the postface certainly makes more logical and more relevant reading for that reader” (Genette 238). In the case of Leaden Wings, the afterword in the TT continues to feminize the novel. The afterword was written by Delia Davin, a close friend and a colleague of Yang. At the time she wrote it, Davin was a researcher at the Centre for Women’s Studies at the University of York, whose continued publications and academic activities mainly centered on issues concerning China and gender issues, both of which suggest that the afterword is written from the perspective of women’s studies. Not surprisingly, then, the afterword concentrates exclusively on the discussion of the female characters of the novel and the
marriage system in China. Although the female characters take only subordinate positions and are not significantly involved in the main plot, Davin pays particular attention to their presence, as can be seen in her statement, “[a]s Zhang is seen as a strong and assertive woman writer it is natural that we should look at her women characters with special interest” (Afterwords 175). She argues that the female characters in the novel are “shock[ing] or disappoint[ing] rather than inspir[ing]” (175) because Zhang “appears to see a ‘good’ relationship with a man as the best guarantee of happiness for a woman”, although she “repeatedly attacks the conventions of marriage as it exists now in China” (179). Davin explicitly argues that “Zhang Jie’s views on women’s oppression are clearly different from those of western feminists” (180). To conclude, the afterword contributes to framing the translation in a way that makes it more feminism-oriented.

The list of characters appearing after the colophon page is another piece of evidence that proves Yang intentionally gives more voice to the female characters. To begin with, the list was not featured at all in the ST, which means this page was added in the process of translation. The list introduces thirty-two major characters, which are the representatives of the competitive parties involved in the economic reform in China. They include the leaders of the department of heavy industry and the factory attached to the department, several young workers from the factory, as well as the wives and female friends of the department leaders. Although it is not uncommon practice to include a list of characters in a book (as it helps readers preview and understand the key players of the plot), in the case of Leaden Wings, the list also features the translator’s evaluations of some of the most important characters. The information for each character in the list not only explains their identity, but also reveals his/her personality and life experiences, all of which naturally deliver the translator’s value judgment. For example, in the list, Grace is introduced as “Li Ting, a malicious section chief whose husband is an invalid”, where the translator’s evaluation and attitude are presented through the adjective “malicious” and the attributive clause, i.e. “whose husband is an invalid”. While the negative evaluation amounts to explicit influence on readers’ judgments of Grace, the attributive clause may evoke consideration as to whether there is a causal connection between Grace’s marital life and her personality, which may then guide readers’ reflections upon the relationship between women’s family life and their social life. Another example is Joy, who is “a widow who works in the ministry”. Joy, who suffers insults and gossip as a single mother, never enjoys a joyous moment in her marriage. As her source of sorrow, Commissioner Fang is introduced as “… Loves Joy but won’t leave his wife”. Joy suffers because Commissioner Fang can never risk the scandal which would ensue if he divorced the woman who betrayed him. The translator’s strategy of highlighting the marital status of these women characters foregrounds a minor theme of the novel which may otherwise be overlooked, that is, when marriage, or even love, impacts upon the two interlock in it, it is usually the female party that is affected negatively. Indeed, in her other works the author Zhang Jie, herself a divorcee who suffered insults and gossip about her private life, repeatedly attacks the conventions of marriage as it was in the Chinese mainland in the 1970s and 80s which almost always reduce women to its victims.

Last but not least, the list of characters is not arranged in the common alphabetic order, but in order of character appearance, which means the leading female characters appear higher on the list. Indeed, five out of six major female characters appear in the first half of the list of thirty-two characters, and the two most important appear at the top and third position on the list. In this way, the female characters do not get overshadowed by the male characters, even when they are not the leading figures in the story and the number of female characters is disproportionate to that of the male characters. All together, these shifts make the female characters more visible, and give them more weight than they appear to have in the ST.

4.2. Textual features

4.2.1. Naming of the characters
It is custom in China that a person’s given name incarnates a quality that the parents wish their child to grow up to possess. For instance, the name “武” (wǔ), which means martial or valiant, is
frequently used in boys’ names as it represents the quality of being courageous and strong. In practice, however, the most common (if not the only) way of translating Chinese names into English is to transcribe the names into Romanized letters (using formerly the Wade-Giles system, or more recently, the Pinyin system of Romanization); e.g., “武” is transcribed as Wu. The disadvantage of this way of practice is apparent: while the phonetic effect is achieved, the connotative meaning of the given name is completely missing.

In the English translation of Leaden Wings, most of the characters’ names are transcribed phonetically into Romanized letters based on the Chinese Pinyin system; however, the major female characters are given English names based on the connotative meaning of their Chinese names, which distinguishes them from other characters. The English names for the female characters are a combination of Romanization and the translator’s interpretation of their Chinese names. This particular strategy is explained in the translator’s preface, where Yang says, “In general these are written according to the Chinese phonetic alphabet [...] I have also given some of the main women characters English names” (xii). When a major female character appears for the first time in the story, a Pinyin transcription of her Chinese name is given, but this is followed immediately by the English name, braced inside two dashes, which interprets the meaning of their Chinese given names. The character is referred to by the English name thereafter. For example, for 叶知秋, “Ye Zhiqiu—Autumn—”, is used, where “Autumn” is the name given by the translator and used to refer to that character throughout the whole story. “Autumn” is chosen for this character because “秋”, the third character appearing in the Chinese name, means “autumn”. By so doing, firstly, the five female characters appear more familiar to English-speaking readers, and are given more prominence compared with both the ST and the other characters in the novel whose names are only transcribed into Romanized letters. Secondly, this familiarity and prominence is strengthened by the positive commendatory connotations of the names. Even negatively presented female characters are given names with positive or neutral prosody, which naming strategy suggests the translator’s confidence in women’s potentials. For example, “何婷” (Li Ting—Grace—), the selfish female official in Zheng’s ministry, is given “Grace” as her English name. Burdened with an incontinent invalid husband on whom she cannot rely, she does not turn out to be desperate; rather, she becomes tough and independent, believing in her own ability and that of her sex. While being “selfish” is not something a woman asks for, being “grace” is something she is always able to.

4.2.2. Translation of gendered discourses
Another kind of textual shift that gives clues to Yang’s intervention from the perspective of gender is her translation of gendered discourses7 in the novel. A gendered discourse is one which “gender is already part of” (Sunderland 2004, 20). For example, a claim such as “men should never bend their knees in whatever situation” can be regarded as a gendered discourse since it positions men in a particular way, exerting a social sanction upon men. A gendered discourse in this study is thus defined as language used in the ST that explicitly or implicitly positions female or male characters; as well as author’s comments on issues related to gender.

Through manual analysis of the ST, a total of sixty-six sentences (or groups of sentences) that most explicitly discuss or mention gender issues were retrieved, and then compared with the TT to identify any translation shifts. The analysis reveals that Yang tends to make a conscious effort to ward off possible sexism, bias against women, and denigration targeted particularly at women. Below is one example that illustrates Yang’s stance towards the female characters depicted in the novel and women in general.

Example 1
Chinese ST and back translation (word for word translation, the same strategy for the examples hereafter)
女人嘛，总是有些让人觉得短浅的地方，也许
Women, always have some let people feel narrow shallow place, maybe
just this narrow shallow make them appear lovable?

English TT
All women had their foibles: maybe that was their attraction.

Example 1 is an excerpt from the inner monologue of Wang Fangliang, a cynical yet cheery male vice-minister. In the ST, he is described as a man with a traditional patriarchal view towards women. The key word here is “短浅” [narrow and shallow], which carries a negative evaluation towards the persons modified. The Chinese ST in this example denounces women in general as likely to be unwilling to accept new ideas or different opinions and showing no serious or careful thought. However, since the point is made from a male's perspective, it suggests that in (some, if not all) Chinese men's opinion it is precisely for such disadvantages that women should be loved (by men); perhaps because women appearing secondary to men in intelligence reveals their supposed incompetence, and thus their vulnerability. Yet, Yang's translation, the word foibles, departs from the original meaning expressed in the ST, as its referential meaning suggests that it is not specific to a particular gender. The Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary defines foible as “a habit or characteristic that someone has which is considered rather strange, foolish, or bad but which is also considered unimportant” (emphasis added). Thus, the negative judgment oriented exclusively towards women in the ST is shifted in the TT where the judgment is not limited to a specific gender.

Example 2
Chinese ST and back translation
唉, 嫁男人 可真 有点 象 押宝!
Alas, marry man really a little like gambling!

English TT
But marriage is a gamble.

Example 2 is similar to Example 1, with Yang turning a judgment targeted at women into one applicable to both sexes. It concerns the inner thoughts of Grace and is a case of the author's opinion expressed through the mind of the character—specifically regarding the contingency of women's fate upon their marital relationship with men. As Davin (Afterwords 179) suggests, Zhang Jie saw a good relationship with a man as the guarantee of happiness for a woman. However, Zhang Jie's view of marriage, which is likely to be representative of most Chinese women of the time, is not applicable to a different time and place, i.e. to western feminists. The conventional idea that a woman's happiness relies considerably on a man she marries and that her fate is decided once she is married is implied in the ST: “marrying a man is like gambling for a woman”. However, Yang's disagreement with this traditional idea about marriage is expressed in her translation, where she makes the statement more general. The translation implies that marriage is a gamble for all, so the happiness of both parties is contingent upon the other, rather than one (a man) overwhelmingly and exclusively exerting power over the other (a woman). The change in one lexical item (from “嫁男人” [marry man] to marriage) has a strong impact upon the way in which this sentence can be interpreted, in that it challenges the traditional view expressed in the ST on the familial roles and functions of men and women in China.
4.2.3. Sexist linguistic forms
In this section, two specific types of sexist linguistic forms are explored: the generic noun man when it is used to refer to both women and men, a case of overt sexism; and the feminine noun girl when it is used to refer to an adult woman, a case of indirect sexism.

4.3. Masculine generic form
One of the recurring examples of sexist usage of the English language cited by feminists and analysts from gender and language studies is the use of generic nouns. The nouns man/men are classed as generic when they are used to refer to both men and women. Sentences using the male generics result in the invisibility of women and have the additional effect of affirming the marked-ness—thus, otherness—of female reference (Hellinger and Bußmann, 2001-03).

Unlike English, Chinese does not feature generic nouns comparable to the English nouns man and men. The Chinese equivalents of man and men are “男人” [man] and “男人(们)” [men] which have only male referents. To refer to people/human in general, the options in Chinese include 1) “人” [individual/person/human being]; 2) “人类” [human(s)/human being(s)]; 3) “人们” [human beings/people]; and 4) “人民” [people]. When these four Chinese words are used with no specific gender reference, the sexist use of the English man/men as equivalent is likely to appear in translation. In this case, using the masculine form reveals a translators’ subconscious or unconscious sexism, and such translation strategy amounts to representing and sustaining patriarchal power in the target language culture.

In order to identify how these Chinese words, “人”, “人类”, etc., are translated into English in Leaden Wings, their occurrences in the ST together with their corresponding translations are examined. The analysis shows that they are consistently translated as man or men in the English TT to refer to human beings in general or mixed-sex groups of people. Examples 3 and 4 below illustrate this point.

Example 3
Chinese ST and back translation
在党校 学习的 时候 学过, 人 是 从 猴子 变来的,
At Party school study when have learned, humans be from monkeys change,
这 说明 外国人 比 中国人 离 猴子 近 得多, 就
this illustrates Foreigners than Chinese away monkeys closer much, for
这 一点 来说, 照理 中国人 也 是 比 外国人
this one point to say, according to theory Chinese just be than foreigners
先进的, 凭什么 竞争不过 老 毛子?
advanced, why cannot beat old hairy?

English TT
In the Party school he had learned that men had evolved from apes. Obviously foreigners were closer to apes, and the Chinese were more advanced.

Example 4
Chinese ST and back translation
这样 优秀的, 中国 不是 太多, 而是 太少.
Such excellent person, China not be too many, rather be too few.
English TT

China had too few men of his calibre.

In Example 3, the Chinese word “人” in the ST is used to refer to human beings in general, while it is translated into the gender-specified term “men” in the English TT. The Chinese ST in Example 4 states that China needs more “people” who are as capable as the male officials working in the heavy industry ministry, yet the people in this context are not necessarily male in gender. The translator’s practice of adopting the male generic men as an equivalent in the TT indicates her unconscious or subconscious sexism.

Although a relatively small number of occurrences of the generic use of man/men in the translation is found—twelve out of 791 sentences which contain “人”，“人们” or “人类”—their existence represents a sexist discourse that jeopardizes the feminist efforts the mediator has made. While the translator attempts to draw on feminist perspectives and make the female characters more visible, she is, nevertheless, still embedded in a deep-rooted patriarchal system that exerts an insidious effect upon her translation performance.

5. The adoption of girl

In addition to the generic nouns man and men, another indirect sexist linguistic form detected in the translation is the use of girl to refer to an adult woman. Research has found that in English the likelihood that adult females will be referred to by the term girl is much higher than that of the usage of the term boy to refer to adult males (Romaine 1999, 134–36). Sigley and Holmes, who use the Wellington Corpus of Written New Zealand English (WWC), also found that girl is three times more likely than boy to refer to an adult. They explain that when a woman is referred to as girl, she is constructed as “an object of specifically male desire” (147, emphasis original), and the term connotes features traditionally attractive to men such as “immaturity, innocence, youthful appearance, subordinate status, and financial or emotional dependence or vulnerability” (149). Indeed, as Stokoe (1998) suggests, using girl to refer to an adult woman “functions to downgrade the status of the person” and that the usage has been regarded politically incorrect in the UK (222). She also points out that anyone who needs to manage “a non-sexist identity” in public discourse is likely to opt against such usage (Stokoe, 1998).

The English word girl is equivalent to “女孩” in Chinese, which means, literally, a female child. To refer to adult women, the Chinese words “女人” or “女性”, and sometimes “妇女”, are used. This means that if the translator adopts girl as equivalent in the TT to “女人”，“女性” or “妇女” in the ST, it shows the translator’s conservative gender view, be it conscious, unconscious or subconscious.

The words girl(s) occur forty-three times in Leaden Wings. Among them, twenty-five—more than half of the total instances—are used to refer to adult woman/women, as illustrated in the following example.

Example 5

Chinese ST and back translation

她上了年纪，不能再象年轻的妇女那样弄得
She gets on in years, cannot like young women that way make
满头小卷。
all around on head tight curls.

English TT

At her age it wouldn’t do to wear her hair in tight curls like a girl.
Example 6
Chinese ST and back translation
年轻的 时候， 他人 很 漂亮， 也 很 有风度， 和 他
Young age, he very handsome, also very charming, with him
一起 在街上 走的时候， 是 足以 使 许多 女人
Together in the street walking, can fairly make many women
羡慕 得 眼红的。
envy red to eyes.

English TT
He had been such a handsome, dashing young man that many girls had envied her when they went out together.

In example 5, she refers to the character Bamboo (夏竹筠), who is approaching the age of retirement in the story. Against her as a frame of reference, “年轻的妇女” in the ST refers to women ranging from twenty-five to around thirty years old in Chinese society, i.e. far beyond the age range that can be covered by the female term for child. In example 6, the word “女人” in the ST also denotes grown-up women. In both examples, the words girl and girls in the sentences imply features and characteristics traditionally regarded as feminine, either caring for appearance (i.e. wearing hair in tight curls, since Chinese are seldom born with curly hair and regard curly hair as an attractive feature) or being sexually emotional (i.e. being jealous of other women over a handsome man). The asymmetry in gender construction revealed by the choice of the word girl is further strengthened by the collocation of the lexical item with the adult male reference man rather than with boy, as shown in the examples below.

Example 7
Chinese ST and back translation
从 外面 又 进来 一男 一 女 两个 青年。
From outside more enter a man a woman two young people.

English TT
A young man and a girl came in.

Example 8
Chinese ST and back translation
那话里， 有着 一种 女性 只有 对 属于
In that word, there is a kind of women only towards belong to
自己的 男性 才有的， 可爱的， 甜蜜的 专横。
their own men have, lovable, sweet peremptoriness.

English TT
A girl would only say such a thing to a man she considered her own.

Both examples involve a female and a male, similar in age. Example 4 is about a couple preparing for their wedding; the “girl” in example 5 is portrayed in the story as the man’s savior from his unhappy life. In the translation, however, they are referred to with words denoting different age groups, a girl vs. a man. Such asymmetrical cross-classification of male and female
by age contributes to consolidating the image of women as immature, vulnerable and in need of the protection of a grown-up man.

6. Conclusion
Previous studies on the translator Gladys Yang claim that the translation *Leaden Wings* showcases her feminist ideas and reveals her feminist identity (Zhong and Wang, Wang, Fu). The present study has shown that the translation is indeed feminized to a considerable extent; however, informed by feminist linguistic studies on sexism, it also questions the claim. This study has found features in the translation that reveal feminist ideas. To begin with, the translator uses several paratextual means, such as preface, afterword, and the list of characters, to highlight the presence of female characters and issues surrounding marriage in China, despite the fact that female characters are only secondary roles in the novel and marriage issues are not the major theme. Meanwhile, she also rewrites the parts that carry patriarchal bias against women and render them more palatable. However, at the same time, the translation also includes linguistic sexism, i.e. the use of the masculine generic nouns *man* and *men*, and the word *girl* to refer to grown-up women, which constitutes a discourse opposite to feminism. Although the translator attempts to draw on feminist perspectives, she is still embedded in a patriarchally-defined linguistic system that limits her translation performance in an insidious fashion. While the previous studies noticed the feminist side of the translation, they have lost sight of the opposite discourse operating in it.

Two factors are relevant in interpreting the curious paradox in the translation. The first is the role played by the patron for publishing the translation, Virago Press. As mentioned previously, Virago is extensively involved in publishing literary works by women. Although the ST was not regarded a feminist work in the source culture, the participation of Virago Press in the production of the translation changes its status in the target culture. As Cochrane (2013) points out, Virago was not the only feminist publishing house in the 1970s and 1980s in the UK. There were other women’s publishing houses like The Women’s Press, and Spare Rib. Like all these printing houses in the era, Virago had “a strong interest in promoting the work of women who might otherwise be ignored; those marginalized by race, class, sexuality and disability, as well as sex” (Cochrane para. 3). With this philosophy, Virago carried out several attempts to extend and highlight the feminist politics implied in *Leaden Wings*, specifically through the addition of afterword and list of characters in Yang’s translation. It is also worth pointing out that Virago had a “complex relationship with the women’s movement and with the academic wing of feminist politics—university-based women’s studies programs” (Murray 1999, 51), which explains Davin’s contribution of the afterword.

The other factor is the effect of the translator’s own life experience. For most time over the half century (from 1940 to 1999) when Yang lived in China, she was in relative isolation from the outside world, particularly in Mao’s era (from the 1950s to late 1970s), which can explain her language style. According to Davin, it was only until the 1980s when Yang came into contact with western feminism and “became interested in the women’s movement that had developed in the west in the years when she was cut off from the world” (Gladys Yang para. 15). Indeed, according to Yang’s sister Hilder Brown, Yang spent only 14 years in the UK throughout her entire life (Yang Xian Yi 2003, 139), and maintained relation with her mother land through sporadic correspondences after she moved to China. Meanwhile, almost all important western ideas were not allowed to spread in the Chinese mainland before the 1980s. Therefore, it is only natural that she lacks of knowledge of relevant feminist linguistic studies developed in the West when she was translating the novel. Her old-fashioned language style is likely to remain the same as it was when she left the UK in late 1930s when feminist linguistics has yet to come into existence.

The study suggests the importance of dialogue between gender and translation studies and feminist linguistics, particularly in helping translators make critical reflection upon their linguistic strategies. As demonstrated in previous sections, the strategies adopted in Yang’s translation are comparable to the common feminist translation strategies, namely, preface, heavy rewriting and
afterword, such as in Lotbinière-Harwood’s. However, clear difference exists between her concept of translating for women and feminist translation, which is revealed by the sexist language forms in her translation. As recently as in the second decade of the 21st century, scholars have still noticed “the enormous gap between the theory and practice of translation” (“Introduction” 53), and a “missing link” (“Talking”) between feminist approaches to translation and linguistics. A critical view of language and translation on the part of translators thus appears to be all the more urgent. It is particularly so as we recognize that language, the tool to construct social reality, has become the weapon for translators who wish to change the status quo for women.

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Notes
1. In this paper, the Romanization of the Chinese names follows the order of the original, i.e. surname before given name, while the name of Gladys Yang follows the order of the English names.
2. A sociopolitical movement that took place in the Chinese mainland from 1966 until 1976. It was led by Chairman Mao Zedong to preserve Communist ideology by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from the society. The movement paralyzed China politically and brought trauma to a generation.
3. Named after the renowned Chinese writer Mr. Mao Dun, the prize was created in 1981 to honor the most excellent Chinese novels every four years and remains the most prestigious award for literature in the Chinese mainland today.
4. A term from the field of Chinese literature that refers to a literary phenomenon influenced by the Chinese economic reform that started in the late 1970s in the Chinese mainland. The aim of the reform was to establish a socialist market economy to replace the centrally planned economy. In this context, a group of literary works emerged in which the writers highlighted the disadvantages of the old economic system and the necessity of reform. One representative of the kind is沉重的翅膀.
5. http://www.virago.co.uk/about/ [last accessed Nov. 2019].
6. The other one is a short story collection titled As Long as Nothing Happens, Nothing Will, translated by Gladys Yang, Deborah J. Leonard, and Zhang Andong, and published by Virago in 1988. The five stories in the collection touch upon the issues of standard of living, health care, treatment of intellectuals, corruption and women’s chastity, in short, major social problems of the Chinese mainland in the 1980s.
7. Discourse here refers to stretches of text, thus differs in meaning from the concept of discourse discussed in Section 3.
8. http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english-cobuild-learners/foible [last accessed in 25 February 2018].

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