

Different Explicitness in Translations of Korean Feminist Literature: A Comparative Analysis of *Kim Ji-young and Mother*

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Article information	Abstract
<p>Article history: Received: 2 Sep 2024 Last revised: 24 Mar 2026 Accepted: 3 Apr 2026 Available online: 9 Apr 2026</p> <p>Keywords: Korean literature Feminist translation Paratext Explicitness Ideology</p>	<p><i>This study examines the English and Thai translations of two Korean literary works, Kim Ji-young, Born 1982 and Please Look After Mother. Using a feminist translation approach, the study found that the four versions employ most of the word choices, sentence modifications, explanations, and footnotes as feminist textualisation, but the translators for each of these novels do not fully adopt this feminist stance. Both the English and Thai translators of Mother portray women as enduringly difficult due to the presence of phallocentrism in their stories. Unlike Kim Ji-young, the Thai translator of Mother employed a more elaborate characterisation to elicit empathy from the reader by depicting the female main character's great suffering. However, the Thai translators of Kim Ji-young used more footnotes to help readers understand the original's sociocultural contexts. Some paratextual features, particularly in the Thai translations of Kim Ji-young appear to reflect the original intention of the writers, potentially reinforcing Korean perceptions of both feminist books. The paper also contends that specific translation procedures are indicative of the translators' supportive ideological stance on the feminist movement, albeit at varying degrees of explicitness in the English and Thai translations.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, has experienced a substantial global expansion. Its growth and market penetration underscore the importance of business aptitude and commercial opportunity (Jun, 2017), including films, dramas, music, cuisine, and cosmetics. As part of *Hallyu*, Korean literature has increasingly gained significant international recognition, particularly shown in how Han Kang, an apt feminist writer, became the first Korean to win the Nobel Prize. In particular, feminist literature, at its core, provides nuanced insights into Korean gender politics, social inequality, and everyday resistance.

The literary works *82년생 김지영* by Cho Nam-joo and *엄마를 부탁해* by Shin Kyung-sook are two of many notable Korean literary pieces that offer insight into the lives of Korean women.

In fact, *82년생 김지영* has become a symbol of the women's rights movement in South Korea. After Irene, a singer from the K-pop girl group Red Velvet, revealed that she had read this book, it sparked a wave of the #MeToo movement, leading to both positive reception and backlash from male groups (Lim, 2022). The novel re-emerged as a bestseller in 2019 after surpassing one million copies sold in 2018 (Choi, 2019). Even members of the Korean National Assembly recognised its societal relevance, with some purchasing it as a gift for President Moon Jae-in and fellow parliamentarians (Song, 2017). This growing interest led SBS, a major South Korean television station, to produce a documentary that explores the real-life experiences of any woman named Ji-young, born in the same year as the novel's protagonist (Kim, 2017).

In the same vein, Shin Kyung-sook, a novelist with fervent support for women's rights, wrote *엄마를 부탁해* to depict women in Korean society as "mother" and "wife," which illustrates the status of Korean women in various roles. In 2009, this work achieved a significant milestone by selling more than one million copies. In 2016, Kyobo Book Centre, the largest bookstore in South Korea, recognised it as the book with the highest cumulative sales over the past ten years since its publication in 2006, after it had sold over two million copies by 2012 (Jung, 2016), with at least 30 languages worldwide having translated this literary work. Such widespread dissemination allows global readers to understand women's perspectives, attitudes, and subjugated real-life experiences as part of the normative Korean social discourse.

Scholars hail both literary works as feminist literature because they expose the narratives of Korean women, who still do not enjoy equality with men. Despite significant technological and industrial advancements, many scholars believe that Korean society continues to highly value male dominance. According to Chai (1997) and Moon et al. (2023), Korean women today still lack equal opportunities in the workforce, primarily serving as homemakers and expected to heed the opinions of men (fathers, husbands, sons, brothers, or even younger brothers). The depiction of women's hardships in the above novels effectively communicates such current conditions. The novelists intentionally pursue justice and strive to represent the genuine portrayal of women who continue to endure oppression.

It is intriguing to consider whether the translated versions of the two Korean literary works, as they are intended, would retain the reflections of injustice faced by women. This holds true whether the translations are into English, where Western societies are generally considered relatively liberal and mostly grant women equal rights with men, or into Thai, which, although another Asian society, differs regionally in terms of core culture. The purpose of this study is to compare the Thai and English translations of the two literary works, examining how they portray the image of Korean women through literature. This qualitative research analyses both the translated texts, focusing on word usage and sentence structure, as well as the paratexts, including titles, prefaces, postscripts, and blurbs, as advised by Batchelor (2018). Our main research question is: How do the Thai and English translations of the two Korean literary works present the image of women in the Thai and English versions, focusing on feminist undertones and gender inequality?

REVIEW LITERATURE

Feminism in South Korea

Shim's (2001) research on feminism in South Korea reveals that Confucianism has had a substantial impact on the beliefs and lifestyles of Koreans, particularly during the Joseon Dynasty, the final dynasty on the Korean Peninsula prior to Japan's occupation. Confucian ideology consistently subjugated women to men. In Korean culture, fathers' authority ruled over women during their childhood, husbands ruled over them after marriage, and sons ruled over them after their husbands' deaths. Later, Christianity and Western culture arrived in Korea in the late 19th century, introducing Korean society to women's rights, gender equality, and new attitudes towards women. For the first time, the government allowed missionaries to establish schools for girls, but the public and the upper classes, showed little interest, regarding women's education as insignificant (Larsen, 2016).

When the Korean Peninsula became a colony of Japan in 1910, Korean women faced increased pressure as the colonisers implemented the "Housewifization" ideology [sic], a gender norm rooted in Confucianism from China (Kim, 2009). In line with the goal of fostering such a mentality, Korean women were somehow allowed to receive education, although it focused on child-rearing, caring for sick children, and household financial management. In the early 20th century, Korean femininity was influenced by a blend of traditional Confucian ideas passed down through the Joseon Dynasty, Confucian-based gender norms from Japan, and family concepts propagated by Western missionaries (Choi, 2023).

According to Choi (2023), the March 1919 independence movement was a significant event for Korean women to appreciate their potential to work alongside men. This led to an increase in the number of women pursuing specialised education. Nevertheless, these women continued to take their responsibilities as wives and mothers in their home life. After gaining independence, many movements for women's rights transitioned to anti-corruption initiatives and the opposition of political power groups. Social movements experienced a decline, however, when Park Chung-hee executed a coup and assumed leadership of the nation with an emphasis on economic reform (Shin, 2020).

The government's accelerated economic development has led to a significant increase in the number of women entering the workforce, but they often faced exploitative working conditions. While some may perceive this as a movement towards gender equality, the primary focus is on labour utilisation, not on broader societal inclusion. In 2001, the Ministry of Gender Equality was established by President Kim Dae-Jung's government, marking a formal acknowledgment of women's rights (Kim & Kim, 2011). Nevertheless, the Ministry's efforts appear largely theoretical. Despite existing legal protections, only a few women report instances of exploitation, especially regarding sexual matters. Many women who have disclosed their issues end up committing suicide, unable to endure the associated shame. This means that although Confucianist influence has gradually waned, it continues to shape Korean societal attitudes significantly (Koeval, 2022). Nowadays, although Korean women enjoy greater freedom in their thoughts and personal decisions, they still face substantial expectations from their husbands after having children (Sohn, 2020).

In today's South Korean society, social norms are characterised by middle-class life. Most of the time, politicians and journalists tend to point fingers at feminism as the cause of the growing gender gap, catering to the views of men in the early stages of their careers (Lee & Chang, 2021). Lee (2021) notes how South Korea has experienced significant shifts in gender perceptions because of the increased consumption of feminism-related writing in online communities. A significant number of women have engaged in controversial online expressions of anti-male attitudes. Radical feminists have been especially vocal in parodying translations with anti-male terms, contributing to the stronger ideological conflict between gender factions.

From the above literature review, it could be said that socio-economic constraints gradually force Korean women to leave their homes for work, despite the expectation that they perform their roles as wives and mothers to the best of their abilities within the family context. Such dual expectation arguably causes societal concerns, such as the declining birth rate (Park, 2020) and is largely reflected in the two literary works analysed in this study.

Feminist translation

Canadian scholars have been at the forefront of feminist translation since its inception, with the goal of overturning patriarchal power culture. This approach to translation underscores and critiques patriarchal language (Le Bervet, 2019). Several feminist translation scholars have criticised the entanglement of mainstream patriarchal concepts, which relegates both women and translation to the lowest rungs of the social and literary hierarchy (Simon, 1996). This group of scholars challenges the notion of fidelity in translation and emphasises the translator's subjectivity to amplify women's voices globally without adhering strictly to the source text.

Feminist translators employ various translation strategies, such as hijacking, supplementing, prefacing, and footnoting. Hijacking is a translation strategy in which the translator "intentionally" intervenes in the translated content, effectively claiming the original text as their own in the translated version (Flotow, 1991). Feminist translation may utilise prefaces and footnotes to highlight the presence of femininity, explicitly recounting the unjust experiences of women that the original text does not specify. Feminist translation studies often propose that feminist translators have the right to intervene in the original text to make women or symbols associated with women more visible. Godard (1990), Flotow (1991) and Simon (1996) are among the scholars who have drawn attention to the significance of feminist translation, prioritising the presence of women in translations and freeing the target language and target culture from patriarchal constraints.

Castro (2009) points out that this approach to translation aligns with the second wave of feminism in terms of concepts such as promoting diversity, rejecting inequality, and refusing gender segregation. Massardier-Kenney (1997) notes how the re-definition of feminist translation contributes to scrutinising translations in general, which often exhibits "bias" against women. These scholars underline gender identity and expose mechanisms that marginalise or devalue women. They attempt to show that translation (in relation to women) is a form of cultural reproduction. Feminist translators frequently do not translate literally or use words lavishly to achieve fidelity to the original text but rather point out women's differences. The

re-reading and rewriting of the original have an infinite number of repercussions, as they unveil the impact of the original on women. They can elevate the voices of women oppressed by gender stereotyping and challenge the notion that translation is merely a replica of the male-centric original (Godard, 1990).

Since 2000, feminist translation studies have grown, and its definitions were expanded to explain historical texts and retranslations. Wolf (2005), for example, examined the works of two feminist translators from the 18th century and analysed publishing guidelines regarding non-misogynistic language. Research in this field has continuously emerged, such as critiques of phallogocentric translation even in feminist writings (Bogic, 2017), studies of para-translation of feminist texts (Abou Rached, 2017), and investigations into the shifting stances of translators due to the evolution of feminism (Rosario Martín, 2005). Research across diverse cultural contexts has highlighted gender issues in literary translation, such as the translation of Chinese American women's literature within Chinese social contexts (Tang, 2018). Scholars have also examined translation strategies and the creation of new feminist identities in translation (cf. Irshad & Yasmin, 2022). Federici (2021) has examined the global application of feminist theory in translation studies. Lee's (2023) study has shown that paratexts around the translation of feminist books can become parodic appropriations of misogynistic discourses, introducing political controversies over Korean translations of the gender equality.

In the Thai context, the application of feminist frameworks to translation studies has been limited. As an extension of studies on ideology and translation (Phanthaphoommee, 2022, 2023), there are only two prominent pieces of Thai research published internationally that address the critical issue of feminism and translation. Rattanakantadilok (2017) tried to present a Western feminist translation approach and explores its potential application to ideologically driven translation practices in Thailand. The researcher views feminist translation as a method that can subvert, differentiate, or avoid misogynistic language in the original text. Another work is by Saejang (2023) who examined the feminist liberation group that emerged alongside the pro-democracy protests in mid-2020. She scrutinised the translation of the Chilean feminist group's song and discovered that they adapted the Thai translation of the song, with the original choreography, to raise public awareness about gender-based violence and parody Thai political-feminist discourse.

It is evident that there is a dearth of research on feminist translation in Thailand. The purpose of this study is to broaden the field's horizons by increasing the examples of feminist translation studies in the Thai context, with a focus on Korean literature's original and translated works. Hwang (2023) points out how Korean literature has become a cultural export because of its international translations into various languages, including Thai. Along the same line, this study aims to determine whether Korean literary works, which depict gender inequality and contain feminist undertones, can maintain these elements when translated into English and Thai, and whether the English or Thai translations accentuate or obscure the feminist subtleties compared to the original.

Research design

This study used a descriptive-qualitative approach to inquiring into culled data for a feminist translation study. We conducted an in-depth and extensive reading of the novels and a comparison between the relevant textual material and the examined themes. It entailed taking notes on the primary data source, or the novels and their translations. The primary data source is *엄마를 부탁해* by Shin Kyung-sook, published in 2008, and *82년생 김지영* by Cho Nam-joo, published in 2016. We compared the original works with their English and Thai translations, resulting in a total of four translated texts. *Kim Ji-young, Born 1982*, the English version of *82년생 김지영* was published by Scribner in 2020 and contains 163 pages. Earnest Publishing published its Thai version, *คิมจียองเกิดปี 82*, which has 192 pages. *Please Look After Mother*, the English version of *엄마를 부탁해*, was published by W&N Essentials and contains 262 pages, while its Thai version, *วันที่แม่ไม่อยู่*, was published by Praew Publishing, containing 239 pages. The intrinsic and collective features of these texts enable a deeper and broader understanding of the phenomenon using selected cases.

As for the unit of analysis across the original and the two translated versions, we looked into words, phrases, sentences, or short passages that contain gender-related meanings and reflect women's experiences and ideological implications. There are five criteria involved when we selected the units. First, they must signify gender roles and societal expectations of women. Second, they must be attitude-laden expressions, especially those with high lexical density or potential ambiguity in translation. Third, they must be instances that contain obvious modification, omission, or intensification of meaning. Fourth, they must be based on crucial moments, i.e., episodes that depict gender-based conflict of everyday experiences. Lastly, character selection centres on female protagonists, supported by secondary characters such as family members and spouses who portray gender relations in the novel. Upon these criteria, we derived approximately 40 units per novel for close comparison.

The subsequent phase involved parsing and grouping the data with the established research questions. This process includes identifying the presence of conceptual elements in the novels being investigated, such as beliefs or character development, plotlines, and locations. It also identified aspects of socio-cultural disputes centred on Korean society's views of women. Apart from analysing the structure of the novel, we also carried out a textual comparison between the two novels and their translated versions, the results of which were then interpreted to evince nuances through a feminist lens. We based this analysis on the assumption that the translation could portray characters' experiences with gender discrimination with varying degrees of detail and explicitness. For example, we looked for a loss or modification of emotional weight that might signify a shift in characterisation. Below are some examples of textual comparisons between the Korean original, the English translation, and the Thai translation.

통명스럽게 변했다	(<i>엄마를 부탁해</i>)
turned sullen	(<i>Please Look After Mother</i>)
กระโศกโศกฮาก	(<i>วันที่แม่ไม่อยู่</i>)

We also took into account the lexical density with a potential mistranslation.

<p>예전과 다름없이 시키는 대로 주어진 일을 해냈다 She handled the tasks she was given as usual เธอทำงานตามคำสั่งเช่นเมื่อก่อน</p>	<p>(82 년생 김지영) (Kim Ji-young, Born 1982) (คิมจียองเกิดปี 82)</p>
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After finding the nuanced modifications that affect the feminist views, we presented the data analysis descriptively, using text structures to highlight the similarities and differences between feminist perspectives in each translation by implementing Krippendorff's (2018) content analysis approach. This approach involved checking critical items, i.e., narrative, style, setting, and ideological patterns, which offer an in-depth examination of each novel. We brought out aspects of character and interaction between the main characters, whereas other elements were only discussed if they were considered pertinent (Boman, 2020).

Our goal is to pinpoint the translation procedures used in the four versions and evaluate how much each version typically favours a particular procedure that allows the feminist perspective to emerge in the target texts. As suggested by Boman (2022), we therefore looked at the translations following three steps: first, reading the texts in their entirety; second, identifying themes and sub-themes and how they related to previous research and the theoretical framework; and third, presenting our findings and insights in relation to the research questions and previous research to create a logical narrative pattern. Following this, we discussed our findings with the broader literature on feminist translation, with the aim of enhancing our understanding of cross-cultural feminist discourse.

Different levels of feminist presentation in translation

As evidenced by a comparative analysis of the original Korean texts and the two translated versions, the portrayal of women in the two stories demonstrates varying degrees of consistency. Both translations of *Kim Ji-young* are incongruous in its presentation of female protagonists' plight when compared with those of *Mother* in various critical points. Translators of both novels employ various translation procedures, which present different meanings at the word level and adding or omitting explanations at the sentence level to depict the characters' struggles or portray other male characters as unforgivable towards women. Furthermore, the Thai translators include footnotes or extensive translations to clarify many issues, as well as suprasegmental features like italics or highlight. The following subsections report the results based on each translation, highlighting the differences in feminist explicitness between the two versions of both novels.

Kim Ji-young's re-presentation with equal level of feminist view

Kim Ji-young, the protagonist, experiences a loss of her social identity as a highly educated professional, which in turn erodes her social value. She becomes a hollow person due to her poor self-esteem. She decides to resign from her position to devote more time to her daughter. She begins to mimic the voices of several women, including former classmates, friends, and relatives of both living and dead people. The story vividly illustrates the difficulties Korean

women encounter in contemporary society. It narrates the story of a woman who is unable to lead a team in the workplace because of marriage and childrearing and then has to forsake all her pursuits to start her own family.

In translating into Thai and English, one notable difference between the two translated versions is the word choice in describing character traits, actions, and emotions compared to the original. For example, in the original text, the initial narration of Ji-young's grandmother's history, which shows strong patriarchal adherence, reflects a level of language that does not have the same negative connotations.

Example 1

KR: 그래도 할머니는 할아버지를 **원망**하지 않았다. 계집질 안 하고, 마누라 때리지 않은 게 어디냐고, 그 정도면 **괜찮은** 남편이었다고 진심으로 생각한다. (p. 26)

EN: Koh Boonsoon did not **resent** her husband to her for having neither the ability nor the will to provide for his family. She truly believed he was a **decent** husband to her for not sleeping around and not hitting her. (p. 16)

TH: ทว่าอย่าไม่เคยแค้นเคืองปู่ นางคิดจากใจจริงว่าผู้ชายคนไหน ๆ ย่อมนอกใจและตบตีเมียบ้างเป็นธรรมดา (p. 30)

In Example 1, the original text contains the words 원망 ('resentment') and 괜찮은 ('acceptable'). The English version translates these accurately according to the characters' thoughts, but the Thai version intensifies the force of attitude, making the expression more intense than in Korean and English. The Thai version also modifies the phrase 계집질 안 하고, 마누라 때리지 않은 게 어디냐고 ('a man who does not cheat or hit his wife'), thus emphasising the inherent male dominance by removing 괜찮은 and altering the perspective with the phrase คนไหน ๆ ย่อม ('any man would...') to mirror the grandmother's perspective during her youth, when men wielded much more power.

Although the above example shows that the Thai translation highlights societal contradictions relatively more than the English version, other instances of the English version bring out negative aspects that illustrate the harsh exclusion of women in Korean society.

Example 2

KR: 하지만 결정적인 순간이면 '여자'라는 **꼬리표**가 슬그머니 튀어나와 시선을 가리고 뺨은 손을 붙잡고, 발걸음을 돌려놓았다. 그래서 더 **혼란스럽고 당황스러웠다**. (p. 72)

EN: The 'woman' **stigma** reared its head to obscure their vision, stay their hands and hold them back. The mixed signals were **confusing** and **disconcerting**. (p. 60)

TH: ฉลากที่ชื่อ "ผู้หญิง" กลับโผล่พรายออกมาบังสายตา อดมือที่ยื่นมาให้พวกเธอกลับคืน และส่งผลให้ใครก็ตามที่เปลี่ยนใจหันหลังให้ จนน่าสับสนอลหม่านยิ่งกว่าเดิม (p. 77)

The term employed in the English translation is far more serious than the Korean term 꼬리표 ('name tag') with only tacitly negative connotation. The Thai translation uses the term ฉลาก ('label'), which is not substantially different. The English translation appears to underline the protagonist's more pitiful condition by choosing a term with an explicitly negative connotation:

stigma, which more intensely defines Korean women than the original and the Thai translation. Also, the English phrase *confusing and disconcerting* also casts a negative light on the manipulation of a woman's life. The original only uses the phrase 혼란스럽고 당황스러웠다 ('confusing and bewildering'), while the Thai translation uses สับสนอลหม่าน ('confusing and chaotic'), which seems to convey a different sense.

However, there are instances where the Thai version uses terms that convey a more negative attitude towards women and give Thai readers a clearer image of Korean women's subjugation to Korean men than the English translation.

Example 3

KR: “넌 그냥 암전히 있다 시집이나 가” (p. 105)

EN: ‘You just stay out of trouble and **get married.**’ (p. 93)

TH: “แกก็อยู่เฉย ๆ แล้วแต่งเข้าบ้านผัวก็พอ” (p. 109)

In Example 3, the English translation lacks the sense of marrying into an in-law's house, whereas the Thai one carries a more literal sense to the original as แต่งเข้าบ้านผัว ('marrying into a husband's house'). The term 시집 means a husband's family. The English translation simply uses a more neutral term compared to Thai, which clearly reflects cultural nuances. This is accompanied by the judgmental use of the word ผัว ('husband'), emphasising the common notion in earlier Thai society that women must comply with their husbands.

Both the Thai and English translations often aim to highlight the peculiar characteristics and awkwardness of the female characters, mirroring their exploitative nature. The translations achieve this by using italics to draw attention to phrases in English or footnotes to offer supplementary explanations, thereby underscoring social contradictions. As an illustration, Ji-young's grandmother defends her grandson in Example 4.

Example 4

KR: 그래도 최대한 표현하자면, ‘**감히**’ 귀한 내 손자 것에 욕심을 내? 하는 느낌이였다. (p. 24)

EN: *How dare you try to take something that belongs to my grandson!* (pp. 14-15)

TH: แก “**ริบัจอาจ**” ยุ่มย่ามกับสิ่งของของหลานชายหัวแก้วหัวแหวนข้าเธอละ (p. 28)

In Example 4, both translators try to point out the profoundly ingrained male-centric mindset of a conservative society. The English version emphasises the grandmother's blind favouritism towards her grandson by using italics to highlight the entire sentences. The Thai version emphasises the term ริบัจอาจ with quotation marks in a similar way to the original. We can infer that the translation equivalence effect remains similar, even with different highlighting techniques. Unfortunately, the English version fails to retain the term 귀한 ('precious'), but the Thai one use a cultural-specific idiom with even more force of positive attitude หัวแก้วหัวแหวน ('cherished/dearest').

In the next example, the original mentions the *Hoju* system, which in the past required Korean women to register under a male relative. The original does not provide additional explanations,

but the English version explains the irrationality of this law using parentheses immediately within the text. Likewise, the Thai translation appears with footnotes to explain this system, which shows how the law has oppressed Korean women since its inception.

Example 5

KR: 1990 년대 말, **호주제**에 대한 논의가 본격적으로 시작되었다. (p. 131)

EN: In the late 1990s, the dispute over the **hoju** system (**the traditional family registration scheme, in which all members of a family must be registered under the patriarch**) began in earnest with the emergence of organisations arguing for its abolition. (p. 118)

TH: ปลายทศวรรษ 1990 ที่เกาหลีใต้เริ่มมีประเด็นถกเถียงเกี่ยวกับระบบหัวหน้าครอบครัว* เกิดกลุ่มต่อต้านที่เสนอให้ล้มล้างระบบหัวหน้าครอบครัว (p. 135)

*หรือโฮจูเจ ระบบทะเบียนราษฎรเดิมในเกาหลีใต้ที่กฎหมายรับรองอำนาจของหัวหน้าครอบครัวซึ่งเป็นผู้ชาย ให้มีสิทธิ์ขาดในกิจใด ๆ ของคนสกุลนั้น - ผู้แปล

All examples mentioned above serve as illustrations of a pattern that is consistent with the entirety of the text. The English and Thai translations both employ word choices to underscore the oppression of women to a similar extent. Although the chosen terms do not always align precisely with the original intent, the translators make up for it in other segments of the novels by conveying the awkwardness and discrimination towards Korean women's lives. Both translations demonstrate an equal degree of coherence in terms of elaboration or explanations that stress gender inequality, even though their translation techniques differ significantly. The English version frequently uses parentheses to provide context or explanation immediately following terms that reflect oppressive Korean society. In contrast, the Thai translation prioritises footnotes at the bottom of the page to maintain the reading flow.

Nevertheless, the next subsection will show how *Kim Ji-young's* case is different from that of *Mother*, in which the Thai translation depicts the oppression of women in Korean society with the most intensity while also showing sympathy.

***Mother's* re-presentation with pitifulness in Thai**

In *Mother*, the narrative revolves around Park So-nyo, an elderly wife and mother who vanished from a Seoul underground station. Her husband and five children feverishly pursued her, as she is currently in poor health. Her disappearance left their investigation with unresolved concerns. To explain the complexities of the familial relationship, the story thoroughly explores Park So-nyo's relationship with her husband and children, as well as the family's background and connection. Her sudden disappearance unleashed a wave of emotions deeply rooted in questions about their past. The story covered unsaid sacrifices, distrusted relationships, missed opportunities, revelations and grievances, and lies and humiliation that enveloped all characters.

Similar to the first novel, the translators of both languages use various translation procedures, namely word selection and intensification that send implication beyond the sentence level, so as to portray the representation of Korean women. However, it appears that the Thai translation tends to opt for words with an increasing force of negative attitude, rendering the

overall image of women more pitiable. In the Thai translation, the use of footnotes is minimal, almost non-existent, whereas the English translation seems to avoid footnotes entirely, except when they are present in the original text.

In Example 6 below, Park So-nyo's husband harsh words serve as an example of how the translator uses intense attitudinal words to evoke sympathy for the female characters due to maltreatment from her spouse. The original text uses simple terms, like the English version, but the Thai translation uses words that clearly display the man's harshness.

Example 6

KR: 큰오빠는 너에게 문구를 더 보충해보라고 했다. 네가 큰오빠를 물끄러미 바라보자 좀더 호소력 있는 문구를 생각해보라고 했다. [생략] 전단지 나눠주는 아르바이트생을 따로 구할 수도 있어, 내가 말하자, 그건 우리가 해야지, 큰오빠가 말을 받았다. (pp. 14-15)

EN: **Hyong-chol tells** you to write something more on the flyer. When you stare at him, he **tells** you to think of better sentences, to tug on the reader's heartstrings ...

When you suggest, 'We can hire someone to give out flyers,' Hyong-chol **says**, 'We're the ones who need to do that ...' (pp. 5-6)

TH: พี่คนโตบอกให้เธอเขียนข้อความเพิ่ม เธอมองพี่ชายด้วยแววตาเลื่อนลอย เขาสั่งให้เธอคิดประโยคที่น่าดึงดูดกว่านี้ ... เธอบอกว่างานแจกใบปลิวพวกนี้จ้างคนก็ได้ แต่พี่ชายคนโตตอบเสียงห้วนว่า พวกเราต้องช่วยกันทำสิ (pp. 4-5)

From the above examples, it is evident that the English version chooses to specify the male characters' names (*Hyong-chol*), whereas the Thai translation retains the original's indication of social status and male dominance within the family with terms like 큰오빠 and พี่คนโต, meaning 'eldest brother'. The depiction of the brother's superiority is also evident in the verb 라고 했다, which carries the connotation of 'commanding someone to do something'. The English version simply uses the verb *tells* in both instances, but the Thai version intensifies the attitude with verbs such as สั่ง ('order/command') and ตอบเสียงห้วน ('replied curtly'), vividly portraying the oppressive nature of the male character towards his younger sister.

Additionally, the Thai translator's portrayal of *Mother* includes word and sentence changes that make her appear more pitiable, given that she had to do everything for her children but never received any attention from her husband or even her children.

Example 7

KR: 큰술 가득 밥을 짓고 그 옆의 작은 술 가득 국 끓일 수 있음 그거 하느라 힘들단 생각보다 이거 내 새끼들 입속으로 다 들어가겠구나 싶어 든든했지야. (p. 75)

EN: I didn't think of **how tired I was**. I felt good that **these were going into my babies' mouths**. (p. 65)

TH: การหุงข้าวในหม้อใบใหญ่กับต้มน้ำซุ๊ปในหม้อเล็กข้าง ๆ มันเหนื่อยสายตัวแทบขาด แต่พอคิดว่า ลูกของฉันต้องกิน มันก็มีกำลังใจขึ้นมาหน่อย (p. 59)

In Example 7, the Korean novelist describes Park So-nyo's arduous task of raising her children with the word 힘들다 (difficult), and the English translation uses the corresponding word *tired*.

However, the Thai translation intensifies the image of the mother's hardship with the idiomatic phrase เหนื่อยสายนัยตัวแทบขาด ('utterly exhausted'). Also, the phrase *these were going into my babies' mouths* seems to have equivalent effect to the original 이거 내 새끼들 입속으로 다 들어가겠구나. However, the Thai version uses a phrase that makes the protagonist feel more pressured: ลูกของฉันต้องกิน or 'my children must eat.'

Furthermore, in Example 8, the Thai translation modifies the sentence structure to underscore the decisiveness of the male character, the husband, who holds the authority to make financial decisions. He forbids Park So-nyo from using the money her child earned, making it clear that she cannot ask for money from him again.

Example 8

KR: 당신은 조건을 달았다. 자식들이 보내주는 돈을 아내가 다 차지하는 대신 당신에게서 돈을 타가는 일은 없기로. (p. 144)

EN: You agreed on the condition: she could take all the money, but she **couldn't come to you for more**. (p. 127)

TH: คุณจึงตั้งเงื่อนไขว่า คุณจะให้เงินของลูกทั้งหมด แต่ภรรยาไม่มีสิทธิ์ได้รับเงินก้อนอื่นจากคุณอีก (p. 114)

The phrase 돈을 타가는 일은 없기로 ('there would be no more asking for money') conveys the idea that money is beyond reach, which aligns with the English translation. However, the Thai translation intensifies the husband's unkindness towards his wife with the phrase ไม่มีสิทธิ์ ('have no right'), which highlights his cruel power.

Throughout the narrative, the image of the neglected and mistreated Park So-nyo persists, even in the sections describing her severe illness, where no one cares. The original text describes this plainly, and the English translation follows suit. Yet, the Thai translation amplifies the meaning, making the mother's suffering appear more severe, almost life-threatening.

Example 9

KR: 바깥일을 보고 돌아오면 죽은 듯이 잠들어 있던 아내가 사실은 눈을 뜨기조차 힘들 만큼 머리가 아파 눈을 감고 있는 것이라는 걸 당신은 알고 있었다. (p. 170)

EN: You must have known that your wife, who often appeared **fast asleep** when you came home at night, kept her eyes closed because her headache was so severe. (p. 154)

TH: หลายครั้งที่ภรรยา กลับมาจากทำงานนอกบ้าน เธอนอนนิ่ง ๆ เหมือนคนตาย คุณรู้ว่าเธอกำลังปวดหัวอย่างหนัก จนลืมตาไม่ขึ้น (p. 137)

In Example 9, the Korean original uses a strong expression 죽은 듯이 잠들어 ('sleep like dead'), which the English translation softens to *fast asleep*. In contrast, the Thai translation stays close to the original with นอนนิ่ง ๆ เหมือนคนตาย ('lying still like a dead person'). Similarly, in Example 10, the original and English texts describe a general illness, while the Thai translation makes the condition seem more severe, increasing the character's distressing condition.

Example 10

KR: 당신은 이제야 아내가 **장에 탈이 나** 며칠씩 입에 곡기를 꿀을 때조차 따뜻한 물 한 대접 아내 앞에 가져다줘본 적이 없다는 것을 깨달았다 (p. 171)

EN: You realise that you've never even handed your wife a glass of warm water when she couldn't keep food down for days, her **stomach upset**. (p. 155)

TH: คุณเพิ่งนึกขึ้นได้ว่า ตอนเธอป่วยเป็นโรคลำไส้ติดต่อกันหลายวัน ในช่วงนั้นเธอกินอาหารอะไรไม่ได้เลย แต่คุณไม่เคยยื่นน้ำอุ่นให้ภรรยาจิบสักแก้ว (p. 138)

The Korean phrase **장에 탈이 나다** means 'get sick in intestines,' but the English translation uses a milder term, *stomach upset*. Conversely, the Thai translation uses an even more severe term, portraying the mother's illness as **โรคลำไส้** ('intestinal disease'), further emphasising her hardship and neglect by her husband.

In addition to various critical points in the above examples, another noticeable aspect of the story is the narrative perspective in each section through the eyes of the characters, such as the daughter, son, and husband. The original text uses the second-person pronoun (너, 당신) to represent these characters, creating confusion and a nuanced perspective on the mother's absence. The Thai language, with its diverse pronouns according to sex and social status (เธอ, คุณ), captures the guilty conscience of the characters better than English, which can only use the second-person pronoun *you*. Moreover, when the original text mentions third-person male characters, it often uses พี่ชาย ('elder brother') to accentuate the influential sense of male gender, which the Thai translation retains to reflect male dominance. However, the English translation clarifies these characters by using his name, Hyong-chol, rather than underlining male dominance as much as the original and Thai versions do.

It is also noteworthy that, unlike *Kim Ji-young*, the story of *Mother* does not extensively use footnotes to explain meanings or give more background information. The English version opts not to explain specific meanings, whereas the Thai translation integrates them into the narrative as a form of literary artistry by the translator.

Paratext: A site for exhibiting feminism

Lee (2023) argues that in the foreword of feminist-translated literature, the translator might thoroughly justify the translation's aesthetic choices, "show[ing] not only the translator's retrospective analysis of his/her own lexico-grammatical choices but also the emotional effects of micro-level decisions on readers" (p. 107). That being said, the four translated editions of the two feminist novels in our study appear to present the paratext surrounding the main text differently. The Thai versions of *82년생 김지영* and *엄마를 부탁해* retain the writers' afterwords and analyses of both stories, whereas the English version omits the analyses and opinions of the two writers. As a result, the English translation removes feminist viewpoints from both stories, hence the surrounding texts, which expresses the ideological position towards women, inevitably vanish.

Kim Ji-young in its Thai version not only includes the author's biography but also features a feminist writer's analysis translated from the Korean original. This analysis highlights that many

Korean women live a similar life to the protagonist's. The story in the book is familiar, as it depicts the ordinary life of any contemporary Korean woman. This allows the readers to clearly imagine Korean women's lives in the original Korean society. Unfortunately, the writers' attempt to reveal the truth about Korean women is absent in the English version, which limits her viewpoints to what the in-text characters alone can convey.

Moreover, the Thai version of *Mother* adds a preface by the publisher, which is an additional element not found in the original. This addition enhances the Korean feminist significance for Thai readers.

[The publisher] *invites readers to discover the meaning of a woman who is called 'mother' through the writing style of Korean literature. This style captures the emotions and feelings of the child, husband, and mother, prompting readers to realise that a woman whom we see as 'mother' has her own life and dreams. She was not simply born a mother.* (Own translation)

Nonetheless, the renowned Japanese author Banana Yoshimoto also contributes an introduction to the English translation of *Mother*. This writer, whose works have also been translated into various languages, aptly provides an introduction that evokes empathy for the mother. In the final paragraph, it reads: “[i]n the future, there will be fewer mothers who lose themselves like this as they constantly keep going, ravaged by sickness and pain, and that is a good thing.” This introduction, however, does not place as much emphasis on feminist perspectives, as it mainly praises the story and the understanding between family members.

Regarding the novel title, both Thai and English editions of *82년생 김지영* straightforwardly use the literal translation, as in *Kim Ji-young, Born 1982*, respectively. However, the Thai edition of *엄마를 부탁해* evokes emotional resonance from its reader by titling the translated book as *วันที่แม่ไม่อยู่* ('The day mother is gone'), instead of literally translating it as *ขอฝากแม่ด้วย* ('Please look after mother') in the same way as the English counterpart does.

For *Mother's* blurb on its back cover, the original Korean edition incorporates endorsements from a literary critic and a contemporary musician, who characterise the book's content as their personal narratives, thereby illustrating a mother's unwavering focus on her husband and children. The Thai edition shows some extracted content on its back cover, along with detailed descriptions of the mother, Park So-nyo, that evokes emotional responses from target readers, while the English edition comes with praise from famous media outlets like *The Guardian* or *The New York Times*.

As for *Kim Ji-young*, the English version's blurb is presented with descriptions of the protagonist: “Kim Ji-young is a girl born to a mother whose in-laws wanted a boy,” “Kim Ji-young has started acting strangely,” or “Kim Ji-young is mad.” In the Thai version, however, not only does it retain the Korean original's endorsement from a journalist from IZE web magazine, but it goes further to present the target readers with an excerpt from Choi Soo-young, a member of Girls' Generation, a South Korean K-pop girl group well-known among Thai audiences. It reads: [b]efore I read *Kim Ji-young, Born 1982*, I had never really thought about it seriously. But after

reading the book, I realised that I had been treated unfairly simply because I am a woman, and I had never been aware of it.” The statement highlights how pervasive gender discrimination is in Korean society, often going unnoticed by those affected. This addition implies that the Thai translation makes use of this familiar figure to help convey its Korean feminist essence to the new target readers. In a nutshell, through their paratextual features, the Thai translations of *Mother* and *Kim Ji-young* seem to express feministic views more effectively than the English translations.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Feminists can consciously establish their ideological agendas through feminist knowledge translation, a form of re-narration and intellectual activism. Cheng (2023) argues that translation activism is generative and enacted through a dynamic process of negotiating the translator’s narrative affinities with the source texts. In this study, when comparing the two versions’ translations, we can see that the translators have taken Korean feminism and given it a new but different level of explicit form, while also keeping some important elements.

The findings reveal that most of the word choices, sentence modifications, explanations, and footnotes in both the English and Thai versions can be called ‘feminist textualisation’ or translations that highlight the plights of women regarding their families, societal expectations of gender values and marriage relationships. However, the translator for each of these novels may not fully adopt this feminist stance when working for the commission. Only the Thai translation of *Mother* seemingly provides more of a window into women’s lives to debunk their subjugation.

Looking at translation procedures, we can see that the subjectivity of the translators is most evident in their work. Examples in the previous section show that the translators employ a range of small-scale techniques to highlight their feminist views on a different level. In *Mother*, the translator employs unique Thai personal pronouns to express the absurdity of the source culture and oppose the normative male tenets. It also appears to explicitly convey traditional meanings, which portrays women’s existence as enduringly difficult due to the presence of phallogentrism in the stories. This clearly resonates with Lee’s (2023) observation of other radical feminist translation practices in South Korea, which aim to unsettle women’s oppression from the male dominant society.

Nevertheless, neither translation shows the radical approach of hijacking and supplementing the passage to completely alter the narrative and make the women play a much more dominant role in the story, as observed in other studies (e.g., Buehler, 2019; Yoon, 2021). This may be because the translators’ primary goal is only to point out the absurdity of the male protagonists and the struggles of the female protagonists, not drastically change their inferior status. In contrast to *Kim Ji-young*, the Thai translator of *Mother* seems to give more embellished and intensified emotional values to the main characters when depicting the main character’s suffering in order to elicit empathy from the target reader. Similar to Baya’s (2019) findings in other contexts, the translator in our case tends to foreground masculine presence through

specific terms that highlight male aggressiveness, while also making explicit certain phrases that carry feminist significance. As such, it seems sufficient to say that the Thai translation, particularly in the case of *Mother*, partially reveals the translator's understanding of the writer's ideological motives and efforts to communicate the feminist views to the target readers. This reflects the translator's gender-related awareness and perspectives on women's empowerment, which is consistent with observations in Tang's (2018) study.

In terms of paratext, the Thai translator of *Kim Ji-young*, for the most part, adopted the footnoting technique to facilitate the readers' understanding of the sociocultural contexts of the original. This can be compared to other feminist translations, such as Bateni et al. (2013), in which female translators intensively used footnotes to highlight their stance on feminist views. For paratextual features like the back cover, the Thai version of *Kim Ji-young* is presented with endorsements from feminist advocates, and that of *Mother* is presented with descriptions that portray the main female character as dedicated and hard-working but neglected by her own family members. Both Thai translated books clearly integrate such feminist views to suggest that the stories are relatable to any woman's negative experiences (cf. Meng, 2020). As suggested by Lee (2021), incorporating these paratexts may expose an ideological fault line between gender groups and encourage individuals to express their agendas in the public sphere. In our case, these paratextual features arguably serve to reinforce, by extension intensify, Korean perceptions of feminism in the original book itself.

To discuss our interpretation of the current translated feminist discourse with the larger literature, we maintain that in the feminist translation effort, the Thai translator for *Mother* tends to discard the androcentric representation of the world and, as suggested by Gross (1999), replace it with an "androgynous model of humanity" (p. 193). This implies that the less explicit feminist representation in the translation of *Kim Ji-young* may not reproduce symmetrically the original writer's intention to portray the gendering of everyday life with patriarchal doctrines. Sharma (1994) posits that the patriarchal society of South Korea has precipitated a sense of inferiority in women. Hence, a translation that lacks an activist element may fail to exhibit the true success of women's efforts to overcome the challenges posed by patriarchal principles. On the contrary, translations that highlight women's hardship, like the Thai version of *Mother*, may at least help speak about their predicament in the original society to a global audience.

By and large, the overall assumption from our findings is that feminist translations that are premised on certain ideological values can function as political communication, re-production, and negotiation of gender—a tool of gender liberation (Ergun, 2010). We agree with Bogic's (2017) notion that translations can paint a different picture of women in the original society by undermining misogynistic attitudes across different linguistic levels. In our case, both Thai and English translations of Korean feminist discourse, while not as violent as those of radical feminists, have used approaches that present opposing discourse more subtly. Our study has also shown that certain translation procedures are indicative of the translators' supportive ideological stance on the feminist movement, albeit at different levels of explicitness in the Thai and English translations. We argue, especially drawing from *Mother* of the Thai translator, that the translation of Korean feminists into a meaningful context within the target culture

still holds the potential to elevate the cause of its supporters. According to Lee (2023), books are “an effective, easily accessible tool for feminist awareness-raising” (p. 104). Here, we push further this view by showing that, in our case, feminist textual elements and paratextual explanations in the book, when translated, can also broaden the discursive repertoires available for expressing women’s gendered experiences in the target cultures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported by a grant from the Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University. The authors acknowledged the use of QuillBot to paraphrase the complex sentences and Grammarly to proofread the final draft of the manuscript.

Disclosure statement

The authors confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this article.

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