Ideological Recreations: A Corpus-Based Study of Female Characters and Translation Strategies in Mo Yan's Big Breasts and Wide Hips and Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out

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Abstract

This study analyses the ideological portrayal of female characters in Mo Yan's novels, Big Breasts and Wide Hips (1996) and Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out (2006), and their representation in Howard Goldblatt's English translations. It explores how translation strategies shape English readers' ideological interpretations, addressing: How does Mo Yan construct female-related ideologies? What techniques does Goldblatt use to convey these ideologies? What differences and similarities exist between source- and target-language readers' interpretations? Using a corpus-based translation studies approach, a parallel corpus was built, supported by the Corpus of Contemporary American English and the Chinese BCC Corpus. Jieba facilitated Chinese word segmentation, TextRank calculated word weights, and AntConc performed collocation analysis with log-likelihood statistics to identify ideological markers, complemented by qualitative structural analysis and reference corpus verification. Findings reveal that Mo Yan crafts female-centred narratives, highlighting the historical violence, social structures, and gender dynamics that shape women's lives. Goldblatt's translations blend domestication and foreignization, improving readability but diluting cultural specificity and political critique. The study confirms corpus analysis as effective for uncovering ideological shifts in translation, underscoring the need to balance cultural adaptation with fidelity to preserve diverse interpretations of contemporary Chinese literature for global audiences.

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Introduction

Mo Yan, a Nobel laureate in literature, is recognised worldwide for his storytelling and exploration of Chinese history, social struggles, and human endurance. His novels have been mainly translated into English by Howard Goldblatt, who brings Chinese literature to global audiences. Goldblatt's translations have influenced versions into other languages through indirect translation. Marin-Lacarta (2014, 2018) argues that Anglophone reception continues to shape how the world sees Mo Yan's works, making English translations essential for study. Mo Yan's novels frequently explore ideological themes, including political authority, rural life, ethical values, aesthetic tastes, and female perspectives (He, 2014). However, few studies focus on ideologies; previous research by Klein (2016) and Du & Zhang (2015) highlights Goldblatt's tendency to simplify or omit politically sensitive content. This study examines how Mo Yan's ideological paradigm is recreated in Howard Goldblatt's English translations, as his decisions shape ideological reception among English-speaking readers. It also examines how translation strategies influence ideological transmission and shape readers' interpretations.

Due to the word limit, this study focuses only on the main female characters in Mo Yan's two novels, *Fengru Feitun* (丰乳肥臀, Big Breasts and Wide Hips)[1] (Mo, 1996) and *Shengsi Pilao* (生死疲劳, Life and Death are Wearing Me Out) (Mo, 2006), and studies the ideology embodied by these female characters. We intend to answer three research questions:

1   How does Mo Yan construe the ideologies related to female characters?

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[1] We include the pinyin followed by the Chinese characters and the English translation of the title the first time a Chinese book is mentioned. After that, only the pinyin will be provided.

2 What are the strategies employed by the translator Howard Goldblatt concerning the transmission of these ideologies?

3 What are the deviations and commonalities between source and target language readers in understanding these ideologies?

To answer the above questions, this study employs a corpus-based translation study method, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, to systematically explore the ideological construction of female characters in Mo Yan's novels and their translations. First, a parallel corpus consisting of the original texts of the two books by Mo Yan and Howard Goldblatt's English translations is built, supplemented by the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the Chinese BCC Corpus as reference corpora.

Jieba is used for Chinese word segmentation to extract high-frequency words and weights via TextRank. Co-occurrence analysis in AntConc, using log-likelihood statistics, screens ideological markers such as trauma symbols, class representations, and gender norms, analysing both micro-linguistic and macro-narrative structures to address RQ1. Translation strategies, such as domestication and foreignization, are compared, examining Goldblatt's rewriting, omission, and reconstruction in context for RQ2. Semantic differences in translated words are verified via reference corpora to explore cross-cultural interpretations for RQ3.

In summary, we integrate corpus linguistics, descriptive translation studies, and critical discourse analysis, considering both data-driven methods and close readings of texts, to systematically examine the dynamic transformation of ideology in translation.

1. Ideology and Translating Ideology
1.1. Ideology and Ideological Markers

The Cambridge Dictionary defines ideology as "a set of beliefs or principles, especially one on which a political system, party, or organisation is based" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). McLellan (1986) explains that Marx viewed ideology as reflecting how ideas and consciousness are influenced by material conditions, particularly societal economics and structures. Hall (1982) asserts that language

forms the foundation of ideology, while Chilton (2004) emphasises its role in shaping and representing the world based on perspectives.

Contemporary research employs empirical methods to connect ideology with textual representations, as language serves as both a carrier and a constructor (Chilton, 2004; Hall, 1982). This requires operationalising ideology into recognisable language patterns, termed "ideological markers" here: words or phrases reflecting beliefs, values, or viewpoints tied to specific ideologies. These markers reveal the writer's or character's ideology and can be identified using corpus tools that analyse frequency, collocation, and context.

1.2. Translating Ideological Markers in Mo Yan's Works

Klein (2016) argues that translation provides a theoretically and politically productive means to represent China, avoiding simplistic ideological binaries in Mo Yan's works and their English versions. He views translation as a cultural and ideological negotiation that shapes global perceptions of Chinese literature, where meaning emerges from discourse, as per Critical Discourse Analysis theories, influenced by readers and context.

Du and Zhang (2015) contend that Goldblatt, in translating Mo Yan's *Tiantang Suantaizhige* (天堂蒜薹之歌, The Garlic Ballads), modifies, omits, or reshapes politically sensitive content to suit English readers' expectations, often omitting ideological markers through "rewriting". They use close reading for comparative analysis, examining additions, omissions, substitutions, and rewording to show transformations in political and aesthetic elements. We will investigate whether the translation strategies outlined by Du and Zhang (2015) are also employed in the other two novels and if ideological markers are omitted during the translation process.

2. Corpus-based Translation Studies

Corpus-based translation studies draw from corpus linguistics and descriptive translation studies (DTS) (Laviosa, 2021). A corpus is a systematic collection of real language samples that reflect actual

usage, large enough to capture language patterns statistically, and stored digitally for computer analysis (Sinclair, 1991). Corpus linguistics involves the computer-aided study of extensive transcribed texts or utterances (McEnery & Hardie, 2012, p.3). DTS focuses on describing real-world translations without prescriptive judgments (Toury, 2012).

Corpus linguistics analyses large-scale data with statistical tools to identify patterns, while DTS examines target texts and cultural factors. Their integration enables systematic analysis of translated texts to uncover translation norms. This study applies this approach to Goldblatt's translations of Mo Yan's two novels, using data from a parallel corpus and reference corpora representing contemporary Chinese (BCC) and English (COCA) discourse communities.

Swales (1990) defines a discourse community as a group sharing values, assumptions, and communication practices. Here, COCA and BCC represent U.S. and Chinese languages, cultures, and values, respectively, allowing examination of ideological markers and their translations to analyse strategies.

3. Translation Strategies

Proposed by Venuti (1995), the primary translation strategies are domestication and foreignization. Domestication involves an ethnocentric trade-off in cultural values, while foreignization highlights linguistic and cultural differences to guide readers toward the source context. Marin-Lacarta (2012) suggests these concepts form a continuum rather than strict poles, proposing that the degree of domestication be qualified.

In Chinese literary translation, studies by Qi & Roberts (2020), Sun (2002), Jiang (2015), Ding (2016), and Kumar (2021) reveal patterns where translators often domesticate titles for target audiences while retaining some foreignization in the text bodies. Jiang (2015) notes Goldblatt's domestication in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* (Mo, 2004) enhances accessibility, while Ding (2016) and Kumar (2021) highlight his use of both strategies, with creative alterations for English readers. Shao (2016) discovers that when dealing with specific Chinese terms, Goldblatt sometimes omits

them due to cultural gaps. However, these omissions are specifically listed and explained in the afterword to compensate for the loss caused by zero translation. This translation strategy transcends the concepts of domestication and foreignization but reflects the translator's attempt to maximise the preservation of the original cultural characteristics (Shao, 2016).

Another direct way to evaluate a translator's translation strategy is to "talk" to the translator himself. In the speech titled "Author and Translator: An Uneasy, Mutually Rewarding, Sometimes Fragile Relationship" delivered by Goldblatt at Shanghai International Studies University, Goldblatt considered the Western readers' awareness and reading interests, giving Chinese literary works a chance to "squeeze" into this small publishing market. The "translating and revising" approach is a smart one (Goldblatt, 2013). The translator readily admitted that in translating nearly ten of Mo Yan's novels, including *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* (Mo, 2011) and *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* (Mo, 2004), he made omissions and alterations to suit American readers.

4. Methodology: Corpus Building and Data Processing
4.1. Corpora in the Research and Corpus Tools

In this study, two types of corpora will be assembled and utilised. The initial corpus is a parallel collection containing two original texts by Mo Yan and their English translations by Howard Goldblatt (Mo, 2004, 2011), serving as the primary resource for extracting ideological terms and expressions related to female characters. It identifies ideological markers and reveals Goldblatt's translation strategies for Chinese terms. The second category comprises two reference corpora, COCA and BCC, used to analyse cultural discourses and uncover nuanced ideological meanings across cultures.

A corpus analysis software tool, AntConc4.2, will be employed, utilising Concord, Wordlist, Keywords, and Lemma List features to analyse the parallel corpus data. Collocation Analysis from the reference corpora will identify dominant discourse patterns and explore the usage of ideological markers in both source and target

languages. Jieba will process the Chinese corpus data, segmenting it to calculate word weights.
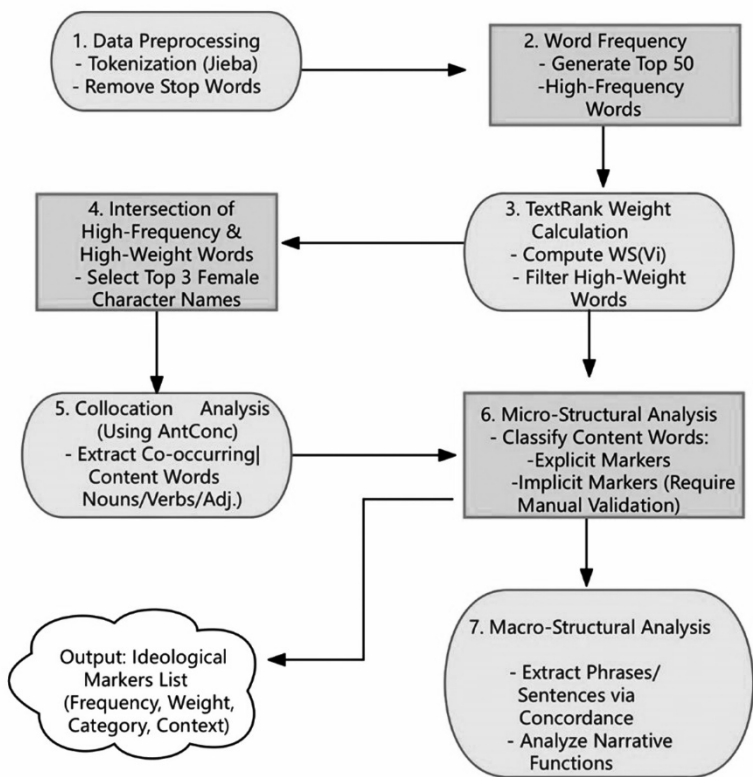
4.2. Word Weight

The principle of word weight relates to TextRank, a graph model algorithm where the weight of a word node WS(Vi) reflects its importance or centrality in the text. The higher the weight, the stronger the semantic relevance, information-carrying capacity, or structural significance of the word (Mihalcea & Tarau, 2004).

The specific attributes reflected by word weights are reflected in the application of corpus linguistics: words with high weights are typically located in the semantic core of the text, may serve as keywords or core elements, have denser connections with other words in the co-occurrence graph, and can distinguish topic differences between texts (Adil Jaafar, 2022; Goyak et al., 2022; Mehler, 2008).

4.3. Screening Ideological Markers

First, a word frequency list and the top 50 high-frequency words are generated by Jieba. Then, Jieba's TextRank algorithm calculates the node weight of each word's WS(Vi) to filter out high-weight words. Next, the top three female names with high word frequency and weight are selected. Then, collocation analysis is conducted with AntConc, extracting content words, such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives, that co-occur with these names. Based on collocation words, microstructural analysis selects content words and tags them as explicit or implicit ideological markers, with implicit markers verified through close reading. Finally, macro-structural analysis extracts phrases and sentences marked by collocation words via the concordance function to analyse their narrative functions in transmitting ideologies.

Graph 1 *Ideological Marker Screening Flow Chart*

4.4. Top Three Female Characters in Two Texts

In *Shengsi Pilao* (Mo, 2006), the top three female characters by frequency and word weight are 春苗 (Chunmiao, WS(Vi)=0.02789, 172), 互助 (Huzhu, WS(Vi)=0.02756, 240), and 凤凰 (Fenghuang, WS(Vi)=0.01945, 196). Chunmiao, despite a lower frequency, has the highest weight, indicating her role as a semantic hub in ideological themes. In *Fengru Feitun* (Mo, 1996), the top characters are 母亲 (Mother, WS(Vi)=0.08674, 1455), 大姐 (Eldest sister, WS(Vi)=0.01794, 217), and 二姐 (Second elder sister,

WS(Vi)=0.01252, 122). Mother's high frequency and weight underscore her central ideological role.

Table 1 *Top Three Female Characters*

Shengsi Pilao			Fengru Feitun		
Name	WS(Vi)	Frequency	Name	WS(Vi)	Frequency
春苗 (Chunmiao)	0.02789	172	母亲 (Mother)	0.08674	1455
互助 (Huzhu)	0.02756	240	大姐 (Eldest sister)	0.01794	217
凤凰 (Fenhuang)	0.01945	196	二姐 (Second elder sister)	0.01252	122

4.5. Ideological Markers

Using female character names as search words, collocates are generated by AntConc, ranked by log-likelihood (LL≥3.84, p<0.05, minimum 5 frequencies) to identify significant associations. The following is how the value of likelihood is interpreted: the less likely the co-occurrence of collocations and node words is to be random, the higher the significance (Anthony, 2005).

Table 2 *Reading of Log-Likelihood*

LL ≥ 3.84	Corresponding p value < 0.05 (significant)
LL ≥ 6.63	The corresponding p value < 0.01 (highly significant)
LL ≥ 10.83	The corresponding p value is < 0.001 (extremely significant)

Collocates, such as place names or actions, are excluded because they lack ideological connotations. Implicit markers, such as "巴结" (butter up) with "中年妇女" (middle-aged women), are extracted via manual review of concordance lines. Thematic roles (Dowty, 1989) include intimate relationship representatives (e.g., mother, wife), class representatives (e.g., rural women), and victims of morality (e.g., oppressed by norms). Ideological functions (Dahm, 1980) encompass symbolising trauma, new social ideologies, gender norms, systemic hierarchy, vulgar culture, and economic class attributes, derived from collocates. The following tables contain the ideological markers extracted by AntConc based on likelihood value and the implicit markers selected with the assistance of the "file view" function and the author's close reading.

Table 3 *Thematic Role Markers with Value of Likelihood*

Thematic Role	*Shengsi Pilao*	*Fengru Feitun*
Intimate Relationship Representative	春苗 (chunmiao): 大姐 (eldest sister，44.45); 妻子 (wife, 18.42); 妹妹 (younger sister, 16.89） 互助 (Huzhu): 嫂子 (sister-in-law, 59.82); 朋友 (friend, 27.45); 姐姐 (elder sister, 24.72); 闺女 (young lady, 23.62); 大娘 (auntie, 22.60）；女儿 (daughter, 16.03) 凤凰 (Fenghuang): 小姨 (aunt, 75.65); 妈妈 (mother, 60.82); 爸爸 (father, 42.24); 女儿	母亲 (mother): 大姐 (eldest sister, 12.49); 二姐(second sister, 68.84); 闺女 (daughter, 50.83); 大嫂(elder sister-in-law, 40.09); 女儿 (daughter, 33.10); 姑姑 (aunt, 23.66); 姥姥 (grandmother, 16,71) 大姐 (eldest sister, first sister):母亲 (mother, 12.49); 二姐 (second sister, 23.56) 二姐 (second sister): 母亲 (mother, 68.84); 大姐(eldest sister,

	(daughter, 11.14)	23.57)
Class Representative	春苗 (Chunmiao): 中年妇女 (middle-aged women, 34.78); 导演 (director, 31.7) 互助 (Huzhu):县、社官员 (County government and commune VIPs） 凤凰 (Fenghuang): 警察 (police, 36.47)	母亲 (mother): 排长 (Platoon Leader, 21.95); 士兵 (soldiers, 18.88) 大姐 (eldest sister): 政委 (political commissar, 44.78); 区长 (district head, 17.43)
Victims of Morality	春苗 (Chunmiao): 情人 (mistress, 18.74) ； 艰难(victim) 凤凰 (Fenghuang): 好孩子 (good girl, 83.84), 处女(virgin, 20.70)	
Religious Symbol or Character	凤凰 (Fenghuang): 猴子 (monkey, 189.67)	母亲 (mother): 马洛亚 (Pastor Marlory, 56.06); 教堂 （church); 牧师 (pastor)

Note:

1. The markers without a likelihood value are implicit ideological markers selected from the relevant text surrounding the node words or their collocates.
2. The English translations are from Goldblatt.

Table 4 *Ideological Function Markers with Value of Likelihood*

Ideological Function	*Shengsi Pilao*	*Fengru Feitun*
Symbolising Trauma	春苗 (Chunmiao): 别哭 (don't cry, 59.85); **孝服** (morning garments); **坟墓** (grave, 18.68); **眼泪** (tears, 13.18); **互助** (Huzhu): 伤口 (wound, 13.62); 缝合 (stitch up, 25.73) 凤凰 (Fenghuang): 惩罚 (punish, 16.86);	母亲 (mother): 跪下 (kneel, 38.72); **断奶** (Wean, 17.27); **感慨** (sigh, 21.59); 叹息 (sigh, 18.87); **日本** (Japan/Japanese, 16.03); **大枪**(gun, 15.82); **大姐** (eldest sister): 汉奸 (traitor, 16.73)；枪毙 (execute, 13.04); **二姐** (second sister): 丢脸 (loose face, 55.86); **哭声** (crying, 12.47)
Symbolising Newly Established Social Ideology	春苗 (Chunmiao): 新华书店 (New China Bookstore, 40.46)；	
Symbolising Gender Norms and Chanlleging	**互助** (Huzhu): 头发 (hair, 74.81); 辫子 (braid, 40.52); 嫁给 (marry..to, 33.38); 神奇 (miraculous, 21.68) 凤凰 (Fenghuang): 处女 (virgin, 20.70)	母亲 (mother): **吃奶** (suckling milk, 26.96); **女人** (woman, 20.80) **大姐** (eldest sister): 报答 (repay, 45.25)

Symbolising Systemic Hierarchy	春苗 (Chunmiao): 巴结 (butter up) 互助 (Huzhu): 军装 (army uniform, 18.96); 县、社官员(County government and commune VIPs） 凤凰 (Fenghuang): 警察 (police, 36.47)	母亲 (mother):跪下 (kneel, 38.72); 态度 (attitude, 33.73); 批评 (criticism,criticize); 排长(Platoon Leader, 21.95); 士兵 (soldiers, 18.88) 大姐 (eldest sister): 政委 (political commissar, 44.78); 区长 (district head, 17.43)
Vulgar Culture Symbol	凤凰 (Fenghuang): 王八蛋 (asshole, 64.56)	母亲 (mother): 畜生 (son of a bitch, 26.52); 小杂种 (little bastard, 20.17)
Symbolizing Social Class with Economic Attributes	凤凰 (Fenghuang): 地下室 (basement room, 29.74); 旅馆(hotel, 21.79); 车站 (station, 38.87)	

Note: The English translations are from Goldblatt.

5. Findings of Ideological Markers and Discussions

In *Shengsi Pilao* (Mo, 2006) and *Fengru Feitun* (Mo, 1996), thematic roles of female characters are quantified via likelihood values (LL). For intimate relationship representatives, "春苗" (Chunmiao) in *Shengsi Pilao* co-occurs with "big sister" (LL=44.45) and "wife" (LL=18.42), while "互助" (Huzhu) pairs with "sister-in-law" (LL=59.82); in *Fengru Feitun*, "母亲" (Mother) associates with "eldest sister" (LL=12.49) and "second sister" (LL=68.84).

High LL values (exceeding 10.83) suggest strong female-centric storylines, implying that Mo Yan crafts a gender ideology where close female relationships over male ones shape women's fates. Class representatives, such as "大姐" (Eldest sister), with a "political commissar" (LL=44.78) and "互助" with "County government VIPs," highlight political ties. At the same time, "police" and "Platoon Leader" indicate violence linked to "凤凰" (Fenghuang) and "母亲".

Ideological functions are reflected in the likelihood of co-occurrence. For "Symbolising Trauma," "春苗" pairs with "Don't cry" (LL=59.85) and "Grave" (LL=18.68), "互助" with "wound" (LL=13.62), and "大姐" with "execute" (LL=13.04). A close reading of "大姐" shows: "First sister stroked Sha Zaohua's dark little face. 'Mother,' she said, 'if they execute me, you'll have to raise her for me'" (Goldblatt, 2006), reflecting her political persecution and loss of agency under historical violence. Goldblatt omits "在搏斗中打死孙不言，被处决" (killed Sun Buyan, executed), balancing foreignization with domestication, where he tries to retain relationships and remove violence. To suit English readers, the translation strategy aligns with Marin-Lacarta's (2012) continuum, which posits that translation strategies exist on a spectrum balanced between cultural and literary considerations.

For "Symbolising Gender Norms," "互助" co-occurs with "hair" (LL=74.81) and "母亲" with "suckling milk" (LL=26.96), reinforcing traditional roles tied to physical traits. *Fengru Feitun* lacks "Victims of Morality" and "Social Class with Economic Attributes" markers, focusing on family epic over socioeconomic themes, unlike *Shengsi Pilao*'s narrative of rural social change.

6. Other Ideological Markers
6.1. "七大姑八大姨"

As shown in Table 3, "大娘," "小姨," and "姑姑" are explicit markers for intimate relationship representatives, yet Goldblatt translates them as "aunt" or "aunti," simplifying and domesticating the nuanced Chinese kinship system. This system includes

patrilineal/matrilineal distinctions (e.g., 姑妈 for father's sisters, 姨妈 for mother's sisters) and age/marriage markers (e.g., 婶, 嫂), which are lost in translation. The following example from *Fengru Feitun* illustrates this semantic loss:

"各位乡党，大爷大娘大叔大婶大哥大嫂大兄弟大姊妹们，俺兄弟扒铁桥打了胜仗…七大姑八大姨都来祝贺…" (Mo, 1996)

"Fellow township residents…my brother has achieved a glorious victory…we have been visited by friends and relatives…" (Goldblatt, 2004)

"七大姑八大姨" (seven aunts from the father's side and eight from the mother's side) is an idiom emphasising extensive kinship with cultural depth, lost in the neutral "friends and relatives." Using BCC, collocate analysis reveals:

Table 5 *Collocates with "七大姑八大姨"*

Verb Collocates		Noun Collocates	
Before "七大姑八大姨"	After "七大姑八大姨"	Before "七大姑八大姨"	After "七大姑八大姨"
害怕（fear），有 (have)，没有 (have not)，见见 (visit)，受到 (receive)，看看 (visit, take a look at)，讲 (tell)，面对 (face)，接受	问 (ask)，汇聚 (gather)，打交道 (deal with)，说 (talk about)，会 (can do)，分享 (share)，帮 (help)，同意 (agree),过来 (come over)，陪 (accompany)	家 (family)，妈妈 (mother)，亲戚 (relatives)，奶奶 (grandmother)，姐姐 (sister)，姐夫 (brother-in-law)，高官 (Senior Officials)，三姑六婆 (Distant female	家 (family)，祖宗 (ancestors)，外婆 (grandmother)，叔叔（uncle），口中 (mouthing)，小舅子 (brother-in-law)，大爷 (eldest uncle)，事业 (career)，叔叔 (uncle)，舅舅 (uncle)

(accept), 招呼 (entertain)		relatives），舅 舅（uncle）， 一干 (a group of)	

Noun collocates like "家" (family) and "祖宗" (ancestors) tie "七大姑八大姨" to kinship, while "高官" (senior officials) suggests authority links. Verbs like "害怕" (fear) and "问" (ask), which imply coercive interference, are absent from the English rendition. This domestication translation strategy erases cultural connotations, limiting target readers' understanding.

6.2. "闺女"

As an intimate relationship representative, "闺女" collocates highly with "互助" (Huzhu) in *Shengsi Pilao*, referring to an unmarried young woman or daughter with intimate connotations. Examples from the parallel corpus show varied translations:

1） "**她大姨，不是舍不得剪，咱**这闺女的头发跟别人不一样，剪断之后，往外渗血丝儿。" (Mo, 2006)

"It's not that, ma'am. My daughter's hair is different from other girls." (Goldblatt, 2011)

2）**我娘**兴奋地说：闺女，虽说是一家院里住着，你可是有十年没进大娘的家门了。 (Mo, 2006)

Well, young lady, my mother commented with notable interest. We all share a single compound, but this is the first time you've been in our house in a decade. (Goldblatt, 2011)

3）**你老婆**说， "**他是有**妇之夫，你是黄花闺女。他这样做是不负责任，是衣冠禽兽，是害你。" (Mo, 2006)

She continued. "He's a married man, you're a young maiden. That's completely irresponsible of him, he's a brute and he's hurt you." (Goldblatt, 2011)

"黄花闺女," an idiom affirming chastity, however, loses its traditional weight when translated to "young maiden." BCC collocate analysis for "黄花闺女" reveals:

Table 6 *Top 5 Collocates with "黄花闺女"*

Rank	Collocates	FREQ	LL
1	男人 (men)	22	3.39
2	寡妇 (widow)	13	3.69
3	做媒 (matchmaking)	13	4.81
4	自身难保 (unable to protect oneself)	12	4.96
5	姑娘 (young lady)	12	3.58

Collocates like "自身难保" (LL=4.96) suggest vulnerability, and "做媒" (LL=4.81) ties to marriage focus, reflecting traditional views on unmarried women's status. "寡妇" adds complexity, contrasting with "黄花闺女"'s unmarried ideal.

Taking "young lady" and "young maiden" as the search words, the function of collocates will be applied to extract the top collocates with reasonable MI (Mutual Information) statistics. MI is the algorithm employed in COCA, which measures the degree to which two words co-occur more frequently than "random co-occurrence" (Biber, 1993).

Table 7 *Top 10 Collocates with "Young Lady"*

Rank	Collocates	FREQ	MI
1	beautiful	109	3.13
2	lovely	69	4.10
3	attractive	26	3.33
4	charming	24	3.96
5	talented	18	3.30

6	grounded	12	3.52
7	courageous	7	3.62
8	clad	5	3.87
9	delightful	5	3.24
10	escort	5	3.05

The top 10 collocates of "young lady" in COCA, such as "beautiful", "lovely", "attractive", etc, show that its semantic connotation has the following characteristics: First, high frequency collocates mostly describe external attractiveness ("beautiful", "charming") or positive character ("talented", "courageous"), emphasising the elegance or socially recognised excellent qualities of young women. Second, collocates, such as "lovely" and "delightful", imply praise or positive evaluation rather than intimate emotions. Third, some collocates, such as "escort" and "clad", suggest that "young lady" is often used in formal social occasions, such as dinner parties and ceremonial activities, rather than private family conversations.

Taking "young maiden" as the search term, repeating the approach applied to "young lady", only 37 occurrences are observed in COCA, and the collocates with reasonable MI scores are articles such as "a" and "the". It is impossible to evaluate the use and connotation in COCA with so few occurrences and the meaningless collocates, of which the statistics can be deduced; it is used very little in modern English, unlike "黄花闺女", which is still used in modern Chinese.

To summarise, the collocation of words for "young lady" shows that it focuses on public image, while the family identity and emotional connotation of "闺女" are stripped away. However, "young maiden" in English means a young unmarried woman and also implies chastity, and it is an outdated expression (Oxford University Press, n.d., 2025). Additionally, "maiden" is an old word that is being used less frequently in modern contexts, according to COCA findings; this domestication translation strategy strips it of its cultural and emotional depth.

6.3. "县、社官员" versus "County Government and Commune VIPs"

In the text of *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out*, there are 14 occurrences of "官员", in which one example of "县、社官员" is as follows:

桌后六条也是从小学校搬来的长凳，凳上坐着身穿蓝色或者灰色制服的县、社官员，从左边数第五个人身穿一套洗得发了白的军装，此人是刚从部队转业回来的一个团级干部，是县革委会生产领导小组负责人。(Mo,2006)

County government and commune VIPs, in their blue or grey uniforms, were seated on six benches, also taken from the school. Fifth from the left, a man whose army uniform was nearly white from many launderings, was a recently retired regimental commander who'd taken charge of the production division of the County Revolutionary Committee. (Goldblatt, 2011)

"县、社官员" refers to a political system concept, specifically officials from the "县" and "社". In the Chinese administrative system, "县" is a county-level administrative division, while "社" refers to the "people's commune", a form of rural collective economic organisation that existed in China from 1958 to 1983 (Xin, 2001). "County Government and Commune" is a literal translation for "县、社", and thus the literal translation of "县、社官员" should be "County Government and Commune officials". However, Goldblatt uses "VIP", a popular social term in the Western world, instead of "official", which can be recognised as a domestication strategy by rewriting the political title. The further exploration of "VIP" and "官员" will be conducted in COCA and BCC to see how they are used in modern English and Chinese discourse.

Taking "VIP" as the search word in COCA, the top 10 collocates within the acceptable MI value (3≤MI≤6) are extracted, and the

collocate data of "官员" from BCC are further calculated in AntConc in the order of likelihood (LL ≥ 3.84) as shown in Table 8.

Table 8 *Top 10 Collocates of VIP and* **官员**

Collocates of VIP in COCA	Collocates of 官员 in BCC
Lounge (5.59), treatment (4.85), club (4.74), room (4.33), list (3.88), guest (3.72), special (3.55), invite (3.22), available (3.07), welcome (3.03)	收发 （send and receive，6.25）, 废话（nonsense，6.25）, 地厅 （prefecture-level，5.90）, 高票当选 （elected with a high vote，5.85）, 顺藤摸瓜 （follow the clues，5.83）, 非同一般 （extraordinary，5.83）, 退休（retired，5.83）, 财务人员 （financial staff，5.83）, 报备 （report，5.82）, 限制 （restriction，5.80）

Note: The numbers in COCA represent MI values, while likelihood is represented in BCC.

As for the collocation words of "VIP" in the English corpus, these words are mainly related to privileges, special treatment, and high-end services, suggesting that VIP is usually associated with enjoying special services, places or identities, and is often seen in business, entertainment or high-end service scenarios. The collocation words of "官员" in the Chinese corpus are related to government functions, administrative procedures, job behaviours and legal supervision, such as "收发" (send and receive，6.25), "地厅级" (prefecture-level，5.90), "高票当选" (elected with a high vote，5.83), "财务人员" (financial staff，5.83), "报备" (report，5.83), and "限制"

(restriction, 5.83). Furthermore, other collocates, such as "废话" (nonsense, 6.25) and "顺藤摸瓜" (follow the clues, 5.83), indicate a negative attitude. "废话" (nonsense) reflects the public's attitude or opinion towards the official's speech, such as believing that the official's speech is empty, lacks substantive content, or has problems of formalism and bureaucracy. "顺藤摸瓜" (follow the clues) is a phrase that appears in texts about catching corrupt officials, which carries negative connotations.

Goldblatt translated "官员" into "VIP" to make it easier for the target readers to associate it with important people, but this conversion ignores the unique political meaning of "官员". This translation strategy is more akin to domestication, as it replaces the specific concepts of the source culture with those of the target culture, thereby sacrificing the cultural and political connotations of the original text.

Conclusion

This study systematically examines the ideological construction of female characters in Mo Yan's novels and their representation in Howard Goldblatt's English translation, employing a corpus-based translation research method. Combining quantitative analysis and qualitative interpretation, data from the parallel corpus and the reference corpus, show that Mo Yan profoundly reveals how historical violence, social structure and gender power shape women's destiny through ideological markers, such as "grave" and "wound" representing trauma symbols, "political commissar" and "platoon leader" epitomising class representatives, and "suckling milk" and "virgin" symbolising

gender norms, and so on. Goldblatt's translation strategy includes elements of domestication and foreignization. The translation also includes replacing political terms. This improves the acceptability of the target readers; however, it reduces the cultural specificity and political criticality of the original text. For example, the translation

of "young lady" strips away the concept of chastity in the Chinese context, while the translation of "county government and commune VIPs" blurs the uniqueness of the Chinese administrative system.

The data findings of this study are consistent with previous scholars' evaluations of Goldblatt's translation strategy. For example, Jiang (2015) points out that he tends to achieve domestication through "fluency and cultural adaptation", while Ding (2016) finds that he often adopts a simplification strategy when dealing with culturally loaded words, which is consistent with the results of this paper's translation analysis of kinship terms and political terms. Moreover, in the limited data of this study, the "mixed strategy" proposed by Kumar (2021), that is, the coexistence of partial domestication and foreignization, has been found when the translator omits violent details such as the "fight" and "execution". Traces of foreignization are also visible in a few contexts, such as the retention of "mother" and religious symbols.

In addition, as pointed out in the introduction, Du & Zhang (2015) emphasise that Goldblatt often omits politically sensitive content, and this study also verified this tendency. For example, the translation of "官员" has weakened the criticism of the bureaucratic set-up of the original text, thereby affirming the effect of Goldblatt's rewriting strategy on ideology.

Lastly, this study proves that corpus analysis is an effective method in literary translation research. The combination of high-frequency word weights generated by the TextRank algorithm and co-occurrence analysis using the Log-Likelihood method can systematically reveal the text's ideological operating mechanism. However, the screening of implicit markers still requires manual close reading.

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