Rewriting Chinese Women through Western Eyes: A Postcolonial-Feminist Re-reading of Pearl S. Buck's *All Men Are Brothers*

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Abstract: This study examines Pearl S. Buck's English translation of Shui Hu Zhuan (All Men Are Brothers) through a contextual, paratextual, and textual lens, with particular focus on her ideological positioning as a Western female translator depicting Chinese women. Grounded in postcolonial feminist theory, the research aims to explore how Buck's bicultural identity and ideological stance influenced her translation choices, especially in the representation of gender. A qualitative methodology is employed, integrating contextual biography, paratextual commentary, and close textual comparison with later translations by Shapiro and Jackson. Findings indicate that while Buck adopts a largely literal and foreignizing translation style, she does not mitigate, and in some cases amplifies, the misogynistic portrayals present in the source text. Her lexical choices, such as translating neutral or mildly critical Chinese terms into morally charged English equivalents, suggest an orientalist and gendered interpretive framework. These translation decisions appear to reflect not only a commitment to linguistic fidelity but also implicit cultural biases toward Chinese femininity. The study concludes that Buck's translation reinforces Western-centered ideological narratives, casting the translator as an active participant in shaping cross-cultural representations. The findings underscore the importance of critically examining the translator's positionality in literary translation. This research contributes to discussions on symbolic power in translation and calls for greater ethical and gender-sensitive awareness among cultural mediators working with texts from historically marginalized contexts.

1. Introduction

1.1. *Shui Hu Zhuan* and Its Female Images

Shui Hu Zhuan (Chinese: 水浒传; literally translated as *The Water Margin*) is one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature. Set during the Song dynasty (960–1279), it recounts the exploits of 108 outlaws who unite in rebellion against corrupt authorities. While the novel champions themes such as bravery, loyalty, and resistance, its portrayal of women is both limited and problematic. Female characters are portrayed infrequently and, when present, are often shaped by deeply misogynistic tropes, typically depicted as morally corrupt or tragically powerless.

Women are not central to the narrative of *Shui Hu Zhuan*. Compared to their male counterparts, female characters are significantly fewer and largely serve to accentuate the heroism of male protagonists (Dong, 2009, p. 79). The novel often employs familiar motifs: helpless women rescued by men or unfaithful wives who are punished, devices that reinforce the outlaws' moral authority and masculine virtue. Notably, a character's treatment of women is used as a metric for his heroism; those who reject romantic entanglements and punish female betrayal are lauded, whereas those who succumb to lust are mocked or condemned (Wei, 1997, p. 138).

As the above analysis suggests, the novel presents women in either tragic or degraded roles, with the rare exception of a legendary female rebel. For this reason, *Shui Hu Zhuan* has been widely regarded as a literary celebration of masculinity and a text with "pronounced misogyny" (Hsia, 1968, p. 97).

1.2. Pearl S. Buck, the Translator

Pearl S. Buck was among the most influential literary figures of the twentieth century, authoring over one hundred works across a wide range of genres, including novels, short stories, biographies, children's literature, essays, and poetry. Many of her novels became bestsellers, with fifteen selected by the Book of the Month Club, a prominent American subscription service. Buck received numerous accolades, including the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize in Literature. She was also the first to produce a complete English translation of the Chinese literary classic *Shui Hu Zhuan*.

As an American writer who spent much of her life in China, Buck received a Chinese education and achieved fluency in the language. Her bicultural background profoundly [2]shaped her worldview and deeply influenced her literary and translational output. This study begins by examining the contextual dimensions of Buck's life, writing, and translation career. It then analyzes the personal, social, and ideological factors that may have informed her translation of

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[2] Book of the Month (founded in 1926) is an American subscription-based service that provides their members with five to seven new hardcover books each month. The club's chosen books are often influential and bestsellers afterwards, such as Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, etc.

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Shui Hu Zhuan. Building on   these insights, the paper investigates Buck's translation strategies concerning the representation of female characters, supported by close textual analysis of selected passages.

1.3. Research Questions

Given Buck's unique position as both an insider and outsider to Chinese culture, and considering the broader ideological forces that may have shaped her perspective, this study seeks to explore how female representations are constructed in her translation. The following research questions guide the investigation:

1.   How did Pearl S. Buck's personal background and ideological positioning influence her understanding and translation of *Shui Hu Zhuan*?

2.   In what ways does her translation construct or reframe the female images found in the source text?

3.   What are the implications of her translational approach for the representation of gender issues embedded in *Shui Hu Zhuan*?

2.   Literature Review

Many scholars have conducted contextual analyses of Buck's translation, drawing primarily on her autobiographical writings, personal correspondence, and public speeches (e.g., Tang, 2007; Dong, 2012; Hu & Ouyang, 2022). Tang Yanfang (2007, p. 80) suggests that Buck's decision to translate *Shui Hu Zhuan* was partly motivated by her dissatisfaction with the situation in China and her belief, expressed in a letter, that the lower classes needed a revolution. Buck's translation is widely viewed as adopting a foreignizing strategy, a tendency contextual and paratextual studies have linked to her deep respect for Chinese culture. As noted by Tang (2007) and Dong (2012), Buck explicitly stated in her translator's preface that she intended to translate the novel faithfully.

Recent scholarship continues to characterise Buck's translation of *Shui Hu Zhuan* as foreignizing, with particular attention to its role in disseminating Chinese culture globally. Hu and Ouyang (2022, p. 69), for instance, examine the translation through the lens of translation aesthetics. They argue that despite the complexity of the original, Buck's literal translation strategies reflect her strong desire to preserve the text's aesthetic and cultural features for Western readers.

They support their argument with examples, including Buck's translation of the numerous poetic passages in the original text. They contend that Buck's renderings preserve the original's rhythm and parallel structure, reflecting her sensitivity to the formal beauty of classical Chinese verse (ibid., p. 70). For example, Buck translated the poem "英雄不会读诗书，只合梁山泊里居。准备窝弓收猛虎，安排香饵钓鳌鱼"(my translation: Heroes do not read books or recite poetry; They are only suited to dwell in Liangshan Marsh. They prepare curved bows to capture fierce tigers, and set fragrant bait to catch giant sea-turtles.) into "A hero I who cannot read, I live in a lair where robbers breed, For a tiger fierce have I set my bow, For bait for a faery whale I go" (Buck, 1948, p. 594). Buck preserves the original four-line structure and offers a faithful interpretation of the content. By doing so, the translated poem achieves a pleasing rhythm that enhances its poetic effect in the target language (Hu & Ouyang, 2022, p. 70).

Secondly, the scholars pointed out that Buck preserves the original forms of address for certain characters, even when such terms may sound unpleasant. For example, a minor female character, the wife of the corrupt official Liu Gao, is portrayed with underlying gender bias. She is harassed by Wang Ying, rescued by Song Jiang, but later betrays Song Jiang to the authorities, framing her as ungrateful and reinforcing negative female stereotypes. Song Jiang calls her "泼妇," typically meaning a rude or quarrelsome woman. Buck translates this as "evil woman". While Hu and Ouyang (ibid., p. 71) argue that this translation retains the original's derogatory tone, the author would contend that it intensifies the negative portrayal of the female image. The term "泼妇" implies a woman who is loud, unreasonable, or ill-mannered, but it does not necessarily carry strong moral condemnation. In contrast, the word "evil" has far more serious connotations, suggesting inherent wickedness or immorality. As such, Buck's translation of the word may reinforce, rather than merely preserve, the novel's gender bias.

The above review indicates that Buck's translation predominantly adopts a foreignizing approach, faithfully conveying both the content and the formal, cultural features of the original. Contextual studies further highlight her profound appreciation for Chinese culture, which likely informed her decision to preserve the source text's narrative structure and cultural elements. Building on these earlier contributions, this paper adds a new dimension by focusing on the gendered implications of Buck's translation choices. While previous scholars have emphasized her cultural sensitivity and foreignizing strategy, little attention has been paid to how her ideological positioning, shaped by her bicultural upbringing and early feminist awareness, may have influenced her treatment of female characters.

This study seeks to fill that gap by applying postcolonial feminist theory to examine how Buck's translation negotiates the intersection of gender and culture. It aims to uncover whether her rendition of *Shui Hu Zhuan* reinforces or reinterprets the misogynistic elements embedded in the original text. By integrating contextual, paratextual, and textual analysis, the research offers a more nuanced understanding of Buck, not merely as a cultural intermediary but as an ideological agent whose translation decisions are embedded within broader gendered and racialized discourses.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1.   Postcolonialism and postcolonial translation

Since the translator is a Westerner, the (re)construction of female images in her English translation of *Shui Hu Zhuan* is inevitably influenced by Western perceptions of the East. This process is closely linked to broader discursive patterns through which the West represents the East. One prominent theoretical framework that addresses such representational dynamics is postcolonialism, which has significantly shaped translation studies and contributed to the development of postcolonial translation theory.

Postcolonialism refers to the historical period following the end of colonial rule. As a theoretical concept, postcolonialism signifies resistance to colonial power and its enduring discourses, which continue to shape cultures even after political independence. Postcolonial theory primarily examines the cultural and discursive power dynamics between former colonial powers and their ex-colonies. It addresses issues such as racism, cultural imperialism, and hegemonic representations, aiming to expose how imperialism extended its influence through culture. Ultimately, it seeks to envision a new relationship between East and West, shifting from domination to dialogue (Wang, 1997, p. 100).

Since the 20th century, many formerly colonized countries have achieved political independence, yet they often remain economically and culturally dependent. Western cultural dominance continues to exert profound influence, giving rise to the academic field of postcolonialism. Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism* is one of the theoretical foundations of postcolonialism, which defines Orientalism as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (ibid., p. 3). In essence, the West constructs stereotypical representations of the East to assert its cultural superiority and extend symbolic colonization. This theory also offers valuable insights for translation studies: when examining English translations of Eastern texts, one can consider how the translator's ideological positioning may be shaped by dominant Western views of the Orient, and how this may lead to a (re)construction of Eastern images in translation.

Scholars of postcolonialism have also focused on translation, contributing to the emergence of postcolonial translation theory, a body of concepts and critiques developed under the framework of postcolonial thought (Fei, 2005, p. 224). According to Douglas Robinson (1997, p. 31), translation in postcolonial contexts plays three roles: as a channel of colonization, a channel of decolonization, and a reminder of the persistent cultural inequalities in the postcolonial world.

The dynamics of colonization and decolonization in translation are closely tied to the strategies of domestication and foreignization. Robinson (1997, p. 109) argues that domesticated translation, which absorbs the source culture into the dominant target culture, has historically served as a tool of colonialism, erasing the unique features of marginalized cultures. In such contexts, translators and writers from subordinated cultures are often compelled to conform to hegemonic norms, leading to a homogenization that undermines cultural diversity (ibid.). In contrast, foreignized translations have a decolonizing significance. But again, the domestication and foreignization in the postcolonial context are also not opposites. Robinson (ibid., pp. 110-111) believed that the use of domestication strategies to translate Anglo-American cultural texts into marginalized cultural texts is also an effective decolonizing translation.

2.1.2. Postcolonial feminism

Colonialism is fundamentally a gendered process, shaped by the power structures and gender ideologies of colonial regimes. Colonial discourse often portrayed colonizers as rational, authoritative men, while colonized women were reduced to sexualized stereotypes, depicted as naïve, submissive, and lacking intelligence (Said, 1978, p. 207). However, the rise of feminism did not necessarily address these intersecting oppressions. Mainstream Western feminism has often universalized the experience of white women, overlooking the distinct struggles of women of colour. Some feminist texts even portray non-Western women as passive victims devoid of agency (Jackson & Jones, 1998, p. 104). In response to this blind spot, scholars have developed postcolonial feminism, which merges postcolonial critique with feminist theory to explore how gender, race, and imperialism intersect.

Postcolonial feminism is a form of cross-cultural inquiry that integrates feminist critique with postcolonial analysis. It rejects the idea that patriarchy alone accounts for women's oppression, instead framing gender within intersecting structures of race, nation, geography, and imperialism. It challenges the "hegemony" of Western/white/middle-class feminism (Lin, 2002, p. 14). Therefore, postcolonial feminism operates on two critical dimensions. it interrogates both the patriarchal norms within colonized societies and the racial and imperialist assumptions embedded in Western feminist discourse. As Lin Shuming (ibid. p. 17) argues, genuine liberation requires resisting not only gender oppression, but also racial hierarchies, colonial legacies, and global power imbalances.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984, p. 337), a key figure in postcolonial feminist theory, critiques how some Western feminist writings construct "third world women" as a homogenous, passive group, ignorant, uneducated, family-bound, in contrast to the portrayal of Western women as modern, educated, and sexually autonomous. Mohanty (ibid.) further critiques the tendency of some Western feminists to universalize women's experiences, assuming that women form a pre-existing, homogenous group with shared interests and desires, regardless of class, race, or internal contradictions. In this way, she argues, Western feminists have created a "double colonization", primarily by contrasting the political immaturity of "third world women" with the progressive ethos of Western feminism.

Another important figure in postcolonial feminism is Gayatri Spivak, whose work focuses on the double marginalization of women in developing nations, oppressed both by colonial legacies and patriarchal structures (Spivak, 1999, p. 125). She criticizes Western feminism for overlooking racial and cultural differences among women and urges Western feminists to abandon their sense of superiority when addressing issues in the Global South (ibid., p. 80). In *French Feminism in an International Frame*, Spivak (1988) critiques Julia Kristeva's *About Chinese Women* (1977) for reproducing Orientalist stereotypes. Kristeva, for instance, describes Chinese women as "wordless," "still," and "piercing," portraying them as silent Others (Kristeva, 1977, p. 11; Spivak, 1988, p. 158). Spivak argues that such portrayals serve to highlight the Western feminist's own authority rather than genuinely engage with the lived realities of Chinese women in the 1970s (ibid., p. 161). She later reminds researchers that the key question is not "Who am I?" but "Who is the other woman? How am I naming her, and how does she name me?" (Spivak, 1988, p. 150).

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology that integrates paratextual, contextual, and textual analyses under the framework of postcolonial feminist translation theory. The aim is to examine how Pearl S. Buck (re)constructed female images in *Shui Hu Zhuan*. By triangulating these three analytical lenses, the research reveals how translation operates not merely as linguistic transfer, but as a site of ideological and cultural (re)writing.

The paratextual analysis draws on Genette's (1997, p. 407) theory of paratext, which includes elements such as prefaces, introductions, and translators' notes. These materials offer insights into the translator's strategies, challenges, and views on gender-related content. This study examines how the translator discusses the original text, its female characters, her translation style, and strategies in her paratexts, as such remarks shed light on translation choices and help explain the construction of female images in the target text.

The textual analysis examines how female characters in *Shui Hu Zhuan* are linguistically constructed and mediated in Pearl S. Buck's translation, *All Men Are Brothers*. Passages are selected based on their relevance to gender representation, particularly language involving moral judgment, violence, or emotional expression. A comparative reading is conducted with translations by Sidney Shapiro and J.H. Jackson, whose more domesticating strategies and restrained treatment of misogynistic content contrast with Buck's often more explicit portrayals. This comparison helps to illuminate Buck's distinctive ideological stance and narrative choices in constructing female images.

The contextual analysis draws on postcolonial feminist concerns with race, gender, and power, situating Buck's translation within its historical and cultural context. It examines how her bicultural identity, as a Western woman raised in China, shaped her authority and reception. Drawing on Spivak's and Mohanty's insights, the analysis investigates how Buck's perspective might unconsciously reinforce a Western feminist gaze while portraying Chinese women.

4. Contextual and Paratextual Analysis

4.1. Growing up in Chinese culture

Pearl S. Buck was born in 1892 in West Virginia, USA (Conn, 1996, p. 22). At three months, 1956, pp. 2-3). Growing up immersed in Chinese society, she learned vernacular spoken Chinese before English (Buck, 1972, p. 169). Buck's literary interests were shaped by her tutor, Mr. Kung, who taught her classical Chinese literature for a decade (Pei, 2009). Among the traditional novels she read, she particularly admired *Shui Hu Zhuan* for its heroic figures (Conn, 1996, p. 139). Mr. Kung also introduced Buck to Confucianism, whose ethical principles deeply shape *Shui Hu Zhuan*, particularly its endorsement of hierarchy and female subordination. Buck admired Confucianism as a moral system (Buck, 1956, p. 200), and this respect may have shaped her translation choices. However, since doctrines like the "Three Bonds"[3] have been criticized for reinforcing patriarchy, her respect for such values warrants scrutiny in analyzing her portrayal of marginalized female characters.

4.2. The "embryonic feminism" and potential orientalism

From 1910 to 1914, Buck studied at Randolph-Macon College in the U.S., earning a Bachelor's degree. Prior to this, her understanding of America came largely from others, particularly American missionaries in China, whose work often reflected Western superiority (Leong, 2005, p. 13). Her father, for example, viewed racial hierarchies as natural and saw himself as a civilizing force. Buck, growing up in this environment, was also exposed to such orientalist ideas (Leong, 2005, p. 13).

Even though her life in the United States did not live up to her idealized expectations (Conn, 1996, p. 24), it undeniably exposed her to new ideas, particularly feminist thought, which nurtured her "embryonic feminism" (ibid., p. 51). However, Buck's feminist awareness began earlier. In *The Exile: Portrait of an American Mother*, she reflects on witnessing gender injustice during her childhood in China, for instance, missionary wives like her mother endured hardships without recognition, receiving unmarked graves while their husbands were honoured (Buck, 1994, p. 328). She also noted her father's misogynistic attitude, believing that women were foolish and burdensome, which created lasting tension in their relationship (ibid.).

It is important to revisit postcolonial feminism, which critiques the ethnocentrism and racial biases in Western feminist discourse (Mohanty, 1991, p. 51; Spivak, 1988, pp. 296–304). In Buck's case, available evidence suggests that her early feminist consciousness was primarily concerned with the plight of white women, such as her mother and the wives of other missionaries. There is little in her autobiographical or early writings to suggest a comparable attention to Chinese women's struggles, even though such hardships likely surrounded her. This selective focus likely stems from her personal and cultural background. Influenced by orientalist ideas during her upbringing, Buck's feminist outlook may have been oriented toward women of her own culture. This is crucial when analysing her translation of *Shui Hu Zhuan*, as her portrayal of Chinese women may reflect both her feminist sensibilities and inherited orientalist perspective.

4.3. Understanding Chinese women

In 1917, Pearl S. Buck married John Lossing Buck and moved to Su County, Anhui Province, where she worked as a missionary wife focusing on local women. During this time, Buck developed strong negative views of the region, reflected in her writings and letters, often cited by scholars such as So (2010, p. 90) and Leong (2005, p. 18). She criticized the local community's "backwardness" and Chinese women's intellectual passivity. For example, in a 1919 letter to her friend Emma White, she reportedly called China "a country given to the devil" (cited in So, 2010, p. 90). Regarding the Chinese women who were the target of her missionary, Buck (cited from Leong, 2005, p. 18) commented, "all Chinese women are totally unaccustomed to using their minds for anything more difficult than gambling or their very simple housekeeping, and so a sermon is quite beyond their reach, often". Although the original letter is unavailable, So's analysis is widely recognized. According to postcolonial feminism, such comments reflect the racial superiority Western feminists have historically shown toward women in the "Global South" (Spivak, 1999, p. 80). Buck's remarks exemplify this orientalist attitude, revealing a condescending view of uneducated Chinese women. This mindset likely influenced her literary and translational portrayal of women, shaping her interpretation of female characters in *Shui Hu Zhuan* within an orientalist framework.

In 1921, Buck moved to Nanjing to teach English literature. The cosmopolitan environment exposed her to students and intellectuals, leading to a shift in her views. She began critiquing the racial arrogance of the missionary community, arguing it undermined the Christian message (Spurling, 2010, pp. 204–205). In a 1927 article, she openly criticized missionaries as "arrogant" and "ignorant" (ibid., p. 144). Her disillusionment extended to missionary translation practices, which she contrasted

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[3] Three Fundamental Bonds can be summarized as follows: subjects should obey their monarchs; wives should obey their husbands; children should obey their parents.

with her own efforts to present a more "earthy" and authentic China to Western readers through her translations of Chinese literature (Conn, 1996, p. 139).

This shift in attitude also influenced her view on translation. Unlike her father, who saw *Bible* translation as civilizing work, Buck viewed her literary translations as a way to introduce Western readers to the "earthy" realities of Chinese life (Conn, 1996, p. 139). Following Venuti's (2018) concept of foreignization, which preserves cultural otherness, Buck's work aligns with foreignizing strategies. Previous studies (Tang, 2007; Dong, 2012) support this, noting Buck's tendency to retain Chinese cultural elements in her translations. Thus, her translation of *Shui Hu Zhuan* likely adopts a foreignizing approach to maintain Chinese cultural features for Western readers.

Buck's earlier disparaging view of Chinese women may have been rooted in orientalist ideology. However, as noted by Richard Jean So (2010, pp. 90–91), notes that studying *Shui Hu Zhuan* in her 1927 Chinese literature course may have deepened her appreciation of Chinese society's themes of rebellion and grassroots justice. Yet, there is no direct evidence that her biases toward lower-class Chinese women were similarly transformed.

In 1934, Buck divorced her first husband and married Richard J. Walsh, president of the publisher that released her *Shui Hu Zhuan* translation. Their close relationship likely reduced editorial interference (Conn, 1996, p. 330). This makes Buck's own views and positionality even more critical to examine in assessing her translation strategies.

4.4. Bridging the East and the West-Buck's fictional writings

Buck lived in China for 40 years, deeply influenced by its culture. She described America as her mother country, giving her physical being, and China as her father country, shaping her spiritual world. This bicultural background made her a keen observer of both cultures (Conn, 1996, p. 24). Her fictional works, like her translation of *Shui Hu Zhuan*, aimed to introduce China to English readers. As former US President Nixon (1973) said, Buck was a "human bridge between East and West," expressing her love for China through her literature. This section reviews her fiction to explore its connection to her translation.

Buck's writing career began in the 1920s during China's New Culture Movement, a time when traditional and modern values clashed. She wrote about China at this cultural crossroads and published articles in American journals like *The Atlantic* and *Asia*. Her first fictional work, *The Chinese Woman Speaks*, was published in 1930 and reflected her desire to give voice to Chinese women oppressed by patriarchy (Conn, 1996, p. 83). This short novel was published in 1930, after Buck completed her Bachelor's degree in the United States. As mentioned earlier, the years in the United States brought Buck into contact with relatively mature feminism and feminist movements.

This novel was likely written after Buck was influenced by feminism and combined it with her experiences in China. It tells the story of a Chinese woman married to a Western-educated man, struggling because her husband thinks she is too conservative. She writes letters to a white female friend in America for help. This seems to contradict the idea that Buck ignored Chinese women's struggles. However, her understanding is limited. The Chinese woman in the novel is educated and wealthy, unlike most women Buck encountered in rural Anhui. Buck's focus was on a small, privileged group of women, not the majority.

Also, Buck portrays the white woman as more intellectual and advanced, while the Chinese woman relies on her for help. From a postcolonial feminist view, this reflects a Western feminist tendency to see Western women as superior and "Third World women" as backward and needing guidance (Amos & Parmar, 1984, p. 7; Mohanty, 1991, pp. 56-57). Buck's depiction aligns with this, showing the Chinese woman as needing to be "saved" by her white friend. Therefore, Buck's view of Chinese women can be seen as biased and Orientalist.

Buck's portrayal of rural Chinese women is best seen in *The Good Earth* (1931), which helped her win the Nobel Prize. The novel depicts village life in Anhui Province, focusing on farmer Wang Lung and his wife O-Lan. O-Lan is shown as hardworking and brave, essential to the family's survival. Yet this strength is consistently framed within a narrative of silence and self-effacement, as she is described as "a faithful, speechless serving maid" to her husband (Buck, 2004, p. 29). This narrative framing, which romanticizes female suffering and compliance, aligns closely with the Orientalist trope of the passive, voiceless Eastern woman.

Buck's portrayal invites postcolonial feminist critique, especially through her repeated use of words like "maid" and "slave" for O-Lan and her daughter. These terms highlight the women's lack of agency, showing them as powerless to control their lives or resist patriarchy. This portrayal is consistent with what Mohanty (1991, pp. 56–57) critiques as the construction of "Third World women" in Western feminist discourse, defined by silence, obedience, and victimhood.

This ideological pattern appears not only in Buck's fiction but also in her 1933 English translation of *Shui Hu Zhuan*, titled *All Men Are Brothers*. Given the close timing and shared cultural context, it is likely that similar narrative tendencies influenced her translation. Buck preserves and even intensifies the misogynistic portrayals of women in the original, depicting characters like Pan Jinlian and Sun Erniang as morally corrupt, manipulative, or violent, with little effort to contextualize or humanize them. Notably, Buck (1948, p. 211) also uses the term "slave" to describe Pan Jinlian's background as a maid sold into marriage, echoing similar language used in *The Good Earth*. This repeated lexical choice reinforces a narrative of female subjugation, highlighting the intertextual connection between her fiction and translation.

This consistent portrayal across Buck's fiction and translation shows a clear pattern: Chinese women are either depicted as submissive, suffering martyrs (like O-lan) or as morally flawed threats to male virtue (as in *Shui Hu Zhuan*). In both portrayals, women's agency is erased, serving to uphold patriarchal values or glorify male bonds. Notably, *The Good Earth* faced criticism upon publication. Wu Lifu (1932, p. 2), the first translator who translated the novel into Chinese, commented: "这些是不是事实呢？作者在揭穿这一切之后，有否抱着一般白色优越的心理，以侵略中国为救中国呢？或竟承认中国足以危害全世的安宁，所以途穷变生，便是黄祸猖獗之时呢" (my translation: Are the events depicted in the novel true to reality? After exposing all these issues, does the author maintain a sense of white superiority, attempting to save China through a form of cultural invasion? Or does she go so far as to suggest that China poses a threat to global peace, implying that when the country is pushed to its limits, it will give rise to the so-called "Yellow Peril"?). Similarly, Sinologist Jiang Kang-hu

(1933, p. 3) writing in *The New York Times*, accused Buck of distorting the image of Chinese peasants by emphasizing their flaws and eccentricities rather than depicting ordinary people.

4.5. All Men are Brothers

When reviewing Buck's life, it is essential to discuss her translation of *Shui Hu Zhuan* (*All Men Are Brothers*). In the following section, I will provide a contextual analysis focused on this translation. Since Buck had a long-term relationship with the publisher and faced relatively little editorial pressure during the translation process, this analysis will mainly explore how her personal views and interpretations influenced her translation decisions.

4.5.1. Buck's Perspective and Translational Intentions in *Shui Hu Zhuan*

Buck chose to translate *Shui Hu Zhuan* mainly because she loved the novel. Her admiration focused on two key aspects, the first being its writing style. In her 1938 Nobel Prize lecture, Buck explained that novels in China were not considered art. As a result, they were free from scholarly criticism and strict artistic demands. Chinese novels were written in vernacular language rather than the classical literary language. This plain, everyday language was closer to people's lives and easier for readers to understand, which Buck greatly admired (Conn, 1996, p.139). Among many vernacular folk novels, Buck regarded *Shui Hu Zhuan* as the most outstanding because it features 108 distinct characters, each with a unique personality. When they speak, readers can recognize who they are without needing their names. For Buck, this unique writing style made *Shui Hu Zhuan* an important influence in the history of Chinese fiction (ibid.).

Another reason Buck loved *Shui Hu Zhuan* was its content. She admired the novel's empathy for common people and the democratic spirit shown by the Chinese peasant class (ibid.; Buck, 1956, p. 164). Buck (1956, p. 265) believed this democratic spirit was especially important in the 1920s when China was torn by civil war and ordinary people were suffering. Later in life, she said that *Shui Hu Zhuan* expressed the Chinese people's spirit of democracy and resistance, making it very relevant during the chaotic times when she translated it (Buck, 1972, pp.75-80). Buck's choice of the 70-chapter version as the original text was also because she valued this democratic spirit. She felt other versions, which ended with the outlaws surrendering to the government, were less revolutionary and favoured the ruling class (Buck, 1948). Buck's love for *Shui Hu Zhuan* greatly shaped her translation style. She argued that the original novel tells a wonderful story in a unique way, so a literal translation is the best approach because it preserves the Chinese language style. In other words, Buck's translation is foreignizing, aiming to keep the original's cultural features, such as its language conventions (ibid., p.xxi).

One point to note is that Buck seems to have a very positive view of *Shui Hu Zhuan* and does not explicitly criticize its violent and erotic portrayals of women, unlike other translators and scholars (e.g. Hsia, 1968; Dent-Young & Dent-Young, 1994). However, this silence should be treated carefully, as there is no direct evidence of her personal opinion on these portrayals. Since Buck was exposed to feminism during college and sympathized with missionaries' wives early on, it is reasonable to believe she was aware of the novel's misogyny. Her choice not to discuss these issues openly might be linked to the orientalist views of Chinese women she held, as analysed earlier.

Buck values the novel's sympathy for common people and the strong friendship among the Shui Hu outlaws, which is why she translated the title as *All Men Are Brothers* (Buck, 1948, p. xxi). As mentioned earlier, the women's suffering and negative portrayals in *Shui Hu Zhuan* often serve to highlight male brotherhood and bravery. In other words, women's pain is used to emphasize men's loyalty and courage. Buck seems especially to admire this male camaraderie. As a skilled writer, she likely understood this narrative strategy and may have chosen to keep, or even strengthen, the depiction of women's suffering to better highlight the bonds between the male characters.

4.5.2. Reception as a Reflection of Buck's Translational Approach

All Men Are Brothers was published in 1933 in both New York and London and sold very well, even making it onto the Book of the Month Club list (Conn, 1996, p. 181). By 2006, it had been reprinted 14 times in the United States. This shows that the translation had a significant impact and was well-received by many readers. This success was likely helped by Buck's existing popularity in the U.S., especially since her novel *The Good Earth* was a bestseller in 1931.

One reason Buck's translation was well received may be related to the cultural climate in the West at the time. After World War I, especially in the 1920s, the United States experienced rapid social and cultural growth, known as the Roaring Twenties, marked by economic progress and artistic innovation (Foer, 2014; Wang, 2019, p. 694). During this period, interest in Chinese studies was rising, and translating Chinese literature was seen as a way to enrich American culture and literature (Woodsworth, 2000, p. 86; France, 2000, p. 222; Wang, 2019, p. 694). In this cultural context, Buck likely wanted her translation to keep the original Chinese language style and cultural features to help promote cultural innovation in America. Studies show that *All Men Are Brothers* tends toward foreignization and follows Chinese storytelling styles (Tang, 2007; Dong, 2012) and follows Chinese narrative conventions (Wang, 2020, p. 19). This alignment with the cultural mood likely helped make her translation popular.

All Men Are Brothers was well received by experts when it was first published. American Sinologist Nathaniel Peffer (1933, p.3) praised the translation in the *New York Herald Tribune* and called Buck a great artist for capturing the unique flavor of the Chinese language. Sinologist Robert Irwin (1953, p.94) the translation suited Western readers' tastes best. However, after Sidney Shapiro's translation appeared in 1980, Buck's work faced some criticism. For instance, Sinologist Robert Hegel (1982, p. 404) described Buck's translation as "clumsy" compared to Shapiro's, which he found complete, accurate, and enjoyable to read.

To better understand the criticism of Buck's translation, Ma Hongjun (2003, p. 126) argues that Buck's use of a foreignization strategy, uncommon in the Chinese translation field at the time, was unfamiliar and even jarring to many scholars and translators, which partly explains the negative reception in China. However, since Ma's study, there has been a growing appreciation for Buck's work. Scholars such as Cao and Tang (2017) have argued that her translation contributes to promoting cultural diversity and helps convey the distinctiveness of Chinese culture to English-speaking audiences.

5. Textual Analysis

As demonstrated in the preceding analysis, Buck generally adopted a foreignizing translation approach. Her potential biases against Chinese women may have led her to retain the original portrayals of female characters, particularly those reflecting misogynistic attitudes, in a manner that closely follows both the content and linguistic form of the source text. In this section, the author will analyse selected passages from the original text that depict women, focusing on their speech, expressions, inner thoughts, and narrator descriptions, and compare them with Buck's corresponding translations. This comparative analysis aims to test and validate my hypothesis. Given Buck's tendency toward literal translation, the author will also examine how other translators rendered the same passages to better assess the effects and implications of Buck's approach.

Although female characters in *Shui Hu Zhuan* are generally not central to the narrative and rarely appear in chapter titles, it is notable that when they do, the narrator often presents them with strong subjective bias, typically emphasizing traits such as violence, deceit, or moral deviance. Literary scholar John Mullan (2006, p. 11) notes that titles shape readers' expectations even before they begin reading, thereby influencing how the story is interpreted. In this sense, chapter titles play a significant role in constructing initial impressions of female characters and are thus key to understanding their representation in the novel. The following examples examine how Buck translated these chapter titles, shedding light on her approach to depicting women.

Sun Erniang (literally "Second Sister Sun") is one of only three female outlaws in *Shui Hu Zhuan*. She is portrayed as a fierce, hot-tempered woman with an intimidating appearance and strong martial arts skills. Her nickname, 母夜叉 ("Female Yaksha"), likens her to a fearsome demon from Chinese mythology, underscoring her violent and inhuman traits. She and her husband, Zhang Qing, run an inn that murders travellers and sells buns made of human flesh, an act that instantly establishes her as a brutal and terrifying figure. From the moment she is introduced, the narrator emphasizes Sun Erniang's cruelty. The chapter in which she first appears is titled: "母夜叉孟州道卖人肉，武都头十字坡遇张青" (my translation: "The Female Yaksha Sells Human Flesh on the Road to Mengzhou; Wu Song Encounters Zhang Qing at Cross Slope"). This title immediately signals both Sun Erniang's gendered and dehumanizing nickname and the violence she is associated with, setting the tone for her depiction. Importantly, although both Sun Erniang and Zhang Qing participate in the human flesh trade, the title singles out Sun Erniang for blame. This creates the impression that she alone is responsible for the brutality, while Zhang Qing is introduced in a more neutral or even heroic light, his name appearing alongside the well-known hero Wu Song. This framing may lead readers to view Sun Erniang as the mastermind of the inn's crimes, despite the fact that her husband is equally complicit. With this in mind, the following section will analyse how Buck translated this chapter title and what that reveals about her representation of female characters.

As expected, Buck's translation is highly literal: "The she-monster of the sea sells human flesh on the road to Meng Chou. Wu Sung meets Chang Ching at The Cross Roads Ridge" (Buck, 1948, p. 239). This version retains the sensationalism of the original, shaping readers' perceptions of Sun Erniang from the start. Terms like "she-monster" and "human flesh" reinforce her brutality and grotesqueness. By contrast, Shapiro (1980, p. 276) translates it as: "The Witch of Mengzhou Road Sells Drugged Wine. Constable Wu Meets Zhang Qing at Crossroads Rise." Compared to Buck's version, this wording softens Sun Erniang's image. "Witch" implies cunning rather than savagery, and "drugged wine" shifts focus from graphic violence to deceit. This comparison shows that Buck's literal approach preserves, and may even intensify, the misogynistic framing in the original.

Pan Jinlian is depicted as a wicked and lascivious woman who poisons her husband to be with her lover, only to be brutally killed by her brother-in-law Wu Song. Yet her story also has a tragic dimension. She was once a servant in a wealthy household and, after offending her master, was married off to the elderly and unattractive Wu Da. Though trapped in an unhappy marriage, she longed for love and met a tragic end. Some scholars argue that her fate reflects the oppression of women in a patriarchal society, which denied them autonomy (Zhang, 2015, p. 17). The portrayal of this character in *Shui Hu Zhuan* , as immoral and her violent death, embodies deep-rooted misogyny (Yu, 2009, p. 129).

The title of Chapter 24, 王婆计啜西门庆　淫妇药鸩武大郎 (my translation: Wang Po Plots with Ximen Qing; The Adulterous Woman Poisons Wu Dalang), casts immediate moral judgment on Pan Jinlian through the term "淫妇" (adulterous woman), framing her negatively from the outset. It also condemns Wang Po, who orchestrates the affair and suggests the poisoning, with language that conveys deceit and manipulation.

Buck's (1948, p. 232) translation: "The old woman Wang now thinks to advise Hsi Men Ch'ing by guile. The adulteress poisons Wu the Elder" remains literal and morally charged, retaining terms like "adulteress" and "by guile." In contrast, Jackson (2010, p. 349) offers a more neutral version: "Mrs. Wang devises a plan for Westgate; Mrs. Wu poisons her husband." His translation avoids explicit judgment, using milder, factual language. This comparison highlights how Buck's literal strategy reinforces misogynistic overtones, whereas Jackson's mitigate them.

Buck's portrayal of female characters in the main text reflects the same pattern seen in her translations of chapter titles. While mostly literal, she sometimes adds negative connotations, intensifying the misogynistic tone of the original. For example, in the first meeting between Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing, a scene where Pan accidentally drops a pole on Ximen Qing's head is described, showing his reaction.

ST: 那人立住了脚，意思要发作；回过脸来看时，却是一个*妖娆的妇人*。(Shi & Jin, 2015, p. 511) (my translation: The man stood still, meaning to get angry; but when he turned his face to look, it turned out to be a charming woman).

TT: The man stopped and prepared to be angry, but when he turned his face to see, he saw *a lovely, loose-looking woman*… (Buck, 1948, p. 220)

TT by Shapiro: Angrily, he halted and turned around, ready to blast. But when he saw *the lissome creature standing there*…(1980, p. 308)

In the original text, the man's reaction changes from irritation to surprise when he sees a "妖娆的妇人" (a charming woman), a phrase that suggests allure without moral judgment. Buck translates this as "a lovely, loose-looking woman," adding

a negative, sexualized implication absent in the original. The term "loose-looking" implies moral looseness, which intensifies the misogynistic tone. This shows Buck's interpretive addition, portraying the woman as morally questionable. By contrast, Shapiro's translation highlights her attractiveness without moral judgment.

To enhance clarity and provide a more accessible summary of the textual comparisons discussed above, the following table presents selected translation examples. This visual representation allows for a clearer understanding of how Buck's translation strategies contrast with those of other translators.

Table 1: The comparisons of selected translation examples.

Original Text (ST)	Buck's Translation	Other Translator(s)	Analysis
母夜叉孟州道卖人肉，武都头十字坡遇张青	The she-monster of the sea sells human flesh on the road to Meng Chou...	Shapiro: The Witch of Mengzhou Road Sells Drugged Wine...	Buck's version retains vivid brutality and the gendered insult "she-monster," reinforcing a grotesque portrayal. Shapiro's version downplays violence and reframes the woman as cunning rather than brutal.
王婆计啜西门庆 淫妇药鸩武大郎	The old woman Wang... The adulteress poisons Wu the Elder	Jackson: Mrs. Wang devises a plan... Mrs. Wu poisons her husband	Buck preserves strong moral judgment with words like "adulteress" and "by guile," while Jackson adopts a neutral tone and avoids moral labeling.
一个妖娆的妇人	A lovely, loose-looking woman	Shapiro: Lissome creature	Buck adds the moralizing "loose-looking," implying impropriety; Shapiro avoids this judgment, keeping the description sensual but not condemnatory.

Source: Author's compilation, drawing on translations by Buck (1948), Shapiro (1980), and Jackson (2010).

6. Discussion

The preceding analyses reveal a clear pattern in Buck's translation: she relies on literalness and vivid, often morally loaded language. While this reflects her admiration for the original, it also preserves and sometimes amplifies its misogynistic tones. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, Buck's translations reproduce Orientalist stereotypes of Chinese women as either passive victims or morally flawed figures, without critical mediation. Although exposed to feminist ideas, Buck did not challenge the patriarchal elements in the text, suggesting her choices were shaped more by Western cultural norms than conscious feminist critique. Her foreignizing strategy preserves cultural features but also maintains problematic gender representations. Thus, Buck's work highlights how a translator's cultural positioning can complicate ethical engagement with gendered portrayals in cross-cultural translation.

7. Conclusion

This paper has examined how Pearl Buck's translation of *Shui Hu Zhuan* is shaped by ideological forces, especially orientalist and patriarchal perspectives, through the lens of postcolonial feminist theory. It addresses how Buck constructs female images and the socio-cultural factors influencing this process via contextual and textual analysis. The findings indicate Buck's translation leans heavily toward a foreignizing and a literal translation approach. While she was known for her cultural familiarity with China, her translation does not domesticate or adapt the text for American audiences. Instead, Buck's version of *All Men Are Brothers* seeks to retain the structure, narrative tone, and content of the original, often at the expense of natural fluency in English. This literalness, however, may not only reflect a neutral desire for accuracy. As the paper has discussed, it could stem from her appreciation of the writing and the story told in the original text and a potential limited understanding - or a biased interpretation - of Chinese women.

These insights have important implications for intercultural communication professionals. Translators, educators, and cultural mediators must be aware of how their own cultural positions and strategic decisions influence representation. Training in translation ethics, postcolonial awareness, and gender-sensitive interpretation is essential when working with texts from historically marginalized cultures.

While this study focuses on Buck's gendered portrayals and implicit biases toward Chinese women through a postcolonial feminist lens, it does not fully address the broader cultural preferences and literary sensibilities shaping her overall translation style. This limitation suggests future research could more deeply explore how Buck's bicultural worldview influenced her translation choices beyond gender issues. Ultimately, this paper contributes to ongoing discussions about symbolic power in translation, advocating for more critical and ethically conscious practices in cross-cultural literary exchange.

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