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6B4T in China: a case of Inter-Asian feminist knowledge negotiation and contestation through translation

Xiaoyi Cheng 

School of Languages and Translation Studies, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

ABSTRACT

Previous researches exploring transcultural feminist knowledge transfer by means of translation pay little attention to translation flows in Asian countries. This study demonstrates what happened when a Korean radical feminist movement, 4B/6B4T, was exported to China through translation in an online environment. The Korean practitioners of 4B/6B4T have adopted several commitments, which have also travelled to China. The manner in which one of these commitments – 비|뎀비| (*bidopbi*, those who exercise 4 or 6B help those who exercise 4 or 6B) – should be translated into Chinese became a matter of controversy on Chinese social media. This study applies the sociological narrative theory to probe this translation debate and its embedded narratives. Moreover, the article employs the notions of fidelity and infidelity to discuss feminist activism in the context of translating 6B4T's commitments as a whole. The study considers feminist knowledge translation as a form of re-narration and intellectual activism that can be used to consciously strengthen the ideological agendas of feminist individuals. It argues that translation activism, when carried out in a feminist activist context via social media, can be understood as generative; it is enacted through the dynamic process of negotiating the mediators' narrative affinities.

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Introduction

Previous researches on the border-crossing of local and transnational feminism have mostly focused on the translation of women writers, literature, feminist classics and must-reads, activist projects, and audiovisual products (Castro and Ergun 2017; Flotow and Kamal 2020). Few studies have delved into the transplantation of feminist movements through translation in the digital space, especially in an inter- (East) Asian context. Current scholarship on knowledge exchange via translation has been more concerned with how knowledge has been transferred from the West to Asia and the rest of the world than with knowledge transfer from Asia to other continents and within Asian countries (Zhu and Kim 2021). This paper focuses on a special case regarding the ideas of 6B4T, a radical feminist movement originating in South Korea (hereafter, Korea). The content of 6B4T,

CONTACT Xiaoyi Cheng  xiaoyi.x.cheng@utu.fi  School of Languages and Translation Studies, University of Turku, Arcanuminkuja 1, 20500 Turku, Finland

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which involves the rejection of heterosexual relationships, marriage with men and procreation, was introduced into China through translation mainly on digital platforms. The translations related to 6B4T have resulted in arguments on Sina Weibo (hereafter, Weibo), a microblogging site and major social media platform in China. The emergence of the movement has coincided with the growth of digital feminism in China, which began around 2018 (Chang and Tian 2021). The translational controversy studied in this paper concerns the translation of one of the commitments for 6B4T practitioners: 비돕비 (*bidopbi*, literal back translation: “those who exercise 4 or 6B help those who exercise 4 or 6B”). According to some, the phrase 비돕비 (*bidopbi*) should be translated as “do not help married women,” while the opposing party argues that the translation should be rendered as “the unmarried help the unmarried.” The translation controversy points to the dissonance between different feminist paradigms within the online pan-feminist community in China.

This paper addresses two main questions: What did 4B/6B4T become after its transferal to China and why? In what follows, I first introduce the 4B/6B4T movement and describe its travelling through translation to China. After presenting the research method and material, I analyze the translation of the commitment 비돕비 (*bidopbi*) from the perspective of the sociological narrative theory (Baker 2006a, 2006b). In the section that follows, I discuss the translations of 비돕비 (*bidopbi*) and 6B4T’s other commitments in relation to fidelity/infidelity (cf. Simon 1996). The conclusion puts forward suggestions for conducting future research.

As will be specified later, the feminist activism through 6B4T’s translation was based on a generative process of negotiating the mediators’ narrative affinities. The case in question further attests to the fact that translation is a form of re-narration and intellectual activism that “constructs rather than represents the events and characters it re-narrates in another language” (Baker 2014, 159, emphases in original). This case study aims to demonstrate how translation has been used by radical feminists to re-narrate and strengthen their own ideological agendas during transnational feminist knowledge flows within a Chinese context.

How it all started: the 4B and 6B4T movement in Korea

How 4B, an online-based radical feminist movement, originated around 2019 and eventually developed into its current form in Korea might not be fully traceable, as online activism is capable of spreading widely and quickly with just “a click of key” (Keller 2012, 441). Nevertheless, it can be argued that the movement was influenced by or spawned out of the radical feminism and lesbian feminism in Korea and closely related to the Tal-Corset (Escape the Corset) movement encouraging women in Korea to abandon, for example, high heels, makeup, plastic surgeries and other constraints and standards around feminine beauty (Izaakson and Kim 2020).

4B, in which the letter “B” is a homophone of “bi,” meaning “not” in Korean, refers to four commitments endorsed by the members practicing 4B: 비혼 (*bihon*), 비출산 (*bichul-san*), 비연애 (*biyeonae*), 비섹스 (*bisekseu*) – that is, opposition to (heterosexual) marriage, opposition to childbirth and rearing, opposition to romance with men, and opposition to sexual relationships with men, respectively. According to Lee and Jeong (2021), 4B “[envisions] a feminist future with/in a non-reproductive future in Korea.” Later, 4B

became 6B with the addition of two commitments: 비소비 (*bisobi*, boycotting sexist products) and 비돕비 (*bidopbi*,¹ those who exercise 4 or 6B help those who exercise 4 or 6B). The dispute and commotion around how this last commitment was translated is the focus of my research. Lastly, the 4T in the 6B4T stands for the rejection of the modern corset,² hypersexual depictions of women in the Japanese otaku³ culture, religion, and idol culture.

Importing 6B4T to China through translation against the backdrop of digital feminism

Some have labelled the dependence of feminist debates and activism on the internet, digital media, and democratization of technology as the “fourth wave” of feminism (Munro 2013, 25). Facilitated by the affordances of digital platforms, the prevalence of online feminist articulation across the globe – sometimes having an offline presence as well – is translocal and transnational. This is a prominent feature of digital feminist activism today, exemplified by cases such as SlutWalk, FEMEN, and the Twitter campaigns #Aufschrei and #YesAllWomen (Baer 2016), not to mention #MeToo and its variants worldwide. They all showcase the real daily lived experiences of women all over the world and the knowledge they have gained by virtue of global networking and connections.

With this in mind, the fact that 4B/6B4T ideas have received attention and gained resonance in China’s social media sites since 2020 is not surprising. On the contrary, the resonance of 4B/6B4T within China’s socio-cultural context was to be expected, given the numerous parallels between the development of (digital) feminist movements in Korea and China, including significant milestones. For instance, the #MeToo⁴ movement emerged around the same time, earlier in 2018, in both countries. In China, a female PhD graduate Luo Xixi reported her supervisor Chen Xiaowu as a sexual abuser on 1 January 2018 (Han 2021), marking the onset of the #MeToo movement which then peaked in July. Similarly, in Korea, on 29 January 2018, a woman prosecutor, Suh Ji-Hyeon, went public to accuse a former senior prosecutor of sexual harassment and misconduct, inspiring many other women that had suffered the same treatment to speak out (Hasunuma and Shin 2019). The feminist voices were criticized, and they caused subsequent backlash as they got louder and fiercer and thus harder to ignore – an anti-feminist wave has been more visible for several years since then. In Korea, the ever-exacerbating gender wars have witnessed the founding of high-profile anti-feminist groups, such as Man on Solidarity,⁵ boycotts of feminism and intensified anti-feminist sentiments online. More recently, the 2022 presidential candidates⁶ deployed political rhetoric negatively associated with feminism to win more voters, mainly perceived to be young Korean men. In China, the stigmatization of feminism and misogynic discourses have been rampant in the wake of the contentious popularization of online-based feminism (Hu et al. 2022), giving rise to some words that carry derogatory connotations⁷ and are heavily used on the Internet to mark out anything that smacks of feminism, for example, “pastoral feminism” (田园女权, *tianyuan nüquan*) and “female fists” (女拳, *nüquan*). In addition, both countries are facing demographic decline which to some extent reflects the young generations’ unwillingness to get married and reproduce. These parallels may have created a sense of narrative kinship between Korean and Chinese feminism that set the scene for the travel of 6B4T.

Undoubtedly, translation served as an indispensable vehicle when 6B4T-related ideas entered the discourses of digital feminism in China. As pointed out by Castro and Ergun in the introduction to their co-edited anthology *Feminist Translation Studies: Local and Transnational Perspectives* (Castro and Ergun 2017, 1), “the future of feminisms is in the transnational and the transnational is made through translation.” One could not resist asking: How did these transnational feminist ideas and discourses envisioning a future that is not centered around marriage and reproduction (Lee and Jeong 2021) get localized?

In the following sections, I will first describe the method and material of this study before discussing from a narrative point of view the translation of 비둑비 (*bidopbi*) that ran into controversy on Chinese social media.

An online ethnography and material

I conducted an online ethnography (Risku et al. 2022) in a non-participatory but observational manner to collect digital data from social media sites, particularly Weibo. More specifically, from around 2020 when online attention began to be paid to 6B4T in China, until June 2022, I observed the ecology of online feminist communities in China and paid special attention to prominent discussions around 6B4T. This was achieved by following Weibo accounts, commentaries, posts/reposts, hashtags (such as #6b4t and #10bt) and links to capture the stream of online interactions, as well as by actively searching for (hashtagged) keywords when necessary. For instance, @MatriarchalStudies (@母系研究)'s prominent post (Studies 2021), which sparked the heated translation debate over 비둑비 (*bidopbi*) was carefully examined, including all the comments under that post. The importing of 6B4T via translation was situated in and propelled by the rise of digital feminist activism in China which emerged around 2018, and therefore it should be studied within this background.

In what follows, the conceptual framework of this study will be introduced.

Translation and narratives

We are living and acting in a highly mediatized world where realities and identities are translated, (re)constructed, (re)framed, and (re)narrated, and narrative theory proves to be a useful and robust conceptual framework to understand the complexness and dynamics within it (Harding 2012, 287). Scholarly discussion in TS has gone far beyond understanding translation as an apolitical move and translators as impersonal and transparent. The strand of research combining narratives and translation introduced by Mona Baker to TS (Baker 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2010, 2014) has further reversed the traditional, take-for-granted understanding of translators as mere bridges or facilitators for overcoming language barrier. On the flip side, translation is understood to be non-neutral, political, and far from innocent (Baker 2013), especially against the background of activism, health, globalization, conflict and war⁸ etc., as in the case in question.

Narrative theory has informed research in TS on different topics. For example, Duraner (2021) examined how the hegemonic LGBTI+ stories in Turkey were represented with narrative framing devices on a LGBTI+ news website; Boukhaffa (2018) investigated how the Orientalist aspects of Bernard Lewis's book *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy*

Terror were translated and reframed into Arabic on the textual and paratextual levels. These studies stress that the role translators or other translational agents (publishers, editors, paratext creators, etc.) play when mediating and constructing the narrative realities and identities about themselves and others is influential and socio-culturally, ideologically, geopolitically, and economically saturated.

This research applies the sociological narrative theory from a constructivist point of view adapted by Mona Baker in relation to TS (Baker 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2010, 2014) to explore the narratives embedded in the translation of 비돕비 (*bidopbi*). Narratives, according to Baker (2006a, 19), are “the stories we tell ourselves, not just those we explicitly tell other people, about the world(s) in which we live.” The constructivist understanding is to consider “narrative as our only means of making sense of the world and our place within it” (Baker 2014, 158). Our lived experiences as human beings are influenced and mediated by these translated or non-translated narratives. There are two sets of conceptual tools in the sociological narrative approach: a typology of narratives and a number of narrative features. The typology identifies four types of narratives, personal, public, conceptual or disciplinary and meta-narratives, of which the personal narratives are relevant to this study. The four features of narratives include selective appropriation, causal employment, temporality, and relationality (Baker 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2010, 2014). The application of the narrative theory has several advantages. First, the theory considers any one-off individual textual choice important.⁹ Second, it allows the researcher to mobilize open-ended and overlapping sets of data across media. Third, it alerts researchers to pay attention to narratives on a larger scale and a legion of interdependent narratives where translation operates (Baker 2014, 159–160).

The ideas of 6B4T, the translation of 비돕비 (*bidopbi*), and the discussion around its translation circulating on China’s social media are also narratives and involve or are involved with other narratives that “cut across time and texts” (Baker 2006a, 4). In what follows, a narrative analysis will be conducted to disclose the translational debate. I shall first concentrate on the personal narratives connected to 6B4T circulating online before analyzing the features of narratives around 6B4T’s translation.

The unmarried help the unmarried versus do not help married women: a narrative account

What does 비돕비 (*bidopbi*) mean? According to the two Korean women-led wikis, womwiki¹⁰ and femiwiki,¹¹ it means that those exercising the 4 or 6B help others who exercise the 4 or 6B. “비” is a prefix meaning “no” or “not,” and it is based on the Chinese character “非.” The syllable in the middle, “돕,” is the stem of the verb “to help.” Even though “비” is a prefix meaning “not,” which makes the phrase sound like “not to help,” here the symbol “비” in the phrase refers to those who practice being “not married” as 6B4T practitioners. The translation thus becomes “those who practice being ‘not married’ help those who practice being ‘not married’” (“NOT” help “NOT”).¹²

“Sisterhood is powerful. It kills. Mostly sisters.” – voiced out by Ti-Grace Atkinson, an American writer and radical feminist activist almost 50 years ago. Today, the quotation still holds relevance in highlighting the prevalent, if not ubiquitous, reality that online feminism is nowhere near a peaceful ideal of sisterhood imagined by people subscribing to the women’s movements. It seems hard for the participants of the 6B4T topic on Weibo to

agree on how 비돕비 (*bidopbi*) as one of the commitments of 6B should be translated. Some argue it is *do not help married women* while others opt for the version *the unmarried help the unmarried*. This bifurcation is apparent in a particular post with 16.2k thumbs-ups, 513 replies, and 3.5k reposts (as of 7 May 2022). The post, hashtagged #the rumour about Korea feminism#, was originally based on a “投稿”¹³ submitted by a person who claimed to be a Korean girl in a Direct Message to the Weibo account that made the post. In the post, the self-proclaimed Korean girl stated the following:

... one of them is 비돕비 (*bidopbi*), which translates as “the unmarried help the unmarried;” but in the context of the Internet in China mainland, it becomes “do not help married women.” This is not what Korean feminism delivers, and it is not what I approve of ... the plain Chinese translation is “不婚人互助” (the unmarried help the unmarried) instead of “不与婚女互助” (do not help married women). (Studies 2021)

The character “不” (do not) at the beginning of the latter sentence usually suggests an imperative command that has a persuasive effect in Chinese. In the former sentence, however, the same character “不” functions as adjective rather than verb and thus creates a more neutral and declarative tone.

The following analyses dissecting the translation of 비돕비 (*bidopbi*) were achieved by engaging with the heterogenous and transformative politics and discourses of digital feminism in China. This is owing to the disordered, fragmented, and amorphous nature of socio-narratives (Jones 2018) that are not fully and/or explicitly articulated in one single “specific stretch of text” but instead “underpin a whole range of texts and discourses” (Baker 2006b, 464). In other words, the analyses were based on scattered but interconnected digital narratives with relevance to the ideology that upholds 6B4T and its translation.

The online feminists’ aversion to men, marriage, and reproduction

As defined by Baker (2014, 161), personal narratives are “stories we tell ourselves and others about our place in the world and our own personal experience.” Li (2020) points out that the Weibo accounts identifying as feminist that have sprung up in recent years have revolved around women’s expressions and dialogues based on their personal lives and responded to their needs to express emotions and obtain knowledge. 4B can be appreciated as an individualized tactic of self-help to withdraw from the reproductive future (Lee and Jeong 2021). In that sense, the online exchanges and communications between participants on the topic of 6B4T, no matter what form they take (reposting, thumb up, replying to each other, etc.), are, in the first place, personal narratives. These personal narratives, whether they concern anti-marriage, anti-procreation, or the question of helping married women or not, have never been elaborated in isolation because any narrative is inseparably associated with other narratives, or as an episode within larger narratives (Baker 2014, 160). For example, the discourses around the rejection of heterosexual romance and sex in 4B and elaborated in 6B4T can easily conjure up the popular narratives endorsed by some, predominantly young, feminists on social media to ridicule – “男宝” (*nan bao*, baby boy/man¹⁴), among others. A comment under the post addressing the translation of 비돕비 (*bidopbi*) by a user (@雨洛雨洛雨洛) who obviously voted for *do not help married women* reads as follows:

OK. Respect. I respect your [married women's] freedom to get married, have children, and crave for “男宝.” (*nan bao*)

The articulation of refusing to marry and bear children expressed in 4B has been absorbed into a more prevailing and compelling slogan-like rhetoric having a persuasive effect – “不婚不育保平安” (*bu hun bu yu bao ping an*, rejecting marriage and reproduction guarantees your safety). In so doing, the articulation has further consolidated that rhetoric and subtly given richness to it by providing an interpretive framework/context of 6B4T.

What is important to bear in mind is that, superficially, these pre-existing textual representations on social media might be called into question regarding their relationship to translation. In fact, the translation of the term at issue 비뚱비 (*bidopbi*) was affected by the feminists' epitextual awareness through a process of cross-contamination, as will be shown further below.

Cutting ties with the sisterhood through translation

In order to create and justify their own versions of narratives, a range of devices (or the features of narrativity) have to be employed by translators: selective appropriation, temporality, relationality, and causal emplotment (Baker 2006a).

Selective appropriation recognizes that “it is inevitable that some elements of experience are excluded and others privileged” in order to coherently form a narrative (Baker 2010, 352). The fact that the whole 6B4T has been selected and introduced through translation into Chinese social media per se suggests a sort of selective appropriation from a vast array of events as regards, for instance, anti-misogyny, anti-discrimination, and women's empowerment against the background of digital feminism in China. 6B4T, albeit originally set in a geographically different place, was carefully chosen by the translators (the subscribers of this topic online) to amplify the voices of “反婚反育” (*fan hun fan yu*, against-marriage & against-reproduction; a slogan-like idea) and to foreground it in China, where the interpretive context is similar to the origin of 6B4T.

The controversy concerning the translation of 비뚱비 (*bidopbi*) has further vividly shown how “translation is central to the ability of all parties to legitimize their version of events” (Baker 2006a, 1) through the devices of selective appropriation and causal emplotment, which “gives significance to independent instances; it is only when events are emplotted that they take on narrative meaning” (Baker 2010, 352). As the messy feminist debates in China ferociously progress, some anti-marriage activists have labelled married women as “婚驴”¹⁵ (*hun lü*, married donkeys), a term used to disparagingly compare the lives of married women enslaved in patriarchal marriages with that of donkeys. Huang (2023, 11) considers the trendy use of the “married donkey” rhetoric as neoliberal and as a “popular way of doing feminism online” in China. In their sets of narratives, “婚女” (*hun nü*, married women) are “婚驴” (*hun lü*, married donkeys) or “驴” (*lü*, donkeys). Once married and pregnant, they become “human vessels of embryos” (胎器, *tai qi*) who “are putting the tripod cauldron on their shoulder” (抗大鼎,¹⁶ *kang da ding*; tripod cauldron literally means men reaping dividends from marriage) and long for a “baby boy/man” (男宝, *nan bao*). These narratives have laid bare the divergence, splits, internal attacks, and certain bigotries among feminists in China, a disillusionment of the

so-called sisterhood of #girls help girls,¹⁷ which permeates into the translation of 6B4T. Two Weibo users similarly expressed their ideas in defiance of the post based on the clarification made by a Korean girl. One user (@父权社会死路一条) said:

Doesn't "mutual aid between the unmarried" exactly mean "do not help married women" ... If they [the Korean feminists] think that [we] should help the married, they will write [something like] the women should help each other. The married don't deserve it. Fuck off.

The other user (@热水器开了一天) wrote:

[It is] the unmarried help the unmarried. So [the translation means] the married women are out/excluded.

The intertwining of the term translated as *do not help married women* and what Freeman (1976) has called "trashing" is easily identifiable.

Freeman (1976) once described the dynamic of trashing in her article *Trashing: The Dark Side of Sisterhood* as she shared the story of how she was trashed out and attacked by other women engaging in the feminist movement in the late 1960s. According to her, trashing is not merely about opposition or done to "expose disagreements or resolve differences" but to "disparage and destroy;" it is a "vicious form of character assassination" (Freeman 1976). This dynamic of trashing permeates into the pan-feminist community in China and effortlessly lends itself to translations that feature selective appropriation and causal emplotment. To translate 비 돕 비 (*bidopbi*) in 6B as *do not help married women* is to deliberately appropriate, duplicate, transplant and transcribe the clear-cut dichotomy of "婚女" (*hun nü*, married women) vs. "单女" (*dan nü*, single unmarried women). The ideology is witnessed within a decentralized Chinese digital feminist community as the radical discourses rise. Selective appropriation can be realized through omission and addition to "suppress, accentuate or elaborate aspects of the larger narrative(s) in which [the source text or utterance] is embedded" (Baker 2006a, 114). The translated narratives that have cut ties with the sisterhood have abandoned the mutual help discourses present in the original and subtly embellished it with a scenario in which women target, charge, and trash each other and are divided into various camps. The translation *do not help married women* fails to capture the meaning of 비 돕 비 (*bidopbi*), which is a pledge among 6B4T supporters to foster camaraderie by mutually helping one another. Instead, it produces a sense of hierarchy between the married and the unmarried. The invention of texts ("married women," which is not explicitly found in the original) and the addition of an imperative tone accentuate what Baker calls an "enemy" culture (Baker 2006a, 75, emphasis in original).

This kind of selective appropriation was also activated by an established pattern of causal emplotment adopted by the supporters of the translation *do not help married women*. Those married women, depicted as married donkeys who do not fight for the right to let their children inherit their mother's last name instead of that of their father, are enslaved into performing unpaid domestic chores by their husbands. Once they, as mothers-to-be, become human vessels of embryos, they might prefer boys over girls in terms of the sex of their baby,¹⁸ or, in other words, want to have a "男宝" (*nan bao*). @5500331919_108 commented in the discussions concerning the translation as a way to rationalize why they were not helping married women:

They only have eyes for their dear husbands; those donkeys who choose to have an abortion if the embryo is female are preparing burial shrouds for their baby.

In a similar vein, another user (@成为铃木园子的女人) argued:

I will be the first one to not help. The best I can expect is that she doesn't let me work [in a marriage] like a donkey with her.

These independent but interdependent instances can be regarded as having been causally emplotted: emplotted as a disgrace to feminism and as choosing to side with and feed patriarchy, married women complicit with men are thus unworthy of help from other women. In the narratives of users such as the ones above, 비돕비 (*bidopbi*) is translated as *do not help married women* as this translation better serves the purposes of these “politically engaged and culturally embedded social actors” (Jones 2018, 289).

On the micro level, adding “married women” to the text can obtain the effect of “identifying protagonists” (that is, married women), an instance of selective appropriation (Baker 2010, 352), in the constructed translated narrative. On the macro level, it has been observed that the advocates of the “married women” stance selectively appropriated or hijacked 비돕비 (*bidopbi*) as if it were originally from China rather than from Korea. One user (@七月荔子) argued:

Please be more awake! Referring to their 6B4T does not necessarily mean we have to copy it without any modification. [It] has to conform to our situations.

Another user (@NOTetwbf) said:

It is inevitable for a proposition to have characteristics of another country once it has been broadcast in that country.

These examples demonstrate that the users tried to downplay the issue of translation, which was supposed to be the focus of their discussion, and to highlight the necessity of adapting or changing 비돕비 (*bidopbi*) to meet the needs of its new audience.

The other two aspects of narrativity are temporality and relationality. The former means that “[narratives] are embedded in time and space and derive much of their meaning from the temporal moment and physical site of the narration” (Baker 2010, 352) while the latter suggests that “individual elements (events, characters, linguistic items, layout, imagery, etc.) derive their meaning from the overall narrative within which they are configured as building blocks” (Baker 2014, 168). In this case, 6B4T was translated at a moment when some Chinese women began to embrace a lifestyle of “no kids, no ring, keep living serene” (Wu 2020). The translation of *do not help married women* was encoded through the dichotomies of matrimony/singledom, married/unmarried women, fake/real feminists during a time when the wars within feminism(s) itself intensified.

In terms of spatiality, the emergence of this debate can also be reduced to the fact that the narrators were essentially telling their own stories and were told by others on a microblogging platform creating information bubbles for everyone consciously or unconsciously involved. At the same time, narrative accrual (Bruner 1991, 18), a process of repeated exposure to a narrative or set of narratives (Baker 2005, 9), makes it harder for them to leave this echo chamber and easier to adhere to their own versions of re-narration. Finally, genericness is another narrative feature discussed by Bruner (1991).

The concept of translation, a genre in itself, serves to activate an impression of authenticity, factuality, and objectivity (Baker 2014, 173). As far as personal narratives are concerned, this may sometimes cause the translation *do not help married women* to circulate and persist without being questioned.

In addition to the translational difference of 비뚱비 (*bidopbi*), it is equally important to examine the unproblematically translated components of 4B/6B4T, or the similarities in translation. In the next section, I will discuss the issue of fidelity/infidelity from the activist perspective of translation.

Fidelity/Infidelity concerning the translations of other 6B4T components in a feminist activism context

Today, activism in our minds spreads beyond the political field and highly visible forms of protests (Baker 2018, 453). For example, fansubbing in China, enabled by the democratization of technology, is understood to be a form of technology-facilitated activism in the cyberspace against official media hegemony (Wang and Zhang 2017). Similar to interventionist fansubbing, translation via social media, “characterized by connectivity and interactivity,” can also be approached from an activist perspective (Jiang 2022, 3). The activist aspect of the case of the present study is even more self-evident. The translation of 4B/6B4T is fundamentally situated and shaped in the milieu of digital feminist activism that aims to effect change by bringing about cross-border/cultural feminist agendas enacted by those ideologically driven social actors on the social media platform, Weibo, which is “an important media for the articulation of different gender voices,” and “also a more effective site for grassroots translation” in China (Jiang 2022, 12). Accordingly, it is fair to conceptualize the transnational and translational 6B4T – which forges an alternative non-reproductive and non-cooperative path for women – as feminist, radical, and activist on the grounds that “sometimes the fact of translation itself [...] is the primary activist achievement” (Tymoczko 2010, 229).

While one of the components of 6B4T, 비뚱비 (*bidopbi*), has been re-narrated and transformed in the movement of Korean feminism, the others have stayed true to the original and have not seen any palpable division with respect to their translation. This cannot and should not be cursorily generalized as betraying or sticking to the source text (broadly defined). Instead, the polarities of infidelity and fidelity have to be reversed and re-understood, especially in the context of (digital) feminist activism which seeks to blaze a trail for others to follow by using such a grassroot platform to enact transformative acts of translation.

Except for 비뚱비 (*bidopbi*), the commitments of 6B4T are also concerned with, as I mentioned in the very beginning of this article, boycotting sexist products, renouncing sex, child-rearing, dating, and marriage, taking off the corset (in a metaphorical sense), rejecting the hypersexualized women of anime, religion, and idol culture. As illustrated in the previous sections, most of the discursive counterparts of 6B4T’s other aspects informed by similar politics can easily be found in cyber space, inhabited by the ideologically driven and politico-consciously (radical) feminists in China. Moreover, the movement itself stemmed from the Escape the Corset movement in Korea and was readily supported by the trending topic amongst feminist discourses in China over the last one to two years – “服美役”¹⁹ (*fu mei yi*, doing beauty service). A mechanism of double narrative affinities

expressed via translation is readily identified here; it is double because the shared affinities exist interculturally (between Korean and Chinese feminism) and intraculturally. Intraculturally, the sense of narrative affinity is partial when the activist translators of 6B4T in China subscribe to a broad narrative which gives cohesion to the group but disagree on other intersecting narratives" (Pérez González 2010, 263). This is demonstrated by the 6B4T case where, on the surface, both fidelity and infidelity can be identified. The pair concepts have been challenged by Simon (1996). She argues that, for feminist translation, "fidelity is to be directed toward neither the author nor the reader, but toward the writing project – a project in which both writer and translator participate" (Simon 1996, 2). As maintained by Duraner, the reconceptualization of fidelity in an activist context can only be accessed when the motives and practices of translators are considered (Duraner 2021).

In my case, on the one hand, the translators of 6B4T seemingly adhere to the principle of fidelity in relation to the translations of components other than 비뚱비 (bidopbi), not out of traditional expectations towards the transparency of translators, but due to their co-commitments to the alternative feminist discourses they wish to present and rewrite in the receiving culture when their narrative affinities are not conflictual. On the other hand, to translate, or, to borrow Godard's (1990) term, to transformance (transform + translate + performance) the phrase 비뚱비 (bidopbi) unfaithfully is to be faithful to their own standpoints and transient "narrative location" (Baker 2006a) emerging through a sense of negotiations of their unstable, indeterminate, and non-static (partial) narrative affinities, with translation presented as the end-product of this meaning-making process. After all, "the only kind of fidelity we can possibly consider is the one we owe to our own assumptions, not simply as individuals, but as members of a cultural community which produces and validates them" (Arrojo 1994, 160).

On top of that, the dynamics of the negotiations among participants are also indicative of the nature of activism through translation, which is "generative" instead of "structuralist," according to the conceptualizations of activism compared by Pérez González (2010, 260–265) on the basis of Mona Baker and Sherry Simon respectively. The structuralist approach of translation activism assumes activist translators to be a more static and discrete presence, brought together by traditional constituencies of collective identities, such as gender and social class. The generative understanding of translation activism puts more emphasis on individual agency over non-fluid social groupings, however, and considers the collective identities of activists as temporary and dynamic constructs that need to be constantly negotiated (Pérez González 2010, 260–265). Therefore, I would take Simon's proposition (Simon 1996) one step further. I argue that, with reference to translation via social media in a feminist activist context, fidelity or infidelity can be seen towards the negotiated narrative affinities of heterogeneity, which emanate from the contingently situated and ideologically driven enablers of the discursive travels that wield generative power of agency through their engagement with translation.

Conclusion

The present study has discussed the importing of knowledge related to a Korean radical feminist movement and analyzed, especially, the narratives in and around the translation of 비뚱비 (bidopbi) in the context of digital feminism in China under the framework of sociological narrative theory in TS. It has also re-examined the issue of fidelity/infidelity

concerning translation via social media in the context of virtual feminist activism. The study considered the feminist knowledge translation as a form of re-narration and intellectual activism that can be used to consciously strength the ideological agendas of feminist individuals. It argued that, with reference to translation via social media in a feminist activist context, translation activism can be understood as generative: it is enacted through a dynamic process of negotiating the mediators' narrative affinities. The research contributes to the evidence that narrative theory serves as a useful tool for analyzing translation practices in the social media narrating site. It proves once again that translation, as an important mechanism of intellectual activism, enables the knowledge, awareness, and epistemologies to be produced and disseminated (Duraner 2021; Ergun 2013).

Conducting this research in a self-reflexive manner enabled me to acknowledge that I, as a researcher, was embedded in, sustained and influenced by an array of circulating personal, public, conceptual or meta narratives that I might consciously or unconsciously subscribe to as well. The implications of the study suggest potential directions for future research: first, the generative agency of activist translators can be further accessed by, for example, an online ethnography. Second, future research could investigate whether paratextual elements in the digital formats have been mobilized in introducing and elaborating the narratives of 6B4T (see, for example, S.B. Lee's research [2020] on how paratexts and translations are interrelated in Korea's feminist context). Paratexts and translations are highly interconnected, and if a paratext is conceptualized to be "a consciously crafted threshold for a text," be it in its original language or *translated* (Batchelor 2018, 142), they provide a powerful means of framing and reframing translations in a certain context. The strand of research connecting paratextual analyses with the questions of gender/feminism in translation deserves scholarly attention that would address non-traditional, digital paratexts (S. B. Lee 2020, 178). Thirdly, from the perspective of knowledge transfer through translation, scant attention has been paid to instances where knowledge has travelled to the West from Asia (not the other way around) or *within Asia itself*. In contrast, the scholarship has tended to delve into the role that translation plays in mediating, interacting with, or resisting Anglophone and European knowledge and thinking (Zhu and Kim 2021) in Asia. The case study in this article exemplified an instance of inter-Asian knowledge negotiation and contestation where radical feminist narratives from one East Asian locale entered another. Knowledge flows are not unidirectional, which is even more evident in digital spaces. One may wonder how the 4B/6B4T supporters in Korea will react once they become aware of the translation of 비뚱비 (bidopbi) as "do not help married women." In the end, the study eventually furthers the notion of translation as transformation in today's digitally mediated world and underpins that "[t]ranslation is a unique way of understanding the knowledge production of transnational feminism, or for that matter any transnational 'ism'" (Min 2017, 13).

Notes

1. The meaning of it is further introduced in later analyses.
2. Used metaphorically, the modern corset refers to the abovementioned beauty practices (high heels, makeup, plastic surgeries, etc.) and standards around beauty that are perceived to please men in a patriarchal society.
3. Otaku is a Japanese word describing people with strong interests, especially in anime and manga.

4. As a worldwide feminist movement, many different names are used to refer to MeToo in different contexts. In China, #米兔 (*mi tu*, rice bunny), a homophone of #MeToo is often adopted. In Korea, #WithYou (#MeToo, WithYou) is a hashtag expressing support and solidarity for the victims.
5. Some consider the emergence of such groups a result of and response to some radical feminist groups. These include, for instance, Megalia (shut down in 2017), which is still known for its logo – a hand sign believed to ridicule the size of male genitalia.
6. At the time of writing, Yoon Suk-yeol, described as an “anti-feminist political novice” (France24 2022) due to the fact that he once blamed feminism for low birthrates, was elected as the new president of South Korea.
7. Some feminists also self-claim these words in order to hijack and resolve the stigmatization around them (see also von Flotow 1991, 78 on hijacking as a strategy of feminist translation).
8. See, e.g. The Routledge Handbook Series of Translation and Activism (Ruth Gould and Tahmasebian 2020) and Globalization (Bielsa and Kapsaski 2020).
9. However, Baker (2014, 175) also adds in an endnote that “one-off choices are only interpretable against the backdrop of established, recurrent patterns.” In my specific case, though established and recurrent, the patterns manifest themselves more through the politics of heterogeneous feminist discourses circulating online rather than the actual translation of a limited “source text.”
10. <http://ko.womwiki0308.wikidok.net/wp-d/5eb9e9b37bf69b65766a00f8/View>.
11. <https://femiwiki.com/w/6B>.
12. I want to thank Taru Salminen, lecturer in the Korean language at the Centre for Language and Communication Studies, University of Turku, for helping me clarify this.
13. “投稿” is a feature that is unique to Weibo. Weibo users can share their thoughts, ideas, or confusions about their personal life and work with Weibo bloggers who have a certain number of followers. The “投稿” the user sends to the blogger through a Direct Message can then be publicly posted by the Weibo blogger to seek advice or opinions from others.
14. See Chen and Gong (2023) for an FCDA (Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis) of the discursive construction of this term adopted by Chinese feminism on social media.
15. The first time the term was introduced to the public could be in May 2020 when a megacelebrity and short-video producer Jiang Yilei (known as Papi Jiang online) was called a married donkey after she posted a picture of herself holding her newborn baby on Mother’s Day. It soon sparked hot debates over another contentious topic around feminist discourses in China: 冠姓权 (the right to let your child inherit mother’s instead of father’s family name). Some who felt disappointed by her deviation from an ideal independent (feminist) woman called her “a marriage donkey with a child who still had to take her husband’s last name”
16. A hashtag linking “鼎” (tripod cauldron) with “驴” (donkeys) is #驴子配鼎 天长地久# (#the love between a tripod cauldron and a donkey will last forever#).
17. This is a hashtag/catchphrase frequently encountered on Chinese social media in threads identifying gender issues, aiming at building solidarity among participants.
18. The skewed sex ratio at birth in China has been discussed a lot online over these years with the aim of improving gender equality.
19. The word skillfully and creatively compares the (compulsory) military service to the beauty routines carried out by women, as the Chinese character “役” (*yi*, service) in the term “美役” (*mei yi*, beauty service) comes from the term “兵役” (*bing yi*, military service).

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Notes on contributor

Xiaoyi Cheng is a doctoral researcher at the School of Languages and Translation Studies, University of Turku (Finland). Her current research interests include translation in digital and online environments, translation and feminism.

ORCID

Xiaoyi Cheng  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9697-8729>

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