

Translating Feminism in ‘Systems’: The Representation of Women’s Sexual and Reproductive  
Health and Rights in the Chinese Translation of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the trans-border circulation and production of feminist knowledge through translation. More specifically, my research focuses the translation of the U.S. women's health book, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, by a Chinese feminist NGO in 1998. My dissertation studies the social, cultural and political aspects of feminist translation, and examines the relation between translation and feminist praxis. Through the lens of gender and (feminist) health politics in 1990s China, I examine how the 1998 Chinese translation conveys the book's message about how women should relate to their bodies.

Set in the context of Chinese society opening up during the late 1970s, my research outlines the emergence of gender awareness in China with the influx of translated feminist texts, especially in the realm of women's health research. Medical discourses were then assigned a privileged position in the studies of women's sexual and reproductive health. However, with increased communications between Chinese and foreign feminists, Chinese women scholars developed new ideas around women's sexual and reproductive health. The Chinese translation of *OBOS* addresses the lack of gender awareness in local discussions about women's health.

With a multi-method study, I emphasize the social and linguistic dimensions of translating a feminist health project into post-reform China. This study is based on both interview and comparative textual analysis data. Using feminist translation theories, I examine how the Chinese translators handled the book's presentation of women's sexuality and reproductive health. This thesis also highlights the constraints on translating feminism from the local context. This raises questions about the power of (feminist) translation, and emphasizes the need to examine the social-political context of translation practices.

## Résumé

Cette thèse examine la circulation et la production des savoirs féministes à travers les frontières par le biais de la traduction. Plus précisément, ma recherche porte sur la traduction d'un livre américain sur la santé des femmes—*Our Bodies, Ourselves*—par une ONG féministe en 1998. La dissertation examine les aspects sociaux, culturels, et politiques de la traduction féministe, et explore la relation entre la traduction et le militantisme féministe. Dans l'optique de la politique du genre et de la santé en Chine dans les années 90, nous examinons la transmission du message du livre sur les relations des femmes à leurs corps par la traduction chinoise.

Située dans le contexte de l'ouverture de la société chinoise durant les années 70, cette recherche décrit l'émergence de la question du genre en Chine suite à l'afflux de traductions de textes féministes, notamment dans le domaine de la santé des femmes. À ce moment-là, les discours médicaux étaient privilégiés dans les études sur la santé sexuelle et reproductive des femmes. Cependant, avec la croissance des interactions entre féministes chinoises et étrangères, les chercheuses chinoises ont développé de nouvelles idées au sujet de la santé des femmes. La traduction d'*OBOS* en chinois aborde l'absence des questions relatives au genre dans les discussions locales sur la santé des femmes.

Mon étude multi-méthodes souligne les dimensions sociales et linguistiques de la traduction d'un projet féministe de santé dans la Chine des réformes. Cette étude se fonde sur les données recueillies en entrevue et l'analyse textuelle comparative. Utilisant les théories féministes de la traduction, nous étudions comment les traductrices chinoises ont géré la description originale de la sexualité et de la santé reproductive des femmes. De plus, la dissertation souligne les contraintes sur la traduction du féminisme imposées par le contexte local. Elle pose des questions sur la puissance de la traduction (féministe), et fait ressortir la nécessité d'étudier le contexte socio-politique des pratiques de traduction.

## Introduction

This research is born out of my interest in gender, feminist and translation studies. Feminist linguists argue that language constitutes the social world and the social relations of power (e.g. see Cameron 1985; Parker 1998). Since the 1970s, feminist and gender studies have contributed to the development of translation research, revealing the ways in which translation theories and practices are traversed by gendered relations of power (e.g. see Chamberlain 1988; Castro and Ergun, 2017; Flotow 1995, 1997, 2001; Santaemilia 2011; Simon 1996). Given my background in feminist and gender studies, I am highly interested in the intersections of translation studies/practices and the travel of feminist writings in our days when trans-border, trans-lingual communications become more and more frequent. In this study, I hope to contribute to conversations in the interdisciplinary field of gender and translation studies with a case study on the travel of women's health communication texts from the U.S. to China in the 1990s.

As a feminist, I am always driven by questions around how women should relate to their bodies. Thus, the global trajectories of the women's self-care 'bible' *Our Bodies, Ourselves* came to my attention. *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, "the most important resource on women's health ever written by and for women" (Ross, n.d.), has changed the way American women relate to their bodies and health. Kathy Davis' pioneering study of the global trajectories of the book shows that, with a strong emphasis on women's embodied experiences with their bodies and sexuality, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* becomes a feminist epistemological project whose scope is extended beyond the U.S. context.

*Our Bodies, Ourselves* is not only a project of translating women's health communication texts, but also as a story of women's self-organizing, political activism and trans-border

collaboration. The trajectory of the book shows that feminist translation can act as a catalyst for social change (Davis 2007). In the history of women's health movements, health feminists have raised questions about how women should relate to their bodies, the misogynist attitudes towards women's sexuality and pleasure, and women's control over their bodies, sexuality, and reproduction. Women's sexual oppression occurs across different cultures. With its women-centered approach, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* appeals to women's health advocates from different cultures, who adapt the book to meet the needs of local women. The trajectories of the book compensate for the lack of attention to translation issues and politics in feminist praxis (Bogic 2017).

Drawing on the interdisciplinary conversations between feminist and translation studies, this dissertation presents a multi-method study of one foreign-language adaptation of the 1992 edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*—the 1998 Chinese edition produced by a Chinese women's health advocacy NGO, Chinese Women's Health Network. To ground this study, I take into account the historical context of the Chinese translation—when China was undergoing a great socio-economic transition from planned economy to 'socialist market economy'. Recent developments in translation studies emphasize the interplay of translation and its larger context. Translation "constructs and negotiate [the world] in a contextually bounded way" (Palmary 2014: 577). My study purports to uncover how the translation of women's health communication texts is embedded in the wider politics, and what effect it has on the transmission of feminist thoughts.

I now present the structure of my dissertation and the focus of each chapter. Chapter one offers an overview of the history of *OBOS* as a global feminist project and purports to explain the significance of my study and put forward my research questions. Chapter two first presents a review of literature that has been written on the travel of feminism from the West to

contemporary China, and then explains the theoretical and methodological frameworks that inform my study. Chapter Three talks about changes in the understanding of women's health issues in 1990s China that foreground the 1998 Chinese translation, and most importantly the development of gender awareness in women's health research. Finally, Chapter Four presents a comparative analysis of the Chinese translation with its source text in order to determine the how the book was mediated during its travel to 1990s China. Chapter Five presents the conclusion, wraps up the theoretical and practical implications of this research, and pinpoints future research directions on this topic.

## Chapter One: *OBOS* Travelling East: Historical Context and Global Trajectory

In the United States, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (first edition appeared in 1971) is considered a success story of feminism because it has united and mobilized women to produce knowledge on women's health that was not otherwise available. The book changed the way American women talk about their bodies and sexuality, and became an icon of the women's health movement (Davis 2007; Wells 2010). The way *OBOS* is made makes it different from other health books of the time: the book has included a collection of personal narratives on how women relate to their bodies. Allowing women to speak out and tell their experience with the medical care system, *OBOS* questioned the authority of medical establishment that often turns a blind eye to women's specific needs. Writing up the book and updating its content, the *OBOS* writing group helped translate science to the common people (Bell 1994).

More importantly, while women used to be excluded from the production of medical discourse, *OBOS* constantly updates its content based on feedback from readers, and includes letters from readers as personal accounts on the subject of women's health (Kline 2005). By including more and more women's perspectives and embodied experiences, the *OBOS* project avoids the fragmentation that became a feature of the Second-wave feminist movement and has survived for decades (82). It is adapted by the translators to the local context to which it travels, and has prospered as a global feminist project. Although not without challenges, especially when it comes to representing women of different ethnicities and sexual orientations, *OBOS* is able to speak to a diverse group of women. The unique way that the book is made allows it to travel outside the U.S., and its content has expanded in this process. But first, let us go back to where

the story begins.

In the late 1960s, the women's liberation movement emerged during the periods of liberal social thought and activism (Marieskind 1975). Women were encouraged to explore the political aspects of their private life, and to challenge the division between the political and the personal. Under the slogan 'the personal is political' that characterizes the second-wave feminist movement, the younger generation of women developed a critical awareness of the social and economic systems that put women at a disadvantage (Davis 22). In this context, women's health became a major political issue as American women were dismayed by the sexism of the medical establishment (Kline 83). In post-World-War-II America, the medical and pharmaceutical science enjoyed unprecedented authority, and medical institutions proliferated to the point that medical care became one of the largest industries in the U.S. (Starr 1982: 335-336). However, since the mid-1960s, more third parties such as lawyers, government officials and academic scholars started to intervene in the medical process and question the ethics of the doctor-patient relationship where the latter was likely to be exploited. After these issues were brought to light, the public urged that patients' rights should be protected as a form of civil rights, and a language of patients' rights was needed to meet this end (Kline 84). While the authority of medical science was undermined by the discourse of bioethics, feminists argued that although actions had been taken for more accessible, less hierarchical health care, these measures ignored the problem of sexism in the medical industry (85).

Feminist material has been written on how women's sexuality and bodies are prohibited by the society and discouraged from expression, and how women's body experiences that contradict dominant male perspectives are devalued, trivialized or made shameful (e.g. see Conboy et al 1997; Ruzek 1978). Since a gender perspective was brought to the study of medical care, health

activists argued that women's bodies are subjected to the gaze of male authority in the medical system. At a time when most of the physicians and doctors were men, and when women hardly made it to medical schools, the female body was medicalized by the paternalistic health care system, often constructed as deviant, as something to put under surveillance and control (Davis 45-46). In the women's liberation movement, the focus on women's body and health issues became important because it led up to an interrogation of the social interpretation of sex differences, which forms the basis for the system of sexism (Marieskind and Ehrenreich 1975: 38). In order to restructure the paternalistic medical care system, the women's health movement emerged as a community-based, grassroots movement that aimed to liberate and empower women by fostering body consciousness and restructuring social definitions of their embodied selves (Ruzek 28; Marieskind 220). Health activists realized that the current medical care system was structured in a way to prohibit women's body consciousness, isolate them from one another, and make the socially disadvantaged groups more vulnerable. A renewal of health activism was thus needed to put women in contact with one another in self-help groups, so that the hierarchical structure of health delivery systems could be challenged.

In the late 1960s, American health feminists were seeking alternatives to the institutionalized medical care system to improve disadvantaged groups' access to medical care, and they were also working on legislative measures to ensure women's rights to abortion and contraception (Kline 85-86). In this context, women's health literature became important not only to women looking for clear and accessible health information, but also to organizations that advocated for women's sexual and reproductive health. The 1970s saw the rise of women-controlled health clinics as a feminist alternative to the over commercialized, paternalistic medical establishment (Morgen 2002). These largely volunteer-based organizations

played a vital role in the feminist health movement. They sought to help women who are not medical health professionals learn how to do self-examination and to learn from other women's experiences on health-related issues (72). For this purpose, these health clinics and women's health organizations needed accessible information on self-help that is easy to understand for the common people to support their work. The American edition of *OBOS* was born in this context and soon achieved nation-wide success.

The *OBOS* project started with a workshop organized during the women's liberation conference in Boston, 1969. The objective was to encourage women to get together and share their stories as part of the consciousness-raising campaign of second-wave feminism (Davis 2007; Kline 2005; Wells 2010). At the two-hour workshop titled *Women and Their Bodies*, women shared their experience with doctors in order to collect information on where to find "good" obstetrician-gynecologists in the community. The participants soon realized that they experienced the same frustration with the lack of information on the functioning of women's bodies, sexualities, contraceptive methods and reproduction, as well as the paternalistic, unhelpful male doctors in the medical establishment.

The women decided to carry out their own research on women's health-and-reproduction-related issues and bring what they learnt during the process for presentation at the workshop. This group of women began to meet regularly to share their research findings on women's health-related issues, and this eventually evolved into the Boston Women's Health Book Collective (BWHBC) (Davis 2007). More and more local women attended their meetings and learnt from the group discussions based on women's health information that the group members collected. This turned out to be a truly empowering process as the participants realized that while none of them were formally trained as practitioners, they

had the ability to collect and evaluate medical knowledge, and that they no longer needed to rely on doctors but on each other for information on health issues (Norsigian et al. 1999). They came to realize that women's understanding of how their bodies function is not inferior to scientific knowledge produced in medical institutions, and women's personal accounts of childbearing, health problems, nutrition and birth control can expand and enhance the medical textbooks written by male 'experts'. The participants also realized how much they could gain from putting together their stories and feelings and sharing them with others with similar experience, while the practices in the medical system prevented them from uniting with other women to find better health care solutions (Norsigian and Sanford 1987). Eventually, their lecture notes and testimonials were published, first as a small booklet, then as a book of more than 200 pages, titled *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.

*OBOS* helped women develop a critical consciousness about the health care system. It allowed them to translate concerns with their private life into public and political issues (Bell 11). It introduced new ideas about women's roles as active, informed health consumers into the public discourse on women's health and reproduction (Elayne 2005). *OBOS* is not only a health information book written by women for women, but it also situates women's health-related, sexuality and reproduction issues in their specific social and political contexts. It politicizes women's health problems for its readers, showing them that the most 'private' problems of their life are actually rooted in the larger systems. The book combined scientific research on health with political reflection on women's social situation (Wells 100). Because of its emphasis on the socio-political aspect of women's health problems, the focus of the book has often shifted in response to changes in the larger social and geopolitical context.

When the book first came out, it focused on topics such as women's reproductive health,

sexuality issues, women's control over their own bodies as empowerment, because of the second wave feminist politics in the 1960s United States (Davis 23). While the book started as a feminist attempt to resist the systems of patriarchy and capitalism in the American medical industry, the later commercial edition that appeared in 1973 turned its focus to the politics of individuality (Musser 2007). With the rise of identity politics, the Boston Collective widened their networks of writers to represent a broader spectrum of experiences (Wells 57). As the BWHBC group enlarged and expanded the content of the book in response to the changing health politics in the USA, the book included new chapters on nutrition, environmental and occupational health, menopause and aging etc. (Norsigian et al. 1999). When the inclusiveness and diversity of the American feminist movement became an issue, the book sought to represent a more diverse group of women and more minority women joined the *OBOS* writing group. Thus, *OBOS* is constantly changing and expanding its content to meet the demand of its audience, in response to a changing (feminist) political context. It is much more than a source of health information for women: the collection of personal accounts and stories help women develop a political consciousness of the paternalistic social system that puts women's health at a disadvantage (Norsigian and Sanford 1987). As one of the co-founders of the BWHBC said: “[w]hat we do best is to help women look more critically at the particulars of their own health care and personal lives to start to name the changes they want to make, and to see that they can and, in fact, have to work with others to try to effect those changes” (291).

Rhetorically, *OBOS* used certain strategies that were highly creative and original compared to other health books produced at the time: by using the collective pronoun ‘we’, the authors invite the reader to identify with the personal accounts included in the book; they also use a wide range of women's narratives to create possible openings for transforming current practices in the

medical establishment, and engage them in public conversations about women's bodies and lives (Wells 11). This attempt to juxtapose different personal narratives to open up space for a reflection on the paternalism of U.S. health care system makes *OBOS* distinct from all the preceding health manuals for women. *OBOS* breaks down the boundary between the private/secret and the public sphere, as the collective revealed the secrets of doctors and physicians—their ignorance of the functioning of the female body—and encouraged conversations among women on private issues such as abortion, masturbation, contraception and orgasm (56). These issues used to be made shameful in the American culture, yet the collective wove them into a new discourse of the body that empowers women.

As *OBOS* became a great success in the U.S., it also attracted the attention of foreign publishers and women's organizations. Since the late 1970s, with the development of transnational feminist networks and global feminist movement, women's health has become an important topic at many world conferences on women, such as the Cairo Conference in 1994. The women's health workshops organized as part of these international conferences allowed members of the BWHBC to meet with feminist health activists from different parts of the world, and thus, they were able to liaise with women's groups interested in translating *OBOS* (Davis 60). A global network of *OBOS* thus became possible. During the 1970s, the distribution of *OBOS* was largely limited to North America and Western Europe. However, with the increase in the number of women's NGOs and more funding opportunities for women's groups in the 'Third World', the demand for culturally appropriate adaptations of *OBOS* grew tremendously in the less wealthy regions such as Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, while the interest in the book gradually declined in Western Europe (61). With more and more translations published in non-European languages, the making of *OBOS* has moved to the cultural 'periphery', i.e.

regions that previously had little power in knowledge production.<sup>1</sup>

Up to the present, *OBOS* has been published in more than 30 languages and sold millions of copies around the world. As the BWHBC observed, the accessible, friendly and conversational style of *OBOS* and the fact that it incorporates many women's narratives and experiences made the book popular among non-Western women's groups that were hungry for "evidence-based, culturally appropriate and non-judgmental information on health, sexuality and reproduction"<sup>2</sup>. The conditions under which *OBOS* travels to different parts of the world are hardly the same. Still, all the overseas feminist translation groups working on *OBOS* aspire to create an oppositional feminist discourse with culturally sensitive, women-centered self-help information, so that they can politicize women's bodies and health in their local social, cultural and political context.

The success of *OBOS* in the U.S. has been ascribed to its ability to preserve its initial philosophy while adapting itself to the changing social, cultural and political context, and staying responsive to a wide range of readers (Davis 43-44). Now, foreign translators and health activists have adopted this strategy to adapt the book for women in various cultural, social and geo-political contexts. The global dissemination of *OBOS* has not meant simply reproducing the original edition in a different language. Translating *OBOS* for a different audience is a process of rewriting and editing the original American version to make it culturally sensitive and relevant to the local gender politics. The translators, especially those living in developing countries, developed a critical awareness of the 'US-centrism' of the book (Davis 78). When the local geopolitics come into play, the women's groups working on its foreign translations have realized

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<sup>1</sup> See Susam-Sarajeva, Şebnem, *Theories on the Move: Translation's Role on the Travel of Literary Theory*, New York: Editions Rodopi, for more discussion on the post-colonial politics of translation and the directed flows of translated

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/global-projects/global-initiative/#whatare>. For more information on the building of the global networks of *OBOS*, visit the website of Our Bodies, Ourselves Global Initiative.

that the dominant, U.S.-centered perspective of the book does not address the specific situation of women living in other societies. As a result, they have tended not to produce ‘faithful’ translations of the American edition, but to preserve its oppositionality (173). For example, when it comes to the social actors of population and fertility control, the Serbian translators of *OBOS* deleted the excerpts that directly address the role of the U.S. government in population control, which is not relevant to the Serbian context (Bogic 2017: 140).

Cultural sensitivity is only one of the problems that the translators of *OBOS* have faced. The foreign feminist activists and women’s groups encounter many obstacles as they tried to ‘import’ this book. Apart from financial problems (such as lack of funding), political upheavals, and military conflicts etc., a common problem for the *OBOS* translation groups is the paternalistic social-cultural system where women’s sexualities and bodies are considered ‘sensitive’ issues (Davis 61-63). Often, they encounter resistance from their societies regarding the ‘obscene’ content of the book, such as photos and descriptions of women’s sexual parts, discussions of homosexuality, masturbation etc. In some cases, the local government does not support the book’s pro-choice narrative on women’s reproduction for religious reasons (e.g. see Bogic 2017). Topics such as abortion, prostitution, and same-sex marriage are considered controversial in many societies, which makes it hard for the book to pass local censorship bureaus. Local publishers might be reluctant to distribute this book because its ideologies run counter to the dominant discourse on women’s bodies and sexualities of a given society. As a result, many of the women’s groups translating *OBOS* had to find a way to square the book’s feminist narrative with the paternalistic ideologies that dominated their own social systems. Thus, the translations of *OBOS* are often affected by the social systems and dominant discourses in place in the target society.

In response to this problem, the BWHBC took action to ensure that the translations of *OBOS* remain loyal to their feminist agenda of empowering women by changing how they relate to their bodies. As Davis points out, the BWHBC has played an active role in the global dissemination of *OBOS*, setting guidelines for translations, making sure that only local feminist groups can produce the translation, and asking the foreign-language adaptations published under the title *OBOS* to stick to the feminist philosophy of the original edition as much as possible (59). The later editions of *OBOS* published since the 1990s have involved substantial collaboration between local *OBOS* translation groups and the BWHBC. The latter not only provides information on the translation, publication and distribution of the book, but also uses its networks to help overseas women's writing and translation groups find donors to finance the local distribution *OBOS*. Moreover, the Collective offers help for facilitating the foreign language translation projects, sets up meetings for *OBOS* translators at international conferences, and arranges for the translators to share and discuss their translation experiences online (Davis 61-62). Thus, the dissemination of *OBOS* across borders and the popularity it has gained globally demonstrate the rise of global feminism (Wells 2). Although the authors and the translators of *OBOS* are located in different geo-political contexts, they have worked together to pass on the feminist message of *OBOS*.

While it is necessary to adapt the content of the book so that it can be resourceful and empowering for women in a non-U.S. context, the translators also put considerable efforts into maintaining continuity between the original edition and its translations, so that the translated versions pass on the sense of empowerment, collaboration, and politicization that the U.S. book embodies (Davis 2007). For this purpose, the translators often retell the story of how the book began with the women's conference at Boston in their preface and situate their own histories in

this feminist ‘legend’. Their purpose was to keep the narratives that politicize women’s health issues and empower women, so that the book can be as life changing to women living in different contexts as it is to the U.S. women (173). Through this line of continuity between the U.S. edition and its translations in other cultures, the global *OBOS* project creates a transnational community of women acting as health informants and feminist activists, which includes not only the authors and their readers, but also the translators and their readers in a different geopolitical context (174). The various translations of *OBOS* have made up an imagined community that recognizes differences and, at the same time, makes a common ground of struggle possible for women in different locations (175). The translations of *OBOS* thus embody a political approach to translation whereby the authors and the translators collaborate to ensure that the feminist message of the source text is passed on (Bogic 20). Therefore, the travel of *OBOS* from U.S. to the ‘east’ is an example of how women’s health communications work in a globalized world. It shows that women’s health communications not only pass on information on health care, but also adopt political strategies to change people’s attitudes towards women’s bodies, sexuality and reproduction in the target society.

As *OBOS* quickly made inroads in Southeast Asia, its translations and adaptations appeared in Japan, South Korea, Thailand and so on. In collaboration with the BWHBC, a Chinese women’s NGO called ‘Chinese Women’s Health Network’ produced a Mandarin Chinese translation of *OBOS* in 1998 (Liu 1998: 4)<sup>3</sup>. This organization is affiliated to the China Association for Mental Health (CAMH), which has a research focus on women’s health and

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<sup>3</sup> The 1998 Chinese edition is not the only Chinese translation of *OBOS*, as a “pirated” Chinese edition of *OBOS* was published in Taiwan in 1976 (Davis 53). Another pirated translation was produced in Mainland China in 1987, and the Boston Women’s Collective had no prior knowledge of this book until I reached out to them (Personal email with BWHBC). Information on the 1987 Chinese translation is extremely limited, and thus I focused my discussion on the 1998 translation in this chapter. Subsequently, I will refer to the 1998 Chinese edition as the ‘Chinese translation’ of *OBOS*, unless otherwise specified.

gender relations in education, economy, environment and law. The Chinese Women's Health Network purports to raise gender consciousness and promote the healthy and comprehensive development of the society<sup>4</sup>. The coordinator for the 1998 translation project was a Chinese Women's Studies scholar and one of the co-founders of the Chinese Women's Health network. The translation team consists of both men and women translators, and more than 60 volunteers and specialist consultants that worked for the project are credited in the book<sup>5</sup>.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese society began to open up after a prolonged period of social movements and political upheavals. After the social reforms in the late 1970s, Chinese feminists were exposed to new thoughts and developments in western feminism through translated feminist literature. Western feminist classics such as the *Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir were translated into Chinese. Although China has developed a discourse of socialist feminism in the past, it did not address the persistence of gender inequality in post-revolutionary China (Angeloff 2012; Wang 2010). The increased communications between China and the West, such as group meetings and international conferences, created opportunities for Chinese women to develop new analytical tools on the systems of sexism.

The Chinese health feminists first learnt about the story of *OBOS* while they were preparing for the 1995 UN Beijing Conference on Women<sup>6</sup>. Having read the American edition of *OBOS* and realized that it is pertinent for the situation of Chinese women, some bilingual Chinese women approached the BWHBC to negotiate a possible Chinese edition (Plafker 1998). The Chinese translation of *OBOS* took approximately five years, and the finalized version came out

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<sup>4</sup> Yang, Yang (Ed.) 'Chinese Women's Health Network', Jan 2014, retrieved from: <http://www.womenofchina.cn/womenofchina/html1/source/16/8729-1.htm> on Aug 20 2017

<sup>5</sup> See Liu 1998 for the full list of people and organizations who took part in the Chinese translation project

<sup>6</sup> Source: <http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/global-projects/china-chinese-womens-health-network-educate-women-in-china/>

in June 1998. After the third print run in 1999, this edition is currently no longer in print<sup>7</sup>. Although the Chinese women's group working on the translation of *OBOS* claimed that they were in the process of producing an uncensored version of *OBOS* adapted for Chinese women's specific situation along with the 'official' version of the book, like what was happening in other South East Asian countries<sup>8</sup>, the 1998 edition remains to be the only Chinese edition currently available on the market.

The Chinese edition of *OBOS* was produced under certain socio-political conditions. In order to contextualize the Chinese *OBOS* project, we must first examine the history of women's movements and feminism in China. Chinese feminism was first born at the turn of the Century, under the influence of translated foreign texts, and then integrated into the discourse of nation building (Stacey 1983). During the nationalist movements and wars against Western and Japanese imperialism in pre-1949 China, women's liberation became a symbol of national liberation (Greenhalgh 2001: 849; Angeloff 2012: 91-93; Yang 1999: 36). From the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, a discourse of gender equality was circulated by the State and translated into policy. In the 1950s, a series of legal reforms were implemented to ensure gender equity in the political, economic, social and cultural realms, protecting women's rights to land, equal pay, free marriage and divorce (Angeloff 94). However, during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, the 'woman question' was seen as individualist and thus must be subordinate to the interest of the collective (Wang 2016: 116). Under such circumstances, Chinese women found it hard to develop an autonomous feminist discourse. While Chinese women had been mobilized on the basis of socialist feminism, such as

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<sup>7</sup> Source:

<http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/global-projects/china-chinese-womens-health-network-educate-women-in-china/>

<sup>8</sup> See Davis, 2007 p. 61.

in the All-China Women's Federation, they depended highly on the State for their work (Yang 37-40). Despite being integrated into social production, Chinese women were still "not a part of discourse production, which was reserved for the State" (Min 2017:19). When the Cultural Revolution came to an end, China's political environment relaxed and more diverse voices began to emerge in public discussions about the nation's future (Min 2005: 274). Since then, Chinese feminists have sought to develop an autonomous feminist discourse and new analytical tools that are most suitable for the current conditions of Chinese women.

From the late 1970s onwards, China underwent a transition from planned economy to market economy. As the Chinese society began to open up because of the new socio-economic reforms, feminist literature that had developed in the other parts of the world travelled to China and profoundly inspired local Chinese feminists. With the influx of translated foreign feminist texts and increased collaboration between Chinese and foreign women's groups, Chinese feminists, intellectuals, and writers attempted to redefine problems such as health and autonomy for Chinese women, using feminist conceptual tools such as empowerment, diversity, and transnational solidarity.

With the development of what appeared to be a liberalist, capitalist market in post-reform China, Chinese women's lives also changed dramatically. The retreat of the State and the opening up of the Chinese economy produced mixed consequences for women in post-socialist China. On the one hand, the social and economic reforms created new possibilities for Chinese women's self-expression and self-consciousness on both organizational and intellectual levels; on the other hand, the social transformations made Chinese women more vulnerable to exploitation and dismantled some of the State policies and programs launched for gender equity (Lin 1997: 12). Chinese women used to be perceived as equals to men in all aspects in post-1949

China, whereas they subsequently encountered “a new class inequality combined with gender stratification” (Min 71). Throughout the 1990s, Chinese women were subject to gender discrimination at work, high unemployment, poor labour conditions, and sexual objectification in the globalized capitalist market (Lin 2001 in Min 71). Moreover, the liberalist argument that the previous socialist programs launched for women’s emancipation have sacrificed economic growth and efficiency for gender equity gained popularity in post-reform China, and a gender division of labour seemed to be revived in the dominant social discourse and served to justify gender inequality in the Chinese society (Lin 13). These conditions added to the challenges facing feminist intellectuals and scholars in China.

In the 1990s, the Chinese Women’s Health Network felt that it was necessary to bring in *OBOS* and make it accessible to local women living through a time of social-economic transition, so that they could learn about self-care with the help of this ‘American feminist classic’ (Liu 1998: 1). The translation of *OBOS* into Chinese is one example of how Chinese feminists have attempted to apply feminist frameworks of theory and action developed elsewhere to the specific situation of Chinese women. The 1998 translation of *OBOS* achieved initial success, with a first press run of 5000 copies that sold out in less than a month (Davis 61; Plafker 1998). Some reviews of the Chinese book were published in China, notably in Chinese Women’s Studies Journals, and they all spoke very positively of the book and recognized its power to politicize and inform Chinese women readers. They maintained that by applying the Second Wave feminist slogan, ‘the personal is political’, to women’s relations with their bodies, the book appealed to the concerns of Chinese women as much as it did for American women (see Gao 2000; Ding 1998; Du 1998; Liu 2000). One reviewer argued that historically, women’s bodies are objectified by the paternalistic discourse on women’s bodies and sexuality in the Chinese society; through

the lens of feminist and gender politics, the book politicizes the Chinese women readers and encourages them to challenge this cultural representation of female sexuality that has dominated Chinese history (Du 57-58). Prioritizing women's everyday concerns such as health, sexuality and reproduction, the book appeals to the common people and mobilizes women in their daily life (Gao 13). At the same time, Chinese women who learnt about *OBOS* also realized that it is necessary to adapt to the book to address the specific concerns of women living in the Chinese society, or to produce a health book for Chinese women inspired by *OBOS* (e.g. Du 57; Liu 2000).

Like most of the other translations of *OBOS*, the Chinese translation project encountered certain problems during the production of the book. During the 1980s and the 1990s, Chinese Women's Studies developed rapidly and many research projects were launched in collaboration with foreign women's groups. Women's studies were then a safe way of promoting social change for some Chinese intellectuals, because the 'woman question' was traditionally considered as unimportant, and thus would not provoke any 'dangerous' political thought that threatens the nation's stability (Liu in Wang 106). However, the production of the Chinese translation was not viewed without skepticism. For example, some senior health officials in China opposed importing a foreign text, and they were unpleasant at this amount of discussion devoted to foreign experiences, let alone the book's extensive coverage of homosexuality, prostitution and female sexuality etc. that they were not used to (Plafker 1998: A49). As Davis notes, Chinese publishers were generally concerned with topics considered 'obscene' under Chinese law, and with the book's emphasis on women's control over their bodies and reproduction, which runs counter to the birth planning program (63). Thus, in order to have the translation published, the Chinese translation group must find a way to square the book's

discussion of women's sexual and reproductive health with the official discourse in the local society.

*OBOS* translations show how women's health communications are passed around through transnational feminist networks, in a globalized world. Instead of moving in a single direction (from the 'center' to the 'periphery'), the original edition is constantly challenged and revised by local women's groups. It is also shaped by local cultural, economic and political conditions. As previous studies on the global trajectories of *OBOS* demonstrates (e.g. Davis 2007; Bogic 2017), while the translation projects aim to unleash women's sense of power over their bodies and lives, the production of foreign-editions is always subject to conditioning factors in the local context. Given the above discussion on the situation of the Chinese book, it will be interesting to examine how well the Chinese translation of *OBOS* has passed on the feminist message of the original version, and under what conditions.

Why did the translators feel compelled to translate this book in China at this particular time? How did they handle the problem of censorship and cultural sensitivity during the translation process, and what does this reveal about their agency as cultural mediators during the transnational circulation of women's health communication texts? When reading against the Chinese context, certain issues that the American edition has addressed are either not relevant, or may be read differently by a different group of readers. For example, given the different reproduction politics in China and in the United States, access to abortion might have different meanings for Chinese women than American women. Thus, it is important to find out whether the Chinese translators took a critical stance on the cultural discrepancies between the source and the target society, and to what extent the book addresses Chinese women's specific situation. To

find the right answer to these unresolved issues, I raise the following questions for my research:

1) How do gender and feminist health politics in the target society come into play in translating women's health communication texts; and 2) how do these politics affect the ability of OBOS to carry forward the political message of the American women's health movement in the Chinese context?

In order to answer my research questions, I have studied existing literature on how feminism travels through translation. Given the feminist agenda of people and organizations who played a major part in this translation project, such as the project coordinator and the BWHBC, the Chinese translation of *OBOS* should be situated within the larger context of feminism travelling from the abroad into China. The next chapter gives an overview of literature written on how translation has allowed feminism to travel, and what role translation has played in the development of modern Chinese feminism. More specifically, I will reference research on how translation has facilitated the self-organization of Chinese women and helped them develop a critical gender awareness.

## **Chapter Two: Literature review, Theoretical Framework, and Methodology**

## *Introduction*

This chapter presents the literature review of my study. The first part of the chapter concerns translation issues in the global trajectories of feminism and emphasizes how the specific context under which feminism travels affects the transmission of ideas through translation. Then, it moves on to discuss some of the more specific issues with the travel of feminism from the outside to China during China's reform period starting from late 1970s, and emphasizes the necessity to examine the 1998 Chinese translation of *OBOS* with a feminist translation framework. The second part deals with the theoretical and methodological frameworks of my study. To investigate the travel of *OBOS* to China as contextually-bound feminist translation, I draw on feminist translation theories and systems theories. Methodologically, my research is a multi-method study that combines descriptive textual analysis, study of secondary literature, and oral history.

## *Part I: Feminism as Traveling theory: The Social, Cultural and Political Aspects of Translating Feminism*

### *2.1.1 An Overview of literature on 'Translating Feminism'*

The global trajectory of *OBOS* brings up the question of feminism as a theory and an ideology that travels across national and cultural borders. Like any other theory, feminism does not stay in one place, but it circulates and takes on new meanings in different contexts (Davis 2007). Specifically, I frame the translation of *OBOS* in Chinese as the travel of a U.S.-originated discourse on women's self-care and self-organization to a non-Western, post-socialist country

where women's concerns are both similar to and different from those of American women. This section concerns the practice of translating feminism and the questions that it brings up, especially in the case of the translation of European and U.S. feminist scholarship in a non-Western context (More specifically, Mainland China).

Since language forms the basis for human communications, translation is a necessary condition for the travel of feminism. As Judith Butler notes, solidarity in feminist praxis, especially solidarity across cultural and linguistic borders, does not exist without translation (Butler in Castro and Ergun, 2017: 113). Translation has played an important role in the "trans/formation" of feminist politics and movements. Therefore, studies on feminism and translation not only require a general interrogation of how gender plays into translation, but should delve into the practice of translation in feminist praxis (Castro and Ergun 2). Translations of feminist ideas and theories are often initiated by a small group of bilingual women who read feminist materials written in another language and find them pertinent to the development of indigenous feminist theories and practices. Often, readers of feminist texts that have travelled from a different linguistic context cannot read the source text. Thus, these writings have to be translated before they can influence and inspire local readers.

However, these translations are not simply processes of transportation of ideas, but they can transform and reinvent the translated ideas, in accordance with the specific socio-historical contexts of the travel. Nowadays, studies of translation and social sciences increasingly overlap and intricate with each other (Slavova and Phoenix 2011). Recent conversations in translation studies show that translation is governed by norms and conventions of the target culture (Lefevere and Bassnett 1990; Lefevere 1992; Hermans 1999). Thus, translation does not simply reproduce equivalence of the source text, but can be affected by larger social context, especially

in the target language. Translation often involves the appropriation and manipulation of texts in parallel with the norms and systems of the target society (e.g. see Venuti 1996: 196). These developments in translation theories all point to translation as a social practice that is prone to numerous non-linguistic factors during its production, dissemination and reception across borders. For example, the selection and translation of French feminist theories for dissemination in Anglo-American contexts have led to the invention of ‘French feminism’ in the English-speaking world that bears little resemblance to its source-text meanings (see Brodzki 2011).

Several scholars have put forward the politics of translation as an important framework for translation studies (e.g. Bogic 2017a; Spivak 1992/2004; Susam-Sarajeva 2002; Slavova and Phoenix 2011). This framework highlights the specific socio-historical context of translation. Imbued with the social relations of power, translation is a political act that has certain consequences (Slavova and Phoenix 333). Thus, a socio-political framework in translation studies requires an investigation into what other similar texts were available at the time of translation, why a certain text was translated not others, who is involved in the process of translation, where the funding comes from, and how the translated texts are disseminated (Bogic 6).

Castro and Ergun argue that the current scholarship on women and translation fails to address the cultural and geographical diversity that has emerged within the field of “feminist translation studies”. This gap in the current literature reinforces the imperialist presumption that feminist translation studies are solely about the West and deters the production of new scholarships on feminist translation in the Non-west (3). Theory is knowledge, and thus it carries

certain authority and power when it travels (Susam-Sarajeva 2006: 11). For translation researchers, it is important to understand the trajectory of translation flows in order to address the gaps in current translation studies with regard to the ‘cultural periphery’ in feminist translation studies. Thus, it is vital to bring the non-Western realities of feminist translation (as well as translating feminism) to light in the scholarship on gender and translation. In effect, more and more Third World scholars are beginning to work on translingual and transcultural diffusion of (feminist) theories between their native societies and rest of the world.

The travel of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* is a good example of how Western feminism can be adapted to non-Western situations through translation. In her monograph on *OBOS*, Kathy Davis has examined the power of translation through the lens of transnational feminism. She argues that translation has ‘decentered’ the book as various feminist translation groups strategically adapt the book for their local situations. Apart from Davis, a few other researchers have examined the problem of translating *OBOS*, a Western women’s health advocacy book, in non-Western societies with particular case studies. For example, Bogic explains the practice of ‘cultural translation’ in the *OBOS* project with specific examples from its Serbian translation (2017a). Her work shows that the Serbian translators of *OBOS* challenged the patriarchal language system in their local society by manipulating the translation. More specifically, in the native Serbian language, the words that refer to the female genitalia are degrading and invoke feelings of shame. When translating women’s bodies in *OBOS*, the Serbian translators chose the more medical terms or words of Latin origin over the words in everyday language, thus distancing the reader from the conventional shaming of the female sexual organs (189-193). This translation strategy has made *OBOS* culturally sensitive to the local cultural and linguistic representations of women’s bodies. It shows the power of language in degrading/liberating

women's bodies and sexuality.

Bogic also situates the Serbian translation of *OBOS* in the local and global politics of translating Western feminism in post-socialist Eastern Europe (2017a; 2017b). Historically, Serbian women have gone through gender violence during local military conflicts, the backlash against gender equality after the collapse of the communist regime, and the rise of anti-abortion right-wing sentiments in the reform period of the 1990s and beyond. The translated *OBOS* created an oppositional feminist discourse for Serbian women with regard to their bodies and sexual health, and has provided information on abortion when access to abortion has become extremely restricted by the Orthodox Church. In other words, this translation of *OBOS* has a 'transformative' power: it facilitates local feminist consciousness-raising campaigns and knowledge production, and shows the power of transnational dissemination of translated feminist texts (199-200).

However, while transforming and empowering women, *OBOS* can also be transformed by the translation. A 'pirated' Chinese edition of *OBOS* that came out in Taiwan, 1975, and this translation is problematic because it has been manipulated and appropriated in parallel with the local social systems (Wang 2012). According to the Wang, *OBOS* was translated and sold in Taiwan as a commercial women's health book, and this translation depoliticized women's body and health issues. The feminist tone of the book was changed to an authoritative voice that speaks to women using the singular second person pronoun, which resembles the tone of other women's health manuals published in Taiwan at that time (5). The chapters on lesbianism, abortion, rape, self-defence, pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum were deleted from the translation. Wang argues that this sanitized translation of *OBOS* reflects the absence of successful feminist consciousness-raising movements in the local society (6). Back then, issues

such as abortion, sexual violence and homosexuality were not considered from a rights-based approach in Taiwan (8). The 1975 Chinese translation produced in Taiwan reflects the ideologies of the target society of the time, and invokes questions about the conditions under which the feminist message of *OBOS* could be transferred through translation. These studies on the global translations of *OBOS* shed light on the cultural, social and ideological dimensions of language and the politics of translation. They further demonstrate the necessity to situate translations of feminist texts in the specific social, cultural and geopolitical context where they are produced.

### *2.1.2 Existing Research on the Translation of 'Western' Feminism in Contemporary China*

With the politics of translating feminism in mind, I now turn to the existing research on the travel of feminist theories between the West and China. The translation of Western feminist classics in Chinese during the 1980s and the 1990s is important for the development of feminist thought and gender consciousness in contemporary China. Western feminism provided theoretical support for Chinese women who sought to break away from the Marxist paradigm of class struggle and revitalize gender in social analysis (Li 1999; Liu 2017). This resulted in a cultural fever with translating Western feminism in 1980s Chinese academia (Wang 2001). Chinese scholars in translation studies have examined the Chinese translation of some of the most well-known Western classics written by women authors. Most of these scholars situate their research within the larger feminist translation scholarship. They make reference to the current state of feminist translation scholarship developed in Canada and elsewhere, such as Von Flotow (1997; 2011), Santaemilia (2011), and Simon (1996). They explore the political and activist aspects of translating feminism in China to varying degrees. Some of them focus on the impact of gender politics in China on the translation (and rewriting) of Western feminist literature, while

others try to explore the influence of Western feminism translated into Chinese on the self-awareness and political organization of Chinese women within and outside the academia.

*The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir is often considered an important Western feminist text by the Chinese academia, and as a result many Chinese scholars on gender and translation have written on the various Chinese translations and adaptations of this book. For example, Liu compared the translations produced in Mainland China and Taiwan. She argues that the translators manipulated the texts of Beauvoir in accordance with their own ideologies. As translators need to read the text and then re-encode the texts in the target language, their lexical choices represent their own interpretation of the source text (2017: 164). The translations were affected by the translators' ideological positions as well as the society's attitudes towards feminism and Western existentialism. Due to the conservative gender attitudes in 1980s and 1990s Mainland China and 1970s Taiwan, the translations produced during these periods share an expression of positive attitudes towards the patriarchal system. However, when two feminist translators translate Beauvoir in Taiwan, their choice of words reflects their criticism of patriarchy. In contrast, in a more recent translation produced in Mainland China by Zheng Kulu (郑克鲁) who does not sympathize with feminism, his lexical choice weakens Beauvoir's feminist tone. Thus, the gender identities and ideological standpoints of the translator make a great difference in the translation of feminism.

Yu's research provides a more comprehensive analysis of translation of Western feminism in Chinese with a focus on the ideological dimensions (2015). She examines several issues with translating feminism in China with case studies of *The Second Sex* and other Western feminist literary texts translated into Chinese. These issues include the translation of feminist terminology, the translation of sexualities, the politics of translation, and censorship (2011; 2015). Taking a

descriptive approach, she argues that the cultural and social identities of the translator as well as the social system of the target society are important to the translation of Western feminism in Chinese.

In particular, Yu problematizes the problem of sexuality, as have other foreign scholars on translation and gender studies (33). She points out that sexuality is subject to both formal and cultural censorship in contemporary China. Looking at the translation of women's sexualities in *The Second Sex* and the *Vagina Monologues*, Yu argues that male and female translators have adopted different strategies when translating women's bodies and sexualities. While the female translators tend to keep the meaning of the source text that describes a woman's anguish with her bodies and sexuality in a patriarchal culture, the male translators either cut the description of female sexuality or appropriate the source text from a masculine perspective.

In both cases, Yu found manipulation of the source text to a certain degree. However, while the female translators interfere with the source text to amplify women's suffering caused by patriarchy, the lexical choices made by the male translators appropriate the source text in accordance with the patriarchal culture where women's bodies are subject to a male gaze. Thus, Yu argues that the gender identity of translators strongly affects the work they produce: the female translators are more likely to sympathize with Beauvoir's description of a woman's suffering and consciously or unconsciously subvert the patriarchal appropriation of the female body in their texts. On the contrary, the male translators tend to distance themselves from the woman in Beauvoir's terms and reinforce the patriarchal standards of women's sexuality by imposing a form of censorship or revision of the meanings of the source text (104).

However, not everyone agrees that the gender identity of the translator alone preconditions translation practices. In a study on the translation of Doris Lessing's novel *The Grass is Singing*

into Chinese, Li highlights the impact of the changing gender norms and ideologies in the target society on the practice of translating women (2017). Comparing two translations of the text by a male and a female translator, she argues that apart from their gender identities, the norms in the larger domestic context also affected the translation. *The Grass is Singing* was imported to China as early as the 1950s as an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist work. The identity of Doris Lessing as a ‘communist’ writer also creates a good reception of her work in post-revolutionary China. Under this context, the feminist implications and gender awareness of Doris Lessing’s work were overlooked.

*The Grass is Singing* tells the story of a white woman who struggles with the normative gender and race identities in a colonial context, and suffers first a mental breakdown, and then murder by a black man with whom she has formed a complicated romantic relationship, for not being able to reconcile the conflict. In accordance with the anti-colonialist norms of the publishing and the literary system in 1950s China, the translator presented the heroine as a malicious, morally corrupt woman who symbolizes the colonial oppressor, and the conflict between her and her killer as anti-colonial rebellion. However, due to the politicization of the ‘Woman’ identity in the field of literary criticism in 1980s-1990s China, Lessing has been ‘rediscovered’ as a feminist author. As a result, the second translation of *The Grass is Singing* has a strong gender awareness. This translator emphasizes the suffering and bewilderment of the heroine with her identity as a woman living in a patriarchal and colonial hierarchy. Thus, Li concludes that the ‘politics of field’ and the changing (gender) politics in the larger social context affect the interpretation of Western women’s work by Chinese translators, as well as their reception in Chinese society.

The translation of ‘Western feminism’ needs contextualization in the domestic context.

With regard to the larger social and political context of feminism travelling from abroad to China, Lin (1997) argues that the relationship between Chinese women's liberation projects and the State has shifted as a result of changing local politics. She uses the translation of the term 'feminism' in Chinese and its socio-political context as an example. On the development of Chinese feminism, she argues that although women's organizations and activities existed in post-revolutionary China since the 1950s, it was not until the 1980s that women's academic and organizational activities became more independent of the State's influence (11). Feminist consciousness began to revive in China's cultural discourse following the end of the Cultural Revolution, but it was more or less marginalized and restricted to academia until wider social, economic and political transformations took place in China.

The mid 1980s and early 1990s saw major transformations of Chinese society and economy, which had significant consequences on women's situations. With the increased involvement of universities, research institutes, non-governmental organizations and individuals in women's work, the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) ceased to be the only organization that regulates women's activities in China (11). International events such as the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women, which was held with considerable official fanfare, also helped politicize women's issues in the Chinese context (12). As women's activities rapidly expanded from academia to the wider socio-political context, there was a pressing need to redefine 'feminism' to suit the term's new uses in various situations.

Min's (2017) research builds on previous studies, including that of Lin (2001), that examine the effects of post-1978 market reforms on the development of a critical gender consciousness for Chinese women. She notes that the reforms created space for Chinese women's action. More specifically, she explores how Chinese feminists have attempted to keep up with the current state

of feminism in other parts of the world and build alliances across borders. Drawing from Edward Said, Min situates the trajectory of Western feminism into China within the framework of travelling theory. However, she argues that Said's idea of travelling theory does not explain certain patterns associated with the travel of feminist theories. Nor does it examine the agents involved in the translation process whose action might account for why such patterns occur (3). Min suggests that the movement of theories is encouraged by certain forms of power, and theories are often produced or created for certain purposes. This is particularly true for feminist theories, as they have clear political agendas. Moreover, it is equally important to 'de-center' the subjects of research on the travel of theories and take into account translingual conversations between the West and the Rest, especially those initiated by non-Western countries.

With regard to the travel of Western feminism to post-socialist Chinese society, Min has examined the socio-economic context of transnational dialogues between Chinese and foreign feminists: the cultural and intellectual 'enlightenment' in the 1980s and the development of a market-oriented economy in the 1990s. Because of China's Open Door Policy, an unprecedented wave of social, cultural and intellectual exchanges took place between Chinese and foreign scholars in the 1980s. Various interpretations and translations of common terms used in Western Women's Studies, such as *feminism* and *gender*, appeared in the Chinese academia. Foreign feminist classics were translated into Chinese, including *The Second Sex* by Simone De Beauvoir and *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan. This translated feminist literature inspired a group of women intellectuals and helped nurture their gender awareness.

The 1990s saw a more radical change in the theory and practice of Chinese feminism since transnational feminism arrived in China through the organization of various international conferences and workshops on women's issues, most notably the 1995 Fourth U.N. World

Conference on women. During this event, non-governmental women's organizations played the part of the translator between China and the West. Some of these organizations, such as the Chinese Society for Women's Studies (CSWS), are not based in China, yet their group members (some of whom are Chinese scholars working and studying overseas) travelled between China and their places of origin to facilitate transnational dialogues on Chinese women. The CSWS felt that it was necessary to introduce more Western feminist writings to the Chinese audience, because many Chinese scholars were not familiar with the meanings of *feminism* and the current state of Women's Studies in the West (51).

In conclusion, Min suggests that the travel of (feminist) theories to China has been facilitated by various individuals and organizations, and motivated by both local and transnational processes. Thus, Min brings the question of the politics of translation into studies on translating feminism in China. Other scholars who focus on the transnational dissemination of feminism have made similar arguments. For example, Kathy Davis argues that the travel of feminist theories is motivated by the activities of women's advocacy organizations in both local and transnational contexts. Translation not only enables the transnational dissemination of feminism, but it also becomes an opportunity for women to unite and collaborate translingually and transnationally. However, the different agents included in the dissemination of feminism also need more scholarly attention. Their backgrounds, interests, and agendas affect the flow of knowledge and information in certain directions and how they are put to uses in the new context.

In order to further illustrate the relation between Chinese women's organizing, communications between China and the West, and Chinese feminists as translators, I turn to a case study on a Beijing-based women's translation group, "East Meets West Feminist Translation Group" (EMW) (Ge and Jolly 2001). EMW was formed by bilingual Chinese and

Western women in preparation for the 1995 Beijing Conference. The group consisted of Chinese women and foreign women who were working or studying in China, and they proposed to build alliances between Chinese and Western women across cultural and linguistic differences. Their work mainly consisted of selecting feminist articles from English-language journals and translating and republishing them in Chinese. For them, translating feminism is never a purely technical or linguistic issue, but a process of negotiating cultural nuances. In order to contextualize feminism, the group members spent a lot of time reflecting on what feminism means to them and sharing their experiences of gender discrimination in China. This was important for them to develop a critical language for gender (64). During the process of translation, it was important for them to contextualize the nuanced understanding of gender and feminism in two different cultures, an issue they explain in their discussion of social and cultural interpretation of feminist terminology in the translators' preface (66). As feminist activists, they are not the 'invisible' translators working behind the scenes, but they acknowledge their existence and their agency as cultural mediators in the paratexts, such as the translator's preface.

They are aware that translation is not just a transfer of information:

Translation rarely remains a purely technical process anyway, and the choice of words and the transition between one linguistic culture and another usually carry some political implications. [...] We were aiming to formulate a feminist language in Chinese. However, we did not mean to slap on clumsy Western labels and concepts. That is why the discussions and 'Translator's Note' were so important. They provided a means to appropriate the Western text and understand, select and adapt the parts relevant to a Chinese context (Jolly in Ge and Jolly 67).

For groups like the EMW, translation becomes a form of feminist praxis. The relaxation of political attitudes towards women's issues and the holding of the Fourth U.N. Conference have created a space for action. As the above research demonstrates, the opening up has allowed Chinese women to reframe their relations with the State in their activities. They came to know new forms of self-expression and activism with regard to the gendered social structure. The

development of a (transnational) feminist praxis coinciding with the emergence of women's translation groups and the flows of translated Western feminism point to the intricate relations between feminist translation and feminist activism.

As Castro and Ergun argue, the translation and the transnational dissemination of feminist scholarship should be studied both as a theoretical development and a political praxis. The translated 'Western' feminist discourse has particular uses and meanings in the Chinese context. It justifies Chinese feminists' attempts to use gender as an analytical category and to seek autonomy from the socialist-revolutionary discourse that prioritizes class (Liu 160). Chinese feminist activists like the EMW translation group have attempted to translate, appropriate and take back Western feminist concepts and terminology so that they will become relevant to the Chinese women's situation.

Many Western feminist texts highlight women's lived experiences with their bodies and sexualities in order to contest the conventional cultural construction of womanhood (Conboy et al 1997). The literary tradition of 'woman's writing' that tries to reinscribe women's bodily experience in language has also greatly inspired women's translation practices (Flotow 1997). However, when Western feminism entered China through translation, this representation of the female body and sexuality confronted the social taboo against sex and obscenity. Concerning the translation of sexual material from English into Chinese, Lung argues that both linguistic and cultural barriers affect the transmission of source text meaning in the Chinese translation. The Western countries where the travel of feminism is initiated are relatively open to and tolerant of sexual texts, while representations of sex and sexuality are tabooed and considered sensitive in the conventional Chinese culture. This creates problems of 'untranslatability' between English and Chinese texts with regard to sexuality (256). In her analysis of the Chinese translation of the

Vagina Monologues, a progressive feminist piece that deconstructs cultural representations of women's sexuality, Yu suggests that the Chinese translators often struggle with the rich and culture-bound terms that describe women's sexual parts and lesbianism. When it comes to diverse ways of saying 'vagina' in the source text, the Chinese translators adopted strategies of bilingual translation and 'zero translation', i.e. keeping the source language terms in the target text (2015). At the same time, the translator made efforts to localize the descriptions of women's sexuality that contain slang language specific to the social context of the source text by adding Chinese slang terms for 'vagina'. In one translation produced for stage performance in Mainland China, the translator simply omitted the ways of saying 'vagina' that cannot be translated into the Chinese context.

Apart from the cultural 'intranslatability', Yu also notes that censorship has affected the translation of Western feminist texts into Chinese. While most Western literary and philosophical texts were censored in China during the Cultural Revolution, the post-reform period saw a relaxation of governmental censorship on translated texts (164). This has allowed foreign publications that used to be considered 'obscene' due to their erotic elements to travel to China. Many of the Western feminist classics fell within this category because of the tendency in First and Second Wave Western feminism to subvert the unequal power relations of gender by addressing constraints on women's bodies and sexuality.

In Chinese publishing, texts that deal with politically sensitive issues and overt descriptions of sex are most likely to be sanitized (Chang 2008: 230). The textual and visual representation of sex and sexuality was subject to strict regulation in China from the 1950s to the 1970s (Yu 8). The reform period of the 1980s and the 1990s saw a relaxation of ideological control in literature and art, but Chinese publications were still subject to 'sanitization' when it comes to erotic or

‘obscene’ representations. (165). One example is the female sexuality in the translation of a Western feminist classic, *The Vagina Monologues*, by a Chinese feminist activist. While sex and the female sexuality were localized and politicized for the Chinese audience, excerpts on lesbianism and homosexuality were omitted from this translation, due to the translator’s self-censorship. Yu argues that the presence of self-censorship reveals the power of the stigmatization of homosexuality in Chinese culture, which continues to affect Chinese people although Chinese society has become more liberated (175).

The aforementioned research sheds light on the historical context of translating Western feminism in China from the early 1980s to the early 1990s. This raises the question of what conditioning factors might have affected the translation of women’s health communication texts in Chinese, e.g. *OBOS*. In contemporary China, translated medical and clinical research texts are important resources for the development of local medical knowledge, clinical research and practices (Wang 2015; Wang 2010; Zhu 1998). However, research on the translation of health communications texts in China have been mostly concerned with problems of accuracy, faithfulness and the fluency of language in the target text. The dissertations and journal articles on medical translation available on Chinese databases such as The Chinese Knowledge Infrastructure, are largely prescriptive, setting up guidelines for medical translators. There is not much research that examines the translation of Western medical texts in Chinese with a social and historical framework.

In the past, Chinese translation studies focused on how to produce ‘good’ translations, and it is not until recently that Chinese scholars turned from prescriptive translation studies to examining the cultural and ideological dimensions of translation (e.g. Wang 1999). They have

consistently argued that the traditional Chinese translation theory that emphasizes the “faithfulness, accessibility, and elegance”<sup>9</sup> of translation constrains the development of translation research and is not very informative for theorizing translation (Sun 2012: 36). But Yu suggests that interests in the intersection of gender and translation have started to grow in Chinese translation studies because of increased scholarly exchange across borders. Interests in the cultural approach to translation studies has started to grow since then. Moreover, young scholars in translation studies—especially a large number of MA and PhD students—have published their research on feminism or gender and translation (2015: 35).

Still, with regard to the translation of what is seen as ‘pragmatic texts’, such as health information, most of research still focuses on equivalence between the source text and the target text, rather than the social and cultural dimensions of translation. As a result, although feminist translation researchers outside China have framed the global project of translating *Our Bodies, Ourselves* as an example of feminism as travelling theory, the relation between local feminist health politics and the translation of women’s health books has not yet been problematized in Chinese translation studies.

Although current literature on translating feminism in Chinese has barely touched upon translations of Western women’s health communication texts, some researchers have examined the roles of health organizations that advocate gender mainstreaming in health and reproduction research. For example, Min’s research tackles the role of an NGO based in the southeast Chinese city, Kunming, which advocates women’s reproductive health. In the 1990s, this organization was facing the problem of how to define a ‘women-centered’ approach to reproductive health, which sounded strange to most of the health researchers and practitioners. For this purpose, the

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<sup>9</sup> “Xin (信), da (达), ya (雅)”

organization adopted an interdisciplinary, rights-based approach to women's reproductive health research (108). This study highlights the role of agencies such as local women's health NGOs in importing 'Western' notions of women's health into China. They have acted as cultural translators in the transcultural dialogues between Western health feminism and Chinese women's health research.

In conclusion, translation has allowed Western feminism to enter Chinese society and inspired local women's activities within and outside academia. Translation has then acted not only as a transfer of information, but also as a process of mediation through ideologies (Simon 1996: 7). Translating Western feminist texts into Chinese often requires the translator's mediation and manipulation, and is also affected by the shifting (gender) politics in the larger domestic context.

While Chinese researchers have examined translation of Western feminist classics such as *The Second Sex*, *The Grass is Singing*, and *The Vagina Monologues* into Chinese with a cultural/social analysis, the translation of Western women's health communication texts have not yet been studied from the perspective of cultural translation. Chinese translation researchers tend to take a predominantly prescriptive approach to study translations of medical/health communication texts in Chinese. However, a prescriptive approach is not sufficient to examine the complexities of translating *OBOS* in China. The politics of translating and distributing *OBOS*—a feminist knowledge-making project—need scholarly attention to the cultural, social and political dimensions of translation. We need to ask questions about who produced this translation, what were their agendas, and why they translated this book—not others—at this particular time? And more importantly, what is its impact, and what does it tell us about the power of translation?

To find out who carried out this particular translation, how this translation was produced, and what response it elicits in the domestic society, a descriptive study method is necessary. It is also important to incorporate a gender/feminist perspective in this study, to find out how the translation of *OBOS* was influenced or even revised by the local social-cultural context. Next, I will explain the theoretical and methodological approach of my research.

### *Part II: Theoretical and methodological framework*

Through a gender lens, my research attempts to uncover how meanings were negotiated when *OBOS* was translated into Chinese and how this process was affected by the social system of the target society. Theoretically, my study is informed by the interdisciplinary dialogue between the terrains of translation studies, social sciences and humanities. Translation is not ‘innocent’, i.e. a purely text-based and linguistic activity (Spivak 1992/2004). As Slavova and Phoenix argue, translation studies have shifted from focusing exclusively on the linguistic aspects towards the cultural, social and political aspects of translation practices; concurrently, research interests in translation are developing in social sciences studies, since translation is an important feature of daily practices in our increasingly mobile and globalized lives (2011: 332). Gender, history, ideology, culture, power relations etc. are important units of analysis in translation studies, since the field has become more interdisciplinary, and intersects with social sciences and humanities.

In regard to my theoretical and conceptual framework, I draw on feminist translation studies that examine the intersections of translation practices, gender and power relations on the one hand, and on Tylyenev’s work on social system theory and translation on the other hand. These

are key references. While the former examines the production and the circulation of translated texts through the lens of gender politics, the latter illustrates how translation interacts with the social system by allowing certain information to enter and impact a given society. Both feminist translation theories and systems theory shift away from a prescriptive approach to translation concerned with generating norms for the translator, and draw attention to the social, cultural and ideological factors at play when translations are produced. Together, they help me conceptualize the circulation of women's health communication texts into a particular social system at a particular time.

### *2.2.1 Feminist Translation Theories: Chinese Translation Studies and beyond*

Feminist translation theories take a critical stance on the political and social dimensions of language. Simon suggests that the 'cultural turn' in translation studies—from prescriptive to descriptive—reads translation as another form of communication penetrated by the tensions of cultural representation (1996). The 'cultural turn' frames translation as a process of mediation on meaning between different cultures and identities, and asks questions about how translated texts circulate and provoke response in the target society. It allows the field of translation studies to form an alliance with feminist thought, since feminism conceptualizes language as a contested site of meanings and identities (7). Moreover, feminist translation theories attempt to construct a "more integrated approach to translation studies" by breaking down the barriers between the dominant/hegemonic languages and those of the marginalized (Slavova and Phoenix 333). In other words, the feminist translation scholarship is highly interested in the operation of power in language and how meanings are contested during the circulation of texts.

Feminist translation studies build on the work of feminist linguists that examine how

language works to sustain gender relations of power, and on the strategies of feminist translators who challenge the gendered expressions of power relations in language. From the 1970s, women translators are trying to ‘take back’ the texts by commenting on their own translations, exploring women’s role as translators in literary history, and criticizing the myths and narratives that govern the terrain of translation studies and sexualize translational relations. The theoretical framework of feminist translation politicizes the practice of translation and seeks to conceptualize how translation is penetrated by social and historical relations, and especially how gender power relations and power hierarchy of the texts are framed in similar ways.

As a result of women’s movements that began in North America from the 1960s to the 1970s, gender became a useful analytical tool for social sciences and humanities researchers in the West. During the gender-consciousness-raising campaigns in both theory and praxis, feminist scholars and activists in North America and Europe began to question the essentialist, paternalistic discourse of ‘gender difference’—the idea that women are inferior to men by nature—and the resulting gender hierarchies that structure Western society. They framed gender as a socio-cultural construction and argued that the ‘battle’ against patriarchy bonds women across cultural and geographical differences, creating a feminist solidarity (Eisenstein 1983). Influenced by post-structuralist and deconstructionist theories in linguistics, feminist translation studies follow the doctrines of the ‘resistive translation theories’ (Wallmach 2006: 13) and develop an oppositional discourse to the traditional views of faithfulness, equivalence and the modest, self-effacing translator in translation studies. Feminist translation theories draw on feminist linguistic thought that looks into how sexism and gender bias in language reflect paternalist ideologies and reproduce unequal gender relations in reality (e.g. see Chamberlain 1988; Mills and Mullany 2011).

The development of 'feminist translation' as a terrain has a specific historical and ideological context (Flotow 1997). Feminist translation was first conceptualized in Canada where English and French were the two official languages and there is a constant demand for translations between those two languages. In 1970s Québec, a group of French-speaking feminist writers developed a radical form of writing trying to articulate their identities both as women and as a cultural minority group in Canadian society; they made use of wordplay and neologism in the French language to subvert the dominant ideological stance in language and create new space for the expression of women's desires (Flotow 1991). This movement of experimental feminist writings elicited research interests on the gender ideology of discourse and the translation of women's texts. Experimental Franco-Canadian feminist writings inspired the feminist approach in translation research to develop an oppositional discourse that deconstructs patriarchal language which ignores women's specific needs and lived experiences (55-56). Women's texts serve as a critical discourse that exposes the ideological modes of patriarchy (Godard 1990). "As an emancipatory discourse, feminist discourse is a political discourse directed towards the construction of new meanings" (44). Feminist writers use translation as a metaphor for 'breaking the silence' to communicate women's experiences, which often requires the invention of a new language for emotions and experiences that were tabooed or not named in language (45). Thus, the feminist discourse frames translation as an act of creativity rather than reproduction (Godard in Flotow 1997: 44).

Feminist translation studies are particularly fruitful in revisiting the old rhetoric of authorship, translation and power. Feminist translation theorists have explored gender as a metaphor in discourses on translation and what this says about expressions of domination in language. More specifically, they criticize the use of paternalistic language in translation

research, which has led to the gendering of translation practices. For example, the metaphor of ‘les belles infidèles’ is used in translation studies to say that translation, like a woman, is either ‘beautiful’ or ‘faithful’ (Flotow 1997: 41). The use of such gendered terms shows the intersection of women’s sexual oppression in a patriarchal culture with the power hierarchy of texts (Chamberlain 1988; 1992).

Traditionally, the author of a text is seen as the real inventor who has the most authority on what he/she wants to say, while the translator is seen as repeating what the author says in a different language, and this unequal power relation is often illustrated with gender metaphors (Wallmach 1998). Feminist translation theory has been influenced by post-structuralist and deconstructionist theories and questioned key notions in translation studies such as equivalence, fidelity, translation as reproduction, and invisibility of the translator (Chamberlain 1988; Santaemilia 2011). It contests the myth of originality/reproduction in the traditional rhetoric of translation studies by showing women’s agency and power as translators. Godard uses the term “*womanhandling*” to refer to the process whereby a feminist translator confirms her identity by displaying herself as the active, self-reflexive participant in the construction of meaning (94). The translator rereads and rewrites a text while not being afraid to leave traces of her manipulation in the translation.

Feminist translation researchers have tried to conceptualize women’s practice of translation by naming some of the strategies they use. Flotow (1991) identified three major strategies and techniques that feminist translators make use of in textual production: Supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and hijacking. In feminist translation, supplementation is a conscious intervention with the text when it is necessary to compensate for differences between language, and it reinforces the translator’s political role as a mediator of cultural meaning. In English

translations of French feminist writings, for example, the translators often have to compensate for the lack of gender agreement in the English language, which is integral to the writing strategies that French women authors use to demonstrate their ideological positions. Prefacing and footnoting is a technique for feminist translator to make herself visible in textual production and to challenge the myth of the ‘invisible, self-erasing translator’. The translator marks her interference with the source text in the paratext and reflects on her strategies in the preface. Lastly, Hijacking refers to a radical strategy that involves excessive footnoting and metatexting. It has been criticized for manipulating the source text to make the ‘feminine’ visible far beyond the author’s intentions, but Flotow sees it as a political strategy to inscribe the translator’s ideological positions in the text, thus subverting the myth that ‘good’ translators should be silent and invisible.

Wallmach also summarizes five common strategies of feminist intervention in translation process that differ from the conventional strategies of translator’s interference in its creativity: substitution, repetition, deletion, addition, and permutation (15). While substitution means replacing the source text language with the target text language, repetition means repeating a source-text segment in the translation instead of substituting it with the target language equivalent. Deletion, an unavoidable strategy in all kinds of translation practice, is when a source text item is not rendered in the target text. Conversely, addition is when the target text contains features that do not correspond to the source text, i.e. when the translator adds something that does not exist in the source text, sometimes as a conscious strategy of interference. Lastly, permutation or compensation refers to when the translator uses italics, footnotes, parenthesis and prefaces, and while the source text segment is rendered in the target text, its position within the target text does not reflect its position in the source text.

Writings that are specifically about women's sexuality and the anatomy of the female body and their translations are another much-explored area in feminist translation studies. In particular, Flotow comments on the politics of translating the female body and sexuality, with a focus on the translation of French feminist writings into English (1997). She argues that the English translations of the experimental French feminist writing (*l'écriture féminine*) serve to contest the patriarchal tradition that makes women's bodies and sexuality shameful. Radical feminist writers tend to experiment with representations of women's sexuality narrated from women's point of view. They search for a particular vocabulary for women's body parts, sexualit(ies) and eroticism that are otherwise often censored and made shameful. The innovative writing strategies of French women writers that focus on 'reinscribing' the female body from a female perspective create great challenges for the English translators. The translators are faced with not only the language differences between the source language and the target language but also the tradition of sanitizing descriptions of women's bodies and sexuality in the English language. As a result, the English translators resorted to neologism—creating new words. Moreover, by explaining the strategy of neologism, the translator brings attention to the sanitization of women's sexuality in language and what gender awareness in translation can do. English-speaking feminist translators have to deal with the 'insufficient knowledge of female biology' in the language (Flotow 19), and develop a liberating approach that draws attention to the political implications of writing and translating the gendered body.

Feminist translation theories conceptualize how gender politics in the domestic society traverse the production of a Chinese translation of *OBOS*. It provides me with the necessary theoretical tools for addressing the cultural, social and political dimension of translating women's bodies and sexuality in the Chinese context. In this research, I aspire to explore the

identity of the translators, as well as other people who have played an important role in the production of the translation, as active participants in the co-production of feminist knowledge.

Feminist translation studies demonstrate the conjunction of translation practices with politics in the larger social context, and politicize women's involvement in textual production and reproduction. "With gender viewed as an integral part in textual production, attention has increasingly focused on politically aware and sometimes politically engaged translators, who are conscious of their influence on the text and may seek to impose it overtly" (Flotow 35). Thus, I feel compelled to draw on the feminist scholarship that replaces the invisible, self-effacing translator with the self-aware, self-reflexive feminist translator who has a political agenda. I purport to uncover how the translators of *OBOS* read and intervene with the source language text, drawing on the conceptual framework of feminist translation that justifies and politicizes the translator's intervention.

Current literature on feminist translation also situates it within the larger framework of transnational feminism. Integrating a transnational feminist framework shows that feminist translation is not only about reinscribing women's lives and voices in textual production, but also the co-production of feminist knowledge across cultural and linguistic borders. As a space of cross-cultural encounter, translation is important to the configuration and innovation of feminist movements in a given society. Feminist translation is a transborder and translingual practice of feminist knowledge making (Ergun 2015). The transnational, transcultural migration of feminism has brought about important "transformation, rejuvenation and enrichment" of discourses in the society to which it travels (35). In this sense, feminist translation, as an act of transnational solidarity, has transformative power.

As Davis's research on the global trajectories of *OBOS* demonstrates, the translation of

*OBOS* is a global project that brings the authors and the translators together. When translating feminist writings, it is not uncommon that the translator collaborates with the source text author, directly or indirectly, in a shared “co-authorship” on the text (Ergun 93). Transnational, translingual and transcultural collaboration is integral to feminist translation practices. Feminist translation is about negotiating and constructing meanings, “anchored in the collectivity of women, with an implicit feminist agenda, and characterized by a critical discourse which problematizes language” (Godard 44). Bogic argues that the various translations of *OBOS* into different languages and cultures show what a political approach to translation looks like. More specifically, the authors and the translators strategically worked together to pass on the feminist tone of *OBOS* in its various foreign-language adaptations (20). Informed by these bodies of literature, I aspire to explore the collaboration of the Chinese translators with health feminists located in other parts of the world, in what Davis sees as a transnational feminist community based on the translation of *OBOS*.

### *2.2.2 Systems Theory in Translation Studies*

Like all translation practices, feminist translation needs contextualization. As the discussion of the relation between women’s movements and feminist translation studies illustrate, feminist translators working in a cultural and ideological context that encourages feminist writings are likely to “produce work that is politically congruent with their time” (Flotow 43). Existing research on the translation of feminism into Chinese (e.g. Li 2017; Liu 2017; Min 2017; Yu 2015) all links it to women’s movements, shifting gender politics, and the development of a gender consciousness in the larger social context. Some of these writings also address the constraints of the social/culture system, such as censorship, that affect how well or completely the source text

is rendered in the target language through translation. As a textual representation of the source text, translation is a form of rewriting. According to André Lefevere, translation reflects a certain ideology and is thus always a manipulation of a source text in a given society (1992: xi). In order to address this problem, I draw on systems theory in my analysis to examine to what extent the translation has been influenced by the cultural and transnational norms in the target system. Systems theory also helps explain under what conditions the Chinese translation was produced and its potential impact on the domestic society.

Systems theory suggests that translation should be studied as a fact of its social context. It treats translations as facts of the recipient system and reveals “an interest in the norms and constraints that govern the production and reception of translations” (Hermans 1985: 10-11). Lefevere argues that translation shows the openness of the target system and opens up the possibility of the transformation of ideologies that dominate the system. Thus, translation should not be studied in isolation but “as part of a whole system of texts and people who produce, propagate, oppose, censor them” (237).

In terms of how material was mediated, accepted, or rejected by the target system during translation, I found the work of Sergey Tyulenev particularly useful because it conceptualizes the role of translation in the target social system (2012). Tyulenev’s research applied the social system theory developed by Luhmann to translation studies. The system exists in opposition to its environment<sup>10</sup> and can be of different types (231). Tyulenev analyzes translation as an integral part of “a larger social domain, or [in Luhmann’s words], the overall social system”, and serves a particular function (20). Drawing on Hermans’ analysis of translation as a phenomenon

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<sup>10</sup> The environment is defined as “[w]hat is not included into the system; the ‘outside’ of the system”. It is defined only “from the point of view of the system for which is it an environment”. While the environment lacks the self-organizing activity that the (social) system possesses, it is capable of interacting with the system by providing information and alternative values for the system to generate “its internal order” (Tyulenev 227).

that exists between different systems, Tyulenev argues that to consider translation as a “heteronomous yet autonomous [social] phenomenon” as Hermans suggests, translation must be considered on the larger scale—within the entire social system (15). More specifically, translation facilitates the opening up and closure of social systems by selecting, filtering and transforming texts that enter a particular society. Translation serves to filter the information that passes into the social system: in a translated text, selections are made, censorship may play a role, and information is appropriated and manipulated (e.g. when certain parts of the source text are not rendered in the target text). Translation is thus an integral part of social communication and “expresses the values of the system, immersed in the overall system, inhaling and exhaling only the system’s communication” (16-17).

From this point of view, translation is conceptualized as a social activity that serves to open up and/or close the system, and Tyulenev thus refers to translation as a ‘boundary phenomenon’ that always finds its place at the frontier where two communication systems interact, and serves the function of being a “specific type of mediation occurring at the boundary of interacting (sub)systems” (136). Translation acts as a social catalyst in this mediatory function between the social system and its environment, to ensure “a more efficient and faster connection between interacting social entities” (138). Drawing on Luhmann, Tyulenev argues that translation plays a certain role in the “social-systemic evolution” (160). Translation keeps the system aware of its discrepancies with the surrounding environment, which motivates the system to evolve to keep up with its environment (161). Translation plays a role in the evolution of the social system by allowing new information to pass from the environment into the system, bringing out innovations of paradigms and poetics in the system. Thus, translation can (and often does) show political engagements (182).

However, Tyulenev also points out that translation does not always play a positive role in opening up the social system through its mediatory function. Although translation prompts the innovation of the system by generating new meaning options, it is eventually up to the system to decide what is acceptable and what to reject (164-165). Although translation may play an active role in triggering social change by providing selection possibilities, it also needs to conform to the system's rule when the system selects and stabilizes new meanings from the environment.

An example of how the target system screens out information during translation is the practice of censorship. Censorship in translation is “a form of manipulative rewriting of discourses by one agent or structure over another agent or structure, aiming at filtering the stream of information from one source to another” (Billiani 2007: 3). Censorship operates both on the individual and institutional levels (Yu 158), and might come from various parties involved in the translation process, such as “publishers home or abroad”, “editors selecting foreign texts and commissioning translators”, local “cultural policy-makers”, and “translators [...] who may have their own political and ideological allegiances (Kuhiwczak 2011: 362). It screens out ideas deemed as harmful or subversive of the common good, resulting in non, partial, near-full or mis-translation to varying degrees (Tan 2017: 61; Yu 2015). Thus, An examination of how censorship operates in the 1998 Chinese translation will shed light on the system's rejection to certain aspects of health feminism.

From the systemic point of view, translated feminist texts represent oppositionality in Davis's terms because they act as a catalyst for shifting gender politics in the target society. For Western feminist texts to be translated into Chinese, the Chinese society must first open up to flows of information from the outside. Translation serves the function of filtering, selecting and transferring information that can potentially change the local system. At the same time, however,

the translation of foreign language feminist texts is subject to the norms of the system and what it deems as acceptable and unacceptable. In particular, when it comes to censorship of women's bodies and sexuality that, as feminist translation literature has demonstrated, is common across cultures, such descriptions may not be rendered through translation due to the target system's rejection.

Useful as it is for my purposes, the social system theory also has certain drawbacks. While it conceptualizes the mediatory function of translation in inter-systemic interaction and explains the mechanisms that allow translation to bring in new information as new possibilities for the system to evolve, it does not address why the flows of translation travel in certain directions, nor is it concerned with specific patterns of mediation or transformation of meaning. It also seems to lose sight of the role of translators, their decision-making process and agency, and how translators use translation as a strategy to resist the social stigma associated with women's sexuality and the dominant expressions of gender.

In his essay on 'Travelling theory', Edward Said argues that theories may lose some of their original power and oppositionality during its travel, given the process of institutionalisation that they undergo in their specific local situations (1983). Theories that travel across a temporal/geographical distance encounter a set of conditions of acceptance, as well as resistance; the idea or theory that has been fully or partially accepted under these conditions will also be transformed by its new uses or new position in the local context (227). Feminism is no exception: taking in new meanings and uses in a new context, feminist ideas and theories can hardly and cannot stay the same after their travel to a new time or place. Indeed, translation allows feminist theories to "circulate and, in the process, take on different meanings and [be] deployed in different ways" (Davis and Evans 2011: 2).

In order to address the specific ways that feminism travels through translation, I need to engage with the theories of the politics of feminist translation while looking at how feminist writings are filtered and adapted when entering a particular social system.

### *2.2.3 Methodology:*

I adopted a multi-method methodology comprising the comparative textual analysis of the translation and the source text, an interview with the coordinator of the Chinese *OBOS* translation project, and extensive research in/on secondary literature in China and the West in the 1990s. The multi-method research combines two or more qualitative research methods in one single study so as to carry out an in-depth analysis of one phenomenon. My research uses textual analysis, interview, and study of secondary literature to address the different dimensions of translating Western women's health communication texts into Chinese.

#### *Descriptive Textual Analysis*

Gideon Toury has mapped out the descriptive translation studies approach, and thus I use his work as an important reference for my methodology. The descriptive approach treats translations as facts of the target system (Toury, in Hermans 40). It focuses on the observable aspects of translation and the context of translation, and thus it can also be referred to as the 'target-oriented' translation studies approach (Hermans 1999: 7). The descriptive approach is not concerned with putting research findings to use immediately to bring advantage to translators, but with understanding how the process of translation itself has occurred and what this reveals about how translation interacts with the larger system. It is based on observation of the text, or more specifically of the translated segments that are observable to the researcher. Segments of the target text constitute the objects of observation and are then paired with segments of the

source text. This sheds light on the problems that might have emerged in the course of translation and on the solutions offered. (Toury 1995: 37).

In my study, I apply the methods of descriptive translation studies to a comparative textual analysis of the translation of *OBOS* in Chinese. From a descriptive perspective, translations are facts of the target system and can have an impact on the recipient culture and language (Toury 1985: 19). The descriptive approach creates space for a comparative study of translated texts. In terms of the levels of comparison in a descriptive translation studies, Toury suggests that one might compare different translations of the same text, either by different translators or produced in different time periods, as well as “different phases in the establishment of a translation, in order to reconstruct the interplay of ‘acceptability’ and ‘adequacy’ when a translation is taking shape (24). For the first level of comparison, I compare the 1998 translation of *OBOS* with another translation produced in 1987 by a different translator. Notably, the latter is translated from an earlier version of *OBOS* and thus not the entire text can be used for a comparative study, since their source texts are not exactly the same. Thus, I compared the paratexts of these two translations; each has a translator’s preface, and I compared the two prefaces since the preface is often considered as an important form of translator’s interference in translation studies. Moreover, I also examined the overall structure of the 1987 edition and the inclusion or deletion of whole chapters and images, in comparison to the 1998 edition.

Since the Chinese language is my mother tongue, I am able to read through the Chinese translation and compare it against the source text. For textual analysis, I also use back translations on the target text, i.e. translating the text translated in Chinese back into English to compare it to its source. Instead of focusing on the entire text, I read through the text and then focus on texts that handle what I suspect to be culturally sensitive issues, such as women’s

sexual pleasure/eroticism and lesbianism. These segments and their constituents as objects of analysis, and pair them with source text as translation solutions. Drawing on the feminist translation theories, I examine the presence (or absence) of the feminist translation strategies named by Flotow and Wallmach in the textual analysis. This said, I am also aware that the additions, deletions or other manipulation of the source text in the target language may be caused by issues such as censorship.

However, the second level of comparison, which studies the evolution of translated segments during the gradual development of the finalized version, are not directly observable on the textual level. This requires either speculating about translation relationships based on an analysis of the observable segments of translated utterances or access to interim drafts as alternative translation solutions that have emerged and been negotiated in the course.

The translated texts and their elements are observable and can be accessed directly, while the process of translation is not observable on the textual level or indirectly available to the researcher, although it constitutes an important part of target-oriented translation studies (Toury 1985: 18). Toury sees this as a weakness of the descriptive approach. A translation does not come into existence all at once, but is the product of a gradual process that involves decision-making and mediation. Looking exclusively at the finalized translation and its source, a researcher has no access to information about how the actual process of translation occurred, such as many people were involved in the process and what kinds of roles they played at different points in the establishment of a translation. The researcher is thus inclined to formulate hypotheses in regard to many aspects of translation. Inevitably, all the people involved in the translation process collapse into the persona of the 'abstract' translator, and a wide range of activities that were possible during the translation, such as revising, post-translation editing and

proofreading are generalized as the single act of translation (1995: 181). In particular, this dismisses information on whether all the persons involved in the process shared the same attitudes or whether they had to negotiate or even struggle over the norms of translation (182). What a comparison of the source text and the result of translated text can offer is limited especially in the absence of transcripts of interim translations available for the study. Thus, a purely descriptive approach is not sufficient when the process of translation itself and the decision-making activities of translator(s) are important to a study.

Regarding the Chinese translation of *OBOS*, I am most interested in how the translators negotiate the norms of the system in the course of translation and what kinds of feminist translation strategies have been employed. Thus, the information about the decision-making process in the gradual establishment of the finalized translation is vital. Moreover, to situate the translation in the transnational circulation and production of women's health communication texts, it is also important to examine the roles and agendas of different people involved in the production, and not to generalize them as the abstract translator. For this reason, I found it necessary to adopt the second research method in my study, which involves talking to people who engaged with the translation of *OBOS*.

### *Interview*

Interview is a much used research method in gender/women's studies. The interview establishes a non-hierarchical relationship between the research and the participant, explores the diversity of women's experiences, challenges the binary of subjectivity and objectivity by showing the researcher's standpoint as a person, and can be easily combined with other research methods to generate qualitative data for in-depth analysis (Ollivier and Tremblay 125). In social science studies, interview as a feminist methodology validates the lived experience of women

that used to be deemed as insignificant and shows the importance of experience to social science investigation (Reinharz 1983: 167). More importantly, it sheds light on the process whereby the translation was produced, and which is not available via a textual analysis.

In this research, the interview is more like a journalist/data-finding approach, since the interview served mainly to collaborate with what I found in the textual analysis. Thus, the process of analyzing interview data was about selecting information that is supplementary to the findings of textual analysis. The interview was recorded and then transcribed. I selected and translated certain statements made by my interviewee from the transcript. The sections that report my research findings include my interview data as supplementary evidence.

However, interview as a research method is also limited by certain constraints, such as the availability of information about the translators, their willingness to participate, the time and cost of travel in order to meet with the potential interview participants, etc. Since the Chinese translation *OBOS* was produced by a team, information about each translator of the team is not always available for my study.

Thus, I decided to first get in touch with the coordinator of the Chinese translation group, Liu Bohong, whose contact information is published on the BWHBC's website. Born in 1951, Liu has actively engaged with feminist research and activism in China for many years, especially women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health issues in the Chinese context. Apart from expertise and experiences in local gender research, she also has extensive foreign travel experiences and connections with feminist scholars and organizations outside of China (Greenhalgh 2001: 865; Liu 1995). I choose her as the primary point of contact not only because information about her is easily accessible, but also because of the important role that she played in the process. The interview was conducted after I received the approval from the ethics review

board at the University of Ottawa, in accordance with the ethics protocol for research that involves human participants.

From the available literature on the Chinese version of *OBOS*, Liu was described as an important member of the group and has talked about the Chinese translation of *OBOS* in past interviews (Plafker 1998). She wrote the preface for the Chinese edition of *OBOS* on behalf of the translation group and published a separate review of the Chinese translation on a Chinese journal. She is also named as an important Chinese feminist researcher<sup>11</sup> and is currently a Women's/Gender Studies professor in the China Women's University in Beijing. Liu has worked as the deputy director of the Institute for Research on Women in the All-China Women's Federation. She was also reported as actively engaged in passing on feminist ideas in the system of All-China Women's Federation<sup>12</sup>. I thus see a strong connection between her past history as a feminist and her contribution to the project of translating *OBOS* in China. Having learnt about her role as the coordinator, I reached out to her in the hope that she would be able to provide more information about other people involved in the process, and have their contact information.

However, due to various concerns, she was not able to put me in contact with the other translators in her team. This was mainly because the translation was produced twenty years ago, which makes it rather hard to reconnect with people involved in the process, many of whom were not in touch with her anymore. Moreover, since people who took part in the translation have reached old age by now, their health conditions also prevent them from participating in the interview. However, she did provided some useful information on who those translators are and their engagement with translation and/or feminism. Based on the information she provided, I did

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<sup>11</sup> Global Feminist Project, Interview with Liu, 2002. Retrieved from: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/55707>

<sup>12</sup> Global Feminist Project, Interview with Liu, 2002. Retrieved from: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/55707>

a research on the translators and managed to find more information about some of them. I will present what I found in terms of the identities of some of the translators in Chapter Three.

Due to extremely limited information on the 1987 translation, I was not able to get in touch with the translator of this version, which came out before the 1998 edition. Thus, I focused exclusively on Liu and her experience with the *OBOS* project in my interview. The interview was conducted in Chinese after I offered her the choice of being interviewed either in Mandarin Chinese or in English. However, there was occasionally code switching during the interview when we were uncertain about the exact meaning of certain feminist terminology. Apart from the process of translating *OBOS*, the interview also touched upon Liu's involvement in Chinese health feminism, her connection with the transnational network of *OBOS* authors and translators, the translation of different kinds of Western feminist texts into Chinese, and her insights into the long-term impact of these translated texts on Chinese society.

#### *Study of Secondary Literature*

My research is framed by the body of secondary literature on the translation of *OBOS*, on the Chinese book and its reception, and also on the context of gender politics, feminism, and women's health in China. In order to determine the relation between translation and changes in the target social system, I delve into existing literature on what texts and discourses were being produced on sex, sexuality, and sexual and reproductive health in contemporary China. More specifically, I draw on both Chinese and Western sources on how women's health and sexuality were viewed in the 1990s China, and the changing social attitudes towards sex-related matters during this period. This helps me uncover the social and cultural conception of women's bodies, sexuality, and (sexual) pleasure in 1990s Chinese society, when the 1998 Chinese translation was produced.

In terms of the Chinese sources, my study is informed by both literature on the production of discourses on sexual health issues and the writings by Chinese women scholars who attempt to incorporate a gender perspective in this kind of analysis. More specifically, the texts produced in the field of sexology provide useful information how social attitudes towards sex-related issues began to change (e.g. Pan Suiming 2006; Huang Zhiping 1996). Then, I found research that looks at the social-cultural studies of sex and sexuality from a gender perspective, and criticizes the lack of gender awareness in the male-dominated domain of Chinese sexology (Du Fangqin 1997; Du Jie 1999; Li Yinhe 1998; Rong Weiyi 2000; Pei Yunxin, Sik-ying Ho Petula, and Ng Man Lun 2007). These bodies of literature help me determine how the Chinese translation challenges the dominant cultural discourse on Chinese women's sexual and reproductive health that did not cater to women's specific needs, as well as women's sexual oppression in a patriarchal culture.

In terms of the Western sources, I draw on bodies of literature that touch upon the cultural and social conception of female sexuality, feminism, and reproduction politics in the 1990s Chinese society (e.g. Susan Greenhalgh 1987, 1994, 2001; Harriet Evans 1991, 1992, 1995, 1997; Joanna McMillan 2006). Given women's relatively marginalized status in the Chinese scholarship of social-cultural studies of sex (Rong 2000; Pet et al 2007), the Western sources that incorporated a critical gender perspective into their analysis of Chinese women's sexuality compensate for the lack of gender awareness in the male-dominated domain of Chinese sexology. These writings inform my research about how women's sexuality was conceived in the target society when *OBOS* was translated, and provide an explanation for the patterns of text production on women's health issues by looking at the larger social-political context.

In addition to literature on the global dissemination of *OBOS* such as Davis (2007) and

Bogic (2017), I found a limited amount of secondary literature on the Chinese edition of *OBOS* published in China not long after the first print run of the Chinese translation came out. They are short book reviews on the Chinese book, no longer than three pages, including one written by the coordinator of the translation project, Liu. They help contextualize the translation by showing how it was reviewed at the time of publication, and shed light on the responses and impacts that the translation elicited from certain parts of the target society.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter situates my research in the existing literature on translating feminism, and on how translation and the social system interact in the travel and circulation of new ideas and theories. Part I summarizes the existing bodies of literature that tackle the translation of Western feminist texts in Chinese and explains why a study focusing on the Chinese translation of *OBOS* can contribute new insights for the scholarship of feminist translation and the politics of translation. Part II outlines my theoretical framework and justifies the choice of my methodology. It conceptualizes the translation of *OBOS* as the political act of feminist translation, and explains why it is important to position the translation of Western feminism in the context of the target system. The next chapter delves more deeply into the larger social, cultural and political context of the translation, bringing up insights and questions that emerged from the interview. It purports to uncover the interplay of target-system politics with the translation of Western feminism in China.

## **Chapter Three: Women's Health, Sexuality and Reproduction in 1990s China: The Opening up of the System**

### *Introduction*

The late 1970s witnessed important social, economic and political reforms in China, which brought about drastic changes on the social-cultural level during the following decades. These changes affected the understandings of women's bodies, sexuality, and sexual health in China, as well as how these issues are linked to the 'woman question' in general. Before the end of the Cultural Revolution, China was a 'sex-less' society (Pan in Yu 164). The representations of Chinese women in the media, art and literature were supposed to be gender-neutral, and discussions of romantic relationships, love and sex-related issues were subject to strict ideological control. Chinese women and men were presented as dressed in gender-neutral uniforms, performing the same labour, and there was no discussion of gender difference or women's sexuality in public discourses (Angeloff 2012: 209; Lu and Devenish 2005: 152). However, with the development of a capitalist market in post-reform China, women's sexuality became prone to commercialization in pornography and prostitution. Women researchers in China soon noticed a revival of the patriarchal discourse in Chinese society that objectifies women's bodies and sexuality. In regard to the sexualization of women's bodies and increased media coverage of sexual violence against women, Chinese women's writings began to address problems of women's sexuality and showed more interest in the feminist notion of sexual autonomy (Evans 1995: 357-358). Moreover, as a result of drastic social change following the Open-door Policy (1978), problems such as pre-marital sex, sexually transmitted diseases, prostitution, pornography and homosexuality became the focus of public debates in 1990s China

(Sigley and Jeffrey 2008: 50). These public discussions and debates formed an environment for Chinese feminist scholars to address these controversial issues and their impact on the well-being of Chinese women.

Moreover, the implementation of One Child Policy in 1979 put the issue of women's sexual and reproductive health at the core of public discussions (see Greenhalgh 2001; Wang 1998). The effects of the One Child Policy, such as the abandonment and murder of female infants and the abuse of women who gave birth to a girl in rural areas, shattered the presumption shared by many in China that Chinese women had been liberated; members of the All-China Women's Federation who are mostly educated urban women, found this particularly shocking (Wang 2). Researchers in social, economic, population, health and feminist studies started to raise questions about how women should be involved in population programs, the negligence of individual women's (and men's) needs and interests under the pressure of population control, how women's health conditions are specifically affected by the policy, as well as the socio-economic impact of birth planning programs on Chinese women's lives and status (e.g. Du 1997; Li 1995). Chinese Women's Studies researchers like Du Fangqin suggest that women's sexual and reproductive health is more likely to be affected by the birth planning program, since most contraceptive and birth control methods target women rather than men (Du 61). While women's sexual and reproductive health were once deemed a private matter, now people in academia started to draw connections between women's bodies and sexuality and the broader issues of gender relations, economic reforms, social change, and the effects of State programs and policy on women's health. This led to increased research interests in women's sexuality and sexual health issues in China from the mid-1990s onward. Thus, the Chinese *OBOS* translation project must be considered within this context of problematizing women's sexual and

reproductive health issues in 1990s China. The changing attitudes towards women's sexuality, health and self-care in China seem to have made the Chinese translation of *OBOS* possible.

The first part of this chapter uncovers what kinds of discourses were being produced on women's sexuality and sexual health from the early 1980s to the late 1990s in China. This allows me to examine in what ways the Chinese translation of *OBOS* represents an oppositional feminist discourse to women's health issues in the Chinese context, and in what ways it may have been affected by the local system. Moreover, it also helps me answer the question "when does it start to make sense to translate rather than produce new material?" By examining the state of literature on women's sexuality and reproductive health in 1990s China, I attempt to uncover why the translation of *OBOS* is important, and in what ways it differs from discourses on women's health produced in the target society when it was translated.

The second part of this chapter is concerned with the process of translating *OBOS* and the Chinese translators who were involved. By exploring the personal trajectories of the translators and more importantly, their involvement in local gender research and/or research on Chinese women's sexual and reproductive health, I will demonstrate that the translation of *OBOS* forms part of the trans-border circulation of texts and ideas to China that shaped the development of local gender research. The translation and circulation of *OBOS* in China reflects the needs of the post-reform Chinese society to develop a feminist/gender approach to sexual health and reproduction issues by learning from how such issues are conceptualized in foreign contexts.

An analysis of the translators and their collaboration with foreign individuals and organizations will also reveal the engagement of transnational agencies and organizations with women's issues in China and the collaboration between Chinese and foreign feminist health activists. As discussed in Chapter 2, the trans-border travel of feminism and feminist discourses

is facilitated by both local feminists and foreign/international organizations. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the multiple parties involved in the translation project and avoid adopting the use of the 'abstract' translator to represent the different parties who participated and exerted their influences on a translation project.

*Part I: The State of Literature ever Written on Women's sexual and Reproductive Health in 1990s China: Knowledge Production, Translation, and Transition*

*3.1.1. Texts on Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health publicized in 1990s China*

This section is concerned with the state of literature about sexual and reproductive health available for Chinese women when *OBOS* was being translated. Davis has explained the success of *OBOS* in the U.S. in terms of its feminist approach to politicizing women's physical and health issues, and to inform American women about how much their health is affected by social and economic systems (Davis 22). As a result, the book has inspired women's health research and activism in the US (2, 120). Similarly, when *OBOS* was translated in 1990s China, there was a lack of research interest in how women's health was affected by the social structures and gender relations.

In 1950s China, the production and dissemination of texts on scientific knowledge about sex and sexual hygiene were seen as important to the health of the population as well as to the moral value and the stability of the society (Evans 1997: 2, 13, 147). However, during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, social attitudes towards public discussions of sex-related issues were conservative and intolerant (Pan in Sigley and Jeffrey 1999: 50). The issues of love, marriage and family, as well as sex-related matters, were not allowed in both public and

academic discussions (Huang 1996: 125). Discussions of sex, romance or love were seen as signs of bourgeois individualism, and sex education also lost legitimacy (McMillan 2006: 79). “There was virtually no public discussion about women’s marital and sexual relationships”, and even information about basic self-care and contraceptive needs was difficult to find outside clinical settings (Evans 8). After the end of Cultural Revolution and the implementation of the Open-door Policy, social attitudes towards sex in public discussions changed accordingly. In their research on the study of sexuality in China since the 1970s, Pei, Sik-ying and Ng from the University of Hong Kong suggest that the number and diversity of academic articles publicized on sex and sexuality have gradually increased since the early 1980s (2007: 203). The following decades saw what some Chinese scholars perceive to be a “sexual revolution” in China (Pan 2006: 16). The increased market demands for books on sex also resulted in a “sex book fever” in Chinese publishing, which became a source for sex education (Yu 2015: 165; 174). A few examples of sexual health manuals published during this time include a second print run of the sex-education brochure *Sexual Knowledge* (Xing de zhishi) first publicized in the 1950s, *Marriage Hygiene* (Xinhun weisheng) edited by Lang Jinghe et al., *A Discussion of Sexual Knowledge* (Xing zhishi mantan) edited by Hu Tingyi, and *A Handbook of Sexual Knowledge* (Xing zhishi shouce) by Ruan Fangfu (Huang 125; Yu 164-165).

As regulations on publishing translated Western materials were relaxed after the Cultural Revolution (Yu 164), translated Western texts on sexology also had a profound impact on sex research in China (Li in McMillan 32). Notably, Wu Jieping, a well-known medical specialist on reproductive health and one of the Chinese pioneers in sex research and education, translated *Human Sexual Response* written by Masters and Johnson under the title *Sexual Medicine* (Xingyixue) in 1982. The publication of this translated book challenged the tradition of not

discussing sex-related issues in Chinese academia, and had an important influence on the understanding of sex in Chinese society (Huang *ibid*; McMillan 2006: 32). The increased number and diversity of texts about sex-related issues reflect the opening up of the Chinese society towards sex, and this brought the discussions of sexual health and sex education back to the public sphere.

However, despite the development of Women's Studies and increased interests in gender analysis in social sciences research, women's health was not seen as a research topic for feminist and Women's Studies in China in the early 1990s; it was considered appropriate for medicine and health sciences. Very few scholars specializing in Women's Studies worked on the issues of women's sexual and reproductive health at that time (Interview with Liu). From 1978 onwards, journal articles, sex education books and self-help guides were produced to deal with "a wide range of matters, including sexual morality, sexual problems, sexually transmitted diseases, [...] the joys and perils of romantic love and marriage, [...] sexual hygiene, [...] female sexuality and physiology", targeting a popular readership seeking expert help (Evans 13). Pei et al found that in the 1970s, academic articles on medical research on sex predominantly outnumbered research on sex and sexuality in social sciences, literature and law (203, Table 1). The production of texts on sexuality during the first half of the 1980s was characterized by a discourse of medicalization, and these medical publications were legitimized and cherished under the dominant discourse that values knowledge deemed as scientific, modern, objective, and also 'politically uncontroversial' (203). Subsequently, medical and sex education articles continued to constitute the majority of texts on sex and sexuality publicized in Mainland China over the next two decades. Thus, it seems that a privileged position was assigned to scientific discourses on sexuality and sexual health in contemporary China, while cultural and sociological studies of sex-related issues were

relatively marginalized during the 1980s and 1990s, and remained so more or less until the early 2000s.

### *3.1.2 The Scientific Construction of Women's Sexuality since 1949 and Its Influence on Texts about Women's Sexual Health Publicized in 1990s China*

The privileging of medical/scientific approaches in the study of sex and sexuality can be traced back to the gender and health politics of 1950s China. In her analysis of the evolution of the discourse on sexuality in post-revolutionary China, Harriet Evans argues that an official discourse based on a naturalized view of sexual difference was consolidated in China during the 1950s, when sex, sexuality, and fertility were deemed objects of investigation in biology and scientific research (1995; 1997). Since the 1950s, the medical experts have been responsible for producing texts that give advice on sex and fertility, and their opinions have been presented to the reader as scientific or 'objective', while other discourses about sex and other sources of information available to the public at the time—such as films and literature—did not have such legitimate status (Evans 34-35). Despite the great diversity of texts and discourses on sex publicized in China since the 1980s, the official discourse of sex/sexuality produced in China during the 1950s still retains a great impact on Chinese people's understanding of sex and sexual health, and in particular, this discourse has a profound influence on how Chinese women growing up in the 1950s and 1960s relate to their bodies and sexuality (Evans 1995: 365-366).

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), descriptions of sex in poetry, fiction and drama were deemed obscene and would lead to banning of the work and punishment of the author/producer. Even advice about basic reproductive and contraceptive needs was difficult to find if not given by a medical specialist (Evans 1997: 7-8). As the Cultural Revolution gradually

came to an end, attitudes towards sex and sexuality began to open up. A limited amount of information on sexual health and development publicized in the first half of the 1970s, such as the *Journal of Adolescent Hygiene* and information on contraception and childbirth given by the All China Women's Federation; however such publications remained scarce and hard to come by until the end of 1970s, to the extent that despite the implementation of birth planning policies in the mid-1970s, the public still had restricted access to information about fertility and reproduction during that time (9).

Evans suggests that more publications on marriage and love were made available for Chinese women after the economic reform and Open-door Policy (13). However, despite the diversity of discourses on sexuality that emerged in 1980s and 1990s China, especially the notion of women's sexual power and autonomy in feminist writings and literature, sexuality was still not discussed in regard to gender power relations in popular or official publications. Thus, texts that treat sex, sexuality and reproduction as gender problems were not easily accessible for the public (Evans 1995: 389).

The texts and popular discourses available for Chinese women as sources of information on self-care also seemed limited in the 1990s. In terms of self-care and sex education manuals that Chinese women might consult, the most easily accessible ones were documents on birth planning disseminated by the government and marriage manuals that serve as sex education texts. With the revival of sex education texts from the 1980s, an emphasis was placed on marital sex since sex was only legitimized within marriage (McMillan 78). Marriage manuals were produced to offer "instructions for harmonious sex cast in terms of science" for married couples, and to organize the intimate lives of their readers on the basis of these instructions (88-89). Moreover, after the announcement of the One-Child Policy in 1979, the production and dissemination of

accessible texts about sexual hygiene and eugenics were important to its success, and became an integral part of the government program to educate the public about birth planning (Chen and Liu 2015; Zhou and Wang 2015; Yu and Ni 1985). When asked about what kinds of texts and publications on sexual and reproductive health were available to women in 1990s China, Liu suggested that a large number of them were brochures and books on birth planning. Under the population planning program, the control of women's bodies was crucial to the State's plans to achieve economic growth and modernity (Evans 1997: 156; Greenhalgh 2003: 164). As a result, the birth-planning documents and booklets disseminated for sex education purposes reinforce rather than challenge the top-down approach in birth planning that prioritizes the Nation's interests over individual women's interests.

Thus, from the late 1970s to 1990s, publications that serve to offer advice on sex and reproductive health for Chinese women and men were more or less premised on the scientific/biomedical discourse of sexual hygiene and top-down demographic targets of the population program. The discourses and texts on women's self-care available to 1990s China seem to be very limited to these kinds of publications. In public discourses of women's health, there was little space to challenge the patriarchal conceptual frameworks that underpin these discourses (McMillan 89). As a result, discussions of the various social and cultural dimensions of sexuality and sexual health were still marginal.

### *3.1.3 Input from Social Sciences and Humanities to Women's Sexuality and Reproductive Health Research in 1990s*

Despite the authority assigned to scientific research on sexual and reproductive health, some of the assumptions of the biomedical approach were challenged by the emergence of

oppositional discourses about sexuality in academia. Notably, in the social sciences and humanities academic discourses on sexuality increased from the beginning of the 1990s. In particular, sociology appears to have had the largest production with a total increase of 105 articles from 1981 to 2000, which outnumbers 55 in literary studies and 21 in legal studies (Pei et al. Table 2). Under the influence of social sciences and humanities studies, some Chinese scholars realized that it is not sufficient to examine issues of sexuality and sexual health only from a medical perspective. This then led to the development of the interdisciplinary study of sex or sexology (*xingxue*) in Chinese universities (Pei et al. 203). Scholars in sexology with social studies backgrounds, such as Pan Suiming, Liu Dalin and Li Yinhe, emphasize that it is important to take into account social, historical and cultural influences on social attitudes towards sex and sex-related issues in contemporary China.

The development of Chinese sexology shows a shift of focus from biomedicine studies to social sciences studies in sex-related research in China (Huang 1996; McMillan 2006; Pan in Sigley and Jeffrey 1996). As the discussion in the next section will show, this development had a positive impact on the production of the Chinese translation of *OBOS*. However, as an academic discipline, Chinese sexology has been criticized as male-dominant, and thus it lacks a gender/feminist perspective in its analyses.

Chinese women scholars have argued for the development of a feminist approach to women's sexuality studies in contemporary China. For example, Rong Weiyi argues that the dominance of male scholars and researchers in sexology has led to biased research on issues related to women's sexuality, and thus negligence of women's sexual health needs (2000). For example, in the collection of papers for the second conference organized by the Chinese Association of Sexology, the number of academic dissertations and articles on the treatment of

men's sexual dysfunction greatly outnumbered those of the treatment of women's sexual dysfunction.

According to Rong, while women intellectuals and writers have started breaking the chains of the moral supervision of women's sexuality, women's voices continue to be marginalized in studies of sex and sexuality in China. She suggests that, due to the shaming of women's bodies and sexuality by the traditional cultural discourse of morality, Chinese women find it hard to speak out about their sexual experiences and needs. Moreover, despite the development of feminist research in China since the beginning of 1990s, the Chinese feminist scholarship has paid little attention to the problem of women's sexuality and sexual health. Most women researchers engaged in the research on women's sexual health were trained in medicine and health sciences. Because humanities and social sciences are not included in the discipline of health sciences, it has been difficult for them to sympathize with feminism and learn about feminist theories, even though quite a few of them acknowledged the importance of gender to health sciences research (77-78). Thus, Rong argues for the incorporation of a gender perspective and the development of a feminist, interdisciplinary approach in research on women's sexuality and health, because Chinese women's sexual health is greatly affected by the social-cultural construction of gender. A feminist perspective will also help empower Chinese women and help them realize that they should have more control of their bodies and their sexuality (79).

In the highly male-dominated field of sexology, a few women scholars have tried to fill in the gap by introducing a feminist analytical perspective into the social and cultural studies of sex and sexuality in contemporary China. As a sociologist and feminist, Li Yinhe identifies the socio-cultural factors that affect women's experiences with sex and how they feel about their bodies. Her work *Chinese Women's Emotions and Sexuality* (1998) addresses women's sexual

and reproductive health problems, including female adolescence, romantic relationships, sexual desire, masturbation, contraception and abortion, childbirth, conjugal violence, violence against women, etc. Li carried out interviews with Chinese women about their experience with sexual development and how they relate to their bodies and sexuality, and argues that this helps construct a women's discourse that challenges the male-dominated public discourses on sexuality which marginalize and trivialize women's experiences (3). Her research findings reveal various ways that in 1990s China, the patriarchal culture made women's bodies and sexuality shameful, and how women's health was affected by the unequal gender order of society. For example, adolescent girls experiencing their first period often experienced fear and shame. Moreover, Chinese women have no say in whether or not contraceptive methods should be used during marital sex. Their male sexual partners often refuse to use condoms so that they get more sexual pleasure, thus they have to undergo abortions due to unexpected pregnancy or place an intrauterine device (IUD) inside their bodies (135-136). These findings show that Chinese women's sexual and reproductive health is affected by cultural practices and beliefs that reflect a patriarchal ideology, and that taking a gender perspective in the study of sexuality and sexual health is important to Chinese women's sexuality and sexual health research.

However, while Li attempted to incorporate a gender perspective in the study of sex, sexuality and sexual health, she focused too much on the cultural dimension of sex, paying insufficient attention to the social and political factors that might have shaped how Chinese women relate to their bodies and sexuality (Pei et al 2007: 208). Moreover, Li was mainly interested in a cultural and sociological study of Chinese women's sexuality and sexual health. She did not try to incorporate her findings in a research on how to produce accessible, easy-to-understand information that can actually help Chinese women who are confused about

their sexuality and how to look after themselves.

In short, despite the growing influences of sociological studies on sex and sexuality, women's voices remained relatively marginal in the production of discourses about women's sexuality and sexual health. Before mid-1990s, "women's sexuality [was] seldom examined as a gender-based issue embedded within the power relations between women and men" (Pei et al 205). It was not until the mid-1990s when international conferences brought out the notion of politicizing women's sexual and reproductive health that women scholars in China began to theorize and consolidate a gender analysis in women's health research and practices.

*Part II: Translation and Feminist Politics: The Contextually-bound 1998 Chinese Edition of OBOS*

*3.2.1 Translating OBOS: Introducing a Women-centered Approach to Women's Sexuality and Reproductive Health*

By the mid-1990s, the absence of a gender perspective in women's health research began to change as more Chinese scholars were exposed to foreign literature that incorporates sociological and gender analysis in health research. Since the 1980s, feminists outside of China had started to criticize the top-down methods in conventional birth-planning practices, and during the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development, feminists successfully transformed the agenda of international population policy from "achievements of demographic targets to the enhancement of women's sexual and reproductive health, choice and rights" (Greenhalgh 2001: 852). This feminist notion was passed on to the Fourth U.N. Conference on Women held in Beijing. As a result, the Beijing conference emphasized the

improvement of women's sexual and reproductive health by changing women's social and political roles, and brought attention to the problem of reproductive rights in China under the population control program (Craft 1995). Moreover, the conference created a good atmosphere for the translation of Western feminist texts that touch on women's sexuality issues, such as *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* by Toril Moi and *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett (Yu 167). These translated texts as well as the agenda of the conference seemed to have an important influence on the development of a feminist/gender perspective on women's sexuality and health in 1990s China.

Liu sees a clear connection between the Fourth World Conference on Women and the development of gender awareness in women's health studies: "In my opinion, the [women's health] researchers and NGOs have benefited the most from the Fourth World Conference on Women. [...] After the Beijing Conference, women's health soon became an object of study and research topic in Women's Studies, and medical practitioners also accepted this new interdisciplinary framework on women's health. [...] Health [or being healthy] does not only imply the state of not suffering from any illnesses, [as seen from] a purely biological, medical framework. These are highly complicated issues, and now the physicians can accept [this framework]" (interview with Liu). In late 1990s, researchers on women's health issues in China realized that women's social roles, the unequal distribution of resources for the two sexes, and the social-cultural construction of women's sexuality are closely related to women's health (e.g. Du 1997; Du 1999; Sun 1997; Xiao 1997). Thus, a biomedical approach to sexual and reproductive health is not sufficient because "health conditions of men and women are not only affected by biological factors, but also by the gendered structure of the society and the social, cultural and economic consequences of gender inequality on women", and "an analysis of both

the social and biological causes of health discrepancies between men and women [...] shows that the causes of such problems are unequal social relations rather than biological factors” (Du 1999: 49). Taking a gender perspective in women’s health care research is important because it provides an analysis of gendered social relations and the impact of gender inequality on women’s health issues (50). Moreover, since the early 1950s, women’s health was conceptualized as reproductive health in popular medical texts, and women’s sexuality and sexual health were framed as crucial to preserving the health of their own and their children, and thus to familial harmony (Evans 146-148). Chinese feminists also challenged the understanding of women’s health as reproductive health by extending the scope of the term to include all phases of women’s lives, from the sexual development of adolescent girls to issues like aging and menopause that older women experience (Du 1999; interview with Liu). These conceptual developments in Chinese Women’s/Gender research began to examine women’s health through a feminist lens, which explains the interests of Chinese feminists and gender researchers in *OBOS*.

Moreover, increased communications between China and the West created opportunities for Chinese women scholars to travel abroad, which allowed them to develop solid English skills and interests in gender analysis, which were important factors that determined their participation in the translation of Western feminism. The opening up of the Chinese society allowed the flows of ideas and people between the Western feminist school and Chinese academia. People went to study abroad in the U.S. and began engaging with feminist studies and research (Interview with Liu). In 1989, a group of Chinese women scholars in diaspora in the U.S. formed the Chinese Society for Women’s Studies (CSWS) in collaboration with American women’s studies researchers (Min 2017, Pei et al., Wang 1998). From the early 1990s, the CSWS played an active role in bridging Chinese Women’s Studies with Gender and Women’s Studies in the US.

The opening up of borders also allowed Western feminist researchers to collaborate with their Chinese counterparts, and thus act as agents in the travel of feminism. For example, many Western women scholars travelled to China to give lectures at Chinese universities, and they also invited Chinese scholars to attend conferences in their home institutions (Wang 24). Some of the most influential conferences include the 1992 “Engendering China” Conference held at Harvard University where four scholars from Mainland China were present (Du 2001: 144); and the two-week seminar “Chinese Women and Development: Status, Health and Employment” held by the CSWS and the Center for Women’s Studies at Tianjin Normal University in 1993 (Wang 25), which is one of the first research institutes on women and gender established in Chinese academia (Du 2001; Interview with Liu). A large number of Chinese women scholars attended the seminar and they showed unprecedented enthusiasm in learning about feminist theories and methodologies from Chinese feminists in diaspora. The majority of them were first introduced to the key concept in Western feminist movements, *gender*, during this seminar (Wang 25-26).

During the “Chinese Women and Development” Seminar at Tianjin Normal University, members of the CSWS were invited to give lectures on gender, feminism and the history of feminist movements in the West to their colleagues in China. Upon the request of Chinese women scholars, the speakers made a list of English books that should be translated into Chinese to introduce Chinese women to feminist studies and movements outside China. Without surprise, many of them recommended *Our Bodies, Ourselves* as a book that should be translated for Chinese women (Interview with Liu).

*OBOS* was thus brought to the attention of Chinese feminists as a Western feminist classic. For Chinese health feminists, *OBOS* embodies a new way of mobilizing women, since it is a women’s health book not written by physicians but by women who were not trained in medicine

but dedicated to the production of knowledge on women's self-care (Du 1998; Liu 1998; Liu 2000). Given the privileged position of medicine and the lack of gender analysis in research on women's sexual and reproductive health in early 1990s China, Chinese feminists were probably surprised that women who were not medical professionals could challenge the authority of physicians and carry out research on health-related issues on their own. As the 1984 preface of *OBOS* states: "we all experience similar feelings of frustration and anger toward specific doctors [...] who were condescending, paternalistic, judgmental and non-informative" (11). And in the 1984 preface: "the more we learn, the less we believe that the medical system as it is structured today can or will alter to meet our needs. So in this book [...] we emphasize what we women can do for ourselves and for one another" (13). In a book review of *OBOS*, Du argues that by politicizing women's bodies and health the U.S. women who co-wrote the book not only produced knowledge about their own bodies and health, but also challenged the institutional practices in the American health system and emphasized the importance of women's lived experiences and consent in clinical practices (56-57). More importantly, a feminist understanding of the 'body' not only places women's bodies at the center of health care, but also suggests that women's control over their bodies is the basis for their subjectivity and empowerment (57).

The book's feminist approach that emphasizes women's control of their bodies and rights to choice was highly appealing to Chinese health feminists. In 1990s China, under the strict One Child Policy, women's health was affected by birth planning methods such as induced abortion and IUD insertion, which was often done without consent (Greenhalgh 1994: 8; Interview with Liu). This process caused women pain and suffering, which caught the attention of women's health advocates like Liu. From 1993 to 1994, under the pressure of criticism from both outside and within China, the authorities had to transform their approach from prioritizing demographic

goals to being more attentive to women's health and choice in the implementation of the population program (Greenhalgh 2001: 856). This created a need for the development of alternative approaches to the top-down methods in the control of population within the Chinese system. Thus, *OBOS* provided a new framework that treats women as subjects of their reproductive health, which is what Chinese scholars on women's health were searching for.

However, as discussed in Chapter 2, discussions of politics and representations of sex and sexuality were most likely to be censored by the publisher in 1990s China (see Chang 2008; Guo 2015; Yu 2015). Thus, the legitimacy of *OBOS* was questioned by publishers because of its emphasis on politicizing women's bodily rights and its 'inappropriate', or 'pornographic' presentations of sexual behaviour and women's bodies. Confronted with an influx of foreign popular discourses since the opening up of borders, the Chinese authorities were concerned with the bad influence of Western notions of sexual liberation that might 'corrupt' the Chinese public and challenge the morals and values of the Chinese society (Sigley 45; 58). Moreover, the book's political approach to women's sexual health and reproductive rights was also found to be problematic: one of the publishers actually refused to publish the book because it was deemed "too political" (Interview with Liu).

The challenge for the Chinese translation group was to argue for the legitimacy of their work and justify their cause. Liu has acknowledged that the resurgence of sexuality research and sexology in 1990s China was helpful in regard to their own project. More specifically, she states that at the beginning, the Chinese translation group had a difficult time finding a publisher willing to publish the book, because it contains too much 'inappropriate' representation of women's sexuality. However, when they heard that a Chinese dictionary of sexology was being produced, they realized that it was a chance for them to justify their own work, as a women's

health book would be no less legitimate than a book about sex terminology. In Liu's words, "Once there's a small opening up [in the system], we take advantage of it" (Interview with Liu; my supplement). Thus, the translation was premised on the opening up of social attitudes towards sex, the increased diversity of discourses about sex/sexuality, the development of interdisciplinary study of sexual issues, and the development of a feminist/gender awareness in sexual and reproductive health research in 1990s China.

### *3.2.2 The Translators of OBOS and Their Engagement with the Development of a New Approach to Sexual and Reproductive Health in 1990s China*

As the coordinator of the *OBOS* translation project, Liu has a good background in women's health research, as she participated in research projects on women's sexual and reproductive health since the early 1990s. By September 1993, along with other Chinese feminist and gender researchers, Liu formed the women's NGO, Chinese Women's Health Network, having learnt that China would hold the Fourth U.N. Women's Conference. As a group, the Chinese Women's Health Network started the project of translating *OBOS*, but not all of its members participated in the translation.

Liu stated that one of the challenges that the group faced from the start was the recruitment of translators, since translating a 700-page-plus health manual that contains a lot of terminology was intense work and required solid English knowledge, while the Chinese Women's Health Network did not have many members who had studied abroad. Thus, Liu had to recruit all the Chinese translators of *OBOS* through her personal networks. Translators came from various domains, such as translation studies, sociological studies and medicine. There was no formal recruitment process for the translators: they all participated on a voluntary basis after hearing

about this book from their friends and colleagues and used their spare time to translate the book. Some of them, such as Zhang Yuping, Wang Jiayang, and Wang Changbin are professional translators and translation studies scholars. Zhang is a member of the Translators Association of China (TAC), while Wang Jiayang, who translated and edited the chapters on sexuality, reproduction politics and women's self-organizing, is a prominent translation scholar, and according to Liu she is also a feminist. Wang Changbin, who did post-translation editing for six chapters in *OBOS*, is a senior translator in the Research Institute of Central Party School of the Communist Party of China. Apart from *OBOS*, he also translated other Western feminist articles and texts into Chinese, which are included in the book *Women: The Longest Revolution—Selected Articles on Contemporary Western Feminist Theories* (Funv: Zui manchang de geming—Dangdai xifang nvquan zhuyi lilun jingxuan) edited by Li Yinhe (1997). Other translators, such as Liu Dongxiao, are not professional translators but researchers with sociological studies backgrounds. For example, Liu has a PhD degree in sociology from Harvard University, and her research interests are mostly transnational women's movements and international development. Thus, it seems that some of the translators had past experiences in feminist/gender research and the translation of Western feminism before taking part in this project. The development of gender research and feminist translation practices in 1990s China is thus important to the translation project since it gave certain Chinese scholars the energies and resources to translate *OBOS*.

Given the book's extensive coverage of biomedical knowledge, many people in the medical domain were also recruited by Liu as translators. Some of them are medical specialists and scholars working in universities, while others are physicians working in clinical settings. Since *OBOS* covered a wide range of issues in regard to women's health, the translation group

recruited physicians and medical specialists from different domains. For example, Liao Susu who translated the chapter on sexually transmitted diseases is a specialist and instructor in epidemiology in Peking Union Medical College Hospital (Beijingxieheliyuan), a renowned hospital in China with a good reputation for medical research. Another medical specialist worth mentioning is Ma Xiaonian, a medical specialist in andrology and prominent scholar in Chinese sexology. Specialized in the treatment of sexual dysfunction for both sexes and male infertility, Ma has published monographs and articles on the scientific research of sex. For instance, he co-edited the book *Modern Sexual Medicine (Xiandaixingyixue)* with two other scholars in sexology. Publicized in 1995, this book sums up the theoretical and methodological development of sexual medicine, drawing on Western theories and methods in sexology and the cultural understandings of sex in China, and is important to the development of Chinese sexology (Huang 125).

Ma is an important author in Chinese sexology, with a research focus on the scientific study of sex. His and other physicians' willingness to take part in the translation of *OBOS* shows that as the Chinese society opened up, the authority of biomedical discourses on women's health was confronted with the influx of feminist, women-friendly texts on sexual and reproductive health from abroad, and some of the medical practitioners were willing to learn and benefit from it. In regard to the state of sex-related research in contemporary China, Pan Suiming states that there were two major schools of thought: physicians or experts of the medical profession prefer to use the term *xingkexue* (the science of sex) and think that the study of sex should be exclusive to medical research; the sociological or interdisciplinary approach to the study of sex, which was often belittled in the medical school (Pan in Sigley and Jeffreys 53). However, the *OBOS* translation project seems to create a space for conversation between these two paradigms.

Most of the physicians who participated either in the translation or in post-translation editing and proofreading had experiences of travelling and studying abroad, had a solid grasp of the English language and were more ‘open-minded’ according to Liu. In 1990s China, despite the development of interdisciplinary frameworks in research on sexual health, many physicians and medical practitioners still argued that the study of sex and sexual health should be “the exclusive domain of the medical profession” and belittled the contribution of social sciences studies to research on sex (Pan *ibid*). Thus, the involvement of physicians as translators of *OBOS*, a book written up by ordinary women based on their experiences that challenges the authority of medical specialists on women’s health issues, shows that translation can create space for conversations between the medical domain and the gender/feminist domain.

An examination of the *OBOS* translators’ past research and professional experiences reinforces the connection between the translation of *OBOS* and the changes taking place in the larger system. The 1990s saw the opportunities for an oppositional feminist discourse about women’s control of their bodies, sexuality and reproduction to be included in the dominant discourses. *OBOS* brought medical specialists and social sciences/gender researchers together in the same project of translating Western feminism in China. Many of the translators were active participants in knowledge production in the interdisciplinary field of studies of sexuality, sexual health, and feminist approaches to health research. Their interests and involvement in the translation of *OBOS* suggest that translation can play an important role in the evolution of the larger system, which in this case means the shift of focus from a purely medicalized discourse on women’s health to a discourse that take into account women’s experiences and perspectives, as well as the various social-cultural factors that affect women’s well-being. However, given their different domains, they might not share the same goals and understandings of the source text,

which created certain problems. For example, Liu also mentioned that the physicians and sociological/gender/translation scholar-activists came into conflict at times in regard to the translation of certain terms. This will be discussed in the next chapter in terms of some of the more specific translation problems.

### *3.2.3 Transnational collaboration and the Availability of Foreign Resources*

The successful production of the Chinese edition of *OBOS* was premised on the opening up of China's borders and the foreign support resources that subsequently became available for the Chinese translators. With the rise of post-colonial reflections on translation politics, many scholars begin to problematize the unequal power relations between the West and the developing world in regard to knowledge production and dissemination across borders (e.g. see Susam-Sarajeva 2006). However, in 1990s China, many Chinese feminists saw transnational links as crucial to gaining knowledge, resources and support for their own agenda (Greenhalgh 857; Min 73). While the Chinese feminist researcher-activists received support from Ford Foundation for their research, they had a say in what issues should be tackled during the negotiation with Ford (Greenhalgh 863). In the interview, Liu spoke positively of the international links between local feminist groups with foreign organizations and feminists. She acknowledged the mutual support between the Boston Women's Collective and her translation group during the production of the Chinese book, and used the term 'sisterhood' to refer to the bonding and solidarity among feminists from different parts of the world.

Among the Chinese feminists of the 1990s, Liu enjoyed the opportunity of extensive contact with feminists in foreign countries (Greenhalgh 860). Her foreign travel experiences and links with feminists outside of China seems to have helped her in the organization and

production of the 1998 Chinese translation. With the aid of a few foreigners in the group, Liu and others working on the translation project applied for funding from the Ford Foundation. Notably, the Ford Foundation has funded many research projects in China in regard to women's sexual and reproductive health (Wang 26). For example, apart from the translation of *OBOS*, the Ford Foundation also supported the production of *Women-centered Reproductive Health* (*Yi funv wei zhongxin de shengyu jiankang*), a collection of academic articles on reproductive health edited by the Chinese reproductive health NGO, Yunnan Reproductive Health Research Association (Zhao et al. 1995). Thus, foreign aid and funds seem to have played an important part in the production of knowledge on women-centered reproductive health as an alternative to the biomedical model in China.

As the authors of *OBOS*, the Boston Women's Health Book Collective also exerted certain influences on its translation in Chinese, and during this process, they provided considerable support for the translation. While none of the members of the Collective speak Chinese, and therefore cannot participate directly in the translation process, they did certain things to ensure that the feminist message of the American book would be passed on (Interview with Liu). The Boston Women's Collective offered the copyright to translate *OBOS* for free, gave the translators more control over the content of the translated book than the publisher, and organized seminars and workshops for different *OBOS* translation groups on different occasions. For example, a seminar was organized as part of the 1995 Beijing Conference, where the Chinese translation group also participated. The Collective also set up guidelines for the pricing of the Chinese book, to ensure that it would be affordable for Chinese women. Their networking across borders influenced the Chinese feminists involved in the project, especially in terms of the notion of sisterhood in transnational feminist networks (Interview with Liu).

Apart from the agents of foreign resources such as transnational organizations and the Boston Women's Collective, the influx of translated foreign materials about women and gender after the Beijing Conference was also important. They helped the Chinese translators conceptualize health feminism in their own language. For example, Liu mentioned that the available translated United Nations documents on feminism, women and gender, such as *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* and *The Beijing Platform for Action*, were useful references for the translators in regard to the translation of gender-related terminology. As discussed in Chapter 2, the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women encouraged Chinese feminists to translate foreign-language feminist texts and develop a critical language for gender during this process (Ge and Jolly 2001). The Conference has made plenty of gender-related documents and texts available in the Chinese language, and thus helped the translators make translation decisions.

However, the Chinese translation group did not accept the U.N. translations uncritically. For example, in the available translated UN documents, the term 'empowerment' is translated either as *shouquan* (授权), which means endowing with power, or *fuquan* (妇权), which means women's power. However, the Chinese translators thought that neither of these translations sufficiently conveys the meanings of the source text, and both need further explanation to make the concept accessible for the Chinese reader (Interview with Liu). In the final translation, 'empowerment' is translated as “赋予女性权利与能力” (Translator's Preface, Liu 2), or 'endowing women with rights and capabilities'. Thus, while these documents were useful for the Chinese translation, the Chinese translators are not passive recipients of these kinds of material and retained their role as the cultural mediator. Given their engagement with the development of local feminist knowledge, these scholar-activists were not afraid to challenge the existing

translations of feminist terminology in UN documents.

The translation of *OBOS* into Chinese, which led Chinese health feminists to form the Chinese Women's Health Network and launch further projects on Chinese women's health, reveals that resources from abroad have acted as an important catalyst for the development of feminism in China (Wang 27). This includes not only financial resources, but also other forms of support such as the organization of meetings and seminars, setting up guidelines for the translation and dissemination of feminist knowledge across borders, the dissemination of translated gender-related documents through international conferences on women, or simply being exposed to the *OBOS* project's approach to mobilize women by building transnational solidarity valorizing women's experiences with their bodies. Through a project like translating *OBOS*, not only texts but also the possible ways of doing feminist work were being passed on.

The above discussion demonstrates the importance of transnational collaboration as well as international conferences and events that brought Chinese feminists and foreign researchers and activists together to the travel of feminism. China's hosting of these events shows the opening up of the Chinese social system, but the involvement of feminist organizations and researchers in the transmission of feminist thinking, and more specifically a women-centered approach to women's health issues, shows that the travel of women's health communication texts requires not only the opening up of the system but also various agents and actors. Translating foreign-language writings of feminism, organizations such as Chinese Women's Health Network and the East Meets West Translation group were agents of the influx of Western feminism into 1990s China.

### *Conclusion*

My discussion of the context of discourse production on sex research and sexology in 1990s China reveals the social and cultural system just beginning to open up. The 1995 U.N. Conference on women held in Beijing signified the development of gender and feminist research in the Chinese context, and led to the influx of gender-related texts and terminology translated from foreign resources for Chinese feminists to conceptualize their own issues. In the meantime, China was also slowly opening up to the discussion of sexuality. However, there was also the absence of a gender framework in women's health in the production of public discourses and research practices. As a book that "validated women's embodied experiences" and "[challenges] medical dogmas about women's bodies (Davis 2), *OBOS* filled in this gap. While a number of Chinese feminists began to question the dominant discourses and practices in women's health research, *OBOS* validated their claims, and served as an oppositional discourse to the dominant understandings of women's health developed under a medicalized and top-down model.

The next and final chapter of my thesis presents a close-up examination of what I suspect are 'sensitive' issues in *OBOS* and discusses how the translation group worked on these issues. I will also examine the extent to which the Chinese translators tried to adapt this book to address Chinese women's specific situations, and what this reveals about the power of feminist translation in this particular context.

## Chapter Four: Translation, Adaptation, and Influence of *OBOS* in 1990s China

### *Introduction*

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of the 1998 Chinese translation with its source text as well as an earlier Chinese adaptation of *OBOS* produced in 1987. With specific examples taken from the Chinese book, I argue that the 1998 Chinese translation attempted to pass on the feminist tone of the original edition but was affected by the various constraints and restrictions from the local social-cultural system. I will discuss the problem of censorship in translation, as well as the strategies of the Chinese translation group to negotiate the terms of translation with the publisher and to pass on the feminist tone of *OBOS* as much as they could. I also will examine the translator's interference with the source text to make *OBOS* more culturally sensitive, especially in regard to the cultural taboo of women's sexuality and sexual pleasure in the 1990s Chinese context. To demonstrate that the 1998 Chinese translation of *OBOS* reflects the feminist agenda of people involved in the process, I identify some of the translation strategies present in the book as feminist translation strategies outlined by authors such as Von Flotow (1991; 1997). However, since multiple people were involved in the translation, and they were not necessarily pursuing the same agendas, the process should not be framed as a 'unified' feminist translation project but a process of ongoing conversation and negotiation, which in the end left a mark on the intellectual formation of all the members taking part in the process, and sheds light on feminist translation as 'transformative'<sup>13</sup>.

Since the focus of my research is on the 1998 Chinese translation, and also due to the

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<sup>13</sup> Bogic conceptualizes how the Serbian translators are heavily influenced by translating *OBOS* as the 'transformative power of translation' in local gender and reproduction politics (2017).

lack of information on the production of the 1987 translation, my discussion of translation issues in the 1987 edition is limited, and undertaken only for the purpose of revealing the changes happening in the larger system when the 1998 translation was produced. While the 1987 Chinese translation does not specify which edition of *OBOS* it is adapted from, I compared the translation with different editions of *OBOS* published during the 1970s and 1980s, and decided that its overall structure and content bear most resemblance to the 1976 edition. However, since this is a highly censored translation (as mentioned in the translator's preface, which will be discussed below) with no information about the source text and very limited information about the translator, there is no definite way to know its source. Nonetheless, a comparative analysis of how the 1987 and 1998 translators read and adapted *OBOS* allows me to further explain why the social and political context of 1990s is important for the production of the 1998 Chinese translation as a feminist translation project. It also sheds light on the different adaptation strategies that the two groups of translators adopted, and the underlying agendas.

#### *4.1 An Overview of the Chinese Translations Compared against their Source Text*

An overall comparison of the Chinese translations with their source texts show that both translations include omissions of source text content to a varying degree. The 1987 Chinese translation contains 10 chapters, as compared to 18 chapters in the 1976 edition of *OBOS*, since the translator has edited the content of the book (Xin, translator's preface, 1987). The 1998 Chinese translation contains 26 chapters, while its source text, the 1992 edition of *OBOS*, contains 27 chapters<sup>14</sup>. The chapter on lesbianism, *Loving Women: Lesbian Life and Relationships*, was omitted from the 1998 Chinese translation. The 1998 Chinese translation

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<sup>14</sup> For a full list of table of content for the Chinese translations and their source texts, see appendix I.

follows the flow of the source text, while the 1987 Chinese edition combined certain chapters and changed the order. Moreover, the authors of the source text as well as the translators were all credited in the 1998 Chinese translation, and each chapter contains a note about its own author(s) and translator(s), while the 1987 translation did not acknowledge the authorship of members of BWHBC. The 1987 translation also contains very few images of the American book. Only diagrams and no photographs were kept. While the 1998 Chinese edition kept a large number of images and photos of the American book, Liu (the main editor) acknowledged that they were forced to drop and modify certain images under the pressure from the publisher. This will be discussed later in the section on censorship in translating female sexuality/anatomy. Thus, an overall comparison shows that on the whole, the 1998 Chinese translation maintained more continuity with the American book while the 1987 Chinese translation features a large amount of omission and appropriation.

The 1987 translation is titled as 《一本女人写给女人的书：我们的身体和我们的心理》，or in English :‘A Book by and for Women: Our Bodies and Our Psychology’ (my translation). ‘A Book by and for Women’ is the subtitle of the 1976 edition of *OBOS*. However, changing ‘Ourselves’ to ‘Our Psychology’ seems to shift the focus from women’s agency and solidarity to a concern with women’s mental health. In the 1998 translation, the title was translated from ‘Our Bodies, Ourselves’ into ‘American Women’s Self-care Classic: Our Bodies Ourselves’, or 《美国妇女自我保健经典：我们的身体，我们自己》 in Chinese. When asked why they changed the title, Liu stated that due to a lack of knowledge about the history of the book in Chinese society about the history of the book, they did not keep the original title but sought to ‘contextualize’ the book for the Chinese reader. According to Liu, the translation group used this title because it emphasizes both the book’s legendary status (‘Classic’) and women’s subjectivity in health care

(‘self-care’). However, one drawback with this translation is that the title emphasizes the Americanness of the book, and does not represent *OBOS* as a global project that involves non-white women living in ‘cultural peripheries’ (Interview with Liu).

Different translations of the title in these two books tell us something about the agendas of the two groups of translators. Compared with the 1987 translation, the 1998 Chinese translation group tried to make *OBOS* more accessible for Chinese women while retaining its history when they translated the title of the book.

#### *4.2 The Translator’s Preface as an Interference Strategy*

Flotow argues that prefacing and footnoting are important feminist translation strategies when a feminist translator is not afraid to mark her presence in textual production and make her interference with the source text visible (1991: 76). Upon examining the 1998 Chinese translation of *OBOS*, I found that the Chinese translators used both prefacing and footnoting as strategies to pass on the feminist message of the American book and politicize women’s sexual and reproductive health. The use of footnoting as a feminist strategy will be discussed later in regard to translating women’s bodies, anatomy and sexuality. I will first explain how the preface contextualizes the book by introducing the roots of the American book in women’s health movements.

In order to demonstrate the importance of the translator’s preface as an intervention strategy, I compared the preface of the 1998 Chinese edition with the preface of the 1987 Chinese edition. Both translations were produced in Mainland China, yet by different translators/group of translators. In addition to the translator’s preface, the 1987 edition also includes the publisher’s foreword. However, it does not include a translation of the American

authors' foreword as the 1998 edition does. In the publisher's foreword to the 1987 edition, the publisher presents the book as “一本指导妇女健康生活的科普新书” or “an information book recently produced that provides instructions for women to lead a healthy lifestyle” (Foreword, 1987; my translation). The translator of the 1987 edition identifies herself as a translator-editor (编者), which implies that the translator not only performed the trans-lingual transfer of texts but also edited the content of the source text. In the preface, the translator-editor states that the translation contains only “a small part of the source-text version”, and the chapters on topics such as substance abuse were deleted because they are not relevant to Chinese women's lives, and also because they are ‘inappropriate’ to the translator (Xin 2).

The 1987 translator's preface opens with a story of how she learnt about the history of *OBOS* from some of her American friends, in a very personal way. As a psychiatrist, the translator argues that this book is helpful to women who experience “severe psychological problems and ask for help” (my translation). Then, she gives two examples of Chinese women, one a victim of sexual harassment and the other a married woman who had trouble experiencing the pleasure of sex, who suffered due to a lack of sexual knowledge and education. However, the translator does not explain why a book like *OBOS* is particularly useful for Chinese women concerned with their sexual and reproductive health. Moreover, she also suggests that she omitted certain chapters that are either not pertinent for Chinese women or seem unacceptable to her, and thus the translated texts constitute only a small portion of the source text<sup>15</sup>.

Both the translator's preface and the publisher's foreword to the 1987 translation completely decontextualizes *OBOS* from the history of feminist movements and women's health

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<sup>15</sup> Xin writes in Chinese: “需要说明的是，这里介绍的仅为原属的一小部分，为从介绍的篇章中，一部分是由于与中国妇女的关系不大，如吸毒等，一部分是由于译者难以接受。” (*OBOS*, Chinese translation, 1987: 2)

politics in the US. While the 1987 translator touches upon some of the cultural stigma on women's bodies and sexuality that affect the well-being of Chinese women, she does not write about this in a feminist language. What is also missing in this narrative is how *OBOS* facilitates dialogues and collaboration on women's health across cultural and linguistic differences. Thus, these two paratexts depoliticize the American book's approach to women's health issues.

Conversely, the 1998 translator's preface focuses on the historical and geopolitical context of the American book, which politicized women's sexual and reproductive rights. As discussed in Chapter One, by retelling the legendary story of how *OBOS* was produced in the American context and situating its translation within this feminist success story, the translators of *OBOS* maintained continuity between their translation and the American book, and thus created "an imagined feminist community" that builds solidarity among feminists in different geographical locations (Davis 173-175). In the foreword to the Chinese edition of *OBOS*, Liu writes many pages explaining how *OBOS* came into being in the U.S. context and its relation to American women's movements. She also talks about how the *OBOS* project offers women accessible, reliable resources on self-care, enables them to challenge the authority of the medical profession, and shows respect for the diversity of women's experiences with their bodies and health<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, she sets the translation into the context of the 1995 Beijing Conference, and the influx of experiences and knowledge produced about women's health movements outside of China

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<sup>16</sup> See the Seven Principles of the Chinese translation of *OBOS*: "1.用妇女的眼睛看健康; 2.妇女的主体性与参与性; 3.对妇女健康定义的再认识; 4.赋予女性权利与能力; 5.向医学权威挑战; 6. 坚持妇女的自助与互助; 7. 尊重妇女的生活经验、多元化和知情选择" (Liu, Translator's Preface, 1-3), or in English: "1. Look at health through women's eyes [experiences]; 2. Reflect the participation of women in determining or deciding [women's] health. 3. Re-definition of women's health [care]. 4. Capacity building and empowerment [organizing]. 5. A challenge to the medical profession [authority]. 6. Instituting women's solidarity and self-help. 7. Respect women's life experiences and diversity, and choice based on information." (Translated by Ge Youli, retrieved from <https://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/global-projects/china-chinese-womens-health-network-educate-women-in-china/>). However, this translation does not well convey the meanings of the source text. Thus, I provide my own translation as a reference: 1. Examine health [issues] through women's eyes; 2. Women's agency and participation; 3. A new conception of women's health and care; 4. A challenge to the authority of the medical system; 5. Women's empowerment; 6. Adherence to women's solidarity and self-help; 6. Respect for women's life experiences, diversity and informed consent.

during this conference (Liu, Translator's preface, 1). In such a way, Liu positions the 1998 Chinese translation within the 'legend' of *OBOS* as a feminist success story, and presents an account of its history of producing accessible, women-friendly information on self-care and the mobilization of women across cultural and linguistic differences. She also situates the book in the context of women's health communication texts travelling from the outside to 1990s China during events like the 1995 Beijing Conference, and thus contextualizes the Chinese translation within and as part of the development of Chinese women's studies and women's health research.

Unlike the 1987 translator's preface that presents the book simply as a health manual for women, Liu's preface complicates the problem of women's health issues by integrating a gender perspective, and frames the production of *OBOS* as a feminist knowledge-making project. She argued that the American authors adopt a feminist stance by analyzing how women's health is affected by political, economic, cultural, social and social factors: "the book is not only about women's health, but examines women's relation with the society, the vitality of feminist movements, from a specific [feminist] standpoint of women's perspectives" (my translation).<sup>17</sup> Thus, Liu's preface acknowledges the translation of *OBOS* as a political approach to knowledge production on women's self-care.

The 1987 translation was produced before the convergence in China of women's studies and research on women's health with the large-scale influx of foreign-language texts and information on gender and social development taking place from the mid 1990s onward. Moreover, since the Boston Women's Collective was not involved (or informed) during the

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<sup>17</sup> In Chinese: "本书的作者们用全新的女性眼光, 站在性别意识的视角, 分析了美国妇女健康以及隐藏在妇女健康问题背后的政治、经济、文化、社会和历史因素, 指出了健康问题的重要性和复杂性, 并在总结妇女生活经验、探索最新科技信息、促进社会政策完善等基础上, 提供了丰富的有关妇女自我保健的崭新思路、独到做法和宝贵经验。在某种意义上说, 这本书不仅是一本关于妇女健康的书, 还是一本从女性角度阐述妇女和社会的关系、妇女运动自身生命力和特定世界观的书。" (Translator's preface, 2)

process, it is hard to situate this translation in the ‘transnational community’ of women’s health communication text translation. While Chinese women’s studies had begun to develop and Chinese women had begun to problematize the ways women were specifically affected by the social structure in the 1980s, there was no environment for developing a political approach to women’s health and sexuality that would challenge the authority of the medical establishment and the role of medicine in reinforcing top-down programs that affected women’s health and well-being. As a result, the 1987 translator’s preface and publisher’s foreword do not address the institutional and structural barriers that affect women’s access to health information and services. The book’s approach to women’s health problems is thus depoliticized.

To conclude, the 1998 translation is a more politically aware production compared against the 1987 translation. A comparison of the 1998 preface with the 1987 preface of Chinese translations of *OBOS* reveals how the two different groups of translators made sense of the source text differently and how this relates to the larger social, political and historical context. In the latter, the gender/feminist perspective on women’s health problems is completely absent. However, the 1998 translation was produced at a time when gender consciousness about women’s health problems was on the rise in China, and by a translation group with a clear feminist agenda. The translator’s preface passes on the feminist message of the American book and contextualizes it for local women. Furthermore, the 1987 translation had more deletions than the 1998 version. This reflects the different positions of translators on women’s health problems and their own agendas, as well as the different social contexts where the two translations were produced.

#### *4.3 Censorship Issues in Translating Women’s Sexualit(ies), Sexual Pleasure and Anatomy*

As discussed in chapter two, the censorship of representations of sex-related matters and sexuality greatly affects the translation of Western feminism in China from the 1980s to the early 2000s. The American edition of *OBOS* contains a lot of descriptions and discussions about women's sexuality, sexual pleasure and other sex-related matters, such as birth control and safe sex. I examined how these texts were translated in the 1998 Chinese edition. Although the 1998 Translation kept more continuity with its source text than its 1987 'predecessor', the deletion of the chapter on lesbianism suggests that censorship is still a prominent issue in its production. My question is to what extent censorship has affected the book's ability to pass on the feminist tone of the source text.

The chapter on lesbian sexuality is considered not only the "landmark publication" on women's same-sex relationships but also the most controversial chapter in *OBOS*, and is "a frequent subject of censorship both within and outside the United States" (Davis 27). Homosexuality was once criminalized on the grounds of 'hooliganism' in the Chinese law, but it was no longer subject to legal sanction after the crime of 'hooliganism' was deleted from the statute books in 1997, which was deemed by many as the decriminalization of homosexuality in contemporary China (McMillan 93; Xie and Peng 2017: 3). It was also de-medicalized in the early 2000s and removed from the list of mental disorders in the newest edition of the Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders (McMillan *ibid*). However, homosexuality is still subject to social condemnation and stigmatization in dominant discourses: in media representation, homosexuality or 'tongxinglian' in Chinese, equals perversion and abnormality, and a medicalized representation of homosexuality is still prevalent in contemporary China despite its removal from the classification of mental disorders (Ho 2008: 496).

In the American context, *OBOS*'s inclusion of lesbianism was an important step in

expanding the scope of U.S. women's health movements, appreciating the variety of women's experiences, and building grounds for solidarity across differences (Davis 26). Moreover, the book frames lesbianism as a political choice and encourages women to come out as lesbians (27). As the authors of the 1976 edition put it in the chapter *In America They Call Us Dykes*, "it was very important for a book dealing with women and sexuality to have a good section on lesbianism, and [...] writing it would help us sort out some of our own ideas, feelings and politics around being lesbians in this society" (81). In the Chinese context, lesbians and discussions about lesbianism are less visible in public discourses than male homosexuality (Yu 174). Thus, the deletion of women's homosexual sexuality from the Chinese edition seems to be a hindrance to the Chinese book's power in transforming local gender politics. It limits any power to break the taboo on lesbian sexuality and to approach lesbianism from a feminist-activist stance.

Apart from the deletion of a whole chapter on homosexuality, in the chapter titled *Sexuality*, a certain number of descriptions, illustrations and testimonials about how women explore and relate to their sexuality were deleted from the Chinese translation. The section on bisexuality was deleted from the Chinese translation, since it is considered a deviant form of sexuality, like homosexuality. Some 'erotic' material was sanitized in the target text. In the sections on oral sex and anal sex, only a small proportion of the source text descriptions of how women explore these forms of lovemaking were rendered in the target text.

In some cases, the deletions changed the tone and the focus of the book to a certain extent. In the section on masturbation, the texts that talk about women's experiences with masturbation were sanitized and removed from the Chinese translation, which seems to have appropriated the meaning of the source text. While the source text contains rich descriptions and illustrations of

how women can explore their sexuality and seek pleasure through masturbation, the target text excludes a detailed description of how masturbation is helpful to the development of women's sense of sexual autonomy and can empower women by helping them find what they really want in sexual relationships. Moreover, two personal testimonials about how women practice and enjoy masturbation were not rendered in the target text. Only one testimonial where a woman talks about how masturbation is not for her was translated into Chinese. In such a way, the focus of the text was changed from encouraging women to explore their sexuality through masturbation and develop a sense of sexual autonomy to resonate instead with the dominant discourse that discourages the practice of masturbation and frames it as shameful.<sup>18</sup>

Even chapters that are not primarily concerned with the issue of sexuality were also affected by the censorship of 'pornographic and obscene material', such as the chapters on AIDS and HIV infection, pregnancy, and violence against women. Notably, the omissions in chapters on AIDS and HIV infection and pregnancy concerned discussions of how these issues were relevant to lesbians.<sup>19</sup> In the interview, Liu mentioned that in the chapter on AIDS, HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, certain parts of the source text were deleted because, since they touch on sex-related matters, they were also deemed pornographic. She did not explain why, in this case, the censorship of pornography particularly targeted the material that deals with homosexuality and lesbianism. However, as aforementioned, homosexuality is a social-cultural taboo in contemporary China until the early 2000s (e.g. see Ho 2008; Li and Wang 1992;

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<sup>18</sup>In the medical discourses of 1990s China, masturbation was seen as unhealthy and a wide range of illnesses was attributed to it, yet more recently it is less associated with adverse health effects but rather with loose morals and a lack of self-control (McMillan 35). In the advice for Chinese adolescents, masturbation were framed as a shameful practice that caused health side effects, sex education material often elaborated on the negative effects of excessive and habitual masturbation, and some texts made direct moral condemnation on the practice of masturbation (Evans 70-71). Evans notes that masturbation was stigmatized and medicalized on the grounds that 'normal' sex was equated to sexual activity between a man and a woman (71).

<sup>19</sup> The omitted sections are 'Lesbian and HIV', *OBOS*, p. 332, and 'Being Lesbian and Pregnant', p. 422, *OBOS*, 1992.

McMillan 2006). In some cases, this taboo has a strong influence on the translation of feminist work in China, leading to the translator's self-censorship or rejection by the publisher (Yu 178). Thus, it appears that the descriptions of the 'deviant' forms of sexuality such as homosexuality, lesbianism, and bisexuality were too culturally sensitive to be rendered in the target text, and thus more likely to be subject to censorship of pornography. The deletion of certain texts on female sexual pleasure, including lesbian sexuality, sheds light on the decisions made by the local system about what may be transferred during translation. This inevitably affects the power of feminist translation to arouse changes within the system.

The book's discussions of prostitution, or the commercialization of women's sexuality, were also partially censored in the Chinese translation. In an appendix on prostitution in the chapter on violence against women, I found omissions of one paragraph that talks about the demands to decriminalize prostitution in Western countries, as well as the statements that challenge the stigma of prostitutes as 'fallen' or morally corrupted women, and instead argues that they should be treated equally with other women at work (*OBOS*, 146-167). Confronted with the resurgence of prostitution in post-reform Chinese society, the State has passed a series of legal regulations and sanctions on people involved in prostitution in an attempt to control the spread of STDs and HIV (McMillan 113-115). In the dominant discourses of 1990s China, prostitutes were presented either as naïve victims of human trafficking and abduction (113), or as 'fallen' and 'immoral' women who resorted to selling their bodies because of their laziness and their greedy desire for luxury goods (Evans 176). The narratives in *OBOS* challenge the stigmatization and victimization of women in the sex trade, which is prevalent across many different cultures. Instead, the book presents them as ordinary women striving to survive in a patriarchal society, and demonstrates their agency in political organizing for the

decriminalization of prostitution. The deleted discussions of the de-stigmatization and decriminalization of sex work, as well as the agency of women in sex trade, seem to be incompatible with the dominant moralist discourse about the commercialization of women's bodies and sexuality in 1990s China.<sup>20</sup> In particular, the demands for decriminalization go against the State policy on prostitution. Again, it shows the transmission of Western health feminism in translating women's health communication texts is subject to the selection and 'filtering' of the local system, which rejects the elements that are deemed incompatible with its norms.

Apart from the translation of verbal utterances, alterations of non-verbal elements, i.e. images and photos, were also evident in the Chinese translation. A total of 19 images and photos were deleted from the Chinese translation, and one image had to be modified to be included (Interview with Liu). She used the modified image as an example of how the rules of censorship were shaped by what constitutes the 'privileged' discourse on sexual and reproductive health: "In the chapter on birth control, there are descriptions about how contraceptive devices work. [...] There is an image, which is quite representative." Here, Liu was talking about an illustration of sexual intercourse between a woman and a man drawn by Nina Reimer, with texts pointing out and explaining the different sites for barriers such as condoms, spermicide, IUD, and cervical cap (*OBOS*, 263). Presenting a complete illustration of their actions, the original image shows

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<sup>20</sup> Pan Suiming's work provides a comprehensive analysis of prostitution in post-reform China based on his ethnographical studies with participants of the prostitution industry in China since the 1990s (e.g. Pan 1999; 2000; 2005; Pan et al. 2005). In his analysis of the dominant discourses that criminalize prostitution in China, Pan argues that the criminalization of prostitution in contemporary China is premised on the nationalist discourse of the 1950s that associates prostitution with the moral corruption of the pre-revolutionary Chinese nation, and the 'transformation' of former prostitutes into moralist women as a great achievement of the Proletarian Revolution for the advancement of women's status; thus, the stigmatization of prostitution forms part of the discourse of national reconstruction in post-1949 China. Notably, the legal discourse of 1989 frames prostitutes as morally corrupted women who need 'moral education', and also reinforces the victimization of female sex workers in the discourses circulated by Chinese women's organizations. (Pan 2003; Pan, unpublished source, retrieved on 2018 March 28 from: <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/86310.html>)

not only the sexual anatomy but also the physical intimacy of the couple. In the Chinese translation, however, the image was cropped at approximately the waist of the couple, in such a way that the ‘erotic’ elements of the image were sanitized. Only the illustration of the human sexual anatomy was kept.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, upon examining other deleted images, I found that they consist mostly of photographs where nudity, physical intimacy and/or homosexual behaviour are displayed. While representation of human sexuality was permitted in scientific or medical texts on sexual and reproductive health at that time, visual representations of intimacy in sexual relations seemed to be much less tolerated. For example, McMillan suggests that after examining 80 Chinese marriage manuals, she has not found “a single photograph of human physical intimacy” (105).

In regard to the problem of censorship in translating this book, Liu made a comment about how the rules of censorship were influenced by the dominant discourses about sex, sexuality and sexual health in 1990s China:

There was a problem with the screening of texts before publication—how to differentiate scientific knowledge on sex from pornographic representations? Where’s the boundary between them? [...] The question for us was what actually constitutes science and obscenity. As you know, before the Open-door Policy and the social reforms, China was still quite conventional. [...] In the texts on birth control, there were lots of details of the human sexual anatomy, including the penetration of the male sexual organ into the female sexual organ. This would be deemed as scientific under the birth-planning program. During that time, nudity was only permitted either in birth planning pamphlets or in art, while the rest was seen as obscene. (Interview with Liu)

In other words, the representation of sex in scientific/medicalized discourses on birth control was more tolerated than other forms of representations in the 1990s social context, which reflects the privileged position assigned to scientific discourses on sex and sexual and reproductive health. Moreover, what exactly constitutes scientific discourses is determined by social policy. Under the birth-planning program, the production and the dissemination of

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix II for the original image and the modified image.

scientific knowledge around birth control are more likely to be tolerated even if this contains explicit descriptions and illustrations of the human body, sexuality, and sexual organs.

Thus, in order to justify her work, Liu showed the publisher some birth-planning pamphlets and brochures that also contain descriptions and/or illustrations of sexual intercourse, questioning why the presentations of the female body and sex anatomy in *OBOS* were deemed pornographic while similar representations in birth-planning texts were not. What becomes obvious is that the translation of women's sexualities and sexual anatomy is affected by the norms of the target society of what is permitted and what is not permitted in texts on women's sexuality. However, certain discourses of sex and sexual health are more privileged than others because of their closeness to social policy. The translators of women's health communication texts had to negotiate these norms in order to pursue their own agenda of destigmatizing female sexuality and pleasure.

While filtering and selection by the local system affects the capacity of translated feminist texts to retain their original political power, the translators' responses to the system's rejection also demonstrate their agency. Confronted with the problem of censorship, the Chinese translation group still tried to transmit the feminist message of the American book in other ways. Notably, they produced an underground, uncensored translation of *OBOS* which includes the chapter on lesbianism. The uncensored translation was kept by some Chinese universities and disseminated among LGBT people in China (Personal email with BWHBC; interview with Liu). The chapter on lesbian sexuality was also made into a separate book by a gay rights organization for dissemination in Chinese LGBT communities (interview with Liu). The production and circulation of the uncensored Chinese translation shows the power of feminist translation not only as sharing feminist knowledge but also as social activism. The Chinese translators sought to

spread the transformative effects of the book in the local society, not only transmitting information but also stimulating changes in the local social context.

In her analysis of the translation of Western feminist writings, Yu argues that women's bodily experiences and the eroticism of female sexuality, described from a female perspective, have important political implications in Western feminist movements, and writings about these issues and their translations are thus central concerns in Western feminist scholarship (106). How the Chinese translators handle the material about the female body and sexuality is also important to the transmission of feminism through translation (83). But my discussion of the problem of censorship in translating *OBOS* reveals the constraints imposed by power opposing feminist translation from the local system, as well as the agency of the translators in breaking down the constraints. In 1990s China, given the dominance of a medicalized discourse on women's sexual health with an underlying moralist tone, the eroticism of female sexuality, including lesbian sexuality, was not tolerated in texts that served to educate women about their bodies and self-care. However, the translators pursuing a feminist agenda responded by producing their own underground translation. As researcher-activists, people like Liu playing a lead role in the translation were not only concerned with the transfer of information, but also the actual effects of these information on transforming local gender politics.

#### *4.4 Culturally Sensitive Adaptation in the 1998 Chinese Translation*

In the travel of feminism, the mediation of meanings and the ways certain terms acquire new meanings in the new context are a central concern for researchers on gender and translation. Cultural sensitivity in translating Western feminism is a central concern in existing literature on the travel of *OBOS*. The translators often take a critical stance against the limited scope of the

source text, and adapt it to make it more accessible and relevant to their social-cultural context, which transforms translation into a knowledge-making process (Davis 200). The foreign language adaptations thus give the American book a new life, “creating a loop that sustains both projects” (Bogic 18).

Feminist translation theories criticize how translation is seen as reproduction rather than knowledge production, and thus rendered feminized and inferior (Chamberlain 1988; Von Flotow 1997). The global trajectories of *OBOS* as a process of decentering feminist knowledge through culturally sensitive adaptations reveal the intersection of translation and gender politics. Thus, the extent to which the Chinese translators adapt the American book for Chinese women’s specific situations is an important concern for my study.

When asked whether they tried to adapt *OBOS* for Chinese women’s specific situations, Liu stated that at that time, the translation group was planning on the production of a separate book inspired by *OBOS* that would address Chinese specific women’s situations. Thus, their primary concern in this project was not to adapt the book for Chinese women’s situation, but to pass on the message of the source text. As the lead coordinator of the Chinese translation group, Liu suggested that translation should transmit and represent the original rather than produce a mixed product of the source text culture and the target text culture. This being said, the translator’s interference is still present in the Chinese translation, though not as prevalent as in some of the other adaptations of *OBOS*.

In the partially censored chapter on sexuality, the Chinese translators used footnoting as an intervention strategy, which reflects their awareness of the negative configuration of the female sexual pleasure in the local context. They made a footnote about how they translated the term ‘masturbation’. As my discussions in the section on censorship show, masturbation carries a lot

of negative connotations in the 1990s Chinese society. The social concerns about masturbation were reflected in the prevalent terminology for masturbation, *shouyin* (手淫), which translates literally as ‘hand lewdness’ in English (McMillan 35). However, the Chinese translators of *OBOS* translated the term as *ziwei* (自慰), which translates into English as ‘self-consolation’. In the footnote, the translators explain that they made this translation decision because from a feminist perspective, masturbation is not about ‘lewdness’ but sexual autonomy, and thus invokes a sense of agency for women.<sup>22</sup> This translation strategy not only compensates for the differences between languages—the term ‘masturbation’ in the English language does not carry the same cultural connotations as its substitutions in the Chinese language—but also de-stigmatizes masturbation in the target social-cultural context. With the footnote, the translators marked their interference in the source text and further politicized their translation decision from a feminist perspective.

In a different example, the translator’s interference with the source text reflects the cultural norms of the target society on female sexuality. In the chapter on lesbianism in the underground translation<sup>23</sup>, while the use of ‘sisters’ to refer to lesbians was present in some parts of the source text, the Chinese translators substituted ‘women’ and ‘lesbians’ in certain sections of the source text with *jiemei* (姐妹) or ‘sisters’ in Chinese. At the beginning of the chapter, ‘being a lesbian’ which opens up the first paragraph was translated as *jiemei zhiai* (姐妹之爱), which literally means ‘the love among sisters’. While the source text says ‘Being a lesbian for me is about the joy and wonder of loving women’, the target text ‘对我而言，姐妹之爱其乐无

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<sup>22</sup> The translators write in Chinese: “这个词在中文中一般被称为‘手淫’。按照女性主义者理解，这是一个积极的自主的概念，而不含有‘淫’的意思。故我们在全书中将此词译为‘自慰’。” (*OBOS*, Chinese translation, 119)

<sup>23</sup> During the interview, Liu showed me a copy of the underground translation of *OBOS*, so I had access to its material for a limited period of time. With Liu’s permission, I photographed the chapter on lesbianism and stored the photos of the texts on my personal computer for further analysis.

穷’, or in English ‘For me, the love among sisters brings endless joy’ (my translation). Here, the translator omitted direct reference to ‘lesbian’ and instead emphasized the ‘loving women’ part, substituting ‘women’ in the source text with ‘sisters’ in the target text. This adaptation strategy does not apply to all references to lesbianism in the source text, since I found instances where ‘lesbian’ is translated as *tongxinglian* (同性恋) or *nv tongxinglian* (女同性恋), which translates literally as homosexuality or lesbianism in Chinese. In the Chinese cultural and linguistic context, women’s same-sex relationships and intimacy are often uncritically linked with notions such as sisterhood and friendship (Sang 2003: 3). Thus, the substitution of lesbianism with sisterhood in certain parts of the text reflects the translator’s reading of the source text in a culturally sensitive way.

To conclude, although the Chinese translation group purported to stay ‘faithful’ to the American book, culturally accessible and sensitive adaptation is still observed in certain parts of the target text. In particular, the translator’s footnote on masturbation shows their positions on gender and sexuality issues. The Chinese translation project is informed by the gender politics in the wider social-political system. The translators were working on an agenda to change the social attitudes towards women’s sexual and reproductive health in the Chinese society. While the representations of women’s sexual pleasure and eroticism in *OBOS* are subject to formal censorship, the translators of the text on sexuality sympathized with the feminist notion of sexual autonomy and attempted to break the social taboo around sex when they made translation decisions. However, not all the translators in the group shared these positions. The next section includes an example of how the translators read the source text differently based on their research backgrounds and how this affected the production of the translation.

#### 4.5 *A Women-centered Framework to Sexual and Reproductive Health*

In both China and the U.S., women's sexual and reproductive health and rights are considered important issues in feminist studies. The U.S. edition of *OBOS* devoted substantial paragraphs to birth control and abortion, since access to these information and services is extremely limited in the 1960s-70s US, and thus critical to American women's struggle for reproductive freedom and rights to abortion. In 1990s China, while women were not denied access to fertility control and abortion services, their sexual and reproductive health was also affected by the wider politics, i.e. the enforcement of top-down demographic planning since the late 1970s. In these two contexts, the dominant views on women's reproduction seem to be at two extremes, although they share the same roots in a patriarchal discourse that does not recognize women's sexual and reproductive autonomy.

In 1990s China, researchers on gender and population were reluctant to openly criticize the birth planning program which, premised on a narrative about the foreseen crisis of overpopulation, received widespread public acceptance (Greenhalgh 858; 862). The production of the Chinese translation of *OBOS* has also been questioned because the book's emphasis on women's reproductive freedom does not fit into One Child Policy (Davis 64). Thus, political sensitivity was a challenge to the transmission of a feminist message in regard to women's sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Chinese translation.

The 1998 Chinese translation of *OBOS* passed on the American book's discussion of fertility control. The translators did not rewrite the chapters on fertility control to address the discrepancies between reproduction politics in the U.S. and China, but they retained the political tone of the book on women's reproductive freedom and rights. The fact that they did not add new material on how local politics affect women's reproductive health is understandable given

China's particular social-political context. However, the book's women-centered approach to reproductive health and its emphasis on women's consent and subjectivity have positive implications for women's reproductive health in the Chinese context. As Liu states in the translator's preface:

With a focus on women's needs and real-life experiences, this book provides an answer to questions that need to be addressed during women's lives, such as: how do we understand and assess women's health? How to enjoy sex and practice safe sex while not being disturbed by gynecological diseases? How to control our fertility and choose contraceptive methods that are best for us? How to stay healthy during the processes of pregnancy, childbearing, and postpartum? How to prevent breast cancer and cervical cancer? When should we receive the hysterectomy, and when should we look for alternatives? [...] How to deal the social-cultural factors that adversely affect women's health? (My translation)<sup>24</sup>

In regard to women's reproductive health, the Chinese translation group framed their work as introducing a patient-centered approach that is more compatible with women's needs (Plafker 1998). The Chinese book teaches Chinese women about the importance of bodily autonomy and embodied experiences, especially when a decision that might affect their reproductive health is made. Given the privileged position assigned to medical discourses and knowledge on sexual and reproductive health, the book helps Chinese women challenge the authority of the medical system on their bodies and health.

Liu used one reader's correspondence with the translation group as an example of how the book has helped transform Chinese women's perspectives on their sexual and reproductive health. She suggests that in the Chinese medical establishment, physicians will propose a hysterectomy for women patients if they have children, because they have fulfilled their mission as mothers and thus their uterus is deemed no longer needed. However, a Chinese woman under

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<sup>24</sup> In Chinese: “本书从妇女的需要和生活实际出发，回答了妇女生命过程中最亟需关切的种种健康问题，诸如，怎样认识和评价妇女的健康？怎样获得优质、安全的性生活又能避免妇科疾病的困扰？怎样控制自己的生育，选择适合于自己的避孕手段？怎样健康地度过怀孕、生育、产后的过程？怎样预防乳腺癌、宫颈癌？子宫切除术何时必须施行，何时又有变通选择？[...]如何对待社会文化中不利于妇女健康的各种因素？”(*OBOS Chinese edition, Translator's Preface, 1998: 2*)

treatment of the fibroid tumors in her uterus challenged her doctor's prescription of hysterectomy and sought alternatives, based on what she had learnt from the Chinese edition of *OBOS*. After some bargaining, she managed to keep her uterus and had only the tumor removed (Interview with Liu). This shows how the Chinese translation has educated its women readers about their rights to information and consent during medical treatment for sex and reproduction-related illnesses.

However, during the translation process, the book's emphasis on women's experiences and subjectivity was subject to appropriation. As aforementioned, the involvement of people from a wide range of research domains in the Chinese translation project created space for conversation with specialists from different disciplines who were interested in women's health issues and could learn from the feminist approach of *OBOS*. However, this situation also gave rise to conflicts and disaccord among the translators who read the source text differently. Notably, in one interim translation, all the translators from the medical domain translated *women* in the source text as *huanzhe* (患者), or 'patients' in Chinese. To the feminist scholar-activists involved in the translation process, the term 'patients' was highly problematic because it medicalized reproduction and childbearing, which constitutes a part of women's natural life cycle (Interview with Liu). Indeed, *OBOS* takes a critical stance on the overpowering medicalization of pregnancy and childbirth. The medical framework pathologizes the natural process of childbirth, intensifies the negative attitudes and doubts towards childbearing, and increases women's dependence on physicians and the medical system:

[O]ur obstetrical system, part of a larger medical-industrial complex, trains its physicians to consider childbearing as a potentially life-threatening situation. Women internalize this view. It focuses on the risk and pathology of childbirth, viewing labor as dangerous, unbearably painful processes, if not illnesses, to be "managed" only in medical settings with routine use of a wide array of drugs and technologies (*OBOS* 398).

Thus, the feminist translators including Liu had to argue with the physicians over the

translation of the term: “In the doctors’ eyes, anyone who goes to see them is a patient. [But] it depends on the specific situation. [...] Childbirth [...] is a natural process. Unless you develop certain illnesses during childbearing, you are not a patient.” Liu is fully aware of the feminist and political implications of lexical choices made in the source text. Given her background in feminist and sociological studies, Liu sees the prevalent use of the terms ‘women’ and ‘woman’ in the source text as a sign of the book’s acknowledgement of women’s agency and subjectivity, and she reads this source text segment as “we women” (Interview with Liu). The use of first-person plural pronoun ‘we’ in *OBOS* is an important part of the book’s consciousness raising tactics, since it emphasizes women’s collective action across differences and creates a sense of belonging to a feminist community for the reader (Davis 2007; Bogic 2017). However, the physicians involved in the translation saw it as an inappropriate term for medical texts, and wanted to change it (Interview with Liu). Liu’s and the physicians’ different readings of this strategic use of pronoun in the American book emphasize the role of politically aware and engaged translators in the production and transmission of feminist knowledge.

To conclude, the Chinese translation of *OBOS* did not directly tackle the specific problems with reproductive health and rights that face Chinese women, which seems to be due to restrictions in the local social system. However, it is in line with the American book in terms of consolidating women’s perspectives and experiences. This makes it different from other books on women’s sexual and reproductive health available in 1990s China, as discussed in the previous chapter. It places women’s embodied experiences and agency at the center of sexual and reproductive health. With the information and knowledge in *OBOS*, Chinese women readers could develop more sense of control over their bodies in the treatment of sex and reproduction-related diseases.

#### *4.6 OBOS and Feminist Praxis in China: A Question about the Power of Translation*

The translation of *OBOS* into Chinese should be contextualized in the on-going collaboration on knowledge making between Chinese feminist scholar-activists and foreign counterpart organizations. This involves both the translation of foreign feminist texts and feminist/gender research and knowledge making in the local society. *OBOS* is not the only foreign-language feminist communication text that Liu's group translated. They also translated the *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women Issues and Knowledge*, which was also funded by the Ford Foundation and published by Higher Education Press in 2007. Liu and her colleagues continued to work with Ford and foreign feminists in various gender research projects after the production of the Chinese translation of *OBOS*.

Once published, the 1998 Chinese edition of *OBOS* was well received in China just like the original edition in the US. Some Chinese readers wrote to Liu, asking for further information about medical advice on self-care or talking about how the book has transformed their perspectives on their bodies and health. The Chinese translation has also become a useful resource for some researchers and professors in Chinese women's studies (Interview with Liu).

Not only the readers but also the translators were transformed by the translation. The feminist scholar-activists learnt that even though they were not trained in the medical profession, they could participate in the domain of women's health research. Liu was not yet a scholar-activist on women's health when she first learnt about this book (Interview with Liu). Her participation in the translation project has helped her develop a critical feminist language and perspective on Chinese women's health, which affected the subsequent research and translation projects where she participated. Moreover, the negotiation over the meanings of the

source text as discussed in the ‘patients vs. women’ example opened up an interdisciplinary conversation in the domain of women’s health. This kind of conversation and negotiation has indeed ‘transformed’ the translators who had no prior knowledge of a feminist approach to sexual and reproductive health. The male physicians and sexologists involved in the translation realized that *OBOS*’s people-focused framework was equally useful to conceptualize men’s sexual and reproductive health problems in the Chinese context. As a result, they proposed to produce a book inspired by *OBOS* that specifically addresses Chinese men’s sexual and reproductive health (Interview with Liu). Although the male version of *OBOS* was not successfully produced, this proposal shows that translating *OBOS* had a remarkable influence on the intellectual formation of the translators.

While the Chinese translation had certain positive impacts on the development of a feminist approach to women’s health in China, its power also has limitations. The 1998 Chinese translation stays close to its English source text and shows less contextualization in the local social-cultural context compared to some of the other adaptations. Apart from a translation of the American book, Liu stated that her group also proposed the production of two culturally sensitive adaptations of *OBOS* for both Chinese men and women. Given the financial success that the Chinese book has achieved in the market, the local publisher is also interested in producing an updated translation. The 1998 translation group received financial support from Ford for the other two adaptations, but later they returned these funds because they failed to produce the adaptations. As the lead coordinator of the group, Liu stated that while she was fully aware of the importance of producing a culturally sensitive adaptation for Chinese women, she did not see it as a priority for the advancement of Chinese women’s health conditions.

As a women’s health advocate and feminist scholar-activist, Liu has led and participated in

different research projects on Chinese women's health. Her extensive experiences of research-activism and engagement with gender issues in the Chinese context have shaped her perspective on feminist knowledge production in China. While she acknowledges the importance of women's empowerment through collective knowledge making and sharing as in the *OBOS* project, she argues that it is insufficient in the Chinese context (Interview with Liu). This forms part of the reason that inhibits her from producing a culturally accessible version of *OBOS* for Chinese women. More specifically, China's social-political structure is premised on a collectivist ideology, with "the central government [as] the sole proprietor of national assets" (Liu et al 2009: 531). This social structure has deeply affected the way women's work and activism are organized in contemporary China. For example, "all social organizations are required to register with the government as an associate or a subordinate of a formal institution, [...] all organizations have to operate within the boundary set by the State and are subject to various laws and registrations that are still restrictive in nature" (Zhang 2001: 162-163). This puts certain restrictions on the operation and influence of NGOs in contemporary China. Thus, Liu sees the realm of health research and services as a domain reserved for the Chinese government, while women's NGOs do not have the capacities and the resources to improve women's health conditions on the large scale (Interview with Liu).

Liu's personal involvement in the development of Chinese feminist scholarship and social practice shows her dedication to producing knowledge that may later translate into policy and social service. In some of her other research projects, including the production of a book titled *Zhongguo funv shengyu jiankang cujin—cong xuqiu pinggu dao zhengce fazhan* (Advancement of Chinese Women's Reproductive Health—From Evaluation to Policy Development), also funded by Ford, Liu also consolidated women's embodied experiences and collected their

testimonials about their reproductive health. These research projects also received support from transnational organizations and feminists outside of China, and showed a combination of international ideas with practical activism in the local context. However, in these projects, the scholar-activists produced knowledge on how to improve the infrastructure intended for the policy makers rather than for individual women to learn about self-care. Their objective is not to mobilize women in health activism but to affect the legislative and decision-making processes.

In the US context, *OBOS* has acted as a catalyst for women's self-organizing and the production of women-centered medical knowledge. Most importantly, *OBOS* consolidates a bottom-up method of knowledge production not based in academic institutions but in radical movements (Davis 120). However, the 1998 Chinese translation was produced by a group of Chinese scholar-activists whose politics were quite different. China has a long tradition of collectivism and social hierarchy with centralized power, which shapes how the society is organized in post-revolutionary China (Liu et al. 2009: 530-531). In post-1949 China, and also during the 1990s, Chinese intellectuals worked in collaboration with the state, which is the most legitimate and effective way for them to "participate in the political and policy debates shaping the nation's future" (Hamrin and Zhao and Goldman in Greenhalgh 2001: 857). As a result, Chinese feminist researcher-activists often pursued their own agendas to varying degrees while working within the State establishment (Greenhalgh 857-858). Liu's position on how to improve Chinese women's sexual and reproductive health conditions confirmed this observation. She suggests that *OBOS*'s approach to women's health and its discourse of personal empowerment, albeit relevant to Chinese women's situation, does not fully apply to the Chinese social-political context. The book transforms only the women who have access to it, which is less effective than carrying out other research projects that have a more direct effect on social service and state

policy.

Thus, producing a culturally sensitive adaptation of *OBOS* for Chinese women is far from the priority for Liu's research group. While she did not deny its importance, she maintained that producing knowledge on gender and women's health that can translate into policy is more urgent than empowering women on an individual basis. When asked about the differences between these domestic women's health studies and the *OBOS* project, she framed the latter as more centered on individual women's experiences transformed into feminist knowledge through solidarity and collaboration; and the former as knowledge produced with the clear purpose of improving the delivery of social service by the government. Precisely, the bottom-up approach of the *OBOS* does not fit into China's social-political context. Thus, it seems like in the Chinese context, individual women's embodied experiences and knowledge still need to be translated into a language intelligible for the policy makers if it wishes to reach its maximum effects. This extends certainly beyond the scope of translating a foreign women's health communication text.

Apart from the 'impracticality' of a bottom-up approach to women's self-organizing in the realm of health, the failure to produce culturally sensitive translations of *OBOS* is also due to the lack of gender-aware translators with the required expertise. This, according to Liu, is especially true for the production of a male version of *OBOS*. She suggested that it was difficult to recruit enough participants who had the required expertise and gender awareness, especially among the younger generation of translators. More recently, with the degree of marketization in China, it is harder to produce a women's health book with women's empowerment as the primary goal, rather than make profits for the publisher. Thus, when approached by a different group of younger translators who were allegedly producing a new translation, she stayed away from the project, dissatisfied with the commercialized nature of the new thing. The development of

transnational links and social changes happening in 1990s China gave certain Chinese feminists the time, energies and resources to translate the book. However, as the larger social and economic context changes, the production of another translation premised on a ‘feminist epistemological project’ seems harder to fulfill.

To conclude, while the 1998 Chinese translation has helped raise gender awareness in the realm of women’s health research and practice, its power also has limitations. The failure of the Chinese translation group to produce a culturally sensitive adaptation of *OBOS* to address the specific local gender and health politics reveals the limits on the power of translation imposed by the local system. Feminist translation is always embedded in the politics of the local context, and these issues must be taken into consideration in any discussion of the power of feminist translation.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I present my findings after a close-up examination of the Chinese translation and a comparison of the target text against its source text. The translators’ translation decisions and interference with the source text tie into my discussions of the larger context of its production in the previous chapter. Unlike the 1987 translator, the 1998 translation group consisted of politically aware translators who pursued their feminist agendas in the translation project. This determined how they handled the book’s discussions of women’s health issues. While the 1987 translation appropriated the source text through both deletion and paratexts, the 1998 translation maintained much more continuity with the feminist tone of the American book, with a few examples of culturally sensitive adaptation. However, in the discussion of sex-related issues, the 1998 Chinese translation had to conform the norms of the target system, especially

when it came to the translation of female sexual pleasure in masturbation and lesbian sexuality. At the same time, the agency of the Chinese translators developed and became visible in their strategies to resist the appropriation of the system by producing an underground translation.

The Chinese translation of *OBOS* had a positive influence on local feminist health politics. It helped transform the understanding of women's health both within and outside of the academia. It affected the feminist research-activists taking part in its production, introducing them to a transnational framework of feminist knowledge production, as well as individual Chinese women readers seeking information from it. However, the specific local social-political system sets restrictions on how much a feminist translation project can achieve in women's mobilization.

## **Conclusion: Lessons Learnt from Contextually-bound Feminist Translation**

In this research, I set the Chinese translation of *OBOS* into the larger context of feminism travelling to China in both theory and praxis. More specifically, I examined the interplay of the translation of women's health communication texts with local gender and feminist health politics, and what this means for the transmission and mediation of women-centered knowledge through translation. I also looked into the impact of the broader contexts on translation of feminist texts. My research suggests that this translation project is premised on China's opening up, and on the influx of foreign resources during the 1995 Beijing Conference for Chinese feminist research and praxis. It is also driven by the Chinese feminist scholar-activists' interests in feminist knowledge about women's health produced outside of China. Chinese women faced many health-related issues in 1990s China, and the Chinese translation of *OBOS* reflects positive changes in local feminist health politics.

Although my research is mostly concerned with the practical aspects of translating feminism, it also has certain theoretical implications for the development of feminist translation scholarship. My research sheds light on the limitations of Western-born theories on translating feminism when applied to the Eastern/Chinese context. My findings on how *OBOS* was adapted to the Chinese context and the (in-)translatability issues reveal that feminist translation theories need to focus more on the local context where feminism travels through translation. As I have discussed in the literature review, some scholars in translation studies have begun to address how unequal power relations between the so-called Western world and the non-West affects the selection of material for translation, and the direction of translation flows (e.g. Bogic 2017a; Susam-Sarajeva 2002, 2006). My research findings confirm that applying a theoretical

framework born out of Western scholarship without taking into account the local context is problematic.

### *Translation, Feminist Praxis, and Knowledge Production*

The 1998 Chinese translation has a lot to tell about how translation intersects with feminist knowledge-making in a local context. In 1990s China, changes in the larger social system created a good environment for the development of gender awareness in women's health research. China hosting the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women also facilitated intellectual exchange between China and the international community in regard to gender and feminism. As a result, the 1990s saw a transition in Chinese feminism from discussions in academia to NGO-based feminist praxis and activism (Min 2017). In this context, the 1998 Chinese translation also helped transform local feminist health politics to a certain degree.

The translation strategies that the Chinese translators used as discussed in Chapter Four reveal their feminist agenda and their gender awareness. Previous research on the translation of feminism points to the role of language in configuring gender relations, and the role of politically engaged translators as cultural mediators (e.g. Bogic 2017; Chamberlain 1988; Flotow 1991, 1997, 2001; Santaemilia 2011; Simon 1996). Examples taken from the Chinese translation confirm that the Chinese translators used translation to challenge the social taboo around women's sexuality and sexual pleasure.

My research also explores the translation process as collaborative and reveals the multiple parties involved. The collaboration between Chinese women's health networks and foreign feminist organizations and individuals, both in the production of *OBOS* and other research projects, confirms the power of transnational feminist solidarity. It also reveals the impact of

women's communication across borders on local feminist knowledge-making, which is premised on the opening up of the local social-political system.

Moreover, not everyone involved in the translation was necessarily feminist, at least not before the project started. Many people involved in the translation process were prominent scholars and professionals with substantial reputation in their own fields. Some of them had been pursuing a feminist-activist agenda in other projects; others had no prior understanding of feminist health activism before their participation in the project. My research attends to the conflicts and processes of negotiation that occurred during the translation, and emphasized the agency of Chinese feminist scholar-activists who, in collaboration with feminists outside China, tried to pass on the feminist message of the source text in as close a form to the original as possible. Thus, the Chinese translation of *OBOS* is a feminist translation and knowledge-making process not in the sense that it is 'translated by women for women' but because it creates a space of exchange and conversation in a way that helps configure local feminist health politics.

#### *Systemic Impacts/Constraints on the Travel of Health Feminism*

My research findings also point to the restrictions on translating feminist health texts. As systems theory suggests, the process of selection and the appropriation of information during translation reflects the capacity of the local social system to filter information coming from outside. As discussed in Chapter Four, the Chinese translators had to conform to the norms of the system in regard to culturally sensitive issues in translation. Yu's 2015 study suggests that constraints exert a distinct impact on the transmission of feminist attitudes on women's sexuality and eroticism. Similarly, during its travel to 1990s China, *OBOS* was sanitized due to the local social-cultural system's rejection of the material that seemed to clash with its core values.

Censorship in translation practices expresses the values of the target system by filtering information from the source language to the target language. The deletion of material on ‘deviant’ forms of sexualities, masturbation, women’s sexual eroticism, as well as sex workers’ self-organizing against the criminalization of prostitution, illustrates this process. Although 1990s Chinese society was opening up to the feminist texts, which brought up changes in gender politics in the wider local society, the system still retained its power to reject what was deemed subversive of its morals and values. However, the translators negotiated with the rules of the system and resolved certain issues by way of an underground translation, which was not to be made available on the open market but disseminated among gay rights and feminist organizations/individuals privately. Thus, feminist translators negotiated with the system’s norms not only during the actual translation process, but also at other stages such as the dissemination of the translated texts. This shows their agency as and links translation closely to feminist praxis and consciousness raising.

Yu suggests that in China, generally speaking, scientific texts are less likely to be subject to censorship on sex-related matters than literary texts (178). This may be explained by the privileged status assigned to scientific discourses about sex and sexuality in contemporary China, and that scientific texts are conventionally viewed as politically uncontroversial. When translating feminist material that includes descriptions and representations of female sexuality, the Chinese translators of *OBOS* used the privileged status assigned to scientific discourses about sex and sexuality, and in particular the production and dissemination of knowledge about birth control, as a justification for their work, because this ostensibly expressed the values of the system.

*The Past and the Future of Translating Feminist Health Texts in China*

Translation has played an important role in the development of Chinese women's awareness. Translated texts on sex-related issues and sexual health, which increased in number during the reform period, have also had an impact on the successful completion of the *OBOS* project. The travel of *OBOS* to 1990s China depended on both factors.

While the 1998 Chinese translation had a transformative impact on local feminist health politics, it certainly also had its limitations. While the Chinese translation maintained continuity with the American book in terms of passing on a 'feminist success story' about women's self-care, it did not transfer the self-organized women's health movement to the Chinese context. This seems to be due to the different ways that the Chinese and the American societies are structured, and what women's health advocates in these two societies perceive as the most effective way of empowering women. As Davis and other authors on *OBOS* have explained, the *OBOS* project and women's health movements in the U.S. context were premised on the consolidation of individual women's experiences. This 'individualist' form of feminism may be transferrable to the Chinese context to some extent, but because of the different social systems in China and the U.S., it appears to be less useful for Chinese health feminists than for their American counterparts.

The scholar-activists working on the Chinese translation could only devote some of their energies and time to this project. For example, Liu has held research positions in the All-China Women's Federation and worked closely with the State establishment in various gender-focused projects. Moreover, the 1998 translation was premised on the vitalization of gender in social research as a result of the 1995 Beijing Conference. When external circumstances changed and the process of marketization in China deepened, a mainly not-for-profit project aiming primarily

to teach and empower women seemed less probable. This happens not only in China, since the Boston Women's Health Book Collective has recently released a statement that there would be no more new print runs or updates of the American edition of *OBOS* due to financial pressure<sup>25</sup>.

However, it is also important to note the impact of new technologies' development and the input of a younger generation of Chinese feminist activists has led to the dissemination of translated women's health texts. For example, the Boston Women's Collective Website shows that a different group of Chinese feminist activists obtained their permission to adapt a newer edition of *OBOS* for digital dissemination<sup>26</sup>. They took a quite different approach from the 1998 translation group, which reflects changes in the circumstances in which Chinese women's health advocates work as well as in the ways in which knowledge targeting a popular readership circulates. This type of initiative is certainly worth scholarly attention in possible future studies about how translation might contribute to feminist praxis and knowledge production.

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<sup>25</sup> Retrieved from :  
<https://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/2018/04/a-message-about-the-future-of-our-bodies-ourselves/>

<sup>26</sup> Retrieved from :  
<https://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/global-projects/china-chinese-womens-health-network-educate-women-in-china/>

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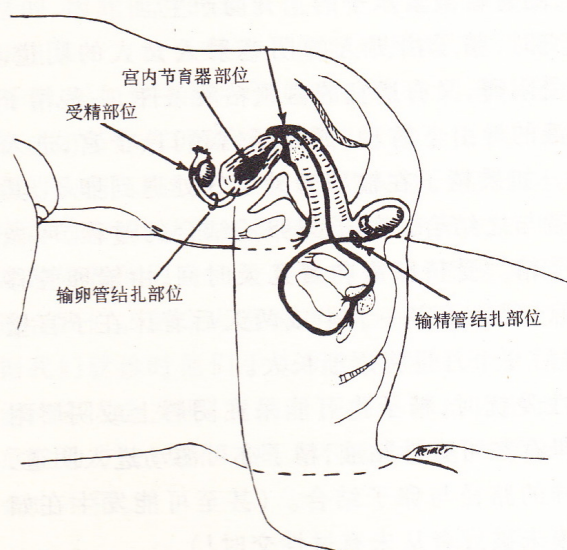
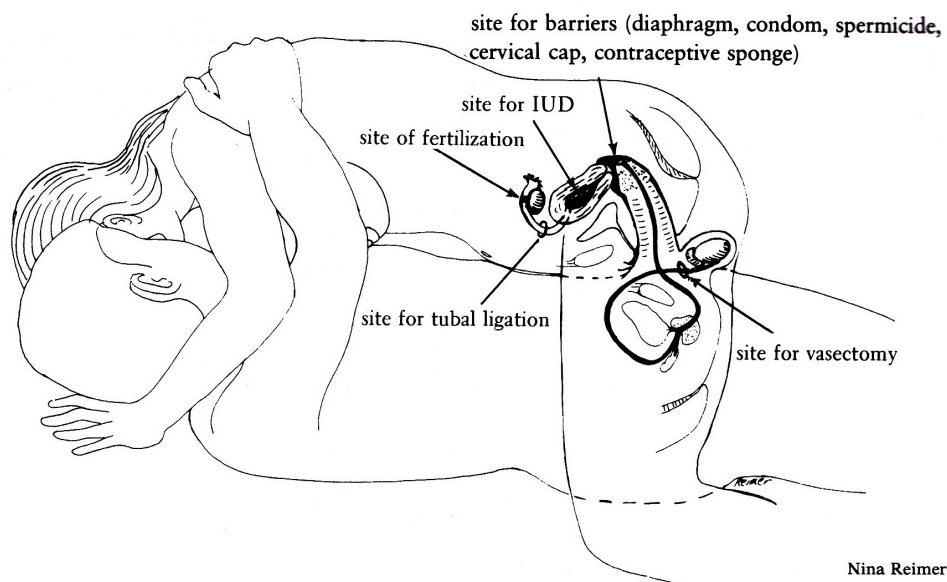
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## Appendix II

### A Modified Image in the 1998 Chinese Translation



屏障避孕部位(阴道隔膜、避孕套、  
杀精剂、宫颈帽、避孕海绵)

尼娜·赖默绘制

## Appendix III

### Sample Interview Questions

*Part 1: Background information about the coordinator and the translator(s):*

1. How did you learn about this book?
2. Did you initiate the translation? If not, who did?
3. Have you done translation before you translated this book?
4. How were the other translators recruited? Why did the person who recruited translators find it necessary to set up a team?
5. As the coordinator, what was your role in the translation of OBOS into Chinese?

*Part 2: The social and political context:*

6. Does the translation of this book have anything to do with the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing?
7. What was being said about women's bodies, sexuality and health in China's public discourse when this book was translated? Were there any books written in Chinese that are similar to OBOS at that time?
8. In your opinion, at that time, did Chinese women and American women face the same problems in terms of their bodies and health? What were the differences (if any)?
9. Did you receive funds to translate, publish and disseminate this book?

*Part 3: Building transnational solidarity*

10. How did you and your team work with Boston Women's Collective on the translation of OBOS?
11. As the author and the copyright holder, how much control did Boston Women's Collective have over the content of the Chinese edition?
12. Did you work with women's groups in other parts of Asia that also translated OBOS, such as Vietnam and Japan?

*Part 4: Translation and rewriting*

13. Did you have any problem finding equivalent words in the Chinese language for the feminist notions and terms used in the source text? Did you consult the translated edition of OBOS published in Taiwan in 1975?
14. If you found certain feminist notions in the source text in conflict with the dominant ideologies in China at that time, how did you deal with it?
15. Apart from the translators, who else had control over what is written in the target text? Examples include the editor, the publisher, the censorship bureau etc.
16. There are omissions of parts of the source text in chapters on homosexuality, prostitution and sex education. Who made those omissions? Why?
17. Did you consider adding things that address Chinese women's specific situation and problems? Did you try to collect Chinese women's testimonials on their relation with their bodies? Why or why not?
18. Why did you add the subheading "American Women's Self-care Classic" to the title of OBOS in Chinese?

*Part 5: Impact of OBOS and what comes next*

19. As far as you know, has the Chinese edition of OBOS been well received in China? Did it help raise awareness on women's sexual and reproductive health in China?
20. From 1998 onward, the original edition of OBOS has been updated several times and its content undergone major changes. Have you considered translating the newest edition of OBOS into Chinese? Why or why not?
21. According to Boston Women's Collective, in 2008, a group of Chinese feminists and activists obtained permission to translate and adapt OBOS for mobile and digital distribution in rural areas. Do you know about this? Why do you think they find it necessary to re-translate and disseminate OBOS in this way?

## Appendix IV

### Ethics Approval Certificate Provided the Ethics Review Board of the University of Ottawa

File Number: 08-17-10

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 09/18/2017



**Université d'Ottawa** **University of Ottawa**  
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2010) and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above named research project. Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the project, the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the project (e.g., change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, including consent and recruitment documentation, should be submitted to the Ethics Office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <http://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/submissions-and-reviews>.

Please submit an annual report to the Ethics Office four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval. To close the file, a final report must be submitted. These documents can be found at: <http://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/submissions-and-reviews>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: [ethics@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uOttawa.ca).