

Tracing the Rise of Female Status in *A Song of Ice and Fire* Through Translation: A Case Study of Daenerys Targaryen

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Abstract. This study explores Daenerys Targaryen's ascent to power in *A Song of Ice and Fire* as a lens to analyze contemporary female empowerment and social mobility. Through translation studies, it uncovers persistent constraints on women's status evolution. While modern women demonstrate growing agency, translational frameworks perpetuate gendered stereotypes, reflecting patriarchal norms in literature and society. The analysis reveals a paradox: women who attain authority often replicate rigid patriarchal hierarchies, leading to extremization rather than liberation—exemplified by Daenerys' transformative arc from marginalized figure to autocratic ruler. The research argues that true progress requires dismantling reductive identity constructs in translated narratives. New-era women must transcend binary definitions of power, resisting both passive victimhood and masculinized dominance. Achieving gender equity necessitates dual efforts: cultivating authentic discursive authority while demanding equitable representation in cross-cultural literary frameworks. Only by subverting translation's role in reinforcing patriarchal paradigms can women transform provisional gains into sustained socio-cultural advancement. The findings advocate for intersectional approaches to reinterpret female narratives globally, challenging both textual and contextual limitations.

1 Introduction

A Song of Ice and Fire, an epic fantasy novel series by George R.R. Martin, has gained global acclaim for its profound character development and rich exploration of literary, political, and philosophical themes [1].

The narrative arc of Daenerys Targaryen serves as a critical lens to examine mission-driven identity formation under multicultural collisions and the rising trajectory of female agency within the text. Set in a patriarchal society marked by male dominance and systemic disempowerment of women, Daenerys strategically navigates power dynamics to ascend socially and politically. Her journey offers a paradigm for real-world female empowerment. Daenerys is selected as the research subject for her embodiment of three contemporary gender-political themes: the struggle for reproductive rights through body politics, gender

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demystification within symbolic power systems, and ethical dilemmas of liberation in post-colonial contexts. Crucially, she resists reduction to a feminist archetype, maintaining an enduring tension between ruler and revolutionary—melting slave collars with dragonfire while engraving "justice" on newly forged chains [2]. This complex duality renders her silver-haired figure perpetually suspended between dawnlight and ice, crystallizing gender politics as both a radiant and perilous double-edged sword. This study will tracing the rise of female status in *A Song of Ice and Fire* through translation.

2 Daenerys through the lens of translation studies

The name "Daenerys" encapsulates numerous culturally loaded terms. In Western translations, "dragon" symbolizes violence and evil—a pejorative connotation—whereas in Targaryen lore, dragons represent majesty, sovereignty, and power, while in Eastern contexts, they signify nobility and auspiciousness. Her title Mhysa, a Ghiscari slave-dialect variant of "mother," is reimagined as a spiritual bond for political communities. The concept of "blood of the dragon," rooted in the Targaryen obsession with blood purity, mirrors medieval Europe’s "blue blood" nobility ideology. Daenerys’ "fire resistance," portrayed as a divine bloodline miracle, merges Christian baptismal imagery with the phoenix rebirth myth in her fiery resurrection scene [3].

Translators must balance domestication and foreignization strategies based on cultural receptivity (see Tables 1-3).

Table 1: Strategic Use of Domestication and Foreignization [4]

Types	English	Chinese	Functions
Domesticated Noble Titles	"Ser"	爵士	Activates Chinese cultural memory of the shi scholar-elite class.
Localized Religious Adaptation	"Mother Above"	圣母在上	Bridges Catholic Marian devotion and Chinese Guanyin (goddess of mercy) imagery.
Foreignized Political Titles	Hand of the King	国王之手	Creates estrangement effects to reflect bureaucratic uniqueness.
Climate-Embedded Proverb	Sun spear	骄阳似矛	It embeds Chinese climatic cognition into the Dornish cultural context.
Culturally Specific Honorifics	"Khaleesi"	多斯拉克语的称谓	Retains Dothraki sociolinguistic nuances of female leadership in steppe tribes.

Table 2: Recontextualization of Daenerys’ Titles and Epithets [4]

Types	English	Chinese	Functions
Mother of Dragons	Cultural Imagery Shift	龙母	Replaces “mother” with mother to avoid biological connotations and emphasize political authority.
Dracarys	Verbal-to-Nominal Conversion	龙焰	Transforms the Valyrian imperative verb into a noun, preserving the action of “dragonfire” while evoking vivid imagery.
Silver Queen	Symbolic Purification	银女王	Uses “silver” alone to distill the symbolic weight of her hair, avoiding literal translations like “Silver-Haired Queen” and echoing classical Chinese poetic brevity.

Table 3: Limitations in Translation [4]

English	Chinese	Functions
Breaker of Shackles	镣铐破除者 Over-Concretization	Reduces the abstract political metaphor of liberation to a literal image of shackles, diluting its ideological depth
stormborn	风暴降生	Retains the original metaphor but risks interpretive overreach due to cultural gaps in perceiving “storm” as a birthright symbol.
Mad queen	疯女王	Implicitly stigmatizes feminist power by conflating “madness” with female authority, reflecting cross-cultural misinterpretation

In summary, translators must strike a balance between domestication and foreignization, while negotiating feminist, religious, and cultural factors—a process of cross-cultural mediation. This leads to the following foundational logic for translation strategies:

1. Cognitive Prioritization: Maximize domestication for foundational world-building concepts (e.g., "Winter is Coming" → "凛冬将至") to ensure narrative framework coherence.

2. Gradated Foreignization: Gradually increase foreignization as the text's fantastical elements intensify (e.g., Valyrian ruins, Green Seers), preserving exoticism while maintaining readability.

3. Intertextual Modulation: Activate cultural subconscious through localized adaptations (e.g., "Red Wedding" → "血色婚礼", leveraging red's ominous symbolism in Chinese culture).

4. Ethical Safeguarding: Apply lexical mitigation to ethically sensitive content (e.g., incest, child abuse) to align with the target culture's moral tolerance [5].

3 Translation studies and cross-cultural narrative rebalancing mechanisms

3.1 Cognitive anchoring and domestication strategies

Baker's narrative framing theory posits that foundational world-building concepts require stable cognitive schemata [6]. The Chinese translation of "Winter is Coming" as "凛冬将至" leverages the four-character structure to activate collective cultural memory [7]. This maximal domestication strategy establishes cognitive anchors during initial exposure, aligning with Dongfeng Wang "Conceptual Assimilation Model," which facilitates reader acceptance of foreign elements within familiar frameworks [8]. Studies show that idiom-based localization improves proper noun retention by 37% [9].

3.2 Graduated foreignization in fantasy contexts

As the narrative delves into fantastical settings like Valyrian ruins, translators adopt progressive foreignization [10]. "Foreignization Gradient Model" demonstrates that foreignization density should increase from 12% in foundational chapters to 45% in core fantasy scenes [11]. For example, "Greenseer" is first rendered as "绿眸先知""Green-Eyed Prophet," domesticated and later standardized as "绿先知" foreignized, a phased approach shown to boost reader acceptance by 21% emphasizes that foreignization must dynamically correlate with the text's "fantasy concentration [12]."

3.3 Intertextual activation of cultural archetypes

The translation of "Red Wedding" as "血色婚礼" successfully activates the Chinese cultural archetype of red as an omen of danger, corroborating the intertextual translation theory. Chinese readers process red-associated crises 0.4 seconds faster, demonstrating how subconscious cultural priming enhances narrative impact. Research indicates that culturally resonant terms improve emotional transmission efficiency by 58% [13-15].

3.4 Dynamic ethical safeguarding

For sensitive content like incest, translators employ "semantic field softening." Ethical Negotiation Model reveals that Chinese readers' tolerance for such themes is 42% lower than Western audiences [16]. By rendering "bedding ritual" as "婚仪" "nuptial ceremony", translators buffer ethical shock while maintaining narrative coherence, achieving a 65 – 78% acceptability range. However, excessive sanitization risks diluting narrative integrity, necessitating balance between ethical adaptation and fidelity.

Contemporary translation operates as a sophisticated cultural mediation system. Through cognitive anchoring, graduated foreignization, archetypal intertextuality, and ethical negotiation, translations preserve narrative cohesion while transmitting cultural hybridity. Future research could employ neurolinguistic methods to quantify parameter interactions [17].

4 Linguistic and cultural analysis of source-target text divergence

4.1 Structural and Grammatical Disparities

- Inflectional vs. Isolating Languages: English (inflectional) relies on morphological changes (e.g., tense, plurality), while Chinese (isolating) depends on word order. This leads to metaphor dilution; for instance, direwolf becomes 冰原狼, balancing biological accuracy and cultural resonance.

- Titles and Moral Judgment: Terms like Kingslayer/弑君者 and Mad Queen/疯女王 retain literal meanings but amplify cultural sensitivities, skewing readers' moral perceptions of characters.

4.2 Challenges in poetry and wordplay

- "The Rains of Castamere": The Lannister anthem's "red rain" symbolizes bloodshed. Its prelude to the Red Wedding (血色婚礼) exploits Chinese taboos around red, amplifying narrative tension.

- "Needle": The dual meaning of Arya's sword—literal sewing tool and metaphor for vengeance—is partially preserved in 缝衣针, though the pun on "weaving death lists" is attenuated.

- Lannister's Motto: "Hear Me Roar" → 听我怒吼 retains surface bravado but loses the subtextual irony linking "roar" to House Reyne's demise.

4.3 Translating fictional languages

Valyrian terms are rendered with archaic Chinese radicals to evoke mysticism. Translator subjectivity further shapes gendered portrayals—Cersei and Daenerys risk misinterpretation due to divergent gender discourses across languages. While "Winter is Coming" → 凛冬将至 gains rhythmic urgency through classical phrasing, it sacrifices the original's minimalist dread. This exemplifies the tension between fidelity and creativity in literary translation. Localized adaptations are not flaws but necessary traces of cross-cultural dialogue. Understanding these divergences is key to grasping the work's essence.

5 Translation and linguistic perspectives on female empowerment in contemporary society

5.1 Daenerys targaryen's evolution

Daenerys' transformation from a "commodified princess" (Khaleesi) to a "liberator" (Breaker of Chains) reflects her cumulative epithets (Mother of Dragons, Queen of Meereen) that construct political legitimacy. The Chinese translation employs zero-translation with

annotative retention for her titles, preserving their linguistic alterity and resisting semantic reduction through domesticated terms like 龙母 ("Dragon Mother"). This approach underscores the irreducible complexity of female identity, which cannot be confined to monocultural frameworks. Similarly, modern women face the dual challenge of resisting reductive stereotypes while avoiding alienation through excessive cultural foreignness [4].

5.2 Arya Stark's language of vengeance

Arya's degendered violence in the original text is reframed through four-character idioms like 凡人皆有一死 ("All Men Must Die"), aligning her with the wuxia (martial hero) tradition. This cross-cultural semiotic grafting taps into Chinese readers' collective memory of 女侠 ("female knight-errant") archetypes, subverting the "deviance" label often attached to female violence. The translation reveals a societal paradox: women's agency in wielding violence remains morally scrutinized, yet linguistic reinvention can legitimize such narratives [4].

5.3 Awakening and dilemmas of female power

Breaking the "Passive Object" Paradigm: Characters like Cersei Lannister and Daenerys initially exist as appendages to patriarchal systems (marriage, familial duty). Their ascent through political strategy (Cersei's court machinations) and military leadership (Daenerys' liberation campaigns) mirrors contemporary feminism's call for proactive claims to political and economic agency, rather than awaiting institutional concessions.

Daenerys' trajectory—from enslaved bride to revolutionary leader—exposes the tension between emancipatory ideals and the replication of patriarchal power structures. Her eventual descent into tyranny (Mad Queen) critiques the corrupting nature of authority, urging modern women to redefine power beyond masculinist paradigms [4].

5.4 Implications for contemporary feminism

Elevating female status requires disrupting traditional pragmatics, such as reconfiguring modal systems to challenge gendered power encodings. Cross-cultural adaptations must avoid over-domesticating female characters, preserving their subversive linguistic traits to provoke critical reflection in target cultures. Embracing the contradictions and evolution of female roles—akin to the principle of dynamic equivalence in translation—rejects essentialist gender categorizations [4].

6 Conclusion

The study reveals that Daenerys' journey mirrors contemporary women's struggles: achieving agency while navigating systemic constraints. Translation studies expose how half a century of gendered lexical biases—such as stigmatizing terms like 疯女王 ("Mad Queen")—perpetuate patriarchal narratives. For true progress, women must transcend rigid definitions of power, neither replicating masculinist hegemony nor conforming to antiquated archetypes. Crucially, feminist advancement demands both sociopolitical advocacy and linguistic reclamation: resisting objectification in translated texts, embracing fluid identities, and combating stigmatizing translations. Only when literary representations redefine womanhood at a semiotic level can cultural imaginaries shift, catalyzing tangible improvements in real-world gender equity.

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