

# The Author–Translator Collaboration in the Translation of Religious Culture-Loaded Word *Jinjin Fengqing*, *WufuTaishang Laojun* and Ecological Culture-Loaded Word *Huangmao Shu* in Xuemo’s *White Tiger Pass*

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## Abstract

This study examines a collaborative translation involving Chinese author Xuemo(XM) and translators Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin (G&L) of culture-loaded words (CLWs) in XM’s work *White Tiger Pass*(WTP). Goldblatt highlights the challenge of conveying Gansu Province’s cultural context in English. The collaboration addresses the challenges faced by G&L. Initial email exchanges in *The Dialects Puzzle of Xuemo’s Books* offer insights into the translation process. The religious culture-loaded word (RCLW) *Jinjin Fengqing*, *WufuTaishang Laojun*, and the ecological culture-loaded word (ECLW) *Huangmao Shu* are studied in details. Author–translator collaboration is analyzed using Nida’s categories of culture-loaded words, informed by discussions between XM and G&L, interactions with liaison Miss Anuo, references to *Don Quixote in North America*, and interviews conducted by the present researchers with XM and Anuo, who coordinated collaboration between XM and G&L. Furthermore, Lefevre’s rewriting theory is applied to examine the influence of poetics, patronage, and ideology on translation strategies. Those discussions and dialogues as paratexts provide firsthand insight into the translation process. The findings indicate that G&L utilized domestication, normalization, and explicitation in the RCLW translation, whereas literal and textual correction are applied in the ECLW translation. The ideology and poetics act as the principal determinants in translating the RCLW while the patronage the decisive factor in that of the ECLW, in line with Lefevre’s rewriting theory. Collaboration between author and translators, as well as Sino–foreign partnerships, constitutes an effective translation model.

**Keywords:** author–translator collaboration, Xuemo, Howard Goldblatt, Sylvia Li-chun Lin, culture-loaded words, rewriting

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, translation studies are no longer limited to static comparisons between source and target texts, but focus more on the dynamic translation process. In the process of literary translation, especially when translators translate contemporary literary works, there are many practical interactions between translators and authors (Xu & Xuduo, 2018).

The American sinologist Goldblatt is recognised as a preeminent translator of contemporary Chinese literature. Hu (2010) highlights that Goldblatt exemplifies a quintessential representative adept at engaging with global publishing entities, news media outlets and academic research communities. Goldblatt is esteemed as an exemplary translator paradigm for facilitating the international recognition of Chinese literature. The examination of Goldblatt’s process would significantly benefit our efforts to enhance the capacity for translation.

Xuemo’s (XM) collaboration with Goldblatt began during his American visit in 2015. Goldblatt selectively translates works he appreciates, having translated over 10 of XM’s works with his wife, Lin, over a decade, typically taking a year for each book. In the course of translating *Desert Trilogy*, G&L corresponded extensively with XM, often through email and telephonic communication. Two volumes, *The Dialects Puzzle of Xuemo’s Books I and II (TDPOXB)*, document their communication and serve as a paratext for a detailed exploration of the translation dynamics between the couple and the collaboration between author and translators.

Qin and Liu (2012) pointed out that Goldblatt is recognised as both a widely read and frequently misread sinologist literary translator. Further investigations are required to analyse Goldblatt’s translation process for enhanced comprehension. However, there are still relatively few people studying G&L’s co-translation strategies, especially in the translation of CLWs in XM’s *Desert Trilogy*.

Several scholars conducted research about Goldblatt’s exact strategy from a different perspective, neglecting the author–translator collaborative translation with the help of paratexts. To fill the gap, the author–translator collaborative translation would be studied with the help of the paratext *TDPOXB* to investigate the translation strategy the translators employed as well as materials from the negotiation

and interaction process between XM and G&L during translation plan discussions, detailed records of which appear in the book *Don Quixote in North America*. The researchers' correspondence with Miss Anuo (a volunteer tasked with coordinating G&L's translation efforts and serving as the editor for *TDPOXB I* and *II*) as a paratext would facilitate the study.

During an interview, XM said G&L wife have been engaged in the meticulous translation of his literary contributions for eight to nine years, and in light of Goldblatt's advanced age (exceeding 80 years), he has ceased to accept translations of works by other authors (Yang & Xue, 2023). The collaborative efforts between XM and translators concerning the CLWs within *Desert Trilogy* merit scholarly examination.

Moreover, an additional aspect is overlooked in these inquiries into translations. This involves examining how poetics, patronage and ideology shape the selection of translation strategies. The existing gap is intended to be addressed. In addition, interviews conducted by the present researchers (with XM on 1 October 2025 and Anuo on 7 October 2025) offer firsthand insight into how collaboration shapes translation decisions.

In this study, the gap will be reconciled through the dissemination of proposed insights regarding strategies for the translation of two representative CLWs in WTP, examined through the lenses of ideology, poetics and patronage within the framework of rewriting theory. Moreover, paratextual elements would be utilized to investigate the complex dynamics inherent in the translation process.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Background on the Author Xuemo and Translation Studies

#### 2.1.1 Introduction of Xuemo and His *Desert Trilogy*

Xuemo (1963–), the pen name of Chen Kaihong, hails from Liangzhou, Gansu province, Western China. Born in China's far west, he plumbs the earth with his footsteps and lives through his pen (Anuo et al., 2023). Collectively titled 《大漠三部曲》 (*Da Mo San Bu Qu*) (*Desert Trilogy*), which includes 《大漠祭》 (*Da Mo Ji*) (*Desert Rites*), 《猎原》 (*Lie Yuan*) (*Desert Hunters*) and 《白虎关》 (*Bai Hu Guan*) (*White Tiger Pass*), they were begun when he was 25 and completed at 46; he had given 20 of his best years to China's peasants through the three volumes.

The research meticulously identified *Desert Rites* and *Desert Hunters*, both disseminated in 2018 by the Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, while simultaneously designating *White Tiger Pass*, published in 2021 by the Zhonghua International Media Publishing Group, XM's own publishing company, as the target texts. The original source material *Da Mo Ji* (*Desert Rites*), *Lie Yuan* (*Desert Hunters*) and *Bai Hu Guan* (*White Tiger Pass*) were carefully extracted from the compilation of the three volumes released by the Encyclopedia of China Publishing House in 2017. *Desert Trilogy* delineates the life trajectories of Lao Shun and his familial unit over several decades within a remote village situated in the Hexi Corridor of Northwest China (Ma, 2014). The trilogy elucidates quotidian rural experiences encompassing agriculture, nuptials, health crises, migration and interpersonal disputes amid conditions characterised by ecological adversity and economic destitution. Through these interwoven narratives, the trilogy unveils the formidable survival challenges encountered by peasant families, imbued with emotional intensity and stylistic vigor. It further underscores emotional fortitude in the face of poverty, intensifying conflicts between humanity and nature, as well as the disruptive ramifications of financial considerations and modernisation on rural women's lives. With its tragic narrative style distinguished by unrefined and compelling language, the trilogy reveals systemic issues including ecological degradation, cultural stagnation and gender disparity. Consequently, XM's rural oeuvre transcends localised storytelling, providing a more comprehensive contemplation on human resilience, dignity and ethical decision-making in an evolving rural China (Guo, 2010).

During his visit to the United States in 2015, XM partook in critical dialogues with G&L regarding the introduction of his *Desert Trilogy* to a broader audience. XM undertook the arduous yet idealistic endeavour of extending the influence of his literary contributions to an international readership. G&L co-translated the published English translations of the three books – *Desert Rites*, *Desert Hunters*, and *White Tiger Pass*.

#### 2.1.2 Related Studies on Xuemo's English Version of *White Tiger Pass*

There are six PhD theses concerning Goldblatt's research on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). They include Sun Yu's examination of Moyan's novels through a cultural lens (2017), Shan's identity-based analysis of Goldblatt's translation philosophy (2017), Jia's exploration of Goldblatt's translation habitus via Bourdieusian sociology (2013), Lv's assessment of Goldblatt's contributions to modern Chinese novel translation (2010) and Wang L.'s analysis of fidelity and treason in Goldblatt's literary translations (2012).

Approximately 117 master's theses are available on CNKI, including Li's discussion on Goldblatt's translating dialect idioms in *Frog* of Moyan using Leech's foregrounding theory (2021), Ping's exploration of Goldblatt's folk language translation strategies (2020) and Jinjin's cognitive perspective analysis of metaphor translation in *Jiuguo* (2020). Numerous scholars examine Goldblatt and his translation techniques.

*White Tiger Pass* is the English translation of *Bai Hu Guan* and represents the first complete English rendition in the West. Wang Y. (2024) examines the translation of Chinese folk language into English, positing that such variations are vital for cross-cultural literary exchange, crucial for making Chinese literature accessible globally, though some cultural nuances may be lost. Nevertheless, the lack of comprehensive paratext limits the analysis of CLW translation.

XM articulates that the esteemed literary critic Chen Sihe posited that Goldblatt's affinity for his oeuvre derives from XM's alignment with the 'spirit of Xiao Hong', a literary figure whom Goldblatt held in high regard, especially noting XM's forthright engagement with the complexities of existence and the vibrancy of his character portrayals (Yang & Xue, 2023).

Except for the above literature, there are few other studies about the translation of *White Tiger Pass*.

## 2.2 Rewriting

Lefevere (1992) describes translation as the rewriting of the original text. However, in the process of translation, three factors constrain and influence the rewriting: (a) patronage (any kind of influential force); (b) ideology (a certain way of looking at the world and imposed by a translator's ideology or patronage); and (c) poetics (imposed by the role of translated works, literary devices and critical methods). These factors interact with each other in the process of translation and under their influence, translators try to translate original texts to comply with the target culture and readers.

Zhao (2017) undertook a thorough investigation of Lefevere's translation concept in his doctoral dissertation, highlighting the evolution of his ideas and the dynamic character of translation studies. Nonetheless, there remains a dearth of scholarly investigations concerning the English rendition of XM's *Desert Trilogy* through the lens of rewriting.

Scholars of Chinese–English literary translation often utilise Lefevere's (1992) concept of translation as rewriting, focusing on poetics, patronage and ideology. Recent scholarship on Fang Fang's *Wuhan Diary* emphasises multi-agent negotiation and digital mediation. Yu, Zheng and Shao (2023) reveal the author's influence on the English title and blurb, the translator's use of omission for protection and the significant impact of critical Chinese readers through social media on final paratexts. Qi (2023) similarly regards source-text readers as censors, tracing the influence of online controversies on paratextual revisions, highlighting the evolving nature of paratexts in the digital era.

Poetics, ideology and patronage interact both independently and collectively. Research on Goldblatt and Ken Liu illustrates translators aligning with dominant Anglophone literary standards emphasising fluency, narrative efficiency and authenticity (Chen, 2020; Liu, 2021b). Goldblatt's alteration of Mo Yan's complex style (Liu, 2021b) and his balanced domestication–foreignisation in translating CLWs demonstrate how both systemic and individual poetics influence translation choices. Lee's (2015) depiction of 'China as dystopia' and Zhu's (2023) assertion regarding the excision of politically charged Cultural Revolution content from *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* at the behest of publishers highlight ideological elements. Sun's (2022) observation that sociopolitical terms are often translated semantically reflects an ideologically cautious approach, maintaining political specificity while deferring interpretation to readers. In *Wuhan Diary*, ideological issues are even more pronounced: Yu et al. (2023) and Qi (2023) indicate that concerns over reputation and political repercussions in China motivate omissions and paratextual changes.

Patronage's influence transcends traditional publishing frameworks. In the Mo Yan–Goldblatt case, Western publishers and editors play a crucial role as patrons, capable of enforcing significant edits and influencing paratextual elements (Liu, 2021a; Zhu, 2023). Chen (2020) redirects focus to translator-centric patronage, demonstrating that Ken Liu's pre-submission translation methods curtailed institutional power. Research on *Wuhan Diary* further broadens the concept of patronage to include digitally empowered readers, whose online critiques serve as a censorial mechanism affecting both authors and translators (Qi, 2023; Yu et al., 2023). In these instances, poetics, ideology and patronage converge: the poetics of fluency and genre, ideological perceptions of 'China' and the influence of publishers, translators, authors and readers collectively inform both macro and micro approaches to culture-specific material.

Current scholarship suggests that intricate patronage networks and target-system poetics shape Chinese–English literary translation (Chen, 2020; Lee, 2015; Liu, 2021a, 2021b; Yu et al., 2023; Zhu, 2023), while CLW strategies can be methodically articulated (Li, 2022; Sun, 2022). However, it overlooks (a) instances where the author serves as a structural patron; (b) the integration of CLW analysis with Lefevere's framework of poetics, patronage and ideology; and (c) the examination of documented translator–author interactions (e.g. Q&A, correspondence) as well as interviews to the author and the liaison people among author and translators as paratexts to elucidate specific CLWs.

The research thus consolidates these elements by positioning the translation of CLWs within an author-as-patron paradigm and employing translator–author communications and interview as paratexts to analyse the negotiation of poetics, patronage and ideology in XM's *White Tiger Pass* translation.

## 2.3 Collaborative Translation

### 2.3.1 The Collaborative Translation between the Translators

The evolution of Chinese translation reflects a tradition of collaborative efforts. Throughout its history, from Buddhist translations to scientific endeavours in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, collaborative translation has been pivotal. Each historical period has exhibited distinct collaborative strategies that varying cultural contexts and translator expertise have influenced. As we anticipate the growth of translation in the contemporary era, collaborative translation remains essential due to its inherent advantages (Liu, 2012). Ma (1998) concluded that the collaboration has a notable historical significance in China.

Scholars have long recognised the potential of the collaboration model. Liu (2012) posited that native speakers proficient in Chinese language and culture best perform Chinese-to-foreign translation. However, training a sufficient number of qualified translators for this

task is not feasible in a short time frame. Given the frequent inadequacies of existing translations of Chinese masterpieces and the urgency of Chinese-to-foreign translation, the co-translation approach deserves consideration to leverage the strengths of foreign translators' native expressions alongside Chinese translators' cultural insights, thereby reducing cultural misinterpretations. However, even currently, most people are only familiar with Goldblatt, overlooking his wife Lin, who co-translated *Desert Trilogy* with him. Relatively few people have studied their co-translation strategies in the translation of CLWs in *Desert Trilogy*.

Li (2012) also mentioned that in recent years, regarding the topic of Chinese literature translation abroad, Goldblatt has always been a research hotspot, while his wife Lin has always been marginalised. However, Lin actually plays an important role in Goldblatt's translation career. Their cooperation is almost ubiquitous – Goldblatt once revealed that even for works bearing only his signature, he would ask Lin to review them before submitting to editors. For two decades, G&L have collaborated on translations, although Goldblatt initially worked solo (as cited in Xuemo, 2019).

Ji Jin (2018) highlighted that G&L's distinctive collaborative approach has successfully brought many Chinese literary works to the world stage, making Chinese literature known to foreign readers and gaining a wide readership. This has methodological guidance significance for China's literary translation abroad and collaborative translation models.

Chang (2021) examined the four phases of Chinese-foreign cooperative translation in China. He highlighted that the Fourth Stage (post-1949) emphasises Chinese local culture's translation and promotion. In literary translation, notable collaborations have emerged, particularly among husband-and-wife teams. Prominent examples include Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, Anna Gustafsson Chen and Wan Zhi, and Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Lichun Lin, who have translated various contemporary works.

Collaborative translation is a good way to explore. Xin, Zhang and Lu (2014) propose that models of transnational collaboration, which the partnerships of Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang exemplify, as well as G&L, have demonstrated notable efficacy in the translation of Chinese literary works.

Zhang (2018) concludes that current research on Goldblatt overlooks the issue of collaborative translation, treating co-translations as reflecting his individual translation style. Feng (2017) believes most scholars adopt a static observational approach with few diachronic dynamic investigations.

According to Goldblatt (2015), the translation of Zhu Tianwen's *Notes of a Desolate Man* (1999) represents his inaugural collaboration with his wife Lin. In an interview, Goldblatt expresses a clear view on his collaboration with Lin. He deems their arrangement as the optimal translation partnership: 'I understand Chinese, and Lin understands English; my native language is English, and her native language is Chinese. It's better when two people can use both languages' (Yan & Goldblatt, 2014, p. 201). He acknowledges that collaboration may cause disagreements, unlike individual translations. However, he points out that their familial bond strengthens their teamwork and offers advantages. He believes this collaborative translation approach will develop over time.

The Goldblatt couple's co-translation model is worthy of study. In a 2015 discussion with XM, G&L (as cited in Xuemo, 2019) described their collaborative translation process. Lin, a native Chinese speaker with English proficiency, composes the initial draft. Goldblatt refines it while comparing it to the original Chinese. They acknowledge their differing perspectives during this process. Goldblatt then returns the revised translation to Lin for further review and enhancement. They may collaboratively create a third draft, with Goldblatt reading in English and Lin referencing the Chinese, engaging in discussions for clarity. In the fourth draft, Goldblatt evaluates the translation solely from an English reader's perspective, without consulting the original text for neutrality. If possible, Goldblatt permits the manuscript to rest prior to the fifth draft for additional revisions.

This collaborative approach, while enhancing quality, extends the timeline; a substantial book that Goldblatt could translate in seven to eight months requires at least a year through their joint efforts. Lin articulates that both must be content with the final product. XM (2019) regards this as 'the most perfect translation method'.

Hong (2021) examined the couple's collaborative translation. She synthesised their translation model into a table and determined that they would create seven drafts to improve the target text.

From this, everyone can understand why we say one person does not complete a translation; it is a multi-party cooperation, including authors, translators, literary agents, editors, readers and the internet – both active and passive participants (Goldblatt et al., 2019). Hong (2019) posits that Chinese translators ought to engage in collaborative practices with foreign translators or sinologists, establishing a model where foreign experts take precedence and Chinese translators assume a supportive role; this perspective aligns with the co-translation model that G&L exemplify. Notwithstanding this, research concerning G&L's co-translation within XM's oeuvre remains infrequent.

### 2.3.2 The Author-Translator Collaboration

XM possesses remarkable insights and the bravery to effect change. He traveled to the United States to engage directly with G&L, seeking their assistance in translating his works. Their in-depth conversation, titled 'Leave the Best Translation Version – Discussing Translation Plans with Translators Howard Goldblatt and Lin', appears in the book *Don Quixote in North America*, published by the Encyclopedic of China Publishing House in 2019. The translators indicated that they would pose questions if necessary, to which XM responded that he would provide answers.

The exchange between XM and Goldblatt highlights a deep mutual respect and a common philosophy regarding collaborative translation. Their dialogue highlights the importance of consensus and thorough explanation in cultivating a meaningful author–translator relationship. Goldblatt (as cited in Xuemo, 2019) views translation as a multifaceted endeavour that begins with a reader’s understanding, followed by careful analysis centred on linguistic expression and reception by English-speaking audiences. Goldblatt emphasises the importance of effective communication with the author, often drafting numerous questions because Chinese authors generally readily offer annotations. He points out that while careless translation can occur, Chinese authors prioritise detailed dialogue to represent the unique qualities of the work authentically, ensuring clarity on any issues related to the translator’s comprehension of Chinese.

XM (2019) expresses profound admiration for Goldblatt’s meticulous and probing methodology, recognizing him as a ‘true translator’. He enhances this collaborative process by preparing his manuscripts ahead of time and annotating dialectical elements with Heima software to minimise potential reading difficulties for the translator. XM further argues that translation is a form of ‘re-creation’ and ‘better creation’, aligning with Goldblatt’s commitment to precise expression and nuance, thereby reflecting a shared aim of enriching the original work (Xuemo, 2019).

Their conversation exemplifies a shared understanding that successful literary translation goes beyond simple linguistic exchange, embodying a deep collaborative recreation that necessitates extensive dialogue and effort to achieve accuracy, subtlety, and artistic integrity.

#### 2.4 Culture and Culture-Loaded Words

According to Etymonline (n.d.), the term ‘culture’, derived from the Latin *cultura*, originally referred to agriculture in the mid-15th century and later expanded to include the cultivation of various facets of growth, such as intellectual development. By the early 16th century, ‘culture’ began to represent the systematic enhancement of the mind, linking it with education and intellectual refinement. In the 19th century, the term evolved further to embody a community’s customs and traditions, reflecting collective history and beliefs.

According to Baker (2004), ‘...the source language word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture, the concept in question maybe abstract or concrete; it may relate to a religious belief, a social custom, or even a type of food. Such concepts are often referred to as “culture-specific”’ (p. 21).

Baker referred to the culture-specific, and different linguists or scholars give the words related to it different names, such as ‘culture-bound terms’, ‘culture color words’, ‘culturally special words’, ‘culture-limited specific terms’ and ‘culture-loaded words’.

Each language has its specific vocabulary, idioms, allusions, ideas and things that we call ‘culture-loaded words’ (Bao, 2007). Bai (2009) indicates that dialect can reflect the differences between local cultures and belongs to the category of CLWs. Its formation and use are inseparable from the local people’s special cultural mentality, customs, religious beliefs and ways of life and production.

Nida (1945), who integrated the domains of culture with language and translation, posits five distinct components of culture: ecological culture, material culture, social culture, linguistic culture and religious culture. In this context, words that encapsulate these five cultural connotations may be designated as CLWs. Consequently, Nida categorised these CLWs into five classifications: ecological culture-loaded words

(ECLW), material culture-loaded words, social culture-loaded words, religious culture-loaded words (RCLW)

and linguistic culture-loaded words. Based on Nida’s classification, *Jinjin Fengqing, Wufu Taishang Laojun* (今今风清, 五付太上老君) as a word imbued with religious cultural significance is a RCLW as it pertains to Taoist deities and their associated ritualistic practices. Conversely, *Huangmao Shu* (黄毛鼠) is categorised as the ECLW. It is a word rich in ecological cultural connotation because it signifies a species endemic to the region and encapsulates ecological understanding. These instances underscore the imperative of cultural specificity that translators must duly acknowledge to ensure precise interpretation.

Based on his classification, the RCLW *Jinjin Fengqing, Wufu Taishang Laojun* (今今风清, 五付太上老君) and the ECLW *Huangmao Shu* (黄毛鼠) would be discussed. Xu (2016) highlights that the study of Goldblatt’s translations should extend beyond merely valuing his translated works, and instead should explore the translation process while extracting insights from his revisions and enhancements of the translated text. Those two CLWs were chosen due to their prominence among approximately 500 complex CLWs that the author and translators examined in Xuemo’s WTP; they serve as particularly salient and representative instances of translators’ strategies as well as exemplifying the collaborative efforts undertaken to enhance the translation of these CLWs to further understand the Goldblatt’s translation process.

Yi, Ng, and Abdul Halim (2025) assert that culture-specific items significantly influence characterisation, with translators’ strategies impacting reader perceptions. This understanding is pertinent to examining CLWs in *Desert Trilogy*, where cultural nuances affect strategies that the translators employ.

#### 2.5 Paratext

##### 2.5.1 Paratexts in this Study

According to Genette (1997), text comprises elements such as titles, prefaces and components within text gaps such as chapter headings or notes. This primary spatial classification is termed ‘peritext’. Detached components include external communications such as media interactions or private exchanges such as letters and diaries. This secondary classification is referred to as ‘epitext’. It is critical to

recognise that peritext and epitext collectively inhabit the paratext's spatial domain. Thus, for those favouring formulas, paratext can be expressed as peritext + epitext.

One of the paratexts in this study consists of three books: *Don Quixote in North America* and *The Dialects Puzzle of Xuemo's Books I and II*.

In 2015, XM undertook a journey to Canada and the United States, where he visited many individuals, including G&L. He meticulously documented the dialogues with them in a volume entitled *Don Quixote in North America*, published by the China Encyclopedia Publishing House in April 2019, approximately four years after his visits to these locations.

Ruxue International Media, Inc. formally disseminated *The Dialects Puzzle of Xuemo's Books I and II* in the United States in 2023, functioning as an invaluable repository of the complex interactions between the translator and the original author. These volumes represent the initial compilation of correspondence in the form of question-and-answer exchanges conducted through email between the author XM and the translators G&L. Their primary challenge has been to understand western China's unique dialects and customs. XM has aided the translators by using clear language and examples to address various challenges during the translation process. The translators also use those two books as the paratext to help analyse the translation of CLWs in *Desert Trilogy*.

The other paratext is the researchers' correspondence with Miss Anuo (a volunteer tasked with coordinating the translation efforts of the Goldblatt couple and serving as the editor for *TDPOXB I and II*), which were also incorporated as a paratext to facilitate the study. Anuo's account serves as a key methodological resource for this research. Acting as the intermediary between author XM and translators G&L, Anuo documented XM's verbal responses to the translators' cultural inquiries in written format. This mediation was crucial for facilitating effective collaboration due to XM's limited availability and reliance on oral communication. Furthermore, Anuo edits *TDPOXB*, which records the questions posed by translators and XM's responses during the translation of the *Desert Trilogy*. Thus, her account offers primary evidence of the negotiation, communication, and decision-making processes that inform the examined translations. Under Lefevere's rewriting framework, Anuo's contribution elucidates how collaborative dynamics, patronage systems, and practical limitations influence translation strategies beyond mere translator-author interactions.

In addition, interviews conducted by the present researchers (with XM on 1 October 2025 and Anuo on 7 October 2025) offer firsthand insight into how collaboration shapes translation decisions.

#### 2.5.2 Goldblatt's Translation from the Perspective of Paratext

Scholars have studied Goldblatt's translation from the perspective of paratext. Huang and Fan (2016) undertook a comprehensive examination of the translational strategies employed in the adaptation of the musical elements and chants within Goldblatt's English rendition of *Red Sorghum Clan*, focusing specifically on the paratextual dimensions. Jiao (2023) examined *Ruined City's* English translation's paratexts and highlighted the influence of social factors beyond the primary text. The paper posits that future dissemination of Chinese literature should align with broader cultural exchange goals and capitalise on agent roles. Further investigation is suggested to explore the competition dynamics of capital among agents within the translation field.

With a case study based on paratext, Yang (2024) points out that Goldblatt's paratexts during his translation of Xiao Hong's works illustrate his multifaceted translator identity. These identities encompass his roles as a skilled translator, meticulous researcher, distinctive literary critic and innovative writer. This study contributes valuable knowledge to translator identity research and presents novel insights into Goldblatt's identity interpretation.

However, it is hard to access the paratext of translation, especially the communication between author and translator because sometimes the author has passed away or, even if the author is alive, they would feel it is unnecessary or bothersome to record the questions and answers among the author and translators. Luckily, *TDPOXB I and II* document the dialogues between XM and the translators. *Don Quixote in North America* records the discussions regarding the translation plan of *Desert Trilogy*. The researchers engaged with liaison Miss Anuo to examine G&L's collaborative translation efforts.

XM provides free lectures on the *pingduoduo* or 'buy together' platform from 5:00 to 5:30 every morning, analysing his own literary works such as *White Tiger Pass* to help readers better understand the background knowledge and deeper meanings behind the texts. He also has a dedicated volunteer team, which includes Miss Anuo who, in addition to managing various tasks, oversees translation responsibilities and comprehends the communicative dynamics between XM on diverse subjects. XM a live streaming session on *Pinduoduo* (in 2022, the author documented the interrogation process on video, and with Miss Anuo's consent, transcribed the video into written format).

All of the above materials serve as valuable paratexts for analysis. Nevertheless, research on XM's translation works utilising paratexts remains scarce.

### 3. Methodology

*White Tiger Pass*, published in 2021 by the Zhonghua International Media Publishing Group, are selected as the target text. The original source text *Bai Hu Guan* was carefully extracted from the compilation of the three volumes released by the Encyclopedia of China Publishing House in 2017. Goldblatt finds the biggest challenge is how to express the special cultural context of Gansu in English without losing its original taste. The translation of CLWs presents significant challenges. Despite multiple drafts that G&L co-translated,

comprehension remains elusive. Consequently, they consult author XM for deeper insights into the CLWs. Their collaboration with the author is integral to the study. Two representative CLWs, the RCLW (今今风清, 五付太上老君) and the ECLW (黄毛鼠) are chosen for detailed analysis in this research.

The study analyses the author–translator collaboration by focusing on the translation of CLWs in *White Tiger Pass*, drawing on discussions between XM and G&L published in *Don Quixote in North America*, along with our interactions with liaison Miss Anuo as well as XM and G&L’s questions and answers recorded in *TDPOXB I and II*. In addition, our interviews with XM on 1 October 2025 and Anuo on 7 October 2025 offer firsthand insight into how collaboration shapes translation decisions. Additionally, Lefevere’s rewriting theory serves as a framework to explore how poetics, patronage and ideology influence translation strategies.

As a qualitative research endeavour, we utilised a descriptive translation studies approach alongside a comparative studies framework. The goal of the comparative analysis is to identify particular translation strategies. We subsequently organised the descriptive analysis in accordance with Lefevere’s rewriting theory (1992), which we applied to the paired texts. We investigate the translation strategies of CLWs based on Nida’s classification, alongside how the elements of poetics, patronage and ideology –factors in rewriting theory – affect the translation strategies of these CLWs in WTP. Utilizing paratext, we intend to explore the collaboration between the author and translator as well as the various strategies they employed based on two examples that represent the numerous CLWs the translators selected to discuss with the author due to their inherent complexity and obscurity.

**4. Results and Discussion**

*4.1 Collaborative Translation of the Religious Culture-Loaded Word ‘今今风清, 五付太上老君’*

Following Lefevere’s (1992) proposition that the interaction of ideology, patronage and poetics governs translation, this study incorporates paratexts such as unpublished interview data to further elucidate the translation strategy adopted for the collaborative translation of the RCLW 今今风清, 五付太上老君 (Jinjin Fengqing, Wufu Taishang Laojun), and how the factors shape the selection of translation strategies.

Table 1 serves to enhance comprehension.

Table 1. Translation of RCLW 今今风清, 五付太上老君

ST	今今风清, 五付太上老君。 (《白虎关》 第二十二章 第一节) (Jīn jīn fēng qīng, wǔ fù tàishàng lǎojūn) Today is clear and bright, and I receive Taishang Laojun’s orders to command you.
TT	Today the sky is clear, and the Grand Supreme Elderly Lord sent me here with his orders. ( <i>White Tiger Pass</i> , Chapter 22, section 1, p. 451)
Question of G&L and Answer of XM	Q: G&L: 今今风清, 五付太上老君? (Jīn jīn fēng qīng, wǔ fù tàishàng lǎojūn?) A: XM: 这是一句咒语。“今今风清”是今天天朗气清, 没有干扰。“五付太上老君”, 是口误, 应该是“吾奉太上老君”, 意思是我奉太上老君的命令, 来向你下命令。按说可以改成正确的, 但我还是原汁原味地保留了看到的原貌和听到的原声, 因为这就是历史, 就是文化。不过, 只有看了解释才能理解其真正含义。 (Zhè shì yī zhǒng zhòuyǔ. ‘Jīn jīn fēng qīng’ shì jīntiān tiān lǎng qì qīng, méiyǒu gānrǎo. ‘Wǔ fù tàishàng lǎojūn’, shì kǒuwù, yīnggāi shì ‘wú fèng tàishàng lǎojūn’, yìsì shì wǒ bǐng tàishàng lǎojūn de mìnglìng, lái xiàng nǐ xià mìnglìng. Àn shuō kěyǐ gǎi chéng zhèngquè de, dàn wǒ háishì yuánzhī yuánwèi de bǎoliú le kàn dè de yuánmào hé tīng dào de yuánshēng, yīnwèi zhè jiù shì lìshǐ, jiù shì wénhuà. Bùguò, zhǐyǒu kàn le jiěshì cái néng lǐjiě qí zhēnzhèng hányì.) Q: G&L: What does it mean? A: XM: This phrase represents a form of incantation. ‘今今风清 (Jin jin feng qing)’ signifies that today is bright and clear with fresh air, free from any disturbances. ‘五付太上老君 (Wu fu Taishang Laojun)’ is a mispronunciation – the correct phrase is ‘吾奉太上老君 (wu feng Taishang Laojun)’, which translates to ‘I am receiving the orders of Taishang Laojun to command you’. While I could not logically amend it, I opted to retain the original form I encountered and the authentic sound I perceived because this embodies history and culture. Nevertheless, one can only grasp its true essence through careful reading of the explanation. ( <i>The Dialects Puzzle of Xuemo’s Books II</i> , p. 241)
Category of CLW	RCLW
Strategies	Domestication; Normalisation; Explication
Influencing factors	Ideology; Patronage; Poetics

The expression ‘今今风清, 五付太上老君 (Jīn jīn fēng qīng, wǔ fù tàishàng lǎojūn)’ signifies a particular genre of incantation, categorised under the RCLW based on Nida’s classification.

When the translators asked the author about it, he clearly told them, ‘This phrase represents a form of incantation.’ As XM elucidated in

the paratext, the verbal formulation constitutes a Taoist incantation aimed at invoking celestial authority. The citation of ‘太上老君 (Taishang Laojun)’, an eminent deity within the Taoist pantheon, firmly anchors the expression within a specific religious belief system. Within Nida’s classification, expressions that are intricately woven into religious rituals, doctrinal tenets or manifestations of supernatural authority serve as quintessential instances of CLWs associated with religious discourse.

The paratext shows that XM clearly articulates that the phrase ‘五付太上老君 (wu fu Taishang Laojun)’ constitutes a verbal misstep; the correct expression is ‘吾奉太上老君 (wu feng Taishang Laojun)’. Xuemo opted to retain the precise spoken form due to its historical and cultural authenticity, notwithstanding the potential for rectification. This exemplifies his distinct inclination towards maintaining the local oral texture and facilitating comprehension for readers through elucidation.

However, the translation asserts that ‘Today the sky is clear, and the Grand Supreme Elderly Lord sent me here with his orders’. In contrast to the source’s informal ritualistic line containing a verbal slip, the translation first normalises the clause, devoid of any indication of a slip or regional pronunciation; the content is articulated as a standardised, formal statement. Second, it explicates the meaning, clarifying the entity who dispatches the speaker, the essence of the command, and presents the discourse as entirely coherent. Third, it smooths for target readers. The sentence is rendered as unproblematic high-register English rather than appearing as a fragment with potential regional speech indicators. Domestication seeks to render the text more natural and less alien for the target audience. The translation eliminates the atypical local texture and substitutes it with a conventional English register that is readily comprehensible without requiring footnotes or cognitive adjustments.

This decision prioritises clarity and fluency over the preservation of an idiosyncratic spoken form that – despite its significance – might divert or perplex readers unacquainted with the local context.

The author preserves the slip in the source; the translators render its meaning in clean, conventional English. The strategy is therefore domestication, normalisation, and explicitation, designed for smooth reader comprehension.

The impact of rewriting factors: ideology, patronage and poetics on translation strategy would be analysed below.

Dinçel (2012) argues that Lefevere’s rewriting framework stresses that ideological, patronage and poetic factors in the receiving culture translations shape translations; translations are not neutral but reflect these forces. From the perspective of ideology, an ideology dictates the expected characteristics of literature within a specific cultural context. When clarity, coherence and an authoritative voice are prioritised, a clear translation becomes essential. The source phrase embodies a ritual utterance containing an intentional slip. By converting the spoken expression into a rigorously formulated declaration, the translation embodies an ideological decision regarding the manner in which English-speaking audiences ought to perceive sacred or authoritative discourse. It deliberately circumvents any semblance of ambiguity or misapprehension, notwithstanding the fact that the paratext indicates the slip was purposeful in order to maintain fidelity to the original.

Interviews conducted by researchers with XM (October 1, 2025) and Anuo (October 7, 2025) provide firsthand insight into the factors of rewriting that shape the translation process.

Firstly, from the perspective of ideology, XM explicitly endorses a reader-oriented translation stance. He acknowledges that when translating for Anglophone readers, the translator may attenuate or omit certain obscure ritual practices or dialectal expressions if they impede comprehension. In his view, limited cultural loss is acceptable when the overarching goal is to enable readers in a different linguistic and cultural system to access the text’s narrative meaning (XM, personal communication, October 1, 2025). This position exemplifies Lefevere’s notion of ideology as a regulating force that determines which cultural elements the translation foregrounds or marginalises. Accordingly, the rendering of the RCLW reflects ideological mediation rather than strict semantic reproduction.

Secondly, patronage refers to the power structures – publishers, editors and academic or market pressures – that can shape what gets published and how. Zhang (2012) argues that Lefevere includes patronage alongside ideology and poetics as a key factor.

XM is not only a writer but also runs his own publishing company. In this study, his own publishing company, Zhonghua International Media Publishing Group, published WTP. Even though XM possesses patronage authority, the final produced text nevertheless excludes any indication of the slip. This implies that an alternative ideology was influencing the precise wording in the target text – one that prioritises clarity, formal authority and accessibility for the designated audience. According to Lefevere, ideology plays a pivotal role in manipulating literary rewritings for a specific societal context. Thus, the paratext distinctly articulated XM’s ideological stance (preserving oral texture, maintaining historical authenticity). The operative ideology of the translators or publishers (smooth, formal English; no indication of slip) manifested in the actual translation. As the translation exemplifies the latter ideology in practice, ideology remains the principal explanatory variable for the outcome – even in the presence of patronage on the source side. Patronage in isolation does not ensure that the source author realises their preferences in the final textual manifestation; ideology continues to dictate which preferences prevail when making decisions.

XM had the opportunity to advocate for the retention of the slip or to incorporate a discernible marker of it. His capacity to publish through his own establishment affords him operational control. However, the slip is absent in the published translation. Anuo confirms that the author even owns the publishing company; once the translators submit a finalised manuscript, publishers refrain from substantive revisions, limiting editorial involvement to typographical and punctuation checks (Anuo, personal communication, October 7, 2025). Such a patronage structure empowers translators to negotiate CLWs without excessive institutional constraint.

This indicates either that XM personally acquiesced to or even endorsed the normalised rendering despite his paratextual comments, or other ideological or poetic pressures – potentially from co-translators, advisors or anticipations regarding how the text ought to be perceived in English – superseded the inclination to retain the slip.

XM serves as a patron for his text, while the overarching patronage framework associated with the translated edition – similar to the anticipations of a global readership – likely promotes a text that is readily accessible, commercially viable and devoid of contentious or ambiguous elements.

Consequently, patronage serves to reinforce both ideological and poetic decisions. It does not inherently negate ideology, but rather offers practical motivation to embrace the ideologies and poetics that will appease the gatekeepers and the audience.

Finally, dominant poetics within the target literary framework also promote an articulate, comprehensible style. Even in instances where the source text employs a ritualistic formula that includes an element of deviation – an aspect possibly perceived as stylistically unique – the prevailing poetics of English literary prose tend to prioritise coherence and fluency over the retention of a spoken irregularity that could potentially hinder the narrative’s progression. Thus, the poetics operational in this context are those that correspond with conventional English literary standards: refined prose, standard syntax and a commanding tone. This observation aligns with domestication-oriented strategies frequently observed in literary translation, wherein the objective is to assimilate the text seamlessly into the target literary canon.

According to Anuo, G&L typically revise a translation multiple times – sometimes producing up to five complete drafts – treating translation as a process of literary recreation rather than mechanical transfer (Anuo, personal communication, October 7, 2025). This poetic orientation emphasises narrative coherence, stylistic fluency and affective resonance in the target language. Consequently, G&L do not simply explain or gloss CLWs such as Jinjin Fengqing, Wufu Taishang Laojun but strategically rewrite them to preserve their narrative function and ritual atmosphere for English-language readers.

Poetics underpins the ideological selection by proffering the stylistic justification: a refined, authoritative sentence aligns with the expectations of exemplary literary style within the target system. This renders the ideology practically actionable.

Taken together, these paratextual data substantiate Lefevere’s theoretical model by demonstrating that the dynamic interaction of ideological accommodation, trust-based patronage and literary poetics shapes the translation of CLWs. The case of Jinjin Fengqing, Wufu Taishang Laojun thus illustrates that ideology, patronage and poetics influenced translation strategy, with ideology and poetics the leading factor. The fact that XM is both author and publisher strengthens patronage as a factor, but ideology still explains why the slip vanished. The specific ideology that ultimately influenced the target text is the target–culture ideology favouring clarity, formal authority and readability – supported by dominant target–culture poetics.

Patronage is present and powerful, but ideology and poetics determine the actual linguistic outcome, especially when different ideological preferences clash.

4.2 Collaborative Translation of the Ecological Culture-Loaded Word ‘黄毛鼠’ and Textual Correction

Fu (2011) pointed out that Goldblatt confronts a notable challenge when faced with errors in the source text. He regards this issue as the most arduous facet of translation, surpassing even the decision of when to commence the translation process.

Goldblatt said (as cited in Fu, 2011), on the one hand, that if he preserves the error, he must apologise to the readers because the original work contains a mistake, and he did not correct it promptly. On the other hand, if he corrects the error, he must apologise to the author because a translator is not equivalent to an author. Some authors might even view a translator’s correction of errors as an act of tampering with their work. Goldblatt’s primary solution is to communicate with the author.

Goldblatt emphasises the importance of author communication when addressing errors. He states, ‘If the author and I have been old friends for a long time, I will try to communicate with them, to discuss whether to change it or not’ (as cited in Fu, 2011, pp. 2–3).

Textual correction occurred during the translation of ECLW ‘黄毛鼠’, which will be given to understand how the author–translator collaboration deals with text error with the help of the paratext. It is a very valuable one for further discussion.

Table 2. Translation of ECLW 黄毛鼠

ST	别淹了黄毛鼠。 （《白虎关》第一章 第三节） (bié yān le huángmáoshǔ.) don't drown the yellow-haired rats.
TT	don't drown any yellow rats. (White Tiger Pass, Chapter 1, section 3 on p. 14)
Question of G&L and Answer of XM	Q: G&L: 黄毛鼠, 指的是毛旦吧? 有什么特别的意思吗? (Huángmáoshǔ, zhīde shì máodàn ba? Yǒu shénme tebié de yìsi ma?) A: XM: 这里是指黄色的老鼠, 正确词语应该是“黄老鼠, 文档错误, 写成了“黄毛鼠。 (Zhèlǐ shì zhǐ huángsè de lǎoshǔ, zhèngquè cíyǔ yīnggāi shì ‘huáng lǎoshǔ’, wéndàng cuòwù,

	xièchénglè ‘huáng máo shǔ’.) Q: G&L: Does ‘黄毛鼠 (Huángmáoshǔ)’ refer to Maodan? Does it have any special meaning? A: XM: Here it refers to yellow-colored rats. The correct term should be ‘黄老鼠(huáng lǎoshǔ)’ – it’s a document error, written as ‘黄毛鼠(huáng lǎoshǔ)’ ( <i>The Dialects Puzzle of Xuemo’s Books II</i> , pp. 9–10)
Category of CLW	ECLW
Strategy	Literal translation; Textual correction
Influencing factors	Patronage; Ideology

According to Nida’s classification, the ‘黄老鼠(huáng lǎoshǔ)’ is an ECLW due to its reliance on specific natural conditions. Nida (2001) defines ecological culture as elements tied to climate, geography, flora and fauna that are culturally significant but lack equivalents in other cultures. In northwestern China, particularly arid regions such as Gansu, ‘黄老鼠’ denotes a rodent species linked to local ecology, agriculture and human–nature interactions. Its cultural relevance arises from its connection to a unique ecological system and rural experiences, which may be foreign to target-language audiences. The term represents a natural species influenced by regional ecology, aligning with Nida’s ecological category of CLWs, and presents translation challenges related to environmental and cultural non-equivalence, not merely lexical absence (Nida, 2001).

At first, they put it into ‘黄毛鼠 (huáng máoshǔ)’, but after the translators asked the author, he told them it was a textual error and should be ‘黄老鼠 (huáng lǎoshǔ)’. Ideologically, a reader-centric approach that values clarity in English contexts influences the translation. Goldblatt highlights the difficulty in conveying Chinese regional culture without overwhelming readers with complexity. The choice of ‘yellow rats’ prevents the inclusion of obscure ecological details that could disrupt the narrative. This decision aligns with Lefevere’s concept of the target culture’s dominant ideology, which favours clarity and readability over precise ethnographic representation. Patronage reinforces this strategy, as demonstrated by XM’s trust in the Goldblatt couple. XM addresses the lexical issue without demanding corrections or cultural elaboration. This authorial leniency, coupled with publisher support, allows translators to focus on functional adequacy rather than strict accuracy. Lefevere posits that such patronage systems permit adaptive translation choices without fear of repercussions. Finally, poetics significantly influences the translation. ‘黄老鼠’ rendered as ‘yellow rats’ maintains narrative economy and stylistic coherence. A more culturally specific translation could disrupt the narrative flow and aesthetic unity. G&L’s focus on literary recreation over strict fidelity accounts for their preference for a concise rendering that retains emotional resonance. Ultimately, the translation of ‘黄毛鼠’ as ‘yellow rats’ illustrates a strategy that ideology, patronage and poetics influence, showing how culturally rich ecological terms can be simplified in translation for literary circulation and reader engagement.

Based on XM’s explanation, G&L ultimately revised it to ‘yellow rats’, employing a literal translation strategy. The author, as a patron, influenced the translation strategy they used.

In addition, it is necessary to mention that the interaction between the author and the translators is productive, and they correct textual errors. This is a very special strategy in rewriting the ST. The ideology of improving the translation’s clarity and accuracy also influenced the textual correction translation strategy G&L employed.

The translators are also excellent readers and could correct the textual error if possible. Goldblatt perceives errors in source texts as a significant challenge, balancing the ethical considerations of preserving versus rectifying them through communication with authors.

Goldblatt provides an example where he discovered a song’s incorrectly ordered stanzas. After identifying the issue, Goldblatt reached out to the author to discuss potential corrections. The author consented to the change, describing his response as very generous. Despite this approval, Goldblatt remained uncertain about the author’s intentions regarding the lyrics. He contemplated whether the reversal was a deliberate choice with significance or an oversight. This ambiguity prompted him to make a follow-up call for clarification on the specific segment. This situation illustrates the complexities involved in error correction, even after initial discussions with the author (as cited in Fu, 2011, pp. 2–3).

Through textual correction strategy, translators elucidate the authentic significance of the ECLW to facilitate comprehension among target readers.

It is necessary to mention that Anuo highly praises G&L’s spirit. Anuo edited *The Dialects Puzzle of Xuemo’s Books I and II*. She remarked, ‘Some translators initially employ machine translation, subsequently refining their work based on that. However, the Goldblatt couple eschews this practice. They embody the utmost craftsman spirit. On one occasion, after the Goldblatt couple completed the translation of *Desert Hunters* and forwarded me the final draft, they reached out to me shortly thereafter, indicating that the draft was no longer valid due to their realization that they had erroneously translated 18 as 81. They would seek other discrepancies. Consequently, they devoted an additional half month to meticulously reviewing the entire manuscript...Even the sinologist Wolfgang Kubin asserts that Goldblatt’s translated texts possess a unique spirituality and luminosity’ (Anuo, personal communication, January 7, 2022).

**5. Conclusion**

This study has examined the collaborative translation of the RCLW ‘今风清，五付太上老君’ and the ECLW ‘黄毛鼠’ in WTP with the help of paratexts. Several findings occur during this study. The main finding is that through a comprehensive examination of

the author–translator partnership involved in WTP, utilizing paratexts, it becomes evident that Goldblatt exhibits a profound sense of accountability in his translation efforts and endeavours to collaborate effectively with both his spouse and the original author.

Besides, the strategies G&L employed are domestication, normalisation and explicitation in translating the RCLW and literal and textual correction in that of the ECLW. The ideology and poetics act as the principal determinants in translating the RCLW while the patronage the decisive factor in that of the ECLW, corroborated by Lefevere’s theory of rewriting.

In addition, the translators used textual correction strategy in rewriting the ECLW to enhance the target text’s quality. They frequently consult authors to improve understanding of the source text. This collaborative approach diminishes translation inaccuracies and fosters the translator’s bicultural competence for conveying cultural intricacies.

In the examination of the translation strategy pertaining to XM’s works, Goldblatt (as cited in Xuemo, 2019) articulated that there exists no dichotomy between what is traditionally termed literal or free translation, but rather a singular concept of ‘good translation’. It is imperative for translators to execute a proficient rendering of the novel.

To attain the aforementioned standard of ‘good translation’ as delineated, extensive efforts are required; beyond his individual contributions, Goldblatt must engage in collaboration with his spouse, Lin, producing no fewer than five drafts to enhance the quality, even if this collaborative process may progress at a tempo slower than that of his independent translation efforts. Furthermore, they must liaise with the author XM to facilitate communication and elucidate the profound implications of the CLW.

Finally, the collaborative efforts between the author and the translators significantly contributed to their enhanced comprehension of the local culture.

Collaborative translation poses a complex array of approaches for potential adopters. With the assistance of the paratexts, the translational endeavour encompassed a dynamic exchange between the translators and the author, in addition to revealing G&L’s collaborative efforts in the translation process. Subsequent inquiries may entail the establishment of a corpus comprising various literary texts, employing a systematic textual analysis alongside methodologies, such as interviews with translators, in order to furnish a more holistic understanding of translation practices within the literary domain.

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All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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