Paratexts in the English translation of contemporary science fiction — A case study of *Waste Tide*

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Abstract

In recent years, Chinese science fiction has gained international recognition through works like *The Three-Body Problem* and *Beijing Fold*, winning the prestigious Hugo Award. This increased influence highlights the need for research on sci-fi translation. However, current studies primarily focus on translation strategies in the works of Liu Cixin and Hao Jinfang, overlooking other sci-fi writers. This study aims to address this gap by examining the paratext of *Waste Tide*, written by Chen Qiufan, a prominent figure in the Chinese sci-fi community. Taking the paratext of Ken Liu's English translation of *Waste Tide* as the main research object, this paper will employ the concept of Genet's paratext, to explore the peritext (the cover, annotation and prefaces) and epitext (Ken Liu's interviews, recommendations from publishers and book reviews by critics and readers) in science fiction translation. Therefore, we can have a glimpse on how these paratexts help Chinese science gain popularity among the English-speaking readers and provide valuable insights for the future translation of a greater number of Chinese indigenous science fiction novels.

Paratexts in the English Translation of Contemporary Science Fiction—A Case Study of
Waste Tide

1.   Introduction

The consecutive international awards received by *Three Body Problem* and *Beijing Fold* highlight the growing recognition of Chinese science fiction on a global scale. This presents a unique opportunity for Chinese academia to engage with and advance the field of science translation studies, an integral component of cross-cultural communication. Translation serves as a lubricant in promoting the unique characteristics of Chinese fiction, and Ken Liu, the translator of the two award-winning books, has made significant contributions in introducing Chinese science fiction to the western world, where the genre originated. It is worth examining why Ken Liu's translations are more accessible to western readers. Notably, Ken Liu is also a prolific Chinese-American science fiction writer, with *The Paper Menagerie* being the first piece of fiction to win three genre literary awards: the Hugo, the Nebula, and the World Fantasy Award. From 2011 to 2020, his works have been nominated 18 times in all grand international science fiction awards, and won two times Locus Award for *The Grace of Kings* and *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories* respectively in 2016 and 2017, which are certain to identify his excellent talent in sci-fi writing.

Waste Tide, written by Chen Qiufan, is a highly acclaimed novel that has garnered recognition in the science fiction community. It was a finalist for the Best First Novel category at the 2018 Locus Awards and was also nominated for a Hugo Award in the Best Related Work category. The book was expertly translated by Ken Liu, marking their second collaboration. Chen Qiufan is a rising star in Chinese science fiction and has a unique background that influences his writing. He grew up near Guiyu, China, which is known for being the world's largest e-waste recycling centre. In *Waste Tide*, Chen candidly acknowledged in his afterword "The Non-existent Hometown" the significant influence he endured form the transformations in his hometown. He articulated, "My hometown has vanished permanently...and is replaced by pollution, congestion, materialism, and a pervasive sense of insecurity..." (Chen 2013, 259) Conversely, it is precisely due to the gradual "nonexistence" of his hometown, that has spurred him to have homecoming journey through his artistic endeavours. This proximity to such an environment has undoubtedly shaped his perspective and provided him with firsthand knowledge of the subject matter explored in *Waste Tide.* Despite his successful career in the tech industry, Chen never abandoned his passion for science fiction. He signed with Zuishi Culture, a prominent publishing company, to release short sci-fi articles and several serialized stories, including *Waste Tide*. Chen's short fiction works, such as *Balin* (2015), *Coming of the Light* (2015), *Waste Tide* (2013), and *G Symbolizes Diva* (2012), have won gold medals in the Nebula Awards for Science Fiction and Fantasy in Chinese. Additionally, *The Algorithms for Life* (2020), *Balin*

(2015), and *The Endless Farewell* (2011) have each received a Galaxy Award for Chinese Science Fiction.

Chen Qiufan's science fiction works have gained widespread acclaim for their exploration of various themes, including the environment, artificial intelligence, man-machine integration, and human behaviour in times of crisis. Drawing inspiration from his own experiences in Guiyu, a city in Guangdong known for its e-waste recycling industry. This industry, originating in the 1980s, has generated numerous affluent individuals, while also contributing to the area's status as one of the most environmentally polluted regions in Guangdong. In an interview with TMTPost in September, 2015, Chen Qiaofan expressed, "My decision to base my creative work on my hometown is linked to my contemplation of the realities of China. In portraying the challenges resulting from the development of China, I aspire to witness its gradual improvement." Chen wrote the novel *Waste Tide* to shed light on the electronic waste crisis, class warfare, and the complexities of human nature. The story is set in a near-future world on "Silicon Isle", an island heavily polluted by e-waste. Three local clans, named Chen, Lin, and Luo, dominate the e-waste processing business and engage in fierce rivalries. They profit from the exploitation of low-paid migrant workers, who hail from impoverished regions of China. These workers, lacking protective gear or proper training, laboriously sift through tons of e-waste daily, extracting valuable components and subjecting themselves to toxic chemicals and violence. The protagonist, Mimi, starts off as an innocent and carefree migrant girl. However, a chance encounter with a virus leads to her transformation into a powerful being with superhuman abilities, known as a giant tech. This transformation brings about a shift in her personality, setting her apart from others. As the story progresses, Mimi becomes entangled in the conflicts among the elite families of Silicon Isle. Initially, she is viewed as a disposable tool, used to cure a boy from the prestigious Chen clan. Subsequently, she endures abuse, rape, and mistreatment at Tide Gazing Beach. The tensions between the migrant workers and the elite families escalate to a breaking point when Mimi is subjected to severe torture, nearly costing her life. These conflicts serve as a catalyst for change and expose the inherent injustices and brutalities that exist within the society of Silicon Isle.

Waste Tide offers a unique perspective on the environmental disaster of e-waste and the resulting social stratification in China over the past three decades. The renowned author Liu Cixin, known for *The Three-Body Problem*, has praised this book as a "pinnacle of near-future science fiction". (Chen 2019, 2) Far from criticizing the dark side of society, Chen intends to explore more on the relationship between human and machine, as Mimi is more than a sacrifice for the elite family conflicts, but an experiment that infuses with corporate ambition, cultural identity and environmentalism. Guided by his concept of "sci-fi realism," Chen

seamlessly incorporates metaphysical ideas, self-alienation, and advanced technology into his works while effectively addressing real-life issues and problems.

Due to the highly analytical and interpretative nature of paratext, as well as the essential role of textual analysis and interpretation in the field of translation studies, the utilization of paratext in translation research can be considered both rational and feasible at a fundamental level. Paratext can be generally concluded as anything that provides some commentary on the text and influences how the text is received. A study of paratext can enhance our understanding of the transformation of a text into a physical object that can be marketed, distributed, and embraced by the general public. Also, studying on paratext reflects that translation is not a pure language transformation, as translators and writers must collaborate with other stakeholders to produce and promote a book that is supposed to be widely accepted by readers. The physical aspects of a book, such as its format, binding, title page, cover, and blurbs, are worth considering as they play a role in capturing the reader's attention. Additionally, the focus should also be placed on authors' conversations, correspondence, and journals, as these elements provide insight into the connection between paratext and authorial intention.

Based on the theory of Paratext promoted by Gerard Genette, a French literary theorist. The following sections of the paper I attempt to:
a) explore the peritext (the cover, annotation and prefaces)
b) explore the epitext (Ken Liu's interviews, recommendations from publishers and book reviews by critics and readers).

2. Literature review

2.1. Previous studies on the paratext in sci-fi translation

A number of scholars have begun to concentrate on the paratext in literary translation. Sehnaz Tahir-Gürgaglar, a Turkish scholar, argues that exploring paratext in different contexts can shed light on various concepts, such as the translator's identity, originality, and anonymity (Tahir-Gürgaglar 2002, 60). Understanding these aspects is crucial in producing translated books that resonate with the intended readership. Some foreign scholars began to study the paratext of translation, revealing how paratext's translation can help produce a time-honoured book. For example, Kovala (1996) conducted extensive research on the paratext used by Finnish publishers from 1890 to 1939, and found that social ideology strongly influenced the paratext, particularly the epitext. Badić focused on the visibility of translators in the paratext of Oliver Twist and discovered that labels, prefaces, afterwords, translatorial and editorial notes can draw readers' attention to important details in the text (Badić 2020, 37). Guttfeld

conducted a diachronic study from 2005 to 2007 among Polish readers of science fiction and fantasy translated from English. The research concluded that paratext, including footnotes, endnotes, translator's prefaces, and afterwords, is a more effective method for bridging cultural differences than substituting with target culture equivalents or embedding glosses within the original text. Among respondents who were required to choose what kind of strategy they expect from translators in avoiding communication gap, the supporting rate on paratext is beyond one third (Guttfeld 2013, 218). Yet in spite of eliciting the attention from general public, research on paratext also indicates that readers oppose translators' intervention on the original text, and prefer a clear distinction between translator's comments and the main text. Although extensive footnotes and endnotes may initially seem cumbersome, Guttfeld argues that they can actually enhance the reading experience by serving as helpful guides rather than intrusive additions.

2.2. Previous study on Chen Qiufan's Waste Tide

Most studies on Waste Tide primarily explore its thematic elements. Wang (2018) argues that Waste Tide depicts the struggles faced in an ecological crisis, specifically drawing from the real-life e-waste recycling site in Guiyu, a coastal enclave in South China known as the largest in the world. This novel discussed thoroughly about science fiction realism, showcasing the author's surreal approach to expressing humanistic concerns about reality. Chen's narrative begins with a foundation in reality, expressing compassion for those who endure the toxic environment while struggling to survive by scavenging waste. Liu (2019) critically examines Waste Tide, highlighting its significant contribution in presenting the complex relationships between technology, gender, society, and culture. However, Liu raises doubts about Chen's portrayal of women, suggesting that their suffering is depicted in a stereotypical manner, primarily serving as a convenient tool to elicit compassion from other characters and readers alike (Liu 2019, 215). Enlightened by "Cyber-feminist" theory, Liu further discussed about ways that Chinese sci-fi fiction should adopt to create a book that gains widely popularity on its characters' identity, social relations and ideologies.

As for the studies abroad, Healey (2021) thought Waste Tide had revolutionized the traditional Chinese realism and Cyberpunk theory. To speak it specifically, this book combined the Chinese modern realism (including smart narrator, the strained relationship between busy groups and loners, and the exploit over female body) and the estrangement of cyberpunk (including body modification and the multiple subjects in global capitalism). Thus, Healey asserts that Waste Tide successfully bridges the gap between mainstream Chinese literary tradition and Western sci-fi

themes, encouraging readers to move away from the concept of human-centred environmentalism. However, despite these extensive studies, there is a lack of scholarly research that thoroughly examines the translation strategies and paratextual elements employed in Waste Tide.

3.   Research methodology: Paratext

3.1. The origin of paratext

The concept of paratext originated from the works of Gérard Genette, a renowned French literary critic who made significant contributions to the field of literary criticism and aesthetics. In his work *Seuils* (1987), later translated into English as *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* in 1997, Genette explores aspects that go beyond the text itself, emphasizing that reading a book involves more than just reading the text, as the paratextual elements are closely linked to the book as a whole. This interpretation echoes Genette's argument that "the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public" (Genette 1997, 1).

Paratext is characterized by its inherent ambiguity, as Genette acknowledges. He focuses on the functions of paratext rather than its evolving forms, emphasizing the importance of understanding these functions with utmost precision. Genette said that the paratext "constitutes a zone between text and off-text, of an influence on the public, an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and achieved—is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it, more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies" (Genette 1997, 2).

3.2. Taxonomic distinctions of paratext

Genette had done a scrupulous taxonomic distinction to categorize the logical relationship between "text" and "book", the status of the writer and of enunciative temporalities and the "anthumous" and the "posthumous", yet he was never contented with purely taxonomic mappings, because paratext can maintain their traditional function while also being highly creative in their arrangement.

Paratext can be generally divided into three categories, including enunciatory, spatial and temporal paratext. The taxonomy of paratext as such could be briefly illustrated as follows (Figs. 1). This paper will focus on the first category, namely, peritext and epitext. Peritext comprises the elements that are situated within the book itself but lie outside the main body of the text. These elements include the title and cover design, annotations, prefaces, blurbs, layout, format, illustrations, and dedications.

On the other hand, epitext refers to the various utterances that revolve around the text but are produced and disseminated outside the physical book. Examples of epitextual components include reviews, marketing materials featured in media platforms, interviews, and other related external sources.
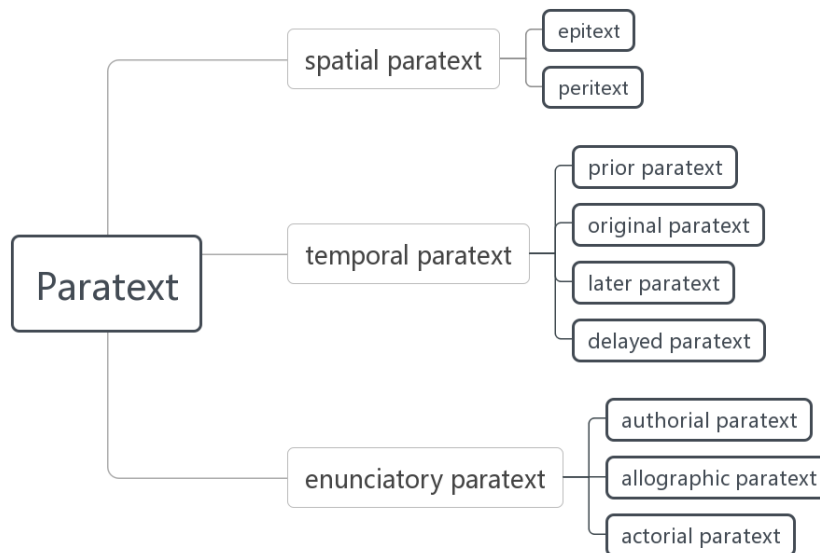
Figure 1. Taxonomy of paratext (in terms of function paratext plays in relation to text)

This paper does not aim to provide an exhaustive analysis of paratextual elements or delve into intricate anatomical and taxonomical distinctions. Instead, its primary focus is on exploring the genre of spatial paratext translation and examining its role in promoting Chinese sci-fi fiction in English-speaking countries. Furthermore, this study seeks to analyse specific components of paratext, namely the peritextual elements such as the cover, annotations, and prefaces, as well as the epitextual elements including Ken Liu's interviews, book reviews by critics and readers, and the publisher's recommendation for *Waste Tide*.

4.   Analysis of the peritext in Waste Tide

4.1. The book titles and covers as paratexts and their functions

Waste Tide has been published in Tor Books (US) and The Head of Zenus (UK) respectively in the same year 2019, and both have unique style in arranging the pattern. Both publishers design two different covers for the hardcover and trade paperback. In the US and UK, new books are typically first published in hardcover format, which targets libraries and

bibliophiles, with an average price of $26 or £20. The trade paperback edition of the same book is subsequently released one year later, with its main target market being traditional book wholesalers and retail bookstores, and a lower price point of below $7.99.
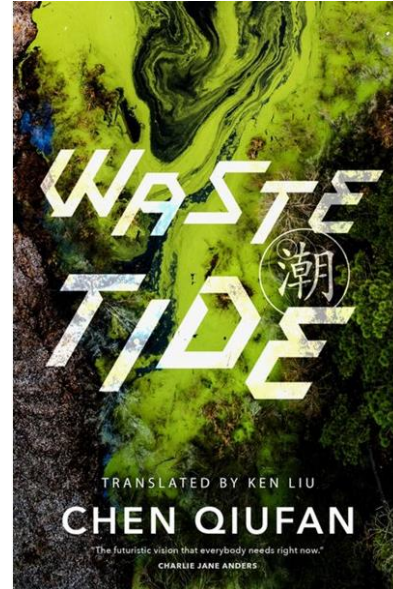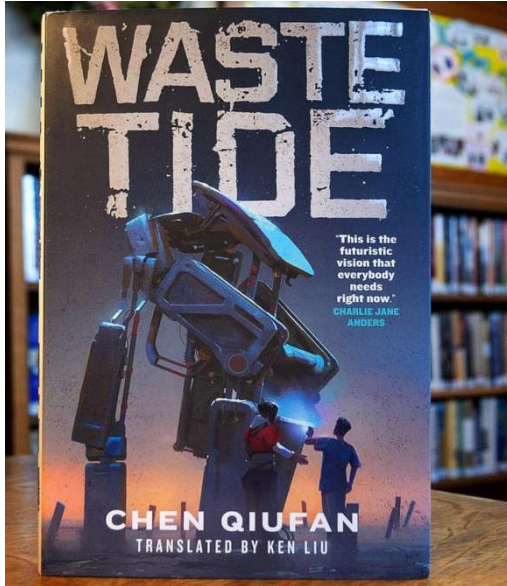
Hardcover by Tor Books   Trade paperback by Tor Books

All the aforementioned front covers employ paratext strategically to elicit readers' interest in the underlying plot. Tor Books' hardcover version, in particular, employs a subtle illustration that depicts a pivotal moment in *Waste Tide*: Mimi and Kaizong standing on the Tide Gazing Beach, discovering a towering exoskeleton robot. This cover cleverly highlights a key comedic aspect of the book, as this is the last time that Mimi has an identity as a human-being, who is still capable of dreaming a beautiful future with her be-loved boy Kaizong. Notably, the robot dominates over half of the cover, underscoring its significance in driving the narrative. And another half above the robot illustration is the title *Waste Tide*. Here comes a rather interesting contrast that the reader may doubt: What's the connection between a mega robot and the tide? Consequently, this paratext effectively entices readers to purchase the book and unravel this mystery. Furthermore, observant readers may notice the depiction of gravestones at the bottom of the hardcover, aligning with the author's portrayal of the mega robot as a "Buddhist-Daoist guardian of the graveyard." Adorned with Daoist charms, plastic or wooden Buddhist prayer beads, and bright red ribbons covering its joints, these paratextual elements clearly illustrate *Waste Tide's* distinctly Chinese characteristics, appealing to readers with an interest in Chinese culture.

Tor Book has chosen a different cover for the trade paperback version of the book, opting for a green cover that has a more visually striking impact compared to the pale blue hardcover. The cover features a stagnant pool of water, heavily polluted and giving off a sickly green hue. The title of the book, *Waste Tide*, is placed prominently in the centre of the cover, with the font appearing distorted as if contaminated by the polluted water. This illustration directly relates to the theme of electronic waste in the book, aligning with Genette's argument that "usually localized iconographic items of information are supplemented by more comprehensive ones pertaining to the style or design of the cover, characteristic of the publisher, the series, or a group of series" (Genette 1997, 24). Simply the colour of the paper chosen for the cover can strongly indicate a type of book. It is also worthwhile seeing that this cover has adopted "chao(潮)", a Chinese character which is in the middle of *Waste* and *Tide,* adding an exotic touch to the overall design. Since the trade paperback version is intended for a general audience, including those with an interest in science fiction or simply looking for a new book to read, the designer has used the visually striking combination of light green and black to make the book stand out on shelves. Also, the outermost peritext again has indirectly influenced the choice of readers and may further affect the remark and critic on Chinese sci-fi. As a result, both two paratexts show a strong tendency to situate the illustration within the stereotypical category, aiming to elicit the readers' initial interest towards the translation in terms of the stereotypical representation of foreignness or even Orientalism.
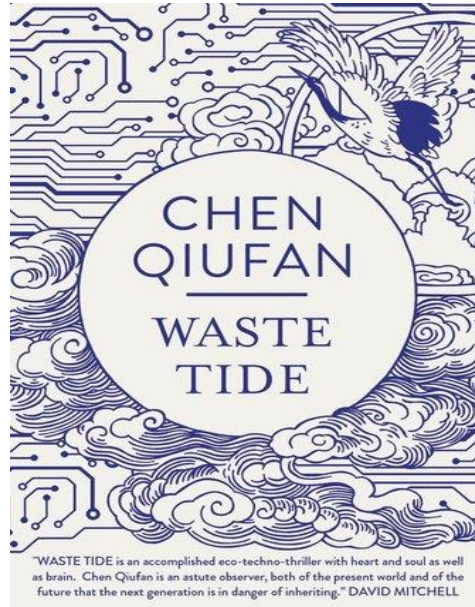
It may be interesting to shift from a visual analysis to a textual analysis in order to observe how the translator's name is included on the front cover. In the Anglophone literary climate, publishers are often reluctant to "advertise" the foreignness of translated literature. Indeed, it can be difficult to persuade them to publish translations at all, and one rarely sees a translator's name on the front cover of a book (Brigid Maher 2013, 145). However, a common feature observed in these two front covers is the use of bold formatting to highlight the author's name "Chen Qiufan," thereby increasing its prominence, while the translator's name is rendered in a comparatively smaller font. As a result, although the reader's initial focus is directed towards the author, the inclusion of the translator's name on the cover is still a step forward, foregrounding the collaborative nature of translation. This change may be attributed to the recent social or ideological turn of translation studies, which identifying translators as performative agents. Also, translators are increasingly recognizing the potential benefits of having their names featured on the cover, as it can lead to potential financial gains, and a greater likelihood of being acknowledged in reviews, where the translator's role is frequently overlooked. For example, one of the central means for securing professional visibility for literary translators has been the ongoing struggle by

organisations such as PEN America's Translation Committee and translators associations worldwide to induce publishers to include the translator's name on the book cover. (Constantine 2018, 95) Hence, Tor books, as a American publisher, might be influenced by these trends.
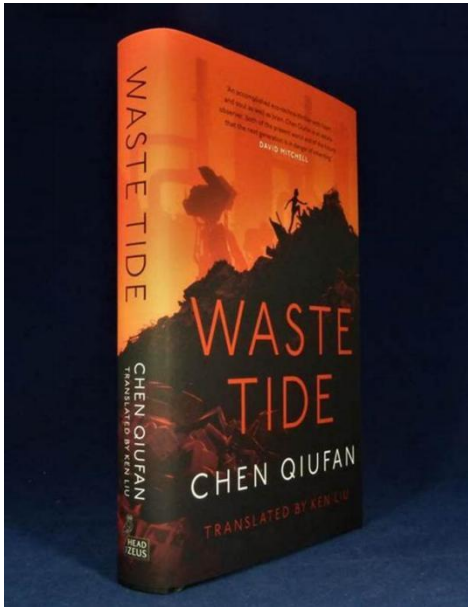
Hardcover by Head of Zeus   Paperback by Head of Zeus

In contrast to the US publisher, the Head of Zenu in the UK employs a more subtle approach in its cover design. For the hardcover, the dark silhouette of a girl, namely Mimi, struggles to climb up the toxic garbage hills, while a large robot looms in the distance, seemingly ready to encroach on her. The use of flame orange as a dominant colour effectively establishes a tragic tone in this work of fiction. This choice aligns with Genette's observation that "the effect of this whole group of peripheral elements has been to push the cover strictly speaking back toward the inside of the book" (Genette 1997, 31).

It is expected that the title and author of a book are the most prominent paratextual elements on the front cover. However, it is noteworthy that the translator's name is also displayed on the hardcover version, indicating that it is a translated novel. This demonstrates the UK publisher's acknowledgment of Ken Liu's contributions by prominently featuring his name on the book's cover, thus recognizing the translator as a form of authorship. In this context, it is plausible to suggest that Ken Liu's established reputation in the science fiction genre has made him a commercially viable choice, leading the UK publisher to prominently make his name "visible" in the front cover.

As for the paperback cover, the UK publisher makes a bold trial, incorporating auspicious clouds and a crane, two iconic Chinese elements,

to adorn the author's name and title which are arranged in a circular format. Drawing inspiration from traditional Chinese realistic painting, the cover employs smooth and strong deep blue brushstrokes. The static computer root nodes present a stark contrast to the dynamic clouds, which can also be interpreted as roaring tides. At first glance, English-speaking readers may find the cover confusing due to their unfamiliarity with traditional Chinese imagery. Yet that's exactly the effect that the publisher expects to achieve, that is to elicit curiosity from readers and the possibility for leafing through the book will be higher. As long as the book would linger on readers' eyes, its content will have more odds to be explored by them. The assortment of book covers also leads us to postulate that the utilization of cultural stereotypes through paratexts is a prevalent marketing strategy employed in promoting foreign literature.

It is worth mentioning that both publishers have incorporated quotations from critics on the cover; however, these endorsements are attributed to different celebrities. As for the US publisher, it chooses "This is the futuristic vision that everybody needs right now" written by Charlie Jane Anders, an American science-fiction author, whose works have won the 2012 and 2017 Hugo and 2017 Nebula Award for Best Novel. With a remarkable track record, she holds significant influence within the American science fiction community and boasts a substantial and devoted readership. Consequently, her words possess the ability to captivate public interest towards *Waste Tide* in the United States, thereby impacting readers' reception of the book. While the UK publisher selects David Mitchell remark: "*Waste Tide* is an accomplished eco-techno-thriller with heart and soul as well as brain. Chen Qiufan is an astute observer, both of the present world and of the future that the next generation is in danger of inheriting." Mitchell is a prestigious English novelist and screen writer who was selected as one of Granta's Best of Young British Novelists, and was listed among Time magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World. Thus, as a prominent figure within the English science fiction community, he holds considerable sway in influencing English readers to gravitate towards this book, potentially fostering an increased interest in Chinese sci-fi.

4.2. Translator's note as an indicator of translation strategies used in the text

Chen has a good command on Mandarin, Cantonese and the dialect of Shantou, which reflects on *Waste Tide*, where the waste people, migrant workers from less developed region, use Sinitic languages and dialects. Ken Liu is quite alert to the abundant topolects in *Waste Tide*, and writes in a note that "The linguistic richness, which is part of the everyday experience of many Chinese, presents certain challenges in a translation intended for

the Anglophone readership" (Chen 2019, 1). In order to conquer the understanding barrier, Ken Liu explicitly says in the notes "I've limited the use of Chinese words and phrases in this translation to an absolute minimum for readability reasons" (Chen 2019, 1). It is of significance to recognize that the translator's note, as a peritext, effectively conveys his intention to employ the domestication, a concept that Lawrence Venuti defines as "the deliberate replacement of linguistic and cultural differences in the foreign text with a text that is comprehensible to readers of the target language."(Venuti 2008, 14) resulting in the translator's role remaining invisible within the translated text.

The subsequent examples serve as representative testimonies within the text, demonstrating that Ken Liu indeed executed his translation approach as outlined in the translator's note.

Example 1:
ST: 好一套好莱坞的陈腔滥调。
TT: What a lovely speech, suitable for a Hollywood film.

The author's viewpoint regarding Scott's deceptive actions in monopolizing the green circular economy industry on Silicon Island is succinctly conveyed in the short sentence. By exploiting humanity's collective responsibility for environmental preservation, Scott manipulates the three local clans into relinquishing their ownership of Silicon Isle. The original sentence incorporates Chinese idioms and a distinct Western image, which, if explained literally, may fail to capture the intended irony. In his translation, Ken opts to use the term "lovely" to convey the meaning of the idiom "cliche (Chen Qiang Lan Diao)", as he recognizes that Anglophone readers will grasp its significance when associated with Hollywood films, thereby enhancing its expressiveness for English readers.

Example 2:
ST: ......, 拯救他们于水深火热。
TT:......, to save them from this living hell.
Example 3:
ST: 不是不报，时候未到
TT: God comes with leaden feet, but strikes with iron hands.
Example 4:
ST: 男人都一个德行，追你的时候把你捧上天。到手后就把你踩进泥里。

TT: All men are the same. When they're pursuing you, you are a goddess. But when they have you, they step all over you.

Examples 2, 3, and 4 mentioned above serve as further evidence of the absence of certain traditional source text (ST) features, both in terms of content and form. The original text features with Chinese idioms and the

part of application of four-character words is very neat in form. While in Ken's translation, all the implications in ST are replaced by the images related to religion, such as "hell", "God" and "Godness" which resonate with English-speaking readers due to shared religious backgrounds. While the writing style is preserved, there is an inevitable loss of the rhythmic form and cultural imagery present in the original language.

Batchelor argues that "More generally, when paratexts are used to discuss translation choices, they become places where the inherent self-referentiality of translation is 'raised to self-reflexivity'" (Batchelor 2018, 32). Therefore, Ken Liu deliberately renders himself invisible in the book, minimizing the gap between translator and text, and thus ensuring that the translated work is easily accessible to Anglophone readers. The peritextual narrative serves as a platform for Liu to defend his inconspicuous presence within the physical and material realm of the book. For McRae argues that "translators are in a unique position to act as ambassadors between cultures......their prefaces are an excellent locus for disseminating their understanding to readers" (McRae 2021, 82). Ken Liu's invisibility in the book has successfully facilitated this book into the target culture, as evidenced by the positive response from readers.

4.3. Annotations

Besides the above two peritexts, annotations used by Ken Liu as subordinate paratextual narratives are rare in Waste Tide. Ken seldom depends on the annotation to explain the culture-loaded words. As mentioned above, he prefers to localize the original text and replace these words with expressions that are easily appreciated by Anglophone readership, except "to convey some flavour of the linguistic variety, I employ phonetic Teochew in selected spots, leaving full tone marks to footnotes to aid readability of the main text" (Chen 2019, 1).

From this important peritext, it becomes evident that Ken Liu, residing in the US, could have the possibility to foreignize the original text, such as employing the toneless pinyin in the text with footnotes to explain, thus creating cultural products that adhere to Orientalist stereotypes. However, Ken chooses the contrary way, trying to limit the use of annotation so as to create a smooth reading experience for readers. In doing so, it has raised an important question that in what extent can paratexts influence the acceptability of source culture images among targeted readers, and this answer are closely linked to analyses of cultural stereotyping in translation.

Chittiphalangsri shows that paratexts are key sites for the development of the Orientalist narrative, and suggests that translators used them to advertise their own legitimacy so as to represent the Orient to the English public (Chittiphalangsri 2021, 65). Yet, Ken Liu is a Chinese

American, who has immigrated when he was 8 years old and received decent education in the US. What's more important, he said he has no trouble in identifying himself as an American writer. Therefore, the translated annotations by Ken Liu demonstrate a deliberate effort to minimize the foreignness of cultural references from the source text, prioritizing invisibility within the text rather than an overt representation of the Orient. It doesn't mean Ken Liu has completely given up the translation of Chinese culture, and the 18 annotations are carefully chosen to explain the tone of Modern Standard Mandarin and Cantonese, which introduce briefly to Dao De Jing (or Tao Te Ching) and other classical folk opera tune. As for this respect, Ken has successfully reached a delicate balance in introducing the Chinese culture and caring for the readability among Anglophone readers. Ken employs the use of endnotes in his book, strategically placing them at the end of the text so as not to disrupt the primary narrative. The endnotes are distinct in their size and content, ensuring that they do not challenge the prominence of the main text. Functioning as peritext, Ken's annotations serve to enhance the accessibility of Waste Tide, a Chinese science fiction universe that may be unfamiliar to an English audience. In doing so, Ken's endnotes highlight the potential of Chinese sci-fi to provide universal insights.

5.   Analysis of the epitext in Waste Tide

5.1. Interviews with translator Ken Liu

In contrast with the 'peritext', which is physically attached to the text, Genette states that "the epitext, in contrast to the peritext-consists of a group of discourses whose function is not always basically paratextual, that is, to present and comment on the text" (Genette 1997, 345).In an interview with The National's Noah Benjamin-Pollak, Ken Liu pointed out that as Anglophone cultures and Sinophone cultures share little affinity with each other, "the challenges of translation are rarely linguistic, in fact, I've found the most difficult aspects of translation to be cultural." Lacking of cultural equivalents for Chinese social codes, the primary Anglophone readership is hard to decode. Therefore, Ken "ended up using a variety of strategies, and sometimes I simply had to abandon the attempt altogether in some places in favour of pacing." This has also been employed in Waste Tide translation, and the annotation is used only when words or phrases that are "typically extremely important cultural concepts or well-known historical figures that form the interpretive background of every average Chinese reader" (Chen 2019, 1). Ken tries his best to furnish English readers with limited paratextual scraps, because he finds that "there seems to be a general dislike for footnotes by American editors in translations" (Chen 2019, 1).

The success of The Three-Body Problem, in turn, has made Ken Liu become a critical channel for Chinese writers seeking Western audiences. In the past decade, he has translated five novels and more than 50 short stories by dozens of Chinese writers, many of whom he has discovered and supported himself. Therefore, Ken seems to be a literary brand that resembles the excellent Chinese sci-fi works, and to choose his translated works means Anglophone readers can embrace the most remarkable sci-fi works produced by Chinese writer. Following Genette's logic, that anything which plays a part in converting binary code into a readable or viewable text should be considered paratextual. This "brand", shaped by his translation philosophy, has effectively served as a successful paratext, enabling Chinese science fiction to gain global recognition and paving the way for the widespread popularity of Waste Tide.

5.2. Recommendations from publishers

As *Waste Tide* is published in Tor Books (US) and The Head of Zenus (UK) respectively, both publishers adopt marketing strategies, as it is a fundamental aspect of the book publishing process. However, as for the publishers' epitext, Genette gives little concern on it as a result of "its basically marketing and 'promotional' function does not always involve the responsibility of the author in a very meaningful way" (Genette 1997, 347). In the digital age, however, the publisher's recommendation, which serves as a crucial commercial epitext, clearly reflects a market-oriented inclination.
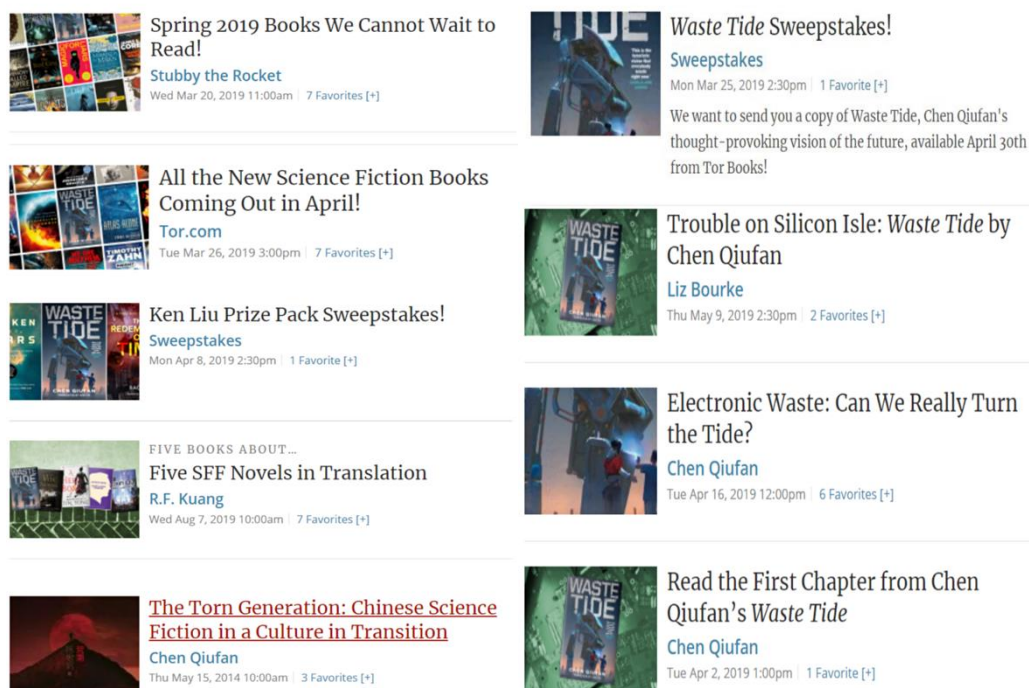

Figure 2. Nine *Waste Tide* related recommendations on Tor.com

The Tor publisher has uploaded nine related passages (Figure 2) to promote the new book *Waste Tide,* three of the titles are explicitly headlined with "translation" and one with "Ken Liu". Although the rest are titled with the fiction's elements, such as Silicon Isle and electronic waste, three out of five have mentioned Ken Liu and introduce his translation work of *Three Body Problem* in its content. For example, a critic named Bourke (2019) writes that "As *Waste Tide*, it's now been translated into English by Ken Liu, whose translation of Cixin Liu's *The Three-Body Problem* won the 2015 Hugo Award for Best Novel, and whose fiction has won awards in its own right". That is to say, approximately 70% of the promotional material for the novel *Waste Tide* on Tor does not emphasize its Chinese characteristics as a unique selling point. Instead, it places greater emphasis on the reputation and "brand" established by Ken Liu, who is seen as a symbol of outstanding Chinese science fiction literature. Given Liu's track record of producing highly regarded translations, books he selects to translate are viewed as reliable and trustworthy. Consequently, rather than positioning Chinese literature as a distinct category, the publisher seeks to capture readers' interest through the content of *Waste Tide* itself and its translator. This paratextual device makes *Waste Tide* present with its unique themes, which indeed cater to readers' taste, as we can see in a comment below a propaganda Kate (2019) wrote "*Electronic Waste: Can We Really Turn the Tide?",* saying "How absolutely fascinating and horrifying. This is why we need books translated. Thank you, Tor, for publishing it in English. I'm going to buy this one right now".

Through the use of publishers' epitext as a marketing strategy, readers can gain an understanding of the overall context of *Waste Tide* without harbouring any preconceived notions of Chinese culture being inferior to the more dominant American culture. However, the presence of these epitexts also highlights the fact that there is still much progress to be made in promoting outstanding Chinese science fiction on a global scale, until it can establish itself as a brand that is worthy of being prominently showcased.

5.3. Book reviews by critics and mainstream western media

In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation,* Genette remarks, "All literary critics, for centuries, have been producing metatext without knowing it" (Genette 1997, xix). The significance of printed critiques by renowned writers in promoting a new book has been widely acknowledged in recent decades. However, in the digital age, the dissemination of information online holds even greater influence. A reader perhaps specially goes to bookshop for *Waste Tide* after spotting and reading a review of a book in today's media. Remarks made by book reviewers and mainstream

media will exert multiple influences on a new book, including its reception, the perception of the author, and even the broader recognition of this specific genre originating from China. It is in this aspect that the epitext has produced the off-text paratextual messages, notably by focusing positively on the book's theme such as electrical waste, Chen Qiufan's writing philosophy and the unique China-themed science fiction and fantasy.

The publication of *Waste Tide* has attracted attention from a number of critics, book review sites and mainstream media. Among these reviews, most of them will first briefly introduce the development of Chinese sci-fi, listing the awards won by Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem,* and the success of Frant Gwo's 2019 film adaptation of *The Wandering Earth.* More interestingly, these remarks would always point out the great contribution of the translator Ken Liu in introducing Chinese sci-fi, as Minton writes that "Anglophone readers will cherish the opportunity to experience Chen's...rendition by Hugo-winning translator and author Liu that maintains the story's essential Chinese character" (Minton 2019, 68). In doing so, the quality of *Waste Tide* seems to be guaranteed by the endorsement from Ken Liu and the burgeoning Chinese sci-fi world.

Figure 3. Book reviews published online

Kathryn Batchelor says in Translation and Paratexts that "ordinary readers of both print and digital literature are able to post their responses to texts online, and these rankings, ratings and reviews form an important

part of the text's threshold" (Batchelor 2018, 53). Therefore, critics' reviews and headlines in mainstream media, as well as common readers' responses will be further incorporated into a Waste Tide's paratexts. In other words, the accumulation of epitexts surrounding the author, translator, critics, media, book review sites, and even the comments of ordinary readers, creates a supportive community that not only fosters meaningful discussions but also serves as an indirect marketing tool for the text. These epitexts have the power to influence readers' interpretations and acceptance of Waste Tide, thus serving as a crucial determinant for the text's success.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Major findings

In summary, it is important to recognize that different types of paratexts serve distinct functions in the production of a popular Chinese science fiction book. *Waste Tide,* for instance, features meticulously designed covers that incorporate stereotypical oriental elements, while recommendations from publishers deliberately avoid emphasizing its Chinese origins and instead focus solely on its themes. Through the analysis provided, we gain insight into how these paratexts contribute to the rise in popularity of Chinese science fiction among English-speaking readers. And the major findings go as follows:

In terms of the peritext:

First, it is notable that the four covers utilize illustrative elements that fall within the realm of stereotypical Orientalism. These paratexts are strategically employed in the marketing of foreign texts to evoke the inherent curiosity of Anglophone readers, thereby generating interest in the translated version.

Second, Ken Liu's note serves as an invaluable aid in facilitating a seamless comprehension of the original text. Acting as a catalyst, Liu's presence within the translated version remains inconspicuous, yet significantly contributes to the enhanced readability experienced by Anglophone readers.

Third, Ken Liu exhibits a limited utilization of annotations, deliberately diminishing the unfamiliar aspects of source cultural elements. This deliberate approach aims to avoid reinforcing the obscure and enigmatic stereotypes associated with the Orient.

In terms of the epitext:

Ken has had several interviews and points out his translation philosophy is to provide an engaging and pleasurable experience. He believes that annotations should only be employed sparingly, solely for highlighting exceptionally crucial cultural concepts.

Instead of highlighting the exotic flavour, publishers' recommendation on *Waste Tide* mainly focuses on its sci-fi related content and Ken Liu himself.

Waste Tide receives positive remarks written by book reviewers and mainstream media, which spilled a lot of ink over Qiufan's writing philosophy and the unique China-themed science fiction and fantasy. What is of special note is that most reviews will first briefly introduce Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem*, which opened the door for Chinese sci-fi. Moreover, Hugo-winning translator Ken Liu's contribution would be mentioned as well. It is through the extensive use of these epitexts that *Waste Tide*'s publicity has been boosted.

6.2. Limitations

Acknowledging the limitations of this research is essential. Firstly, it is important to note that the study does not encompass enunciatory and temporal paratext, which could potentially uncover new findings and contribute to the success of science fiction books. Furthermore, the definition of paratext is not fixed and evolves with the ever-changing world, including emerging studies on multimodality translation. For example, in movie translations, paratext may extend to include subtitles, background music, and even characters' facial expressions. Hence, there exists a considerable amount of potential research beyond the scope of our investigation. Additionally, the research lacks a comparative study to ensure the generalizability of its results to other genres, thus potentially limiting its practical applicability.

6.3. Suggestions for further studies

More research is needed to further conduct a comprehensive examination of the application of temporal and enunciatory paratext in a broader range of Chinese science fiction cases. Besides, further research can also investigate the translation of sci-fi in terms of chronological order, enabling a more conclusive understanding of the development of paratext and the underlying philosophical concepts embedded within the texts themselves. This would greatly facilitate research on the functions of peritext, enhancing the readability for English-speaking readers and encouraging them to engage in critical reflection on the future of Chinese science fiction.

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