

# On Two Chinese Versions of Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence*: From the Perspective of the Paratext

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**Abstract:** Since its first introduction to China in the era of the Republic of China (1912-1949), William Maugham's masterpiece *The Moon and Sixpence* has been translated into Chinese in more than sixty versions, most of which are accompanied by rich paratexts. However, little attention has been attached to the translation of the work. This study takes two Chinese versions of *The Moon and Sixpence*, namely, *Fu's version* and *Chen's version*, as its objects and delves into the hermeneutic function of the respective paratexts of the two Chinese versions. It is found that paratexts of both versions have the potential to deconstruct, play down, and even suppress the meaning of the translated text to some degree. The former version features a cooperative interpretative relationship between the main text and the paratexts, with intertextuality achieved among those different types of paratexts. In contrast, the latter version features unbalanced multi-voice interpretations of the text with various paratexts constructed by different agents. The result of the study reveals that the paratext is not subservient to the main text. It offers insights into how the type and number of paratexts may have a negative effect on the interpretation of the translated text, which has been overlooked in translation studies.

**Keywords:** The Paratext, Translated Literary Works, Hermeneutic Value, *The Moon and Sixpence*, Translation

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## 1. Introduction

*The Moon and Sixpence* is a representative novel of the celebrated British writer William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965). Ever since the publication of its first Chinese version, entitled 怪画家 ("An Odd Painter") by Wang Heyi in the Republic of China, there have been more than 60 Chinese versions. Among these retranslations, two versions are the focus of our concern. One is titled as 月亮和六便士, translated by Fu Weici (1923-2014), who is one of the first-class prominent Chinese literary translators, first published by the Foreign Literature Publishing House in 1981. In 1995, this translation was incorporated into the complete works of Maugham by Shanghai Translation Publishing House. After that, it has been republished many times and included in various series of foreign literature. Fu's version is a classic of translated literature and is loved by several generations of Chinese readers. Thus in this study, this version is labeled as a classic one. Another version was translated by Chen Yixuan, a promising and productive translator in Taiwan, China, titled as 月亮与六便士, published by East China

Normal University Press in 2016. Since its launch to the market, this version has attracted much attention from Chinese readers. In China, Fu's version is considered classic, while Chen's version is a competitive rival.

Although *The Moon and Sixpence* and its various Chinese versions have been ranking among the best sellers in China in recent years, there is unproportionally little research on its Chinese translation. Existing research is primarily confined to the main text of the Chinese translations [1-3]. Most of the studies did not go much further than identifying specific translation strategies of the translator. The paratext of the Chinese versions is rarely examined. The few attempts at reviewing the paratext of *The Moon and Sixpence*'s Chinese version focus on its positive potential [4, 5]. The paratext of the translated text represents different viewpoints set by the translator and other agents for target readers. It involves the interpretation of the main text by many translation agents. There is still a lack of in-depth attempts to examine the hermeneutic value, the paratext in the Chinese translation of *The Moon and Sixpence*, and its negative potential in particular. This study is intended to bridge the gap. The

research is to answer the question of whether ample paratexts are sure to help enhance the understanding of the main text of *The Moon and Sixpence*. It takes two representative Chinese versions of Maugham's novel *The Moon and Sixpence*, Fu's version (2016) and Chen's version (2016) that we have mentioned above, as a case to examine the interpretative and rhetorical function of the paratext in the translation of classic foreign literary works. The study aims to draw attention to the potential of interpretative and rhetorical functions of the paratext in translations.

## 2. The Paratext of Translation

The paratext refers to the surroundings of the main texts. The notion of the paratext can be traced back to the works of French narratologist Gerard Genette. In his French book *Seuils (Thresholds)* (1987), Genette discusses the term *paratext* and analyses its importance to literary texts. In the English version of the book entitled *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997), Genette introduces the notion of the paratext: "A literary work consists, entirely or essentially, of a text, defined (very minimally) as a more or less long sequence of verbal statements that are more or less endowed with significance. But this text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations... they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book. These accompanying productions, which vary in extent and appearance, constitute what I have called elsewhere the work's paratext." [6] He then explains that "for us, accordingly, 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." [6] Genette borrows the metaphor of a threshold to manifest the function of the paratext to guide the readers' reading before entering the main text, thus offering the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. Genette insists that the paratext is always "the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, 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)." [6].

In the opening remarks of his article *The Proustian Paratexte* (1998), Genette further explains the term of the paratext to be "all of the marginal or supplementary data around the text." [7] In Genette's words, the paratext comprises various forms of thresholds, to be specific, "author and editorial (i.e., titles, insertions, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces and notes); media related (i.e., interviews with the author, official summaries) a private (i.e., correspondence, calculated or non-calculated disclosures), as well as those

related to the material means of production and reception, such groupings, segments, etc." [7] A paratextual element consists of message in material form. In accordance with the location of the paratext to that of the main text, the paratext elements can be further classified into two spatial categories: peritext and epitext. The former is within the same volume, including the title, preface, and elements inserted into the interstices of the text, while the latter is at a more respectful distance, which includes all those messages outside the book, like the media, letters, diaries, and so on. [6].

Since its first introduction by Genette, the notion of the paratext has been applied to different fields, and translation studies is no exception. In translation studies, existing research into the paratext mainly adapts the term and theoretical framework put forward by Genette to translation studies. Most translation studies scholars hold that translation is a kind of creative writing, and that the translated text can be viewed as the main text, with those elements around the translation text as its paratext. [8-11] Kovola (1996) was one of the earliest scholars to deal with the paratexts of literature translations. The paratextual elements Kovola discusses are titles, author's and translator's names, series, prefaces, blurbs, notes, advertisements, and illustrations. After surveying the way paratexts were used in publishing translations and the way they manifested tendencies towards ideological closure, Kovola stresses the unique role of paratexts "as mediators between the text and the reader and their potential influence on the reader's reading and reception of the works in question" [8]. Tahir-Guicaglar (2002) argues that Genette's considering translation as paratext is to consider translation as a derivative activity, which offers a restricted view of translation and does no good to translation research. After refuting the idea of translation as a paratext, she holds that translations should be judged by their intellectual and literary merits. Paratext of the translated text in her study refers to "presentational materials accompanying translated texts and the text-specific meta-discourses formed directly around them." [10] The paratexts she deals with are peritextual and epitextual elements containing names of writers and translators, generic and paragenetic indications, and the visual lay-out of covers, titles, and series titles. Tahir-Guicaglar explains that paratexts of translations are materials surrounding and presenting published translations, which lie at the threshold of translations. [11] After a systematic account of Genette's understanding of the paratext and an examination of conceptualizations of paratexts in translation studies, Batchelor defines a paratext as "a consciously crafted threshold for a text which has the potential to influence the way(s) in which the text is received." [12] Her definition is functional and more open to taking into account different modes of texts. The paratext of a translation has the function of controlling reading and the way the text is received [8], revealing how translations are presented to their target readers [11], and not only participating, enriching but also interpreting the meaning of the translated text [13].

Based on the notion of the paratext and the spatial typology of the paratext proposed by Genette, this study holds that

translation is a text with its own paratexts. The paratext of the translation in this study mainly focuses on the peritext, which includes the preface, foreword, afterword of translators and other agents, translator's notes, illustrations, and back cover of the published translation. The following part will analyze the paratextual element of two Chinese versions of *Maugham's The Moon and Sixpence* to see their interpretative function.

### 3. The Interpretative Function of the Paratext in Two Chinese Translations of *The Moon and Sixpence*

#### 3.1. The Preface, Foreword, and Afterword

The preface, foreword, and afterword are of vital importance to the interpretation of the main text. They can offer a comprehensive introduction to the main text and thereby a complete interpretation of the main text. [14] The preface and foreword of a translation by the translator or other agent other than the author is the threshold for the potential target readers to get close to the translated text. In this way can the preface and the foreword, together with the translation text, show the intention of the interpreter and the author, whereby the interpreter plays a role in molding the text into a shape that suits his purpose. [15].

The published version of Fu's translation of *The Moon and Sixpence* has a preface written by the translator Fu Weici, in which the translator gives an introduction to the profile of Maugham, including his family, educational background, writing experience, writing style, and to the main contents and theme of the novel. In the preface, the translator clarifies that the protagonist in *The Moon and Sixpence* was modeled on the British painter Gauguin. He also clearly points out that the work is a fiction rather than a literary biography. "We shall bear in mind that Maugham portrays a completely different character from Gauguin, besides the general outline of life. Under Maugham's pen, the protagonist is more absurd, more out of mind, thus making a deep impression on the readers." [16] In contrast to the preface of Fu's version, Chen's version does not have a translator's preface or introduction. However, there does exist an introduction to the main text entitled *Another Explanation of a Height*, written by Liu Yu, a writer and associate professor of political science at Tsinghua University. Liu Yu interprets the novel from a perspective of academic point of view. The prefaces and foreword of the translated text is a product of intentional interpretation, which inevitably may overemphasize and overlook certain aspect of the main text, and even run the risk of manipulation or overinterpretation. Both prefaces of totally different styles and focus highlight one aspect of the novel while simultaneously playing down certain aspects.

#### 3.2. Translator's Notes

Translator's notes are the supplementary means translators use to make explanations and annotations to certain items mentioned in the main text of the translation. Those items

main cover polysemes, allusions, dialects, foreign languages, culture-specific items, etc. The translator's notes are the basic interpretation of the main text, which helps to remove possible obstacles to reading and understanding facing the potential target readers.

After a comparison and contrast of Fu's version with Chen's version, we find that the translator's notes of the two versions are similar in general and different in some parts. There are 66 translator's notes in the Fu translation, 24 of which are explicitly noted as "the original is French", and the remaining 42 are notes on related background knowledge covering cultural special items such as historical figures, mythical figures and stories, names of places, costumes, literary allusions, and explanatory notes on the explication of the topic. Chen's version has fewer translator notes, with a total number of 41. Those translator's notes can be classified into two categories: notes of related background knowledge and notes of explanation.

##### Example 1:

...you would have thought that Monet, Manet, and the rest of the impressionists had never been. [17].

Fu's version: 看了他的画, 你会认为莫奈、马奈……。注释: 克劳德·莫奈 (1840-1926), 法国画家。埃多瓦·马奈 (1832-1883), 法国画家。[16].

(Note: Claude Monet (1840-1926), a French painter. Edova Manet (1832-1883), a French painter).

Chen's version: 看他的画你还会以为, 像莫奈和马奈等……。[18].

##### Example 2:

He reminded you of those jolly, fat merchants that Rubens painted. [17].

Fu's version: 看到他, 你不由会想到鲁宾斯画的那些一团和气的胖商人。[16].

Chen's version: 他让人想起鲁本斯笔下画的那些心宽体胖的商贾。

注释: 彼得·保罗·鲁本斯 (Peter Paul Rubens, 1577-1640), 德国画家。[18].

(Note: Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), a German painter).

The translator's notes in examples 1 and 2 reflect the historicity of understanding. According to the viewpoint of modern hermeneutics, the attempt each time when we're trying to make to understand the world is based on our specific context, so each time our understanding of the world is a momentous historical event. The translator's notes manifest the translator's vision and understanding of the source text. As for the people's names of the source culture, both translators adopted different translation strategies according to their times and social and cultural context.

##### Example 3:

She was a Maenad. [17].

Fu's version: 她成了迈那得。

注释: 希腊神话中酒神的女祭司 [16].

(Note: The Maenads are priestesses of the god of wine, Dionysus in Greek mythology).

Chen's version: 她是追随酒神的狂女。[18].

##### Example 4:

*He painted her over and over again, sometimes with a pareo on and sometimes nothing at all.* [17].

*Fu's version:* 有时候围着一件帕利欧, 有时候什么都不穿。

*注释:* 当地人的服装, 一种用土布做的束腰。[16].

*(Note: The pareo is the local costume, a kind of waist girdle made of local cloth).*

*Chen's version:* 他一直反复画她, 有时候身上披着花布, 有时候一丝不挂。[18].

Examples 3 and 4 show the direct presentation of the original meaning by the translator's notes in Fu's translation and the cover of the original meaning in Chen's translation. As for the cultural special items like mythical figures and the unique costumes of a specific culture, Fu's translation adopts the method of transliteration plus translator's notes to convey the information of the source text to the target readers as much as possible. In contrast, Chen's translation adopts the free translation method to reduce or even erase the special meaning of the source text.

*Example 5:*

*...where for six sous you could sleep in a cot.* [17].

*Fu's version:* 六个铜子可以睡在一张小床上。[16].

*Chen's version:* 在那儿只要花上六苏就能睡在简陋的床上。

*注释:* Sou, 法国旧制硬币, 价值五生丁 (一生丁等于百分之一法郎)。[18].

*(Note: Sou, a former French coin, worth five centimes one centime is worth one-hundredth of a Franc).*

*Example 6:*

*I saw him, the sea gray under the mistral and foam-flecked...* [17].

*Fu's version:* 大海在凌冽的北风中一片灰蒙蒙, 白沫四溅。[16].

*Chen's version:* 在我想象中, 海面在密史脱拉风的吹拂下卷起了一片灰扑扑的泡沫。

*注释:* 密史脱拉风 (Mistral), 专指法国南部海岸干燥而寒冷的西北风。[18].

*(Note: Mistral refers to the dry and rigid northwest wind on the southern coast of France).*

*Example 7:*

*He went as surgeon on a tramp steamer to the Levant.* [17].

*Fu's version:* 在一艘开往地中海的不定期货船上谋了个医生位置。[16].

*Chen's version:* 他上了一艘前往黎凡特的不定期货船当外科医生。

*注释:* 黎凡特 (Levant), 一个不精确的历史上的地理名称, 大体指地中海东部沿岸。[18].

*(Note: the Levant, an imprecise historical-geographical name, generally refers to the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea).*

Translators' notes play an active role in facilitating readers' reading and helping translators construct cultural identity. [19] In examples 5, 6, and 7, Chen's version is inclined to provide related cultural information loaded with culture-specific items like the monetary unit, natural phenomenon, and geographical name by adding translator's notes, intended to

enlarge the horizon of target readers to the greatest extent. In contrast, Fu's version adopts the strategy of domestication to deconstruct and even cover the meaning of culture-specific items, which directly changes the understanding of target readers.

### 3.3. Illustrations of the Translation

In published translations, illustrations are often inserted as an explanation of the main characters, key scenes, and typical artistic contexts in the main text of the translation. As a form of paratexts, illustrations have the potential to concretely and vividly explain the meaning of words and complement the meaning of words, and directly participate in the generation of the meaning of a translated literary work. The explanatory value of illustrations lies in the explanatory relationship and intertextual relationship with the content of literary works. The diagram itself contains choice, with emphasis, but also has the function of shielding and misleading. The value of illustrations in translated literary works lies in their interpretative and paratextual relationship with the contents of the main texts of the translation. Illustrations in their accounts involve selection and making the focal points stand out.

The two Chinese versions of *The Moon and Sixpence* differ significantly in this aspect. One can find no illustrations in Fu's version, while there are rich illustrations in Chen's version. There are altogether 29 pieces of full-colored copies of Gauguin's paintings in Chen's version, which is intended to build intertextuality with the information mentioned in the translator's preface of the translation that "Paul Gauguin is the prototype of Charles Strickland, the protagonist of *The Moon and Sixpence*." For Chinese readers familiar with Gauguin's paintings, those 29 pieces of illustrations scattered in Chen's translation are likely to guide their reading expectations to see the novel as a narration about Gauguin, thus running the risk of destroying the authority of the fiction. For readers unfamiliar with Gauguin's paintings, these illustrations may be misleading to suggest that they are the paintings of Strickland, the protagonist of the translated text. Therefore, those 29 pieces of illustrations are supposed to be of little positive effect. On the one hand, they help mold the readers' pre-understanding of the translated text with a potential for misinterpretation. On the other hand, those illustrations are likely to interfere with the readers' reading horizon in the process of reading. In this case, Fu's version with no illustration is preferable to Chen's version since those 29 pieces of illustrations inserted in Chen's version may contribute no positive but a negative effect to the interpretation and understanding of the content of *The Moon and Sixpence*.

### 3.4. Back Cover

The back cover is another paratextual element of the published translation, designed to attract readers' attention and help the book's reception. The two Chinese versions of *The Moon and Sixpence* are designed to have a back cover with a unique style. On the back cover of Fu's translation is a short introduction to Maugham and his writing style and a

brief summary of the plot of *The Moon and Sixpence*. However, the back cover of Chen's version seems to be more intentionally designed. In addition to sketching the content of the novel, Chen's translation is provided with the interpretation by Fan Bingbing, a Chinese actress, pop singer, television producer, and model who was once in the spotlight both in China. Fan Bingbing interprets the novel as "about the dream and pursuit. The Moon is beautiful and distant, which symbolizes the dreams pursued by us. However, the process of pursuing our dreams may be of loneliness and of much labor or even prove to be fruitless in the end. Sixpence symbolizes worldly and trivial life, which at the same time is of its value. After reading the novel, you may reflect on your status quo and ask yourself what is held by your hand, the Moon or Sixpence." Although Fan Bingbing's interpretation is one of the general readers', her interpretation is of more commercial value than the interpretative value.

## 4. Conclusion

After an analysis of the four paratextual elements of the two Chinese translations of *The Moon and Sixpence*, we find that paratexts in both versions have shorten the distance between the work and the reader, and at the same time deconstruct, play down, or even totally suppress other features of the text. As a classic translation version, Fu's version is accompanied by paratexts in a simple and traditional form. Despite their simple forms, those paratexts in Fu's version have successfully achieved intertextuality. The paratexts covering the translator's preface, the translator's notes, and the back cover form an interdependent and harmonious relationship with the interpretation of the whole text. Compared with Fu's version, Chen's version involves more types of paratexts and agents. As a retranslation, Chen's version attempts to help facilitate the understanding of ideal readers by making full use of abundant paratexts. The translator's notes are provided with the method of thick translation to supplement related background information as much as possible. With an introduction written by the celebrated scholar before the translated text and the comments by the famous actress on the back cover, Chen's version has attempted to build a foresight for the ideal readers. However, such foresight may have a positive effect on the readers' understanding and interpretation of the text, as well as a risk of simplifying the meaning of the full text.

It should be noted that all interpretation is a highlighting [20]. Even the harmonious interpretation is also a process of emphasizing a feature of the main text; it will inevitably play down or suppress other aspects of the main text. As the threshold between target readers and the translated literary works, paratexts of the published translation can have both positive and negative effects on the interpretation and reception of a foreign literary work. It is one of the core issues to be tackled in retranslating classic literary works to bring different interpretations in dazzling forms of paratexts into tune. Hermeneutical consciousness may be the key. For further exploration, a survey of the reader's comments on the two Chinese versions of *The Moon and Sixpence* by Fu Weici

and Chen Yixuan is needed to help uncover the reception of both versions with different forms of paratexts.

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