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## The (mis)use of paratexts to (mis)represent the Other: Chun Sue's *Beijing Doll* as a case study

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## Abstract

Translation is believed to be the site par excellence of intercultural encounter and exchange, but how this exchange takes place differs enormously depending on the cultures and literature systems that come into contact. Different cultures have different views on the function of source texts in translation and different expectations about the role of the translator. They therefore have different translation norms that have an impact on the final product, i.e. the translated text. Power relations between cultures are also reflected in a translator's approach to the translation task, and the way in which publishers present translated texts to their target audiences. Translation has, therefore, a social and ideological dimension. By analyzing three translations (into English, Catalan and Spanish) of Chun Sue's *Beijing*

*Wawa (Beijing Doll)*, a Chinese chick lit autobiographical narrative, I will show how different strategies used in transferring paratextual elements across linguistic and cultural boundaries in these translations reflect different degrees of intercultural sensitivity and different ways of representing the Other. All three translations from Chinese evidence a tendency to manipulate the appearance of the source text or even to appropriate the Other, resulting in a reshaping of the author's image of herself. Consequently, the function and status of the text in the literary system of the target culture is modified. Some of the paradoxes evidenced as a result of publishers' re-presentation of the original for their target audiences are reflected upon, and conclusions drawn.

**Keywords:** Chinese literature; otherness; paratexts; paratranslation; translation.

## 1. Introduction

Different cultures have different views on the function of source texts in translation and different expectations about the role of the translator. Those who commission translations also differ on what they believe the function of literature in translation is. Some see the source text as sacrosanct, others just as a guideline to be adapted as needs be. The value attached to a translation, moreover, varies depending on the historical moment in which it is produced, the relationship between the target and the foreign culture, the kind of text involved, etc. Power relations between cultures are reflected in the way in which the Other is represented, how translators and publishers deal with the concept of Otherness (i.e. cultural difference) and how they approach the task of presenting translated texts to their target audiences. Any translation activity has, therefore, a social and ideological dimension that needs to be addressed from a critical perspective.

By analyzing translations into English, Spanish, and Catalan of Chun Sue's *Beijing Doll*<sup>1</sup> (北京娃娃, *Beijing Wawa*), I will show how the use of paratextual elements (i.e. those that envelop or provide a setting for the text) reflects different narrative constructions of the Other, along with varying degrees of intercultural sensitivity and can be analyzed both in literary terms and in terms of power relations. I have chosen to analyze the translations of *Beijing Doll* for three reasons. First, dealing with Chinese literature in translation enables me to study questions related to cross-cultural power relations. Secondly, the availability of translations into English, Catalan and Spanish of the original text in Chinese allows me to compare the marketing strategies of publishers in three different target-language cultures. Finally, the presence of less frequently used paratexts, such as photographs, hand-

written texts, e-mails and a table of contents, alongside more conventional paratexts in this particularly innovative and thought-provoking autobiographical narrative, enables me to carry out a deconstructive reading of the (para-)translations under study. This approach will provide a comprehensive overview of how the Other is represented, i.e., how foreignness is appropriated and modified to conform to target-reader expectations and to make it compatible with the dominant narratives of the receiving cultures. Overall, this approach can shed some light on the underlying ideological factors influencing the way a translation project is undertaken in each case.

The aim of this paper is thus threefold: (i) to show how, through paratranslation and in particular through the (mis-)use of paratextual elements, the Other is (mis-)represented and, consequently, the voice of the author is, to some extent, silenced; (ii) to show how this (mis-)representation modifies the function and status of the text in the literary system of the target cultures; and (iii) to show how power relations between cultures and literary systems can be brought into light by analyzing the paratextual apparatus.

I will first offer an overview of the state of the art to methodologically contextualize my study. Following a brief introduction to the book and its context, I shall analyze the paratextual elements in the Chinese original and in three of its translations (English, Catalan and Spanish). I will then highlight, and discuss, some of the paradoxes evidenced before finally presenting my conclusions.

## 2. Methodological approach

In this paper I will adopt an interdisciplinary approach combining theories and methodologies taken from Literary Studies, Translation

1 The English translation of the title of *Beijing Wawa* will be used henceforth to refer to the Chinese original.

Studies and Sociology, as I will explain in more detail below.

The main object of my study will be a set of paratexts. According to Genette (1997: 1) paratexts are those productions that surround the text and extend it, precisely “to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its *reception* and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book”. It is crucial to take into account that “the paratextual element is always subordinate to ‘its’ text, and this functionality determines the essence of its appeal and its existence” (Genette, 1997: 12).

While some characteristic features of paratexts are spatial (cover, title page, preface and footnotes), others are material (format and paper) or visual (illustrations, lay-out, typeface and overall design). These elements may seem irrelevant or anecdotal to the lay reader, but they are often decided on by the publisher, usually without consultation with the author or the translator of the text. However, as we will see, they implicitly convey information about the publisher’s intention and contribute to form the image of the Other.

Paratranslation, which is not only the translation of paratexts, but also aims at becoming “a symbolic reference to the physical or virtual space occupied by all the possible productions that surround, wrap, accompany, extend, introduce and present a translation” (Yuste Frías, 2012: 119), is a relatively new area of inquiry within Translation Studies, which “brings an innovative perspective from which we are able to reflect on translation and ideology” (Garrido, 2011: 70). While translation is an area reserved almost exclusively for translators, paratranslation is the realm of other mediators, especially editors, “who usually have more power to decide how the work is to be presented in the target society” acting “in accordance with a particular ideology, which has a strong tendency to allow itself to be influenced

by economic criteria” (Castro, 2009: 10). Editors are, in fact, the ultimate agents responsible for conforming the text “to the dominant ideology of the receptor society, its beliefs and values, and to the ideology of the markets operating in the cultural industry of that society” (Garrido, 2011: 67).

Despite the analytical value of the theory of paratranslation, it is an area of study relatively neglected within Translation Studies. Reference must be made to the works authored by members of the research group Translation and Paratranslation (T&P) from the Universidade de Vigo, such as Castro (2008, 2009), Garrido (2005, 2007, 2011, 2014), and Yuste Frías (2005, 2010, 2012, 2015). The collective volume edited by Gil, Orero and Rovira-Esteva (2012) is also worth mentioning for the variety of topics and approaches it offers<sup>2</sup>. As far as contemporary Chinese translated literature is concerned, to the best of our knowledge, apart from the contributions from Marín Lacarta (2012a, 2012b), focusing on the role of paratexts in the creation of Chinese otherness in the Spanish context, no work has been published comparing different paratranslations of the same Chinese original.

On the other hand, the concept of narrative as a discursive resource to interpret, negotiate and reconstruct the Other in the target culture has also proven to offer interesting insights into the construction of authorship and identity and its variation between receiving cultures. In this respect, works such as that of Summers (2012) and Harding (2012) are especially inspiring. Paratexts act as narrative frames, which focus on certain aspects of the authors’ personality or background, offering given interpretations of the text. I will thus resource the analytical tools offered by both the theory of paratranslation and narrative theory to set a combined alternative framework of analysis in order to uncover issues of ideology related to the translation of *Beijing Doll*.

2 This book is, in fact, a compendium of several of the ideas debated at the 7th International Conference on Translation held at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in 2010, under the title *Paratextual Elements in Translation*.

### 3. *Beijing Doll*: a particular case of Chinese chick lit

*Beijing Doll* is a life narrative about a seventeen year-old Chinese girl. It is a self-referential work which features a single female teenager navigating through the challenges faced by her generation: balancing demanding social expectations with personal relationships, raising issues of identity and femininity, independence and love, and examining the nature of commodity culture. It is a personal or self-narrative work, which frequently evokes age, generation, gender, as well as literary and musical tastes as identity markers.

Although some critics have included the author, Chun Sue, in the group of so-called “beauty writers”, along with other well-known Chinese female writers such as Wei Hui and Mian Mian, Chun Sue herself claims to be independent and denies being representative of anything or anybody. Nevertheless, this narrative is reinforced by the fact that the title, *Beijing Doll*, brings to mind the semi-autobiographical novel *Shanghai Baby* written by Wei Hui. Intertextual reference may well account for the title chosen, both for the original and the translations, thereby taking advantage of Wei Hui’s success both in China and abroad. Partly because this type of literature relies on the authors’ personal and sexual experiences for much of its appeal, their works have also been referred to as “body writing”. Some scholars, such as Chen & Zeng (2000: 107), place it within the broader Chinese literary movement called “post-new literary generation” which advocates individualism, materialism and consumerism. Most of these features coincide with those characterizing what is known as chick lit in Western literary circles. Still other authors label youngsters like Chun Sue as *linglei* (Beech, 2004; Cingcade, 2008; Drissel, 2012), which could be translated as *alternative*. *Linglei* people are described as individualists, independent thinkers, who often push the boundaries of social propriety to the limit yet tend to avoid criticizing the government or communist party directly (Drissel,

2012: 22). As Beech (2004) puts it, “[U]nlike countercultural movements in the West, which often germinate in protest activities, most *linglei* are not motivated by economic anxiety or political dissatisfaction...Instead, their rebellion against conformity is largely an exercise in self-expression, a mannered display of self-conscious cool”.

It is not easy to determine exactly what motivates a person to write about his or her life, but if we understand the changes taking place in the rapidly developing China of the 1990’s and the socio-historical context in which this book was written, we could well presume that Chun Sue, born in 1983, was searching for her own identity and looking for a way of asserting herself. She felt special and original, wanted to become independent from her parents and find true love. As Evans (2000: 229) puts it, “the mere possibility of exploring romance and desire opens up channels to self-discovery that necessitate a radical rethinking of past assumptions about gender and sexual relationships.” Chun Sue lives in the present and looks to the future, sharing the aspirations and anxieties of young women around the world although, according to Williams (1980: 126), the way in which these narratives resolve problems and tensions will rarely please modern feminists. In Chun Sue’s writing we find the expression of her innermost passions, dreams and secrets. We see her as confident and vulnerable, smart and naïve, independent and immature; in short, not lacking in her share of human weakness.

Through their texts, authors consciously or unconsciously take sides in the many conflicts that exist in society, i.e. their texts always present a particular image of the world. Chun Sue describes her experience growing up in a world she dislikes and rebels against. She questions the education system in China, filial piety, and women’s role in society. Her personal storytelling deals with the very real problems and tensions in women’s lives in China. She expresses her anger and discontent with Chinese society by actively taking part in marginal, and even subcultural, activities mainly within the punk music circles of

Beijing<sup>3</sup>. What she says and does is in clear defiance of traditional values in Chinese society, still present in official discourse today. Nonetheless, “she stays away from the grander ideologies such as democracy, freedom and equality that have often motivated her alternative brethren in the West” (Beech, 2004). Despite its apolitical stance, she touches on sensitive topics for government censors, which is the reason why her book and others like it have eventually been banned by the authorities. Officially, the book was “unsuitable and too depressing for young readers” (Beech, 2004).

Chun Sue has not only continued to write books, but she has also expanded her channels of self-agency to embrace cyberspace with the opening and maintenance of several personal blogs<sup>4</sup> and a Facebook page. This shows how her life is still unfolding and her self-understanding is constantly changing as she engages in the act of writing. Writing constitutes an integral part of the life that she is contemplating. Writing an autobiographical narrative, as well as producing a blog, is the self-motivated, intentional, and deliberate practice of someone who is presenting herself to the general public and making her voice heard.

Chun Sue's *opera prima* is characterized by an intimate, confessional, fresh, and often chatty style. She often tells her story in the first person, which gives it an air of authenticity. The fact that the line between direct and indirect speech is often blurred suggests a high degree of spontaneity. Formally, the book is not organized in the form of diary entries but rather chapters and subchap-

ters with a linear development which follows the author's progress through various stages of her life experience. Generational and relational conflicts in her life do not resolve themselves at the end of the book, since her narrative is a “work in progress” it is merely a snapshot, a four-year segment of her life.

#### 4. *Beijing Doll's* paratexts

My analysis of the paratextual elements in *Beijing Doll*, both in the first edition of the Chinese original and in each of the three translations selected will focus specifically on the spatial and visual aspects of paratexts and how they affect the way in which the original narrative is reframed to make it compatible with the dominant narratives of the receiving cultures, i.e. how it is presented to the publishers' proposed target audience. Moreover, as we shall see, the way in which different paratexts are used not only affects the reception and consumption of the text, but can also effectively determine the way in which the Other is represented. An analysis of the features of the paratexts present in the Chinese language source text is followed by that of those present in the English, Catalan and Spanish versions, respectively.

##### 4.1. Front and back covers

Although the original text and its translations were published in paperback, the covers of the

3 According to Campbell (2012, quoted in Wasserstrom, 2012), Chinese punk rock bands are enthused with an intense patriotism alongside their radical beliefs. They know there are problems, but they believe, deeply, that there are domestic solutions and strategies, i.e. practitioners really believe that rock and roll can change the world. For example, Pan Gu, one of the bands our heroine is a fan of, took asylum in Sweden in 2004 after using one of their public appearances to call for Taiwanese independence. Therefore, China's punk rock bands' stance towards their country's socio-political situation is not neutral, neither is that of their followers.

4 Since other so-called “beauty writers” have acknowledged that their paratexts represent them as much as their literary works (Ferry, 2002: 671), in future research it would be interesting to examine the relationship between Chun Sue's blogs and how she has continued to construct her own identity as a woman, expressing her own ideas and emotions, as well as exploring social relationships. See <http://blog.sina.com.cn/springtree> and <http://www.weibo.com/springtree?source=blog>.



Chinese and English versions are more pliable and smaller in format. Since “the mass-market paperback is seen as the key way to attract teenagers to purchase literature” (Yampbell, 2005: 350), and the Chinese and English versions have been produced in a lower-cost format, they are apparently targeting a different audience a younger, less affluent one than in Spanish-speaking countries or Catalonia. These choices determine the reception of the work and represent an ideological reading. They also delimit the type of readership in each case.

As far as the title is concerned, it is worth mentioning that Chun Sue admitted in an interview published in *China Daily* in 2004 that the publisher changed the title at the last minute. The original name of her book was *The World of Ice*, but she had no choice in the final published title. By altering the title, the editor was influencing how the original would be read in the domestic culture. The (para)translation of the title has been literal in the three cases under study, thus framing the book within the narratives of Chinese “beauty writers”.

Despite what one might expect given its title, the front cover of the Chinese original in four different editions I have had access to (Figure 1) does not feature the sophisticated image of an exotic, modern Chinese woman, but rather a photograph of a natural, unassuming teenager. The publisher does not rely on the photographs of the author showing herself off to attract attention from the public, as other Chinese “beauty writers” have done and for which they have been criticized. Rather, the photographs used are aimed at attracting an audience of adolescents who can identify with the projected image of the author. The images draw attention to a solitary figure, encouraging empathy with the isolated

youngster, and framing the text as the narrative of a single protagonist.

Alongside the pseudonym of the author Chun Shu<sup>5</sup> (春树) and the title of the book, *Beijing Wawa* (北京娃娃), two subtitles attract the attention of the target audience: one in Chinese, *shiqi sui shaonü de canku qingchun zibai* (十七岁少女的残酷青春自白), (Confessions of the Cruel Youth of a Seventeen Year-old Girl) in Chinese<sup>6</sup>, and another in English (I, Seventeen, Badness Gire [sic])<sup>7</sup>. Although there is no explicit reference to the genre to which the book belongs, the word “Confessions” in the Chinese subtitle would indicate that it is some kind of autobiographical writing. At the bottom of the front cover we find the name of the publisher, *Yuanfang Chubanshe* (远方出版社), a rather small, little known publishing house located in Inner Mongolia, on the periphery of the Chinese literary system.

The front covers of the translations of Chun Sue's book also feature photographs of the author similar to those in the different Chinese editions (Figure 2)<sup>8</sup>. However, while the photographs on the covers of the Catalan and Spanish translations are in black and white, the cover of the English translation is much more colorful, upbeat and reminiscent of the English punk rock band The Sex Pistols, whose album cover for their “Never Mind the Bollocks” from the 1970s, functions as an intertextual reference for the target culture readers. However, the use of pink as the background color on the front cover (also used in one of the Chinese editions, see Figure 1.d), might well be a strategy to target young women, since this color is the one seen as best representing chick lit from a non-verbal standpoint (Montoro, 2012).

The front cover of the English version includes the pseudonym of the author in transcription (Chun Sue); the translated title of the work

5 Chu Shu is the correct transcription in pinyin of the writer's Chinese name, which she has Westernized as Chun Sue.

6 All translations from Chinese, Catalan and Spanish are mine.

7 The last word is a misspelling of “Girl”, which has been corrected in subsequent editions.

8 Although there are at least three different English editions available, each new edition has a different cover. I have therefore limited my analysis to the first Riverhead Trade paperback edition (2004).



**FIGURE 1**

Front covers of different Chinese editions of *Beijing Doll* in Chinese<sup>9</sup>



Fig. 1a



Fig. 1b



Fig. 1c

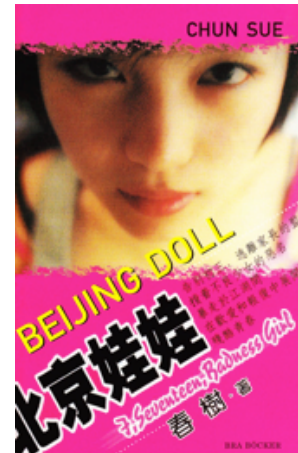
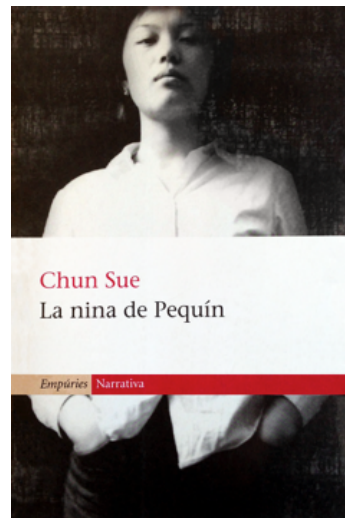


Fig. 1d

**FIGURE 2**

Front covers of English, Catalan and Spanish translations of *Beijing Doll*, respectively



(*Beijing Doll*); and a subtitle indicating the literary genre to which the book belongs (A novel). We also find a quote from the *Asian Weekly* press review: "Reveals the cruel youth of a new generation... Uncensored, raw and bloody." Framing the text as "uncensored", "cruel", "raw", and "bloody" focuses on the sociopolitical bad image of China, indicating the dominant contextual and inter-

pretative approach of the receiving Anglophone literary field.

If we turn to the cover of the Catalan version, we are given the pseudonym of the author in transcription (Chun Sue); the translated title of the book (*La nina de Pequín*); the name of the publisher (Empúries); and the series (Narrativa) [narrative].

<sup>9</sup> The one being analyzed in depth in this paper is the first on the left, corresponding to the first edition (2002).

The cover of the Spanish translation is slightly different. Apart from the pseudonym of the author in transcription (Chun Sue), we find the title of the book both in Spanish (*La muñeca de Pekín*) and Chinese, *Beijing Wawa* (北京娃娃); followed by a subtitle: “*El relato autobiográfico de una joven rebelde: Un canto al espíritu punk y la búsqueda del placer*” (This is the autobiographical narrative of a young rebellious woman: A song in praise of the punk spirit and the quest for pleasure) along with the publisher's name (El Aleph). This narrative also guides the reader towards a given stance, one that is much more positive, though also more trivial, than the original.

The back cover of the Chinese original features a text that partially repeats the content of the preface; the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) and the price. The back cover of the English translation includes a short laudatory summary of the book, three quotations from press reviews by *Time* magazine, *Asian Weekly* and Inter Press Service; the name of the translator (Translated from the Chinese by Howard Goldblatt); an indication of the genre (Fiction); reference to the publisher's web pages; the price; and the ISBN. In the case of the Catalan translation, the author's pseudonym in transcription (Chun Sue) is repeated, as is the translated title of the book (*La nina de Pequín*); the name of the translator (Traducció de Sara Rovira) [translated by Sara Rovira]; the name of the publisher (Empúries) and the series (Narrativa, 219) [Narrative]. Laudatory accounts of both the book and the author are given. In Spanish, the back cover repeats the book's title in Chinese (*Beijing Wawa*, 北京娃娃), probably for marketing reasons, since it gives it an exotic touch; the name of the publisher (El Aleph) and the series (Modernos y clásicos de El Aleph) [Aleph Modern and Classic Literature]. Laudatory presentations of both the book and the author are given. In short, whilst in the original text the marketing strategy uses paratexts that

borrow the author's own words, in the case of the three translations this function is taken over by external authoritative voices, such as literary critics, reviewers or the editor him/herself, thus marginalizing the author's voice.

The paratextual elements included in the front and back covers of the original text and its translations evidence the difference in criteria of the publishing houses and their editors with regards the way in which their texts are to be presented to their target audiences. It explains, for example, the stark contrast between the rather lack-lustre covers of the Spanish and Catalan translations and the upbeat English cover which functions as an intertextual reference for the proposed target audience, reinforced by the press review from the *Asian Weekly*. Another strategy used to appeal to the target audiences of the Catalan and English translations of *Beijing Doll* is to include the name of the translator on the back cover.

According to a survey carried out by the European Council of Literary Translators' Associations, the name of the translator is mostly mentioned on the title page (De Haan, 2011: 22). In the case of the UK and US, since the public has a high resistance to translations, publishers tend to leave the translator's name off the cover of the book (Barry, 2007b: 219). Taking these tendencies into account, the fact that in our case the translators' names appear on the back cover attracts more attention and increases her/his visibility. Howard Goldblatt, the translator of the English text, is well-known for having introduced the English-speaking world to Chinese literature through translation. Including his name on the back cover must be interpreted as a signal the publisher is probably addressing a reader interested in Chinese literature who will trust the translation if s/he sees a familiar name. As Wardle (2012: 39) states, “the reputation of the translator is one factor that affects the reception of the target text”<sup>10</sup>.

10 It is probably the prestige of Howard Goldblatt that entitled him to include a translator's postscript which is not present in the Catalan and Spanish versions.

The reason why the translator's name is visible on the back cover of the Catalan version can be further explained by the fact that at the time *Beijing Doll* was published in Catalan there were only fifteen works of Chinese literature available in a Catalan translation. This decision might also be due to a marketing strategy.

As for the Spanish version, one of the reasons explaining why there is no reference to the translator's name on the front or back cover is because the translation was carried out by a team of three people. This could be viewed with suspicion by readers, given that a single translator is the norm. Besides mentioning the translators' name, reference is made in all three translations, on the title page, to the fact that they have been translated from Chinese. This information is relevant in the sense that it increases the foreignness and exoticism of the text. Moreover, since indirect translations for Chinese literature are the norm in the publishing market in Spain (Marín Lacarta, 2012a), it must also be seen to constitute an added value to the Catalan and Spanish versions.

Genre adscription may also be understood in terms of marketing strategies in the target cultures. As has already been mentioned, in the subtitle of the Chinese original, we find the word "confessions", an explicit contract proposed by the author towards her readers, telling them the text should be read as autobiographical writing and thus establishing a direct link between the identity of the author and the main character. The publishers of the English and Catalan translations were, however, unwilling to present the book as an autobiography or diary, and instead have presented it as a novel or narrative. In the case of the English translation, including the word "novel" on the front cover calls for further analysis. The use of this word does not necessarily signify: "This book is a novel" but rather "Please look upon this book as a novel". The incorporation of a genre indicator to change the work's genre status is not without justification. The fact that the novel is universally said to be

a better "seller" than any other genre (Genette, 1997: 97) must be one of the reasons behind this decision. The editors decided the book would enter into the target culture as a novel, acting in accordance with their existing discourse, ideology and economic considerations. However, whilst this decision may have a positive outcome for future sales, the outcome for the author is altogether negative. Autobiographical writing is a means to self-empowerment, an opportunity for women to exert agency and to make their voices heard. Giving readers the responsibility of deciding to what extent a work is autobiographical or not, or whether it is autobiographical at all, is a subtle way of silencing the author's voice, denying her right to exert agency over her own identity.

Finally, on both the back and front covers of all three translated texts, to attract the target reader there are commonplace clichés and stereotypes based on the "banned in China" label, on the one hand, and the promise of sexual excess and dirty realism on the other. As already mentioned, the words "uncensored, raw and bloody" on the front cover of the English translation contribute to reinforcing these clichés and stereotypes. The texts on the back cover go still further: "A young girl's sexual awakening", "explicit sensuality", "unflinching attitude toward sex", "based on her feelings and sexual experience from the age of fourteen" and "hunger for passion". Both the Catalan and Spanish translations follow a similar strategy. On the Catalan back cover one can read: "*prohibida a la Xina*" (banned in China), "*té prohibit sortir de la Xina*" (she is not allowed to leave China) and "*enfant terrible de la literatura xinesa*" (*enfant terrible* of Chinese literature). For its part, the Spanish translation presents the book as follows: "*utiliza la promiscuidad sexual como elemento de afirmación personal y de occidentalización*" (she uses sexual promiscuity as a means of self-assertion and westernization).

Framing the text as "banned in China" and "uncensored", on the one hand, contextualizes it within expectations about the sociopolitical

context of the writing. This narrative strengthens dominant narratives in the West about China, favoring the image of an evil and repressive Chinese communist government. On the other hand, all the comments highlighting sex and sensuality also reinforce familiar narratives about Eastern women as objects of Western male desire.

Within the text, one cannot find direct disparagement or criticism of the Chinese communist government nor very explicit sex scenes. These statements are clearly designed to attract a large readership by seeking and ensuring the acceptability of the translated book in the target societies, even resorting to unethical marketing strategies. Chun Sue has never been banned from leaving her country, therefore, we must interpret these kinds of statements as part of the Western mainstream narrative to discredit China. However, just as the negative effect of genre adscription was utilized to silence the voice of the author, so too the use of clichés and stereotypes is exploited to neutralize any cultural sensitivity towards the reality of Chinese society as described by the author. We must wonder why none of these paratexts revolve around the reasons for Chun Sue's success in China, nor focus on her talent as a precocious author, nor highlight the book's innovative paratextual apparatus.

These findings concerning the use of paratexts coincide with those of other scholars studying the reception of translated Chinese literature. On the one hand, Lovell (2006: 34), who studies the reception of Chinese literature in the English-speaking world, states that, "[t]he best marketing strategy for Chinese literature is to emblazon "banned in China" on the cover". On the other, Barry (2007a: 14) states that in the market economy, nothing sells like a "banned in China" label. Based on an in-depth analysis of paratexts in Chinese literature in Spain, Marín La-carta (2012a: 337-8) also concludes that mentioning censorship on back covers and literary press reviews is the most usual device used to attract the Spanish reader. The reason behind this phenomenon might be that the idea of censorship

nurtures the Western stereotype of Chinese totalitarianism and its non-democratic government.

#### 4.2. Table of contents, chapter titles, preface and postface

Other important paratextual elements found in *Beijing Doll* are the table of contents, chapter or internal titles, a preface and a postface. The table of contents has at least two functions. On the one hand, it serves to list the titles of the sections (i.e. chapters and subchapters) into which the book is divided. On the other, it provides readers with information on how the narrative is structured, as well as its chronological development. According to Genette (1997: 294), "many internal titles make sense only to an addressee who is already involved in reading the text, for these internal titles presume familiarity with everything that has preceded." The table of contents in the original Chinese text comprises six chapters and fifty-nine subchapters. The English version disregards not only the table of contents but also the internal titles corresponding to each chapter. Nevertheless, it adds mute divisions of the text into subchapters using asterisks. These changes are significant both from the formal and functional point of view, as they change the book's internal structure and appearance and how the information is presented to the reader. With this new format, the readers of the English version will not be able to learn the different stages her life revolves around at a glimpse. The Catalan translation maintains an abbreviated version of the table of contents (only the titles of the main chapters remain), but moves it from the front to the back of the book, making it less visible. Nevertheless, the division of the text into chapters and subchapters (together with their corresponding titles) exactly follows that of the original. As for the Spanish version, both the table of contents and internal divisions of the text are faithful to the original, so readers can get an overall impression of what they are going to find from the first pages.



In the original Chinese text, the table of contents is followed by an opening text entitled *yi xie jiandan de jieshao he yi xie ai* (一些简单的介绍和一些爱) [Some simple presentations and some loves], written by the author herself, which may be considered to be a preface or introduction to the book. It is structured into thirty numbered items, introducing those keywords and people of significance in her life. The function of this text is to guide the reader through the text thereby ensuring, on the one hand, that the book is read “correctly” and, on the other, that the work’s autobiographical nature is reinforced and the reader can therefore identify the main character with the author. In the English version the thirty items in the original have been reduced to twenty-five. Deleted items include names of Chun Sue’s friends or people she admires, and her school’s regulations. The reasoning behind the deletion of these items in the English translation seems rather arbitrary, since other similar items have been preserved. Moreover the educational system is one of the objects of Chun Sue’s criticism in the book. Therefore, the anticipation and summary value of these items in the original is lost in the English translation. In contrast, both the Catalan and Spanish translations preserve the thirty items in their entirety and thus their function as Chun Sue’s keywords or important topics in her life is preserved.

It should be noted that all three translated versions of *Beijing Doll* include a second text, written by the author and placed before the preface described above, that was produced specifically for readers of the English translation but has also been included and translated in the other two versions, which proves that the editors had the English translation as a reference when they decided to translate the book into Catalan and Spanish, respectively. In this, Chun Sue justifies herself and explains the vicissitudes her manuscript underwent in China before it was eventually published, as well as what its publication meant to her in terms of reader feedback and self-esteem.

The original Chinese text also includes a postface written by Chun Sue’s best friend and publisher. In this text, the publisher explains how he was moved by the story of a teenager full of ideals and wishes and describes it as a bleeding wound, establishing a direct connection between the author and the main character. This connection is further reinforced by the number of pictures of the author placed throughout the text. The publisher also affirms that *Beijing Doll* exhibits much more cruelty and authenticity compared with the works of Mian Mian, Wei Hui (a couple of the so-called “beauty writers”) and Han Han. This postface frames the text within the broader narrative of Chinese *linglei* literature in the source culture. None of the translations analyzed include the postface and, thus, the contextualization narrative of the source text within Chinese culture and the literary arena is lost.

#### 4.3. Layout and presentation

Typesetting, i.e. vertical versus horizontal printing, the use of different types of fonts, and the presence or absence of bilingual texts, among others, are also paratexts of significance when comparing the source text and its translations. The original text presents both vertical and horizontal printing throughout the book the Chinese morpho-syllabic writing system can easily adapt to both whereas only the English translation uses vertical writing as a “running head” in the left and right margins. Whilst the Chinese original uses different font types, including handwriting, the three translations use a uniform font type throughout the book, except for the front and back covers. Another aspect worth mentioning is the fact that the original text is bilingual, combining alphabetical (English) with morpho-syllabic writing (Chinese). This is already visible in the front and back covers. The use of English is a sign of modernity, cosmopolitanism and snobbism in China. The author no doubt uses it to attract the attention of Chinese adolescents

obsessed with a marginal US/UK cult world. The Catalan and Spanish translations are also bilingual in that they keep the English present in the Chinese original, although only alphabetical writing is used throughout (English and Catalan, and English and Spanish, respectively)<sup>11</sup>. In contrast, the English translation is monolingual. Most of proper names of individuals and music groups have also been translated into English. Therefore, in this case, the text has undergone a much more domesticating process, in the words of Venuti (1995), where the mediatory agents have overridden most alien elements including unexpected paratextual elements in this kind of narrative, so the reader misses the opportunity to enjoy a new cultural and aesthetic experience.

Finally, I would like to comment on several features of *Beijing Doll* that make it quite singular and demonstrate that it is clearly intended for the teenage or young-adult market. Apart from decorative patterns or designs used as “running heads” throughout the text, there are fifteen pictures of the author; three excerpts from her diary; five poems (three of them handwritten); an extract from an essay; and an e-mail (see Figure 3 for an example of these kinds of paratexts). All these paratextual elements are interwoven into the main body of the text, illustrating it, reflecting the spontaneity and intimacy of the author, and providing readers with access to her innermost thoughts and feelings. Like a collage, they give the book its unique appearance and testify to Chun Sue's precociousness as a writer and a teenager engaged in the activities of subcultures in China. As she explained to the author of this article in a personal communication (June 13, 2014), all of these paratexts have the function of providing an informative and historical background to the story she is telling. In translation, however, these particular paratexts have been completely eliminated.

As a result, an originally innovative, heterodox text has been transformed into a conventional, homogenous narrative that has nothing in particular to offer readers when compared to other narrative texts, and leaves the reader wondering why this text has been selected for translation rather than others worthier from a literary standpoint or at least more oriented towards mainstream readers. When asked about the reasons why some passages of the text or paratexts were deleted from his English translation, Goldblatt confessed in a personal communication, November 17, 2011, not remembering what or why he might have omitted, but that there might be a reason, “which could easily have been an editorial decision made by the publisher, who had a copy of the book and was not interested in reproducing any of the images in it”. As for the Catalan version, the translator also suggested to the editor that he include these paratexts, but this idea was rejected since they did not fit his paratranslation project. These paratexts, which were selected by Chun Sue herself, are part of the author's narrative and contribute to giving a clearer and more complete picture of her. They portray a not particularly seductive teenager, either in a defiant posture or with a romantic look in her eyes; we can see the way she dresses, her different haircuts, her handwriting, her private correspondence, some of her friends, and even what her bedroom and workplace as a writer look like. Since all these paratexts offer very valuable and complementary information about her identity, they should have been considered as important as the text itself. When asked by the author of this article about it, Chun Sue (2014) stated that she would have preferred all of these paratexts to have been kept in the translations, but that there was nothing she could do about it. It seems that, at least in the case of the English and Catalan ver-

11 The Spanish front and back covers also show the title in Chinese characters, presumably to reinforce this exotic element.

sions, the editors are those responsible for the omission of these paratexts. The reasons behind this decision may be that these paratexts do not exploit the Western narratives of repressive political culture associated with China nor the narratives that reify Chinese woman as an object of sexual desire.

## 5. Discussion

The results of my paratextual analysis, combined with narrative theory, point to a series of interwoven paradoxes concerning issues such as the author's identity, the relationship between literary systems, the (re-)presentation of the Chinese Other, and cross-cultural power relations, as I will explain in more detail below.

As we have seen, an author's narrative is not constructed by the writer alone. Publishers commissioning translations determine the main function of the final product, and design the paratextual project accordingly. As a result, the writer is framed within the narratives of the receiving culture. As a consequence, the author's identity inevitably varies between the original and translated texts. Since market considerations continue to play a key role in the decisions taken, Chinese "lowbrow" literature is deemed to be worthy of translation only if it is presented in the guise of something else. The reason why *Beijing Doll* has been a successful bestseller<sup>12</sup> and possibly why publishers decided to translate the book in the first place, may be found in the fact that it approaches the question of female identity from a postfeminist

### FIGURE 3

Example of the internal layout of paratextual elements in the source text



12 According to Reinoso (2007), *Beijing Doll* sold 100,000 copies during the first weeks after publication, before it was banned.



perspective, making reference to the central themes of post-feminist women's writing<sup>13</sup>: sex and relationships, consumer culture, education and careers, friendship and popular culture. On the one hand, as women's writing that does not fall under the category of feminist writing, it can be embedded in the Western narratives of the Oriental *femme fatale*. On the other hand, despite the fact that the book is full of references to local music and literature, the *linglei* intercultural movement, as a collective identity, combines the nonconformist demeanor and style of various Western youth subcultures with Chinese cultural characteristics. Therefore, since *linglei* is "the result of syncretistic cross-cultural interactions" (Drissel, 2012: 3), in some respects the book is also quite universal. Ommundsen's (2008: 343) quote summarizes this phenomenon very well: "[t]he market power of exoticism continues to make them [women writers] more attractive to Western readers than their male counterparts, but the global popularity of chick lit has also created a new readership less likely to fetishize cultural difference than to seek out the commonalities of women's lives which increasingly defy geographical and cultural borders." The fact that in 2010 Chun Sue was named one of *Cosmopolitan's* "Women Beyond the Dream", was also featured on the cover of the Asian edition of *Time* magazine, and that *Beijing Doll* has been translated into at least ten different languages and even reedited in some cases can be taken as a proof of her global appeal and international visibility. This visibility is due to a network of paratexts, consisting of the different translations of her books, her activity in the Chinese blogosphere and her appearance in the Chinese and international media. In the final analysis, it is the target audience that determines whether a cultural product is local

or global. It is my belief that the marked degree of manipulation of the paratextual elements is, in the case of *Beijing Doll*, the result of a series of conscious decisions to upgrade the status of the text within the target literary system and to present it as a globally acceptable product.

Published by a publishing house located on the periphery of the Chinese literary system, labeled as chick lit and banned in China, the original text in Chinese has been relegated to the margins of Chinese literature. Popular culture can be the battleground for an ideological struggle between the active resistance of subordinate groups, and the forces of "incorporation" of dominant groups in society, i.e. between dominant and subordinate classes and cultures. Chun Sue, who lives an intense, subversive cultural life, clearly takes sides in many of China's social conflicts. This explains why it was hard for her to find a publishing house willing to publish her story, which was banned shortly after publication. However, as Beech (2004) puts it: "[u]nlike intercultural movements in the West, which often germinate in protest activities, most *linglei* are not motivated by economic anxiety or political dissatisfaction". Instead, they are more worried about self-expression and how to choose a path that fits their own individual identity (Chun Sue, cited in Beech, 2004). In short, "she stays away from the grander ideologies such as democracy, freedom and equality" (Beech, 2004). In Chun Sue's own words: "[w]e want the physical freedom to travel where we want, work where we want, have the friends we want", but they are not "so concerned about spiritual freedom" (Beech, 2004). The initial ban, which had more to do with moral values than politics, did not prevent the book from being produced in multiple pirate copies nor from being reissued in later official editions in 2008 and 2010.

13 Aronson (2003: 904) states that, "in the early 1980s, the media began to label women in their teens and twenties as the "postfeminist" generation". This so-called third-wave feminism "is said to explicitly embrace hybridity, contradictions, and multiple identities" (2003: 905). Ferriss & Young (2006: 80) also point out that, "[r]ather than direct political action, the strategies of third-wave feminism are diffused, spread primarily through popular culture".

Although some of the paratranslation and marketing strategies of the target culture publishers sought to place the book in a more central position, once translated, *Beijing Doll* was again located at the periphery of the literary system (a) because it is a translation and (b) because it comes from China. According to Barry (2007b: 217), of all the books published in the UK only 2-3% are translations, and this pattern is replicated across the entire English language publishing industry. Zgadzaj & Roberts (2013) state that in Spain translations account for 24% of published books, so it is understandable that readers are much more used to reading literature in translation and that there is no prejudice against it. As a result, in Spain and Catalonia translated literature is not necessarily looked upon as peripheral literature just because it has been translated. But in the case of *Beijing Doll* it is a marginal cultural product because of the author's origin, since according to official statistics, in the period 2000-2009 Chinese ranked 19th in the list of original languages translated into Spanish (Ministerio de Cultura, 2010: 24). The first paradox evidenced in this study is the fact that *Beijing Doll* is not viewed as peripheral literature in Western countries for the same reasons as it is in China, i.e., because it gives voice to subcultures, subversiveness, and non-mainstream culture. It is considered peripheral because the original is in Chinese and target readers have to overcome a series of stereotypes associated with that before they approach it on equal terms with other foreign literatures. According to the polysystem theory, which accounts for the behavior of translated literature, when a work of literature occupies a peripheral position in the target literary system, it tends to be acceptability-oriented, i.e. the translator tends to adapt the translated text to conform to the dictates of the target literary system (Even-Zohar, 1990). In other words, the text tends to be "domesticated" through the translation process (Venuti, 1995). In the case of *Beijing Doll*, domestication of the translated text implies using paratextual elements to reframe the text with a selective focus

on the writer's sexual life and problems with the Chinese authorities, as a mechanism to satisfy the expectations of Anglo-American and Spanish audiences rather than the broader narratives on which Chun Sue's text draws.

However, the marginal, subversive nature of the original Chinese text and the unusual relationship established between Chun Sue's narrative and the paratextual elements introduced have been neutralized as a result of this process. Both text and paratexts have been made subservient to a specific ideology, that of the literary establishment in the target culture. As a result of decisions taken by target-culture publishers, a "middlebrow" audience has been targeted an audience that differs as much from the original "lowbrow" target reader as it does from the "highbrow" academic elites who are hostile to this kind of literature and who, if asked, both in China and abroad, would select other texts for translation.

A further paradox lies in the fact that although some of the decisions taken by publishers regarding the use of paratextual elements have distorted the image of Chun Sue and partially silenced her voice, by the mere fact of having had her text translated, she has crossed the boundary between popular and high culture to reach middlebrow audiences in foreign cultures. According to Wardle (2012: 32), "[a]ll these paratexts mean that each publishing company can market what was once the same source text in their own way, each attempting to win over a targeted share of the potential readership". Chun Sue's work has, as a result, experienced a significant shift from the periphery of the Chinese literary system to a more central position in the target literary systems. Her book is peripheral in the Chinese literary system partially because it has been banned by the authorities, and yet it is precisely this "banned in China" label which has pushed it to a more central position in the target literary systems.

The following data demonstrate the shift that has taken place. On the one hand, while it

takes around twenty years on average for a Chinese female writer to be translated into Spanish, in Chun Sue's case it took only one year (Rovira-Esteva & Sáiz-López, 2008: 244-51). On the other hand, although both Western and Chinese literary critics consider *Beijing Doll* to be second-rate literature, the book can be found on the recommended reading lists of contemporary Chinese literature in a number of Spanish and American universities<sup>14</sup>. One reason may be that most students have not yet achieved the level of language proficiency required to read fluently in Chinese. Unfortunately, when it comes to finding good Chinese literature in translation for less proficient students of Chinese to read, first-class literary works do not abound, especially in Spain.

One last paradox is worthy of note. According to Venuti (1998: 81), "the very choice of a foreign text for translation can also signify its foreignness by challenging domestic canons for foreign literatures and domestic stereotypes for foreign cultures". The choice of *Beijing Doll* as a text for translation was ground-breaking and offered publishers the opportunity of introducing readers to a radical new literary voice, new images, and alternative forms of expression from mainland China. The use of multiple, varied paratextual elements provided the means of doing so. Nevertheless, the overall strategy at work in the paratranslations produced, and the way in which the Other has been re-presented for three different target audiences (in particular in the English *Beijing Doll*) provide evidence of a process of adaptation of the translated text to conform to the style and subject matter that currently prevail in home markets. Chun Sue's text is not framed within narratives involving her innovative subjective aesthetic, but rather focus on the book's political and sexual dimensions,

which seem significantly more important to the profile of Chun Sue and her text in the Anglophone and Spanish literary market.

## 6. Conclusions

In this paper I have tried to: i) show how the Other, specifically Chinese chick lit and Chun Sue's *Beijing Doll* as a case study, is (re-)presented in translation through the shifts in the narratives based on the use of paratexts; ii) highlight the resulting changes in function and status of the original text in the source and target literary systems; and iii) underline the unequal character of intercultural power relations where narratives are the means to exert this power; i.e. the fact that in the case under study the construction of the Other's identity is based on unequal power relations. I have carried out my analysis based on the use and treatment of paratextual elements in the original text and in its English, Catalan and Spanish translations.

The use of paratexts as tools for comparative analysis is innovative since, to the best of my knowledge, they have been relatively little explored in Translation Studies and they have never been used to carry out a deconstructive analysis of contemporary Chinese literature in translation. In this article they have been shown to be useful in identifying the process by which the translated texts were adapted to conform to target audience expectations (i.e. mainstream ideology) in order to ensure success in terms of market indicators.

Chun Sue's text is interesting not so much for its literary value (a highly subjective concept) as for its criticism of Chinese mainstream ideologies and institutions. Writing is her ideological battleground, where she expresses her

14 Spanish universities including *Beijing Doll* in their recommended reading lists of contemporary Chinese literature include the Autonomous University of Barcelona and Pompeu Fabra University, amongst others; whilst American Universities including this book in the reading list of some of their courses include Temple University, the University of Texas, Columbia University and McGill University in Canada.

resistance to the dominant culture. As we read, we hear the voice of a young woman who uses her personal storytelling to construct her identity and tell her readers what really worries her about her everyday life. The large number of cultural references found in her text makes it markedly local, yet the overall paratranslation strategies used have converted it into a global product.

Texts are generally believed to be immutable in themselves<sup>15</sup>, but paratexts are considered much more flexible and transient. They are used to adapt texts in time (when they are published) and space (depending on target-culture taste, beliefs, values and agendas). In fact, the essence of paratexts is their functionality. Since paratexts provide multiple data on publishers' strategies when presenting books to their chosen target audiences, I have compiled a comprehensive inventory of paratexts, such as those located on front and back covers, the title page, title, subtitles, internal titles, preface, postface, table of contents, format, font type, and illustrations, to name but a few. The examples given serve to illustrate the diversity and importance of paratexts in determining the physical appearance of a text, which can help situate the text within the source and target literary systems and narratives. In the case of *Beijing Doll*, many of these elements have been manipulated (e.g. changing the designs and illustrations on the cover) or even dropped (internal visual paratexts, internal titles and table of contents, postface, letters and e-mails), drastically changing the way in which the book has been presented and potentially received, and losing the confessional style reflected, for example, through the use of personal letters and e-mails. This would indicate that the significance of the paratextual features specific to the source text was over-

looked in the translation process, supposedly, I assume, to promote the text in a way that satisfied Anglo-American and Spanish literary values and preconceived perceptions about contemporary Chinese women's literature.

(Para-)translation projects are the arena *par excellence* for potential intercultural encounter and exchange, but foreign texts can be a source of cultural wealth or cultural poverty depending on the approach taken by translators and paratranslators. After analyzing the three different translations of *Beijing Doll*, it is clear that the editing of paratextual elements has not only literary and aesthetic, but also ideological, cultural and marketing implications. Domesticating strategies such as those adopted in the English translation may be explained in terms of the publishers' response to the expectations of more authoritative cultures, which are neither prepared nor willing to accept the "foreignness" of Chinese culture, or, better said, "unexpected foreignness". In the case of the Catalan and Spanish translations, the publishers probably followed a similar strategy to the publishers of the English translation, due to the fact that, as is common practice, the decision to translate the book was based on its prior success in the English translation or because the publisher had already been offered translation rights by an international literary agency. The results of this study thus reflect the asymmetrical power relations between cultures the Chinese and Spanish cultures functioning as "minor" cultures in contact with Anglo-Saxon culture, Spanish and Catalan culture, in turn, functioning as "major" cultures in relation to Chinese. This finding is in agreement with Marín Lacarta's (2012a) findings, which concluded that Chinese literature receives an unequal treatment within the global literary system and, especially, in Spain.

15 It is naïve to believe that the original text remains essentially the same once it has been translated, since we often find cases where the translated version of a text has undergone heavy editing (even dropping whole passages of the original). Although this issue is directly related to those I address in this paper, a textual analysis of this kind is beyond the scope of this article.

The translation ethics of sameness underlying the global strategy of transferring paratextual elements has enabled and ratified existing narratives, canons, and interpretations, according to Venuti (1998: 82). The ethics of translation behind the paratranslation of *Beijing Doll* partially silences Chun Sue's voice, taking from her the right to assign meaning to her text. This is a clear example of power relations at work and is reminiscent of old orientalist practices, where the Other is (re-)presented, through a shift in the narratives, not as s/he really is, but how the target culture wants to see him/her. The translated text is subject to relocation in new narratives, as it travels between cultures. Not only do the most powerful mediating agents impose their interpretation of the source text on their readers, but they also impose it on the readers of other "minor" cultures, which are different from the source culture such as the Catalan and Spanish. I would like to bring this paper to a close by suggesting whether such approaches might not have negative intercultural consequences, since we would appear, once more, to be missing an opportunity to broaden our horizons, to eliminate stereotypes and to contribute to real intercultural understanding. Why not use translation and paratranslation to approach the Chinese Other in all its inner diversity and complexity, instead of using them once more as a reductive, restrictive and narrowing gate? A feasible and optimal way to do so, as suggested by Yuste Frías (2015: 326), would be to allow the translator to engage and play a decisive role in the decision-making process regarding the whole paratranslation project.

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