

# Paratexts in *The Wisdom of Laotse* Translated and Edited by Lin Yutang: Types and Functions Investigated

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**Abstract:** Paratext is of great significance in analyzing translators' decisions and motivations in intercultural communication. As an outstanding editor-translator-author, Lin Yutang was good at using paratexts in foreign dissemination of traditional Chinese culture, and the extensive paratexts in *The Wisdom of Laotse* translated and edited by him have left a deep impression on readers. Yet few current studies have comprehensively examined the paratexts in it. This article focuses on the paratext in this book to examine what categories of paratexts Lin Yutang employed in translating Chinese philosophical classics, and how they functioned in contributing to the success of this translation. With a textual close reading and comparison, it is found that Lin mainly employed four types of paratexts: introductions, footnotes, translator's comments, and various headings or titles. They share similarities in function though used in different contexts. Overall, Lin's adoption of those paratexts aimed to achieve three intended functions: clarifying textual meaning, bridging cultural gaps, and communicating personal thoughts. The first two functions are indispensable for translating philosophical texts, while the third is optional, not only reflecting Lin's subjectivity but also helping to construct his cultural identity and make the translation more interesting. Regardless of the specific functions, Lin Yutang's ultimate goal was to eliminate cultural barriers and promote the acceptance of his translation.

**Keywords:** *The Wisdom of Laotse*, Editor-Translator, Paratexts, Lin Yutang, *Dao De Jing*

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## 1. Introduction

Lin Yutang, widely recognized as a prominent Chinese writer and philosopher abroad, is also a prolific translator. It is believed his translation career might begin in 1914 and lasted for more than 60 years [1]. He also proposed three renowned translation criteria of "faithfulness, fluency, and beauty" in China. However, the study of Lin Yutang as a translator had long been neglected by Chinese academia, and it was not until the beginning of this century that attention was paid to it [2]. We hold that one of the major reasons is Lin's translated works are not the traditional ones which have only one source text and a counterpart target text. Instead, Most of them incorporate target texts translated from different sources as well as translator's notes, introductions, etc. according to certain themes or principles. In other words, Lin Yutang acted as an editor-translator, especially when disseminating Chinese wisdom in Taoist classics. *The Wisdom of Laotse*, one of his "Trio of Wisdom", first published in the Modern Library series of Random House in 1948, is a case in point. In it, Lin

Yutang translated *Dao De Jing* (《道德经》, also called *Laotse*) and excerpts of *Chuangtse* (《庄子》), but did not just juxtapose them in the original forms. He creatively picked up excerpts of *Chuangtse* to interpret, confirm, or supplement *Laotse*, usually abbreviated as "to interpret Laotse with Chuangtse" (*yi zhuang jie lao* 以庄解老). Besides, he also placed a long introduction before the main text and imaginary conversations between Confucius and Laotse after it. In this way, the book is rich in significant supplementary materials usually called paratext. Yet, only a few researchers in recent years have analyzed paratexts in the book as a whole while the majority have just cast their eyes on the part *Dao De Jing* to explore translation strategies or quality. For instance, Zhang Lei approached paratexts in this book from the perspective of thick translation [3]. Lu Zhaoqi explored how Lin Yutang had successfully combined thick translation and paratext together and hence promoted the dissemination of this book [4]. Weixing Huang et al. probed into text-close thick translation in two versions of *Laozi* and then found both Lin Yutang and the other translators prefer to use notes and commentaries

most in providing additional information to achieve contextualization [5]. In general, existing research mainly explored paratexts in this book either from other theoretical perspectives or only focused on scraps of them. Moreover, most of the research only touched upon the English reprint published in China but seldom dealt with the first edition published abroad, which presented paratexts in a different way. Consequently, this article will try to comprehensively delve into paratexts in the first edition so as to figure out what kinds of paratexts Lin Yutang usually adopted and what functions they served generally so that we can get some insights for enhancing the spread and reception of traditional Chinese culture.

## 2. Paratext and Translation

Genette once stated that a text without paratext does not exist and has never appeared in history [6], demonstrating the universality of paratext and its importance to a text. The same is true for translated texts, especially in translations of ancient Chinese classics, where huge linguistic and cultural differences require the existence of more paratexts. To put it differently, paratext and translation are inextricably linked. In this part, we will first comb the definitions of paratext and then explore what the paratextual path has contributed to translation studies.

### 2.1. An Overview of “Paratext”

According to Genette, paratext means the “marginal or supplementary data around the text” [7], which is a “privileged place... of an influence on the public, an influence that... is at the service of a better reception for the text...” [6]. For Batchelor, “the paratext consists of any element which conveys comment on the text, or presents the text to readers, or influences how the text is received...(and) may be physically attached to the text...or...separate from it...” [8]. It is not difficult to find there are some similarities between the two scholars’ views on paratext, and they both agree that paratexts are crucial complementary elements in a text, aiming to influence readers and enhance the acceptance of the text. Paratexts come in many different forms, and without them, we may not have a qualified or ready-made book but just be presented with some difficult-to-read manuscripts. Genette has categorized paratext into peritext and epitext based on its position in relation to the text [6]. Peritext is the typical paratext which is usually located inside a book, like titles, preface, notes, etc. while epitext is located outside the book and generally includes interviews, conversations, letters, and so on [6]. In short, as Genette suggests, the paratext is a “threshold” [6] that is ubiquitous, connecting two different worlds and facilitating our reading of the text. If uttered in a metaphoric way, paratext is to text what hair is to the body. We usually tend to ignore their presence, but they are always there to play a role.

### 2.2. The Paratextual Path in Translation Studies

Although translation studies just found its place as an

independent discipline in the 1970s, it had actually gone a long way of obscurity in history. In traditional research, people paid more attention to text comparison, semantic faithfulness, stylistic equivalence, etc., and thus usually devoted to analyzing the translations themselves, but ignored or failed to highlight the abundant paratexts. This situation has gradually changed since the late 1980s when translation studies underwent the Cultural Turn. With the research interest shifting from semantic equivalence to cultural intervention, the academia began to focus more on how social or cultural factors influence translation decisions and reception. Then, the paratext of translation, as a “hidden” element located in the marginal zone for a long time, has also started to draw the attention of translation researchers again [9]. It becomes a repertoire of translation background, process, intention, etc. from which researchers can find what they need to explore the translation. In other words, paratext has broadened the research field for translation discipline and especially provides a platform to observe translation behavior from cross-discipline perspectives. It “offers valuable insights into the presentation and reception of translated texts themselves” [10]. Meanwhile, paratexts will also guide us to evaluate a translation that seems not so readable more objectively and fairly for translators sometimes have to use them to build diverse shared contexts for readers and finally promote their understanding of the translation at the expense of its fluency. All in all, the paratext of translation “participates in, enriches, and even explicates the meaning of the main text of a translation” [11]. It shows translation practice is more interesting and complex than often imagined and keeps reminding us that translation studies should strike a balance between main text and paratext if regarding translation as a social-cultural behavior.

## 3. Major Types of Paratexts in *The Wisdom of Laozi*

As mentioned above, *The Wisdom of Laozi* is a recompiled translation by Lin Yutang and thus contains extensive paratexts. Different categories of paratexts were used on different scales in it, reflecting to some extent the translator’s diversified and reader-oriented paratextual strategy. Owing to space constraints, we will only focus on the major types of paratexts in it.

### 3.1. Introduction

Well-written introductions for readers are relatively common in Lin’s works, and this book is no exception. Before the main text, Lin Yutang wrote a four-section introduction as long as 19 pages. In section one, he generally introduced the origin, development, and reception of Taoism in China, Laozi and Chuangtse’s contribution to Taoism, and their differences. He emphasized distinctively that “the best approach...would be to read Laozi with Chuangtse” [12]. Section two highlighted the key feature of Laozi’s thought—paradox, and reminded readers of the affinity of

Laotse's ideas to that of some Western thinkers, like Emerson, etc. In this way, readers may be instructed to understand Laotse from their own cultural horizons. Section three mainly informed readers of the significance of Taoism to contemporary Westerners. He thought Laotse's naturalism was helpful in overcoming the prevailing materialism and scientism since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The last section saw his clarification of the translation process, principles, and major revisions. Moreover, Lin went further to write another short introduction at the beginning of the "Prolegomena" to explain the necessity of its presence, its characterization in content, and the structural adjustments he has made to it. We cannot abruptly judge whether Lin's introductions are accurate or not for they are "more discursive and more obviously subjective additions" [13], but can conclude without the slightest hesitation that what he did is quite reader-friendly. As an editor-translator, he intended to build a readable text and help reduce reading obstacles for readers in the target culture through such wonderful introductions.

### 3.2. Footnotes

American sinologist and translator Howard Goldblatt once did not approve of using footnotes in translation, arguing that they would spoil the reading [14]. His concern is not unfounded. Nevertheless, in contrast to his literary translation, footnotes are still highly recommended and necessary in academic or specialized translation. Without their presence, some translations of Chinese classics will undoubtedly be difficult to understand. Lin Yutang is exactly the kind of translator who likes to use footnotes to solve translation problems. There are 178 footnotes in *The Wisdom of Laotse*, and 145 in the main text. Such a great number of footnotes at least suggest two aspects: first, interpretation and translation of Taoist classics is rather difficult because of their terseness, obscureness, and equivocality; second, Lin tried to strike a balance between the source culture and target culture. In order to preserve the deep meaning of the source text, he stuck to literal translation and even believed translation sometimes "required a certain stupidity" [15], but Lin also took readability and comprehensibility into account, so he spared no effort to include footnotes which played different roles. First and foremost, they were used to explain sentences' connotations, clarify words' meanings, or highlight specific concepts. For example:

ST: 不尚贤，使民不争[16].

TT: Exalt not the wise, so that the people shall not scheme and contend [12].

Footnote: Exalting the wise in government is a typically Confucian idea [12].

Without this explanatory footnote, western readers may feel confused as to why Chinese sages disapprove of praising the wise, and after seeing it, they naturally realize this seemingly unreasonable idea is just a reflection of the sharp difference between Taoism and Confucianism. Besides, some footnotes were set as reading tips or editor's clues to help readers look through the book more easily. Roughly speaking, Lin used various types of footnotes in this specialized translation in the

hope of rendering the translation clear and comprehensible.

### 3.3. Translator's Comments

As an editor-translator, Lin Yutang never just satisfied himself with translating the original faithfully and exactly, and he often can't help giving comments as paratexts in translation to express his own propositions or help readers grasp the key thread of thought. In *The Wisdom of Laotse*, we actually have met a very special situation. He employed translations of excerpts of *Chuangtse* to interpret that of *Dao De Jing*, but *Chuangtse* itself sometimes is hard to understand, so he had to make some comments on those excerpts although he said he just confined himself to an editor's job of making the connections clear...and tried not to express his own opinions [12]. Apart from comments on Chuangtse's ideas, he also commented on *Dao De Jing* or just expressed his opinions towards the difference between Laotse and Chuangtse. For example, after translating Laotse's ideas about "water", he gave a paragraph comment to point out that probably the most marked difference between Laotse and Chuangtse is reflected in the subject of non-contention (*bu zheng*, 不争) [12]. Besides, in chapter 16 "Knowing the eternal law", he also put a paragraph to comment why "the doctrine of passivity (emptiness) and quietude arises from the doctrine of reversion...and the eternal reversion from activity to inactivity is the basic philosophy of Taoism". [12] As we know, "the most basic tenet of translator commentaries...is to inform readers about the source text, writer, and culture" [17]. Lin Yutang chose to produce various comments not to show off his learning but to present Laotse's ideas more clearly and accurately. He hoped readers would not go astray too far and understand Taoist culture better with the help of his well-designed comments even at the risk of being criticized as misinterpretation or interruption of reading fluency.

### 3.4. Headings and Titles

*Dao De Jing* has been divided into 81 chapters by ancient Chinese scholars, of which the first 37 chapters are usually called *Dao Jing* (道经) while the rest are *De Jing* (德经) [16]. It shares the common feature of classics at that time, namely, lack of chapter titles. Thanks to his Western education background and professional suggestions from the publisher, Lin Yutang apparently noticed this discrepancy. He was fairly conscious of the reading habits of Western readers, so he didn't just follow the original pattern of the book, but rearranged it in a new way according to his own plan. He also divided the book into two parts as before but held that the first part would be from chapters 1 to 40, which mainly explains the principle of Tao, while the rest 41 chapters mainly discuss the applications of Tao. Then he divided all chapters into seven books and each one includes several chapters that have connections or similarities in terms of the main idea essentially. What's even more remarkable is that he considerably added book headings, and chapter titles for *Dao De Jing*. Besides, as Lin attempted to interpret Laotse with extracts of *Chuangtse*, he also composed section titles with

numbers for almost every extract in a careful way. Such titles and headings stood there like signposts in the ocean of wisdom. As a kind of “organizational paratext” [13], Lin could set up a clear-cut Contents for interested readers with them and do his best to minimize the likelihood that readers will give up reading it because they can’t find apparent reading clues. They can grasp the rough idea of each part and can flip straight to where they want to read quickly instead of feeling lost in the strange and difficult materials.

## 4. Functions of Paratexts in *The Wisdom of Lao-tse*

Although Genette once pointed “the functions of the paratext...constitute a highly empirical and highly diversified object that must be brought into focus inductively, genre by genre and often species by species” [6], we still found that different categories of paratexts may also share functional similarities despite being used in different contexts after sorting out the main types of paratexts and their characteristics in this book. Katharina Reiss’ categorization of text into three types: informative, expressive, and operative based on the three functions of language proposed by Karl Bühler [18] obviously can shed light on analyzing functions of paratext as it is also a special kind of text. As a result, we also roughly classify the paratextual functions of this book into three kinds: clarifying textual meaning, bridging cultural gaps, and communicating personal thoughts, which will be discussed below.

### 4.1. Clarifying Textual Meaning

Because of cultural differences, translators always prefer to adopt paratexts to elaborate on indeterminacies or difficulties in the main texts, especially when meeting philosophical classics that often need a literal translation. That’s why meaning clarification is the most important function of the paratexts in *The Wisdom of Lao-tse*. Lin was always inclined to interpret the original with somewhat different paratexts in this book out of concern that readers might not understand the true meaning. His interpretation through paratexts is mainly demonstrated in three ways: explain vague concepts with footnotes; guide readers to grasp the gist with comments; and build context with an academic introduction.

ST: 谷神不死，是谓玄牝 [16].

TT: The Spirit of the Valley never dies. It is called the Mystic Female. [12].

Footnote: The Valley, like the bellows, is a symbol of Taoistic ‘emptiness’.

In this example, Western readers may feel confused about the essence of the “spirit of valley” for they don’t share similar cultural knowledge, so he inserted a footnote to clarify it by comparing “valley” to “bellows”, and explaining its symbolic meaning. Thus, readers may find hints to decipher its true sense. Various comments are also rather prevalent in this translation. In the first chapter of Book Three “The Imitation of Tao”, Lin contributed a two-paragraph comment to

illustrate the essential spirit of that book for readers. It first indicates Book Three will become more mystical and emphasizes that Tao cannot be named, described, and known, thus what we can have is only a feeling of reverence and awe for the mystery [12]. Then it compares the philosophic attitude towards blankness and mystery with the state of mind of scientists facing unknown nature, which ingeniously made it more accessible. As for the introduction, we can easily find Lin never just piled up a bunch of historical materials, but composed in a sinologist’s way which combines background information with academic research. He generally analyzed the essential spirit of Taoism, its similarity with Western thinking, its practical significance, etc. to help construct cultural context and construe the whole book. Even before the Prolegomena, he also briefly expounded its main idea for readers before they move to the main text. Anyway, paratexts like these are numerous in this book. Their presence actively helps to build a thick semantic context and make the book lucid. On the whole, Lin relied on the authoritative explanations of Chinese scholars, but he also employed his subjectivity in translation. In order to “gain ideal readers, allowing them to maximize their proximity to the meaning of the text based on the cues” [19], he spared no effort to clarify textual implications with diverse paratexts. After all, only a well-balanced translation between readability and adequacy can spread Chinese culture more effectively in foreign countries.

### 4.2. Bridging Cultural Gaps

Susan Bassnett has pointed “the translator treats the text in isolation from the culture at his peril” [20]. Lin Yutang obviously didn’t want to take that risk, so he also attempted to bridge cultural gaps that may undermine reading pleasure in this book by providing different categories of paratexts. As guided by an unusual translation principle that only the translation that possesses some stupidity or literalness can be seen as faithful [15], Lin’s translations of *Lao-tse* and excerpts of *Chuangtse* are far closer to the original texts in both form and content, thus bringing some difficulties for readers because they lack requisite Chinese cultural or linguistic accumulation. Therefore, extensive paratexts were employed to compensate for the inadequacy of shared contexts to make the translation intelligible. In the Prolegomena, when he met the name Huei Shih (惠施), he complemented a footnote that reads “a good personal friend of Chuangtse’s. The two friends really admired each other greatly, though they always differed and argued. Also referred to as ‘Hueitse’” [12] to introduce his identity and relationship with Chuangtse. Relying on this additional cultural tip, readers can roughly know why this name recurs in Chuangtse’s articles and also understand better their debates and disagreements. Besides, the original *Lao-tse* and parts of *Chuangtse* did not initially have real chapter titles. If they are presented in such an unfamiliar or crude way as a book, Western readers may feel lost or unpleasant and throw it away. Then, Lin Yutang designed new titles and headings to bridge the cultural gap in publishing and eliminate structural barriers in translation. For English readers, it is important that

a book be well-organized and easy to navigate. With such titles, Lin reduced formal differences and met readers' cultural horizons of expectation. In addition to these two strategies, what Lin did most was compensate for grammatical components for there are sharp differences in sentence patterns between Chinese and English. Here is a typical example:

ST: 持而盈之, 不如其已。揣而锐之, 不可长保[16]。

TT: Stretch (a bow) to the very full, and you will wish you had stopped in time. Temper a (sword-edge) to its very sharpest, and the edge will not last long. [12]

In Chinese, sentences without subject, object, or connectives are exceedingly common. Such grammatical features also abound in *Laotse*, which seems to reflect the depth and commonality of Laotse's wisdom as they can be understood in different ways. If it is only translated in the original grammatical pattern into English, a hypotactic language that needs an object or connective to be precise and smooth, readers may feel perplexed about its meaning. In view of the discrepancy in this example, Lin used parentheses to compensate for proper objects and supplemented necessary connective "and", making sentences become coherent and also leaving space for new interpretations. Readers can replace "bow" or "sword-edge" with other familiar items according to their own life experiences. To sum up, different types of paratexts like footnotes, titles, or parentheses had been employed by Lin Yutang to achieve the intended function of bridging cultural gaps in order to make the book more accessible and thought-provoking.

### 4.3. Communicating Personal Thoughts

Due to cultural and linguistic barriers, Lin Yutang was usually forced to adopt paratexts to elucidate textual meaning or bridge cultural gaps in philosophical translation. However, in this book, he also took the initiative to produce paratexts in certain seemingly unnecessary places, in which case he hoped to achieve the intended function of conversing with readers about his own feelings or views. This was pretty typical in his translation but not strange, after all, he was also an excellent author and had the urge to express his own personal ideas. In the Introduction, Lin tried to dialogue with readers about his own mind openly. He not only told readers that he might choose Taoism as his religion [12] but also candidly stated what he revised and why he did so in this edition compared with that of 1942. He also dialogued with readers in the main text.

ST: 视之不见名曰夷, 听之不闻名曰希, 搏之不得名曰微。[16]

TT: ...That is called the Invisible (*yi*). ...That is called the Inaudible (*hsi*). ...That is called the Intangible (*wei*) [12].

Footnote: Jesuit scholars consider these three words (in ancient Chinese pronounced nearly like *i-hi-wei*) an interesting coincidence with the Hebrew word '*Jahve*'.

After translating these concepts, Lin went ahead adding the footnote to draw readers' attention to the imperceptible similarity in pronunciation between them and "Jahve". Actually, the translation is already unambiguous without this

footnote, but Lin still did so. It is not hard to deduce that he may want to convey his feelings to readers that this coincidence vividly demonstrates the interculturality and commensurability between different cultures. Besides, He occasionally made use of paratexts to express his academic opinions. A lesser-known name "Laolaitse" appears in Chapter 29. Lin first compensated for the cultural context through a footnote to inform readers that some scholars have essayed that "Laolaitse" was actually "Laotse", but meanwhile pointed out they often failed to provide conclusive evidence to prove it [12]. He then explicitly expressed his own scholarly discovery that the advice given to Confucius by Laolaitse in this passage was similar to that given to Confucius by Laotse in Sima Qian's *Hsiki (Historical Records 《史记》)*, thus providing a possible new piece of evidence that indirectly justifies their view [12]. Obviously, he didn't just aim to spread Chinese wisdom but also hoped to exchange his own personal academic reflections with readers to make the translation more interesting and deserving to read. In a word, sometimes Lin's choice of utilizing paratexts in seemingly unnecessary places isn't unreasonable. With them, he communicated his attitudes, feelings, or findings in the translation like an author, making readers feel his frankness, carefulness, and sincerity, then they may love this book more.

## 5. Conclusion

Among various factors contributing to the success of *The Wisdom of Laotse*, the proper and ingenious usage of paratexts is quite striking. The major types of paratexts Lin Yutang employed are introductions, footnotes, translator's comments, titles, and headings which seem as commonplace as those in other translations, but actually indicate a special personal style. The academic and dialogical introduction as well as the innovative paratextual strategy—"to interpret Laotse with Chuangtse" are cases in point. These paratexts mainly served three kinds of functions: clarifying textual meaning, bridging cultural gaps, and communicating personal thoughts. As Lin chose to translate the original in a literal way in case of injecting too many personal interpretations into it, the first two paratextual functions are extraordinarily necessary for readers. On the one hand, footnotes or introductions had to be used to explain specific philosophical concepts to make the translation understandable while on the other hand, paratexts like comments, parenthesis, and titles, etc. were also indispensable for readers to grasp the main ideas and cultural implications. Compared with the two compulsory functions, communicating personal thoughts is a function that seems optional to some extent for understanding the text. Still, it represents Lin's attitude, emotion, and unique experience as an editor-translator-author. It adds vitality and honesty to the translation. In a nutshell, no matter what types of paratexts Lin Yutang employed and what functions they served, the fact we can never negate in terms of his paratextual strategy is that he hoped to eliminate the cultural and linguistic obstacles, build a thick shared context and finally promoted the dissemination and reception of Chinese wisdom through them.

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