

**Packaging Culture and the Production of Stereotypes in English Translations:
In What Ways to Paratexts in English Translation Shape Global Perception of National
Literatures, and How Do They Contribute to the Circulation of Cultural Stereotypes?**

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ABSTRACT

The study delves deep to investigate the role of paratexts in English translations in establishing and shaping the global perceptions of national literature, contributing to the circulations and stabilization of cultural stereotypes. The essay advocates and argues that the paratexts such as book covers, publisher blurbs, translator introductions, and marketing discourse, function as powerful interpretive mechanism that paves the way and condition acts of reading, drawing on paratext theory, translation studies, world literature frameworks and postcolonial critique. Based on Alex Waston's analysis of the Anglophone literary marketplace and the "packaging" of Japanese literature for English-speaking audience, the study illustrates how translated text are framed through minimal cultural cliché, interlinked with market expectations. By forecasting paratext as ideological and commercial mediators, this essay challenges text centric approaches to world literature and translation. It also makes it clear that how national literatures are transformed into expandable cultural identities. The essay contributes a genuine and original intervention by envisioning a conceptualization paratext as sites where literary value, cultural meaning, and stereotype formation traverse within global publishing economy.

Keywords: paratexts, English translations, national literature, cultural stereotypes, expandable cultural identities, global publishing economy

INTRODUCTION

In an era characterized by concentrated global circulation of literary texts, translation plays a vital role in shaping how national literature are experienced beyond their original, native linguistic and cultural context. Translated literature seldom approaches readers as an unmediated textual artefact. In fact, it is framed by a complex network of paratext, like book covers, publisher blurbs, translator prefaces, reviews, interview and endorsement, that guide and lead interpretation even before the first line of translated text is read. These paratextual elements are not merely additional and supplementary, rather they act and function as interpretive frames that condition reader expectations and influence the cultural context and meaning assigned to literary work.

This essay advocates that paratexts in English translations endeavors a decisive impact and influence on global perceptions of national literatures. Particularly, it aims that such paratexts often contribute to the

circulation and stabilization of cultural stereotypes by presenting national literary traditions through intimate, market-friendly cliché. While translations is frequently celebrated as a medium of cross-cultural exchange and understanding. The Paratextual framing of translated literature can contrast reinforce essentialist and minimal representation of cultural differences.

The pivot on English translations is significant due to the central position of English within the global literary system. As the reader and scholar of world literature have noted, English operates and functions as a dominant language of circulation, negotiating visibility and symbolic capital upon the texts translated into it (Casanova, 2024; Moretti, 2000). Therefore, it can be considered that the entry into the Anglophone literary marketplace is not a neutral process. It requires texts to be contributed comprehensible and attractive to specific readerships, which is shaped by cultural expectations and commercial imperative. Paratexts play a crucial role in this process by mediating between the source culture and the target audience.

The essay is based on Alex Watson's analysis of how Japanese literature is packaged for Anglophone readers and audience. Watson depicts that English –language paratexts frequently frame Japanese text as enigmatic, minimalist, timeless, and melancholic, therefore aligning and interlinked them with orientalist perceptions and Western aesthetic preferences (Watson, 2019). Although Watson's work delivers an important point of departure, my essay extends his deep vision and insights by keeping paratextual framing within a broader horizon of theoretical domain that includes paratext theory, translation studies, world literature and postcolonial critique.

The core research question leading this inquiry is: In what ways do paratexts in English translations shape global perceptions of national literatures, and how do they contribute to the circulation and stabilization of cultural stereotypes? To answer this question, my essay puts forward three interconnected and interrelated arguments. Firstly, paratexts function as thresholds of interpretation that importantly shape how translated texts are read and understood. Secondly, in the background and context of global literary markets, paratexts are deeply involved in the processes of cultural branding and commodification. Thirdly, these processes result in the repetition and normalization of cultural stereotypes that minimize complex literary traditions to simplified identities.

By highlighting paratexts as sites of ideological mediation, my study challenges approaches that emphasize solely on the translated text itself. It opines instead for a more expansive understanding of translation as a cultural, economic, discursive practice rooted within the global system of hegemony and power.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Paratext as Threshold of Interpretation

The notion of the paratext was most influentially articulated by Gerard Genette. According to him paratext are the “threshold” that mediated between a text and its reader (Genette, 1997). For him, paratexts include all the verbal and visual material that encompass a text and enable it to be perceived and received as a book. These helping material shape how readers approached the text, impacting the interpretation, genre classification, and value attribution.

Genette discriminates between peritexts, which are physically attached to the book, such as covers, titles, prefaces and footnotes and epitext, which remain outside the book such as interviews, reviews and promotional material. Both of these forms are pivotal in the context of translated literature, where readers often rely on paratexts to recoup for limited familiarity with the source culture.

Significantly, Genette emphasizes that paratexts are neutral. They are made and produced within specific institutional context and background, and serve special functions, including persuasion, legitimation and instruction (Genette, 1997:2). In translation, paratext frequently consider an explanatory role, positioning the translated text within cultural and ideological frameworks that shape reader perception and reception.

Translation as Cultural and Ideological Mediation

Translation studies has dominantly accentuating the ideological dimensions of translation. Lawrence Venuti puts emphasis that translation is shaped by asymmetrical power relation between cultures and language. Particularly, in contexts where a hegemonic and dominant language such as English mediates access to global readership (Venuti, 1995). Venuti's divergence between domestication and foreignization culminates how translations often privilege fluency and familiarity at the expense of cultural difference.

As Venuti's works advocates primarily the textual strategies, paratexts plays a reciprocal role in domestication. Translator prefaces, publisher blurbs, and marketing descriptions frequently frame cultural difference in way that provide it intelligible and non-threatening to target audiences and readers. Like framing can contribute to what Venuti terms the "invisibility" of translation enveloping and masking the interpretive hard task involved in mediating between cultures (Venuti, 1995:1-2).

From this point of view, paratexts can be understood as sites where ideological choices about audiences, representation and value are made explicit. They do not only explain the text, but also they position it within a hierarchy of cultural meanings shaped by the expectations of the target culture.

World Literature and Global Literary Markets

The circulation of literature in translation cannot be understood apart from the global literary marketplace. Pascale Casanova visualizes world literature as a structured space characterized by unequal power relation, in which literary value is produced through struggles for recognition and legitimacy (Casanova, 2004). In this domain, translation into dominant languages such as English functions as a form of consecration, granting texts access to global visibility.

Casanova's focus on literary capital highlights the economic and symbolic stakes of translations. Paratexts are influential in this process, as they support and help position texts within established hierarchies of prestige and aesthetic. By framing national literatures in particular ways, paratexts bestow to the production of literary value in the global market.

Similarly, Franco Moretti supports for analyzing literature as a global system shaped by economic and institutional forces that merely through close reading of individual texts (Moretti, 2000). From this point of view, paratext emerge as crucial mediating devices that facilitate the movement of texts across borders by aligning them with dominant narrative forms and cultural expectations.

Postcolonial Critique and Cultural Stereotyping

Postcolonial theory provides critical lens for analysing how cultural difference is represented and commodified in global contexts. Edward Said's notion of Orientalism exposes and uncover how Western representation of non-Western cultures rely on recurring tropes pf exoticism, timelessness, and otherness (Said, 1978). These tropes operate not merely as misrepresentations but as form of knowledge production that stabilizes power relations.

In this context of translation, paratexts often reproduce orientalist discourses by formulating national literatures as expressions of essential cultural qualities. Such representations simplify complex literary traditions and reinforce stereotypes that transmit and circulate widely within global market. By keeping paratextual practices within postcolonial critique, my study highlights their role in the ideological construction of national literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly involvement with paratexts has expanded significantly since the late twentieth century, especially the unification of paratext theory within studies and its subsequent perception in translation studies. Early work on paratexts inclined to treat them as peripheral to literary interpretation; however, recent scholarship increasingly recognizes their constitutive role in making reader perception, reception and cultural meaning. Within translation studies, this shift has harmonized with a broader move away from text-centric models towards contextual, ideological, and sociological approaches to translation.

One major thread of scholarship examines paratexts as instrument of mediation in translated literature. Researchers have analyzed how covers, prefaces, and blurbs frame texts for new readerships, often shaping genre classification and interpretive expectations (Batchelor, 2018). These studies depict that paratexts frequently compensate for perceived cultural distance by providing explanatory or evaluative cues, thereby minimizing uncertainty for target readers and audience. While such framing may facilitate accessibility, it also dangers imposing interpretive constraints that privilege dominant cultural perspectives.

Another frame of work focuses on the visibility of translator and the digressive role of translator prefaces. Scholars argue that prefaces often function as sites of authority, positioning the translator as a cultural mediator. While simultaneously emphasizing asymmetrical power relations between source and target culture (Hermans, 1996). Translator discourse repeatedly addresses imagined Western readers, emphatically constructing them as culturally uninformed and in need of guidance. This dynamic reinforces the ideological dimension of paratextual mediation, particularly in translation from non-Western languages into English.

In the context of world literature, paratext have received comparatively less endure support. Although world literature scholars focus on circulation, translation, and reception, the mechanism through which texts are packaged for global markets are often treated implicitly rather than analyzed directly. This deletion is striking given that paratexts play a decisive role in enabling texts to cross linguistic and cultural borders. By foregrounding paratexts, my study responds to call for more materially grounded approaches to world literature that attend to publishing practices and market dynamics (Helgesson and Vermeulen, 2016).

Japanese Literature in English Translation

The study on Japanese literature in English translation provides a special revealing case study of paratextual mediation. Numerous studies have observed that Japanese texts are frequently framed through a limited collection of cultural tropes that emphasizes aesthetic minimalism, emotional restraint, and philosophical depth. These representations are often presented as inherently “Japanese”, thereby essentially cultural difference and blurring internal diversity and historical specificity (Ivy, 1995).

The analyses of English-language covers and blurbs reveals a preserving reliance on visual and verbal cues associated with traditional Japan, such as cherry blossoms, calligraphy, and zen imagery. Such paratextual strategies create a sense of cultural authenticity. While simultaneously aligning texts with western orientalist imagination. Scholars have argued that this form of cultural branding positions Japanese

literature as a refined, contemplative alternative to Western modernity, provisioning to niche markets seeking aesthetic and philosophical depth (Kelts, 2006).

While these studies offer valuable insight, they also focus on representation rather than circulation. Less attention is paid to how market forces shape paratextual choices or how these choices function within broader systems of literary value. It is in this context that Alex Watson's work assumes particular significance.

Alex Watson and the Anglophone Literary Marketplace

Watson's analysis makes an important intervention by situating paratextual representation within the material conditions of the Anglophone publishing industry. Watson examines them as products of market logics that prioritize recognition, branding and consumer appeal, rather than treating paratext as isolated textual features. His work illustrates that English-language publishers often rely on familiar cultural scripts to market translated Japanese literature, thereby reducing the perceived danger and risk in an already competitive marketplace (Watson, 2019).

The crux of Watson's argument is the notion that paratexts "package" national literature for consumption. This packaging involves selecting and enlarging certain cultural features while marginalizing others, producing a curated version of national identity aligns with Anglophone reader expectations. Watson's analysis reveals how repeated paratextual framing contributes to the formation of a stable, recognizable image of Japanese literature within the global market.

However, while Watson's provides a compelling account of how Japanese literature is marketed, his analysis remains largely confined to a single national context. The present study builds on his insights by situating paratextual packaging within a broader theoretical framework that includes translation studies, world literature theory, postcolonial critique. In doing so, it seeks to demonstrate that the mechanisms identified by Watson are not unique to Japan but indicative of wider patterns in the global circulation of translated literature.

Translation, Publishing, and the Anglophone Literary Marketplace

To understand the role of paratexts in shaping global perceptions of national literatures, it is necessary to examine the institutional context in which translated literature is produced and circulated. The Anglophone publishing industry operates within a market characterised by intense competition, limited shelf space, and strong preference for texts perceived as commercially viable. Translation, particularly from non-Western languages, is often viewed as a financial risk, leading publishers to adopt strategies that maximize market stability.

Paratexts function as key tool in alleviating this risk. Covers and blurbs are designed to signal genre, tone, and cultural appeal quickly and efficiently, enabling potential readers to make purchasing decision with minimal uncertainty. In case of translated literature, paratexts frequently emphasize exoticism or cultural uniqueness as selling points, framing difference as a form of aesthetic value (Sapiro, 2016).

This process aligns with broader dynamics of cultural commodification under global capitalism. Nationalism literatures are transformed into branded products, each associated with a distinctive set of characteristics that can be marketed internationally. Paratexts play a crucial role in stabilizing these brands by repeating familiar descriptors and visual motifs across multiple publication.

Significantly, this branding process is not imposed solely by publishers. Translators, editors, reviewers, and even authors themselves participate in the production of paratextual meaning. Translators prefaces may adopt explanatory tones that reinforce cultural hierarchies, while reviews often reproduce paratextual language in their evaluations. Through repetition, these discourses acquire the status of common sense, shaping collective perceptions of national literatures.

English as a Gatekeeping Language

The dominance of English within the global literary system further intensifies the power of paratexts. As scholars have noted, translation into English often serves as a gateway to international recognition, enabling texts to circulate beyond regional or linguistic boundaries (Casanova, 2004). However, this gatekeeping function also imposes constraints on how texts are presented and interpreted.

Paratexts in English translations frequently address an implied Western reader, positioning the source culture as an object of explanation or discovery. This asymmetrical relationship reinforces existing power structures within world literature, privileging Anglophone norms of readability and cultural legibility. In this context, paratexts become sites where global inequalities are negotiated and reproduced.

From Mediation to Stereotype Formation

The paratextual framing of Japanese literature in English translation offers a particularly revealing illustration of how national literatures are curated for global consumption. As Alex Watson demonstrates, Japanese literature entering the Anglophone marketplace is frequently accompanied by a consistent set of visual and verbal cues that shapes reader expectations before engagement with the translated text itself (Watson, 2019). These cues operate across multiple paratextual sites, including book covers, publisher's blurb, translator's introductions, and promotional reviews, producing a coherent and recognizable image of "Japanese Literature" as a branded cultural identity.

One of the most striking features of this packaging is the emphasis on aesthetic minimalism and emotional restraint. Covers often employ scant design elements, muted colour palettes, empty space, and stylized natural imagery, that evoke calmness and introspection. Such visual strategies align with long standing Western perception of Japanese culture as contemplative and refined. The recurrence of these motifs across different authors and genres suggests that paratextual design is less concerned with representing individual texts than with reinforcing a stable cultural identity legible to Anglophone.

Publisher blurbs further affirm this framing through carefully selected language. Description such as "haunting", "enigmatic", "quietly profound", and "timeless" appear with remarkable frequency, positioning Japanese literature as an aesthetic experience rather than a historically or politically situated piece of work. These terms operate as evaluation, signaling literary value while simultaneously narrowing the range of interpretive possibilities available to readers. By foregrounding atmosphere over context, blurbs encourage readers to approach texts as expression of an essential cultural sensibility.

This strategy aligns closely with what Said (1978) identifies as orientalist discourse, in which non-Western cultures are represented as static, mysterious and fundamentally different from the modern West. In the case of Japanese literature, paratexts often draw on positive stereotypes, serenity, subtlety, rather than overtly negative ones. However, the effect is similar: cultural difference is aestheticized and detached from social and historical specificity.

Close Paratextual Analysis

Book Cover as Visual Interpretation

Book covers constitute one of the most immediate and influential paratextual elements shaping reader perception. In translation of Japanese literature, cover design frequently functions as a form of visual interpretation, translating cultural difference into recognizable symbols. Images of cherry blossoms, traditional architecture, calligraphic script, or solitary figures against minimalist backgrounds recur across editions, regardless of the thematic content of the text.

These visual choices are not arbitrary. They operate as semiotic shorthand, signaling “Japaneseness” to potential readers browsing in bookstores or online platforms. As Genette (1997) notes, paratexts are designed to ensure that a text “comes into the world” in a particular way. In this context, the world into which Japanese literature enters is one already structured by orientalist expectations and market logics.

The repetition of similar cover designs across multiple works contributes to the homogenization of Japanese literature as a category. Distinction between genres, historical periods, and authorial voices are flattened in favour of a unified aesthetic that prioritizes cultural recognition. This homogenization reinforces the notion of singular national literature defined by timeless qualities rather than by internal diversity and change.

Publisher Blurbs and Marketing Language

Publisher blurbs play a central role in articulating the cultural narrative surrounding translated texts. In Anglophone market, blurbs often position Japanese literature as offering insight into a unique cultural worldview. Phrases such as “a glimpse into the Japanese soul” or “a meditation on the fleeting nature of life” frame the text as a cultural artefact rather than a work of literature engaged with specific social realities.

Such language exemplifies what Venuti (1991) identifies as domestication at the level of discourse. Cultural difference is rendered intelligible through familiar tropes that resonates with Western philosophical traditions, such as existentialism or romantic melancholy. While this strategy may facilitate reader engagement, it also risks assimilating the text into pre-existing interpretive frameworks that obscure its cultural specificity.

Moreover, blurbs often emphasize universality alongside cultural difference, suggesting that Japanese literature is both exotic and relatable. This dual positioning allows publishers to appeal to broad audiences while maintaining the allure of otherness. The tension between universality and difference is resolved through paratextual framing that presents cultural specificity as an aesthetic flavor rather than a source of intellectual challenge.

Translator Introductions and Prefaces

Translators introduction occupy a particularly complex position within the paratextual apparatus. On the one hand, they offer valuable insights into translation choices and cultural context. On the other, they frequently adopt a didactic tone that reinforces asymmetrical relations between source and target cultures. Translators often address an implied Western reader, explaining cultural practices, social norms, or literary conventions deemed unfamiliar.

While such explanations may be well intentional, they can also contribute to the construction of cultural difference as something that requires mediation, and interpretation. Herman (1996) argues that translator

discourse often positions the translator as an authoritative guide, implicitly reinforcing the idea that the source culture is opaque or inaccessible without expert intervention. This dynamic aligns with broader orientalist assumptions about non-Western cultures as objects of knowledge rather than as equal participants in global literary exchange.

Furthermore, translator preface sometimes reinforces the same stereotypes found in marketing discourse. References to subtlety, ambiguity, or emotional restraint recur, framing these qualities as inherent cultural traits rather than as stylistic choices shaped by historical and literary contexts. In doing so, translator discourse contributes to the stabilization of cultural identities that circulate beyond the text itself.

Reviews and Critical Response as Epitexts

Beyond the book itself, review and critical commentary function as epitexts that extend and reinforce paratextual framing. Review in mainstream Anglophone media often echo publisher language, praising Japanese literature for its “quiet beauty” or “philosophical depth”. Such repetition amplifies paratextual narratives embedding them within broader cultural discourse.

The cumulative effect of this repetition is the naturalization of specific ways of reading. Readers encounter the same descriptions across multiple platforms from book jackets to reviews, creating a sense of consensus about what Japanese literature is and how it should be approached. As a result, alternative interpretations that foreground social conflict, political critique, or historical specificity may appear incongruent with established expectations.

Paratexts As Mechanisms of Stereotype Circulation

The close analysis above demonstrates that paratexts do more than mediate individual texts; they participate in the circulation of cultural stereotypes at a systemic level. By repeatedly framing Japanese literature through a limited set of aesthetic and philosophical tropes, paratexts contribute to the formation of a stable cultural image that circulates across texts, authors, and publishing contexts.

This process can be understood through the lens of stereotype formation as a cumulative and iterative phenomenon. Individual paratextual choices may appear benign or even appreciative, but their repetition across the literary marketplace produces a semimetal discourse that constrains meaning. Stereotypes gain power not through singular misrepresentation but through consistent patterns of representation that become taken for granted.

Market dynamics play a crucial role in sustaining these patterns. Publishers, operating under commercial pressures, are incentivized to reproduce successful paratextual strategies rather than experiment with alternative framings. As a result, cultural stereotypes become embedded within the infrastructure of literary circulation, shaping not only expectations but also editorial decision-making.

Significantly, this process does not affect all national literatures equally. Literatures from dominant cultural centers often enjoy greater flexibility in paratextual representation, while those from perceived peripheries are more likely to be framed through essential identities. In this sense, paratextual stereotyping reflects and reinforces broader inequalities within the global literary system (Casanova, 2004).

Paratexts, Power, and Ideological Translation

The analyses presented in the previous sections demonstrate that paratexts are not peripheral features of translated literature but central mechanisms through which power, ideology, and cultural meaning are negotiated. In Anglophone literary marketplace, paratexts function as form of ideological translation, mediating not only linguistic difference but also cultural value and national identity. This mediation is shaped by structural inequalities within the global literary system, where English functions as a gatekeeping language and Anglophone market exerts disproportionate influence over which texts circulate internationally and how they are understood.

From this perspective, paratexts can be understood as instruments of cultural governance. By framing national literatures through particular aesthetic and thematic lenses, they regulate interpretive possibilities and delimit the range of meanings that readers are likely to attribute to translated texts. This regulatory function aligns with broader dynamics of cultural power, in which dominant cultures define the terms under which difference is recognized and consumed. Crucially, the ideological force of paratexts lies in their apparent transparency. Covers, blurbs, and prefaces often present themselves as neutral guides or helpful contextual aids, masking the interpretive work they perform. As Genette (1997) observes, paratexts are designed to appear natural and self-evident, thereby concealing their construction. In the context of translation, this naturalization is particularly potent, as readers may lack the linguistic or cultural knowledge required to challenge paratextual framing.

The notion of ideological translation foregrounds the way in which paratexts translate cultures into marketable narratives. This process does not necessarily involve distortion or misrepresentation in a crude sense; rather, it involves selective emphasis and strategic omission. Certain aspects of national literature are amplified, those that resonate with target-culture expectation, while others are marginalized or rendered invisible. Over time, these selections crystalize into stereotypes that shape both reader reception and institutional practice.

Original Contribution and Implications for World Literature

This study makes three principal contributions to scholarship in translation studies and world literature.

Firstly, it advances a conceptual shift from text-centered to paratext-centered analysis. While existing scholarship has acknowledged the importance of paratexts, they have rarely been theorized as primary sites of ideological production within global literary circulation. By foregrounding paratexts as thresholds where cultural meaning is negotiated, this essay demonstrates that interpretation begins well before engagement with the translated text itself.

Secondly, the study extends existing analyses of Japanese literature in English translation by situating paratextual framing within a broader theoretical and comparative framework. While prior research has documented orientalist tendencies in representation of Japan, this essay shows how such tendencies are embedded within market structures and institutional practices that shape world literature more broadly. The mechanisms identified here are not unique to Japan; they are indicative of systemic patterns in which national literature from perceived cultural peripheries are packaged as consumable identities.

Thirdly, the essay contributes to debates on world literature by highlighting the role of paratexts in the production of literary value. World literature has often been theorized in terms of circulation, translation and reception, but the material practices that enable circulation, design marketing, branding, have received comparatively little attention. By analyzing paratexts as sites where economic, cultural, and ideological forces converge, this study calls for a more materially grounded understanding of world literature.

The implications of this analysis are significant. Recognizing paratexts as ideological mediators invites a rethinking of ethical responsibility in translation and publishing. Translators, editors, and publishers are not merely conduits of literary texts; they are active participants in shaping cultural knowledge. Greater awareness of paratextual power may encourage more reflexive practices that resist stereotyping and foreground diversity within national literatures.

CONCLUSION

This essay has argued that paratexts in English translation play a decisive role in shaping global perceptions of national literatures and in circulating stereotypes. Through theoretical synthesis and close paratextual analysis, it has demonstrated that paratexts function as thresholds of interpretations that mediate between source cultures and Anglophone readership. Far from being neutral or supplementary, these elements actively construct cultural meaning, often aligning translated literature with market friendly stereotypes that privilege recognition over complexity.

By focusing on the packaging of Japanese literature for Anglophone readers, the study has shown repeated paratextual strategies contribute to the stabilization of cultural identities within the global literary marketplace. These identities, while often framed positively, nonetheless constrain interpretation and obscure the heterogeneity of literary traditions. The circulation of such stereotypes reflects broader inequalities within world literature, where dominant languages and markets shape the terms of global cultural exchange.

Ultimately this study calls for a more critical engagement with paratexts as sites of power and meaning-making. Further research might extend this analysis to other linguistic contexts, examine reader reception empirically, or explore alternative paratextual practices that challenge dominant narratives. By attending to the material and ideological dimensions of translation, scholars can contribute to more nuanced and equitable models of world literary circulation.

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