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Feminist paratextual (re)framing of online social translation

A case study of @subtitle girl (@zimu shaonü)

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This study focuses on a range of paratexts around an influential social media account in China named *@subtitle girl*, who dedicates herself to online feminist content production in the form of (editing) and subtitling feminist clips from English to Chinese. The study aims to identify how the feminist subtitled clips are paratextually (re)framed in the context of digital feminism. The study adopts a suitable theoretical conceptualization of paratextuality and views *@subtitle girl's* translational activities under the online social translation/subtitling rubric. Different paratexts around *@subtitle girl's* subtitling are examined on the macro and micro level. It is found that, on the macro level, the factual paratextual elements avatar, username, and short bio of *@subtitle girl*, and algorithm-generated statistics about their subtitling facilitate a (post-)feminist (self-)branding and (self-)promotion of their subtitled work. On the micro level, the hashtagged synopsis for each clip and the comments introduce, highlight, reconstruct, and repackage the subtitled feminist content for the Chinese female audience online. The study shows how the feminist (re)framing on two levels of *@subtitle girl's* online social translation/subtitling is fulfilled against the backdrop of digital feminist content production: both the (self-)marketing of the producer/subtitler and the interaction between the producer/subtitler and their AV content consumers and among their consumers are valued.

Keywords: digital paratext, digital feminist content production, online social translation, @subtitle girl, paratextual framing

1. Introduction

Paratext, both as a theoretical concept (Tahir-Gürçağlar 2002) and an analytical tool, has been discussed in translation studies for many years concerning different

translational genres and a myriad of social-cultural, historical, and political contexts, mostly based on the work of the French narratologist, Gérard Genette ([1987] 1997). Translation studies scholars have intensively explored the dynamics between paratexts and translations in literary fiction as a continuation of Genette's work, with the translator's preface as the most widely examined form of paratext (Batchelor 2018, 26). The current scholarship concerning audiovisual, digital, and media paratexts is still limited.¹ This is wildly disproportionate to the ever-increasing and diversified global circulation of digital media productions (movies, webtoons, e-books, e-games, fanvids, etc.) made possible by translation (broadly defined).

The coming-of-age of digital media and the democratization of technology have broadened the concept of paratext and, as a result, complicated the relationship between various paratextual materials (posters, trailers, fan-made campaigns, etc.) and translations (Freeth, 2023; O'Sullivan 2018; Qi 2023). Therefore, this research gap needs to be filled in translation studies for better interdisciplinary dialogue, especially considering the proliferation of research on different paratextual elements conducted in, among others, digital studies and media studies (Brookey and Gray 2017; Geraghty 2015; Gray 2010).

The engagement of the concept of paratext with the issue of feminism and gender, as claimed by Batchelor – though almost entirely confined to literary texts – has been central in translation studies (2022, 124). This trend partly leads to a “fertile intersection between paratextual analysis and research connecting translation and socio-cultural and ideological contexts” (Batchelor 2018, 36), in which the present study lies. This is undoubtedly not counterintuitive as it speaks to the fact that, even prior to the digital era, paratext has been an established and important site for some feminist translators to explicitly show their feminist (activist) attitudes and to present political agendas in and through the translated work – which has been especially confirmed and consolidated since the inception of the Canadian Feminist Translation School. For example, without referring to the term “paratext,” Flotow (1991), on the grounds of the Québec feminist translators' practice, expounded “prefacing and footnoting” as a feminist translation strategy, which is “almost routine” (76) in order to achieve their feminist intervention. It has been observed that the feminist translators “immodestly [flaunt] [their] signature” in footnotes and prefaces as a way of “[womanhandling]” the

1. For a list of the limited amount of research on paratexts and translation into other domains other than literary fiction, see Batchelor (2018, 26); for a more detailed literature review of extant research on paratexts in audiovisual and news translation, see Batchelor (2022, 124–127). For a recently published special issue of *Translation Studies* on media paratexts and translation, see Bucaria and Batchelor (2023).

text and actively participating in the meaning creation process (Godard 1990, 94). In short, paratextual strategies have long been effectively employed to exercise the agency of translators and further frame and/or reframe certain translations in a feminist way in the traditional printed media.

As a feminist translator, Lotbinière-Harwood once argued that “signature, in turn, creates context. A feminist’s signature on a translation positions the reader expectations” (1989, 154, quoted in Ergun 2013, 284). Therefore, given such a background in printed literature, what about the digital context? How is the signaturing digitally created on the paratextual level when the constellations of paratexts can influence the reading of the translations of feminist content? This article aims to illustrate how, thanks to the non-linearity of translational activities (Qi, 2023) in Web 2.0 spaces, a range of digital paratexts are presented and mobilized in (re)framing digital feminism in a Chinese context.² This study focuses on the paratexts around an influential social media account on Sina Weibo (hereafter, Weibo) named *@subtitle girl* (*@zimu shaonü*) dedicated to editing and subtitling short clips of feminist content. Weibo, deemed the counterpart of X (formerly Twitter), is the biggest microblogging site in China. Weibo has emerged as a pivotal nexus for public discourses within the Chinese digital ecosystem, profoundly shaping the information landscape and opinion climate. Influential accounts can steer conversations on and mold public perception of critical issues such as feminism. Among accounts focused on similar content creation, *@subtitle girl* stands out as a prime example with unparalleled popularity (as detailed in Section 5), highlighting its substantial influence. This study answers the question: How are the subtitled short videos paratextually (re)framed in a (digital) feminist content production environment on Chinese social media? The present tentative case aims to showcase the diversity, flexibility, and interactivity associated with those digital paratexts that sway the reception of subtitled feminist clips.

The article starts with a brief introduction to the background of *@subtitle girl*’s translational activities. It then adopts a suitable conceptualization of “paratext” for the present case, characterized by *online social translation*, before situating itself within the current scholarship exploring (digital) paratexts and the questions of feminism/gender. The data and method are then introduced in

2. “Framing” is a nebulous term used across different disciplines. However, “the words *frame*, *framing*, and *framework* are common outside of formal scholarly discourse” (Entman 1993, 52, emphases in the original). Hence, throughout this paper, it is used mainly in the metaphoric sense without reference to specific theoretical frameworks. Or, put in another way, it is used to simply suggest that “paratexts can be seen as sites in which framing takes place” (Batchelor 2018, 145). However, for further reading on “framing,” see “framing” in TS (Baker 2006; Batchelor 2018, 145–147; Faria, Pinto, and Moura 2023) and in media and communication settings (Entman 1993).

Section 4. The paratextual analysis of *@subtitle girl* on both the macro and micro level is made in Section 5. Finally, the article concludes with a summary highlighting this case's implications for related research.

2. Digital feminism and translation

This section does not consider “digital feminism as a self-sufficient conceptual framework” (see Chang and Tian 2020) and does not intend to tap into it in depth. Instead, briefly contextualizing the case of *@subtitle girl* within such a context provides a clearer understanding of the nature and scope of its translation-mediated activities on Chinese social media. Numerous empirical investigations have documented the ways in which young women globally leverage social media and various digital platforms to challenge patriarchy, addressing issues such as misogyny, sexual harassment, and rape culture (for example, among many others, Han 2021 in the Chinese context). This reliance on the spreading of feminist discourse and activism on digital technologies and online platforms has been characterized as the emergence of “fourth-wave feminism” (Munro 2013, 25) that enables a trans-local and transnational feminist dialogue (Baer 2016). Castro and Ergun (2017, 1) state, “The future of feminisms is in the transnational and the transnational is made through translation.” *@subtitle girl* aptly embodies a form of translational activity that facilitates the border-crossing of a range of feminist ideas through audiovisual works by translating/subtitling, editing, and disseminating those works online. This kind of immaterial labor for producing intangible goods can also be understood from the perspective of the production of feminist content online that is often subject to a neoliberal post-feminist environment (Gill 2016), requiring the self-branding of the content producers and the co-framing between them and their audience (Chen and Cheng 2023; Pruchniewska 2018), which sometimes are realized through various (co-created) paratexts, as will be shown later.

3. Online social translation, (digital) paratextuality, and research on feminism and translation paratexts

This section is devoted to related theoretical concepts and previous work that probes into a variety of printed and digital paratextual materials through the feminist/gender lens. First and foremost, the subtitling of *@subtitle girl* on social media is viewed under the rubric of *online social translation* (Dolmaya and Sánchez Ramos 2019), which refers to the translation activities that involve a

social media platform (e.g., bottom-up fan translation). Compared to other alternative terms such as amateur or non-professional translation,³ online social translation is more in consonance with the term online social media (Dolmaya and Sánchez Ramos 2019, 132) and is capable of emphasizing the socially interactive and participatory nature of Weibo⁴ – a site for grassroots translation characterized by “connectivity and interactivity” (Jiang 2023, 364).

3.1 Theoretical concepts

According to Genette ([1987]1997), a paratext can be understood as “what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public” (1), and a paratext “is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author” (2). In his view, the paratext can generally be divided into two categories, namely peritext (which is attached to the text, such as a book foreword and postface) and epitext (located outside the text, such as book reviews and comments).

However, it is noteworthy that digital media have transformed the notion of paratextuality and the relationship between paratexts and translation texts in at least the following ways. First, contemporary readers can greatly influence the content and revision of paratexts even before the finalization of those paratexts. For example, the online (bilingual) source text readers who were able to read the English target text of a controversial book about the Covid-19 crisis, *Wuhan Diary*, functioned as, in the words of Qi, “reader-censors” on social media in 2020. Those readers impacted the final paratexts used to market the book during the book’s pre-sale period on Amazon due to their dissatisfaction with the publisher’s paratextual manipulation of that book (Qi 2023). Similarly, the Korean distributor of the film *Suicide Squad* re-released the subtitled trailer of the movie amidst criticism from the viewers of the original trailer describing the heroine as submissive and coquettish. Moreover, a transcreated movie poster that distorted the image of the leading feminist intellectual Ruth Bader Ginsburg (RBG) was revised before being made public in response to online female consumers’ discontent in Korea (Lee 2020). Second, the above examples clearly suggest that paratexts do not always reflect the author’s stance (but that of the audience, publisher, translator, and/or other agents), as already observed by many others (Batchelor

3. For a disambiguation of related terms, see Borodo (2022).

4. To avoid a reductive reading, it also should be noted that Weibo exemplifies a digital platform where fan engagement and fandom culture undergo processes of codification and corporatization. See Yin (2020) on how fan culture on Weibo is digitalized and evolves into a form of algorithmic culture.

2018; Freeth 2023, 6–8; Brookey and Gray 2017; Gray 2010). This therefore gives rise to the need to free paratextuality from the Genettian’s authorial intention. Third, Gray puts forward the notion of “viewer-created”/“audience-created” paratexts to refer to paratexts such as online reviews and comments, which “[carve] out alternative pathways through texts” (2010, 143). Considering these paratexts could enhance our understanding of the meaning-making and negotiation process occurring in the digital world, where user-generated content proliferates. In my case, the subtitled clips shared by *@subtitle girl* are surrounded by many comments from viewers that are of great interest.

Based on the above discussion, the article adopts two forms of paratextual relationships (both are not author-dependent) as complementary with each other – the “consciously crafted” paratextuality and the “collateral paratextuality” maintained by Batchelor (2018, 142) and Freeth (2023), respectively. In her notable work, Batchelor adapted the definition of paratext to TS, proposing that a paratext “is a consciously crafted threshold for a text which has the potential to influence the way(s) in which the text is received.” Unlike Batchelor’s contribution, Freeth’s collateral paratextual approach understands paratextuality as a non-hierarchical relationship that is dynamic and fluid, shared among the constellations of (digital) co-texts.⁵ These co-texts “co-occur and co-construct meaning through their relationships with the media text and each other” (Freeth 2023, 422). This approach avoids spatial taxonomy (the distinction between peritext and epitext) and taxonomies of medium-specific properties (such as Weibo in this paper). Making such taxonomies is not desirable when the case concerns multilayered digital textual elements (Cao 2021, 151) and platform-specific. More importantly, within Freeth’s framework, the “materials that were not [‘consciously crafted’] as thresholds for a text but may still function as such” (Freeth 2023, 426) can also be included as long as the relationship mentioned above (for co-texts, with the media text and each other) is enacted. Put another way, Freeth’s collateral understanding is apposite to the digital world, where identifying conscious crafting is not always practical – such as for user- and algorithm-generated materials – as will be shown later. For example, who should be responsible for both the content *and* the form (how they are positioned, etc.) of that content? In my case, the user comments and platform-produced statistics about *@subtitle girl*’s subtitled clips that can move the audience towards, around, or away from the subtitled clips (the media text) can thus be considered. Hence, when two frameworks are combined, varied degrees of consciously crafted paratextuality can “coalesce within a given textual space” (Freeth 2023, 420).

5. See also Adami and Ramos Pinto (2020). Their definition is that co-texts are “signs (in any mode and their combinations) co-occurring with those that are the momentary focus of attention in a text” (73).

3.2 Paratext and feminism

Paratexts have been studied through the lens of gender with different focuses. Regarding inquiries on book-related paratexts and feminism situated in East Asian contexts, Jiang's research (2019) suggested how the voices of Chinese female writers over the period 1980–1991 were degendered under a voyeuristic gaze othering China. This act arose from the Anglophone publishers' ideological and political considerations and needs. Lee's work (2021) showed that feminism-related books were paratextually marketed to enhance feminism (through the book titles, cover images, and translators' prefaces) in an unprecedented wave of feminism in South Korea over recent years. In terms of the research into digital paratexts and feminism/gender, Lee's study (2020), as noted earlier, showcased that the gender ideology in South Korea actively influenced the revisions of a subtitled trailer and a transcreated movie poster. Jiang (2023) put the translation by two grassroots translation groups (*JoinFeminism and Zhihe Society*) of female and queer sexuality into Chinese via social media into an activist context. By analyzing the paratextual materials such as editor's notes and introductions of the text/video, comments, and discussions of the audience of their translation, she found that the two groups' translations contributed to feminist/queer activism and created an alternative sexual discourse by disseminating knowledge about sexual diversity.

The findings of past research have two significant implications for the present case. First, printed and digital paratexts sometimes are indicative of a particular ethos or ideology that has gained currency at specific times, such as in 1980–1991's China (Jiang 2019) and in South Korea towards a "gender-conscious society" (Lee 2020, 2021). Thus, associating paratextual materials with the local (feminist) context can enhance a nuanced paratextual reading. Second, the issue of commerce can have a huge effect on the creation of paratexts of cultural derivatives in the digital feminist context due to the paratext-creators' concern regarding their reputation and revenue, as noted above earlier (Lee 2020, 185). This is especially relevant to this case study, where the object of investigation, *@subtitle girl*, intrinsically engages in the form of (popular) feminist content production (via subtitling) on social media. Accordingly, *@subtitle girl* could be influenced by the click-driven (social) media environment due to the rise of the Internet economy and be subject to the popular media culture which, when co-opted by the post-feminist discourses, tends to "[sell] feminism" (Windels et al. 2020).⁶

6. According to the feminist media scholar Rosalind Gill, postfeminism, "as an analytical category in media studies" (2016, 612) that is "deeply enmeshed with neoliberalism," can be understood as "empirical regularities or patterns in contemporary cultural life, which include the emphasis on individualism, choice, and agency as dominant modes of accounting" (613).

The following section is dedicated to data and method description before analyzing *@subtitle girl*.

4. Data and method

Upon checking its homepage, *@subtitle girl*, with around 2.6 million followers (as of August 2023) on the social media platform Weibo, has been editing and adding subtitles for video clips for several years.⁷ Most of these subtitled clips (all with English as the source language) –from sources such as TikTok trending videos, (Netflix) stand-up comedies, and American variety shows – strongly bond with feminist politics and discourses.

As mentioned earlier, data was collected and analyzed on two levels: the macro (about the account) and the micro level (about the subtitling). The macro level elements, the avatar, username, and short bio of *@subtitle girl*, and algorithm-generated statistics about its subtitling will be investigated in Section 5.1; the micro level elements, the “synopsis” put out by *@subtitle girl* before each clip, and the comments contributed by both *@subtitle girl* and their audience will be examined in Section 5.2.

To carry out an analysis on the micro level, a temporal frame from mid-July 2022 to mid-July 2023 was set to collect data due to the huge volume of the short, subtitled feminist videos posted online by *@subtitle girl*. Furthermore, this study follows the purposive sampling (Braun and Clarke 2013) method, a common strategy in qualitative research. This way of sampling aims to generate “insight and in-depth understanding” (Patton 2002, 230) of the topic of interest. It involves “selecting data cases (participants, texts) on the basis that they will be able to provide “information-rich” (Patton 2002, 230) data to analyze” (Braun and Clarke 2013, 89). Thus, three cases were selected for a detailed analysis, and the results are reported below. These three instances of subtitling are straightforward and information-dense in terms of both the content and form of their paratextual elements and are capable of illustrating the diversified and interactive digital paratexts around *@subtitle girl*'s translation practices, which is in line with the aim of the study as set out in the introduction. It also should be noted that when examining the comments of each example, the primary focus will be on the user comments that *@subtitle girl* highlights through reposting, as well as the most liked comments. By doing so, the aim is to tackle the thorny “what if” (Batchelor 2018, 55) issue to some extent, that is, how can we be certain about whether a

7. The author of this paper was told by the account that all the subtitles were produced by *@subtitle girl*.

significant proportion of the audience has come to the text through this or that paratext? This question is addressed by emphasizing (as noted above), in Gray's words (Brookey and Gray 2017, 105), the "loud" rather than the "quiet" paratexts due to their content and/or form (whether placed in a conspicuous position, etc.)

5. A Paratextual analysis of *@subtitle girl*

Section 5.1, discussing the macro level, explores the factual framing (see below) of *@subtitle girl* towards their (post-)feminist (self-)branding and (self-)promotion on the social media Weibo. The following section, 5.2, discusses the micro level and probes into the paratextual co-framing (Chen and Cheng 2023) between *@subtitle girl* and the audience of their subtitled clips.

5.1 Factual framing towards a (post-)feminist (self-)branding and (self-)promotion of the subtitled work of *@subtitle girl*

As the overarching step, the initial feminist signaturing on the subtitled instances is done through factual framing. Factual paratexts can be understood as those "whose existence alone, if known to the public, provides some commentary on the text and influences how the text is received" (Genette [1987]1997, 7), such as the factual information on the sex and race of a book's author.⁸ In the digital era, remaining anonymous (in full or in part) does not necessarily preclude such information from being disclosed, inferred, and interpreted by the networked public on social media. The profile of an account can be configured by a variety of elements, for example, the unique username or handle, avatar, short self-introduction/bio, and other platform-specific features or properties.

As put by media and communication scholars, "few things are more personal in social media interactions than personal profile images or avatars" (Gerbaudo 2015, 916), positioned at the upper left-hand side of the user homepage and meant to be the first thing noticed by online visitors influenced by this practice of (public) impression management (Rose et al. 2012, 589). Furthermore, set in the emergence of the Chinese digital (post-)feminist context, their research relates the imagination and creation of the avatar to the self-identification and empowerment of female users (Chang, Ren, and Yang 2018, 326).

8. Genette here vaguely included only factual "paratext that consists *not of an explicit message* (verbal or other)" ([1987]1997, 7). In my case, those paratexts that render factual information are considered with factual paratextuality, with or without an explicit (written) message.

@*subtitle girl*'s self-selected and edited profile picture is taken from a scene from the BBC comedy-drama television series *Fleabag* (2016–2019), written by and starring Phoebe Waller-Bridge.⁹ The picture features the titular protagonist, known only as “*Fleabag*,” determinedly looking back at the camera. Hailed as a “tipping point for feminism” (Hogan 2020), *Fleabag* can be said to have gained huge success, attested by the BAFTA and Golden Globes awards; popular also among the Chinese female audience, it has a rating of 8.9 (season 1) and 9.5 (season 2) out of 10 on Douban, a major review site of multimedia contents in China. The popular and scholarly readings of this show generally believe that it breaks the confines of neoliberal femininity and the normative expectations of female sexuality by bringing to stage the sexually transgressive, messy, and cringe life of a young, white London-based female main character in an ironical and sarcastic way (Holzberg and Lehtonen 2022).¹⁰ By consciously choosing this visual “dust jacket” which would be repeatedly encountered and further remembered by their followers in every meditated instance, @*subtitle girl* unwaveringly conveys and strengthens their feminist translator/subtitler’s image (no matter what strain of feminisms it takes). As part of the subtitler’s “critical self-expression or even self-empowerment” (Chang, Ren, and Yang 2018, 326), this avatar boosts the subtitler’s online presence and helps to reach and engage their intended feminist audience by guiding them towards the edited and translated work shared by @*subtitle girl*.

The profile picture is not the only location where “broader contextual information” can be textually manifested (Freeth 2023, 427). First and foremost, the username of this account ‘@*subtitle girl*’ suggests that subtitling is the absolute focus, while the word “girl” could insinuate a sense of the intimacy of sisterhood formed and shared between the account and their audience, perceived predominantly to be young urban female; this username can function paratextually, moving the targeted viewers towards the subtitled clips. Second, in the account bio of @*subtitle girl*, “female” is put for the gender item, and “Hollywood variety show translation production” is shown as their introduction – both of which to some degree “[construct] expectations for future viewing” (Gray 2010, 136) – if comprehended by the potential viewership together with other co-texts including the accompanying *Fleabag* visual picture and the account’s nickname omnipresent in every subtitling-mediated instance. A basic fact, notwithstanding

9. The profile picture was digitally archived on 12 August 2023 using the archive.fo: <https://archive.fo/IcQii>. This profile picture has never changed over at least the last four years, as observed by the author of the present article.

10. In this paper, however, the authors provide a slightly different feminist reading of this show by arguing it still embodies a new form of “postfeminist sensibility.”

the absence of direct textual evidence, is that the vast majority of all the clips subtitled from English deal with feminist concerns, for example, the issues of consent culture, period shaming, sexual and domestic violence, to name a few. This fact, in turn, easily corroborates *@subtitle girl's* intended “self-presentation” (Goffman 1959) constructed paratextually – as an online social translation account devoted to subtitling and producing clips that communicate with the *Fleabagish* feminism from English to Chinese.

Thanks to the Weibo-specific properties, some not (fully) consciously crafted paratexts also prompt the factual framing of *@subtitle girl*. On their account homepage, labels put under the profile picture such as “popular movie blogger in trend” and “V-index in movie category: 85.24” can be clearly shown to any visitors.¹¹ These labels are auto-generated by Weibo’s measurement of the account’s attractiveness and activeness, functioning in the same way as other algorithm-generated statistics appearing under the username *@subtitle girl*, that is, the number of the account’s followers (2.611 million) and the times of reposts, comments, and thumbs-ups it has received to date (33.345 million). The above can be considered the textual manifestations of the reputation and popularity of this account’s translation.

Overall, a paratextual triangulation can be argued to form consisting of the feminist self-presentation on the part of *@subtitle girl*, the indisputable factual facts about *@subtitle girl's* subtitling (i.e., its commitment to creating feminist content with subtitles), and the platform-level endorsement (labels, etc.); and it is within that triangle that a mechanism of reciprocity can be found to exist between the paratexts discussed above, intentionally created or not. Coalescing together as co-texts, these paratexts thus vouch for and invigorate *@subtitle girl's* feminist (self)-branding and (self)-promotion (Pruchniewska 2018) of their subtitled work. These are of great importance for those who engage in feminist content production to survive the neoliberal digital knowledge economy, where “practices of digital feminism are intricately connected with the contemporary cult of self-branding, a core tenet of post-feminism” (Pruchniewska 2018, 823; see Batchelor 2018, Chapter Six on the paratextual branding of *Walter Presents*, a VOD service). All the following encounters with the subtitled work (in Section 5.2) have already been placed under a recognizable framework of (a) the branding of the subtitler, who is on the macro level communicating their feminist translator’s value and trustworthiness with the recipients of their translated production through paratexts, and (b) acts of subtitling.

11. V-index is calculated weekly/monthly for measuring influence; this account is monthly ranked 4 (with a score of 85.24) among other content producers at the time of writing.

5.2 Co-framing by *@subtitle girl* and their audience

Chen and Cheng's (2023) research reveals that co-framing is a collective strategy that maps out the interactions between online female/feminist celebrities and their fanbase/audience in the new digital media era, which is undetachable from the (self-)framing (as discussed in Section 5.1) of those content producers. In my case, specifically, the paratextual co-framing enacted by *@subtitle girl* and their audiovisual content consumers is established through the online social subtitler's consciously devised paratexts and their viewers' comments, which belong to audience-created paratexts (Gray 2010).

Before analyzing the mechanism of co-framing, a screenshot taken from *@subtitle girl* (see below, Figure 1) will be mobilized as illustrative for the ease of the following analysis. The yellow rectangle features the subtitled clip as the text, the blue rectangle above the clip (as the hashtagged "synopsis") which indicates the paratexts created by *@subtitle girl*, and the yellow circle the viewers' comments, totaling 755 items in the bottom right. Sometimes, *@subtitle girl* reposts the original post (i.e., the yellow rectangle) and, as such, highlights some of the comments by bringing them to the forefront. This is signaled by the green rectangle in the screenshot. The repost is represented by the red rectangle with its own comments below (5 pieces in the red circle). In the green rectangle, there is a comment chain positioned straight above the yellow rectangle; these comments being highlighted are contributed by different users with their names in orange, by @严艺术家, @Clorisolé, and @里理哩喱鲤, and finally by *@subtitle girl*, whose comment is on the far left next to @里理哩喱鲤.

The paratexts examined below can be classified into two types according to the creator of the paratexts in question: (1) the hashtagged "synopsis" consciously devised by the translator *@subtitle girl* (as shown in the blue rectangle in the above screenshot) and (2) the comments-turned-paratexts co-created by *@subtitle girl* and their audience on top of or below the subtitling post. As will be seen below in Examples (1), (2), and (3), these co-texts that surround the subtitled clip fulfill the navigational, commercial, and interpretive functions of digital paratexts (Birke and Christ 2013, see also Batchelor 2018, 50–54) (mainly for type 1 above) and also (re)frame the subtitled clip temporally and spatially (mainly for type 2 above).

Reconstructing texts temporally and spatially via the paratextual space "often [makes] the information more salient, thus investing it with new meaning" (Kim 2018, 394). In the case of *@subtitle girl*, such temporal and spatial framing is made possible by connecting the meditated feminism embodied by the subtitled clips with the local and transnational feminist voices and sentiments in China's digital feminism background. To be precise, the temporal and spatial reconstruction is



Figure 1. A screenshot taken from *@subtitle girl's* page that shows the positionality of different (paratextual-)co-texts coalescing together

realized by commenting and reposting, and as such adding more layers of paratexts. The navigational, commercial, and interpretive functions of the *@subtitle girl*-crafted paratexts are performed by putting introductory lines and hashtagging before subtitled feminist short videos.

Example (1) features an instance where the subtitled video, lasting for 14'29 min (15:34 pm, 4 May 2023), is about the sexual consent culture (性同意文化, *xìngtóngyì wénhuà*). It is not out of the blue that the clip has received 8.55

million views and 112 thousand thumbs-ups (as of mid-August 2023) as it is paratextually reframed and repackaged in the socio-context by linking the subtitled clip advocating for sexual consent to the then-ongoing “Shi Hang Scandal” where Shi Hang, a renowned Chinese screenwriter has been accused of sexual harassment by a dozen women starting from 29 April (Yang 2023). On 3 May, prior to the posting of the subtitled clip, @*subtitle girl* made a post (which can be viewed as the subtitler’s real-time comment on this social event) to appreciate a Chinese male celebrity’s response to the sexual microaggressions at the workplace with a hashtag #Shi Hang# for comparison (03:44 am, 3 May 2023). In the clip, Trevor Noah, a famous South African comedian/writer, shared his views on the importance of consent culture and on the ways of promoting it. Above the clip, the subtitler-created paratext reads as follows.¹² :

Trevor’s discussion about the consent culture. “A person who has done something wrong to you can take your power and control you.” “The criterion for judging consent is whether the other party likes it or not. It does not depend on what you think.” “The concept of sexual consent needs to be as deeply etched in everyone’s minds as it is to promote no drunk driving.” ... An honest discussion of the various possibilities of promoting the culture of consent. An insightful talk. #Sexual Consent Culture# #Movie Recommendations for Spring Season# (15:34 pm, 4 May 2023)

This kind of “synopsis” added before the clip can be viewed as, in the words of Gray (2010, 23), an “entryway” paratext, which “grab[s] the viewer before he or she reaches the text and tr[ies] to control the viewer’s entrance to the text” by presenting the viewers with preferred interpretations. The above entryway paratext consists of four components: (1) a one-sentence introduction of the clip (who says what); (2) (translated) text extracts from the clip in quotation marks (from “A person ... control you” to “The concept ... drunk driving”); (3) the positive appraisal of Noah’s talk (“honest,” “insightful”) and at the end (4) two hashtags. Together, the first three navigational components guide the audience’s interpretation of the translated clip about sexual consent by simply introducing the clip, appropriating the text, giving prominence to its key theme, and directly appreciating Trevor’s talk. As for the fourth component, the first hashtag (#Sexual Consent Culture#) partly serves the navigational and interpretive functions by highlighting and promoting the theme of sexual consent; the second hashtag (#Movie Recommendations for Spring Season#) can be interpreted as a pure commercial paratext for driving traffic to the account’s subtitling, a commonplace for online feminist content production, as already noted earlier in this paper.

12. Unless otherwise specified, all translations are done by the author.

The connection of this clip with the “Shi Hang Scandal” is made more explicit in another post following the subtitling post by *@subtitle girl* which can also be viewed as the subtitler’s real-time comment. In this post, *@subtitle girl* expressed disdain for Shi Hang’s revealing of the private chat history online between him and some women in an attempt to prove his innocence (18:03 pm, 4 May 2023). Afterward, *@subtitle girl* reposted the original post of the subtitled clip on 5 May. A user commented below:

I commented under Shi Hang’s Weibo that sexual harassment is felt by the other party, not you. Then, a man tried to defend [Shi Hang] by saying that he was sexually harassed because of my existence and asked me to compensate him. Are there any sisters who can teach me how I can diss this troll? (comment 1, Anonymous, 07:17 am, 5 May 2023)

The paratexts in Example (1) enhance the viewers’ cross-cultural engagement with the translated text by accentuating the central message of the text and adapting the text to the local target context. Temporally, spatially, and paratextually repositioned within the high-profile social event of the “Shi Hang Scandal,” the subtitled text surrounding a transnational feminist issue can thus evoke local feminist concerns and become as such more noticeable at that specific moment. In other words, the translated video became more relatable to its viewers due to these paratexts that side with the gender ideology of the target culture. The viewers’ subsequent encounter with the text has been reframed. Such an effect also manifests itself in Example (2).

Example (2) relates to the topic of menopause (更年期, *gēng nián qī*). The subtitled clip of 2’10 min is a dialogue between Michelle Obama and the host, Oprah Winfrey, calling for more attention to be paid to menopause on the societal level (15:05 pm, 10 May 2023). *@subtitle girl*’s initial paratext added for this clip starts with her introduction of the text:

Michelle Obama chats with Oprah about how 「menopause」, a physiological problem that every middle-aged woman faces, is ignored by the whole society. [Some] even ask their elderly mother but they do not remember this. “Women’s physiological problem is not studied at all. [If you] don’t teach us about menopause, why would you dictate how we use our uterus?” Eloquent 🙌. #Do You Know About Menopause# #Movie Recommendations for Spring Season# (15:05 pm, 10 May 2023)

The composition of the above entryway paratext follows the same logic as in the previous example. It starts with a concise introduction followed by quoted translated text extracts and *@subtitle girl*’s favorable review of the talk between two celebrities and is then ended with two hashtags (with the first one being more

or less navigational and interpretive and the second being marketing-oriented). Hashtags can be said to “have become both a tool and a space for digital feminist activism.” In digital spaces, as a consciousness-raising tactic, searchable hashtags can make feminist issues more visible, immediately respond to social events, create counter-discourses, and organize collectively (Linabary, Corple, and Cooky 2019, 1828). In the same vein as the hashtag #Sexual Consent Culture# in Example (1), the hashtagged threshold to the text (i.e., this synopsis) has turned into a site for achieving the subtitler’s feminist activism, and so has the subtitling. Later, the initial post is reposted (in a way shown in the red rectangle in the illustrative example), with the comments from both *@subtitle girl* and the recipients of the clip being positioned above the original post (in the green rectangle) side by side in the following way:

@subtitle girl: Pay attention to <menopause> // *@guang-young*: We need more!
 // *@大尾巴小白羊 (dàwěiba xiǎobáiyáng)*: With the disappearance of [their] fertility value, female menopause and what is after that are almost invisible, and hormone therapy is even rarer in China. Menopause is just one phase of life. We need more research, scientific popularization, and publicity of menopause 🍷
 // *@有盐电影 (yǒuyán diànyǐng)*: We need to discuss and talk about this more 🍷
 (co-comment 2, *@subtitle girl* and three others, 05:32 am, 11 May 2023)

First, the “translated/subtitled” universal menopause can be considered to be imbued with the local Chinese females’ affective resonances and empathy generated among the contributors of the comments, as manifested in the above co-created comment 2 in the chain. By exploiting the collateral paratextual space to relate menopause to its local social realities, they proactively demand more societal attention be paid to the issue of menopause in an overt fashion and more specifically, on what aspects the former would be improved, for example, hormone therapy, research, etc. The frequent use of “we” as italicized above also stirs up a politics of (transnational) solidarity through mediation. This co-comment chain continues and effectively brings a sharper focus to (due to its more conspicuous location compared to the comments *below* the post of subtitling) the local bodily female experiences (of pain) disclosed, for example, in the top-rated comment below (with 397 likes):

No one tells me that it (when I am going through childbirth) is so fucking painful. So, I wised up to start researching the matter of menopause well in advance. (comment 3, anonymous, 15:08 pm, 10 May 2023)

Overall, the content of the translated video has been closer to the female audience through these paratexts that help present and channel the translation.

Example (3) is concerned with the issue of colonialism (殖民主义, *zhímín zhǔyì*), an important factor that could contribute to and reinforce the gendered oppressions operating on multiple and overlapping levels (race, social class, etc.) through the lens of transnational feminism (in feminist translation studies) (Abou Rached 2020). The subtitled clip of 7'26 min is taken from the speech given by the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a MacArthur Fellowship award-winner and the author of *We Should All Be Feminists*. The speech was delivered at the venue Humboldt Forum in Germany by Adichie in 2021. In her speech, she touched upon Belgian colonialism in the Congo and the German colonial and imperial legacy/heritage. *@subtitle girl* puts the following words before the clip:

[This is] Adichie's speech when she was at the Humboldt Forum in Germany last year. She talked about the selective blindness of European history textbooks to its colonial history and the issue of the return of African cultural relics. Telling only half the story, she said, is essentially lying. #Entertainment Shows Re-creation List# (13:05 pm, 10 July 2022)

The supra threshold to the subtitled clip will be not elucidated further again as it holds the same paratextual pattern as in Example (1) and (2), except for having only one commercial hashtag. In the same manner as the preceding example, *@subtitle girl* reposted the original post, and the comments coming from both *@subtitle girl* and other two users appear on top of the clip (in the green rectangle):

@subtitle girl: “The history of colonized countries matters as well” // @春眠不觉晓露晓 (chūnmián bùjué hánlùxiǎo): Historical nihilism: I don't admit it=I haven't done it // @a土人 (a tǔrén): It's so well said. The narrative that holds the right to speak is actually erasure. (co-comment 3, *@subtitle girl* and two others, 18:42 pm, 22 July 2022)

The first comment above (i.e., “The history of colonized countries matters as well”) was put in quotation marks by *@subtitle girl* in that the source of this sentence is the original text (i.e., Adichie's speech). Adichie said in her speech: “The history of Africa and Asia and Latin America must matter as well (03:33, subtitled clip).” *@subtitle girl's* comment on the far left can be regarded as the summary (by summarizing Africa, Asia, and Latin America as “colonized countries”) to foreground the anti-colonial voice from the so-called Global South in Adichie's speech. At the same time, this piece of comment can also implicitly influence and direct the reception of Adichie's talk that apparently evokes anti-colonial sentiments among the Chinese audience who have been long demanding Japan to face up to its history of colonization, aggression, and war crimes against Chinese

during the Sino-Japan war as part of the World War II, as can be attested by the most thumbed-up comment (586 likes) below the post of subtitling.

This speech also applies to Japan. Turning a blind eye to history and not apologizing for past mistakes is an act of cowardice. I cannot agree with this view more. (comment 4, anonymous, 13:18 pm, 10 July 2022)

The reframing and reconstruction of Adichie's speech addressing the topic of colonialism on the paratextual level are done by both the subtitler, that is, *@subtitle girl*, and the recipients of their subtitled work. Through the practices of commenting and reposting, *@subtitle girl* and their audience use the paratextual space to provide, invite, and even encourage a new but rather relevant and specific local reading of their translation. The paratexts in Example (2) can be argued to have a direct bearing on the viewer's perception of the translation in question by expanding the narrative of the text and making it of immediate interest to the Chinese audience. The translated clip has been socio-historically and ideologically placed and read anew.

From a transnational feminist translation perspective (Castro and Ergun 2017), this paratextual reframing exemplifies how translation can function as a site of resistance and cultural negotiation, attending to interlocking asymmetrical power relations, which transnational feminist translation is mindful of. *@subtitle girl* creates a transnational feminist dialogue that resonates with Chinese audiences while maintaining the critical stance of the original speech. The audience's engagement with the translation, as evidenced by the most-liked comment, demonstrates how paratexts can facilitate the localization of transnational feminist discourses. *@subtitle girl* and their audience together contribute to a broader transnational feminist project of challenging dominant historical narratives and fostering cross-cultural solidarity among postcolonial subjects. This sort of reframing also epitomizes "translation as a force that recognizes that meaning is always still in the making" (Krafft and De Souza 2024, 2). Texts, including translations as social practices, exist in relation to other texts and cultural contexts (Sakellariou 2020).

As demonstrated in the above three examples, thanks to the interactivity of the social media platform Weibo, *@subtitle girl* and their audience hence are able to intervene in the production of meaning in a feminist way by taking advantage of the paratextual zone around translations. This sort of co-framing occurs through creating short but relevant synopses (sometimes hashtagged) as entryway paratexts (by *@subtitle girl*) and commenting and reposting, thereby adding more layers of paratexts (by *@subtitle girl* and their audience). In this way, it vividly exemplifies how the "paratext contributes to audiences' meaning-making, enjoyment, and/or to the *storification* of a text" (Brookey and Gray

2017, 109) and how the paratexts can strengthen the mediating role of translation/subtitling. Translations as such have become the supplementary texts of local affairs and concerns at a given moment for those feminist AV content consumers who can relate to those translations and whose trajectory with the translations is shaped by a range of pertinent paratexts.

6. Conclusion and discussion

The present study, based on a complementary conceptualization of paratextuality in TS (Batchelor 2018; Freeth 2023), examined the paratexts found alongside the online social translation/subtitling of the influential social media account *@subtitle girl* on Weibo, which is dedicated to online feminist content production in the form of subtitling. With a view to identifying the paratextual (re)framing of the subtitled feminist short videos produced by *@subtitle girl*, the study used the method of purposive sampling to collect data from it and accordingly analyzed the following paratextual elements on two levels: (1) the avatar, username, bio, and algorithm/Weibo-generated statistics of *@subtitle girl*. (2) the consciously devised entryway synopses put out by *@subtitle girl* and the viewer- and subtitler-created paratexts in the form of comments. The mediation process (including both the translation of the AV feminist content and the creation of paratexts) mainly involves two parties: the subtitler and their audience. The former translates, (self-) markets, foregrounds the feminist theme of their subtitling, and channels the reception of their work. The latter, through the comments, injects new local feminist discourse/concerns and female experiences into the translation, effectively guiding each other, enriching those videos' feminist connotations, and extending the connectivity of the virtual community built around *@subtitle girl*'s translations. This mediation process also chimes with digital feminist content production that values both the (self-)marketing of the producer/subtitler and the interaction between the producer/subtitler and their AV content consumers and among their consumers. This research is a tentative case, and there are certain limitations with a purposive sampling method and with a focus on only one account. More research could be done in the future by including, for example, accounts similar to *@subtitle girl* present on different social media platforms.

The implications of this study for future research on digital paratexts, subtitling/translation, and feminism are summarized as follows. First, in general, the idea of the paratext's subservience to the text clearly does not apply. On the contrary, a range of co-texts of undeniable paratextual relevance adjacent to the subtitled feminist clips engages in the shaping and (re)framing of those clips, the comprehension, reception, and "afterlife" of which are, in this sense, influenced.

Second, the participatory milieu of online social translation/subtitling allows for the interactivity associated with different paratexts (e.g., comments-turned paratexts) and the reciprocity between the paratextual co-texts of different positionalities. Therefore, theoretically speaking, the understanding of paratextuality by relationship (Freeth 2023) facilitates the reading of paratexts in terms of constellations and networks (see also Henry-Tierney 2021) and proves to be rather advantageous in this scenario where *@subtitle girl*, their subtitling and paratexts should be considered as a meaningful whole. Third, via reposts and comments (as also part of the mediation process), and among the targeted audience (understood as fans of feminism) brought together by the subtitled videos. This phenomenon indicates the potential for translation/subtitling and paratexts on social media to be emotionally charged and invested. Therefore, future digital paratextual research in TS could also be done from the perspective of the affect/affective dimension in feminist/gender/ideological/political contexts. Fourth, a multidisciplinary approach that brings the current study into dialogue with insights from (Feminist) Media and Communication Studies and Paratextual Studies benefits similar future research in many ways.



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