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Peritextual Research from the Perspective of Transknowletology: A Case
Study of the English Translation of *Hsing-ch'a Sheng-lan*

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Abstract

Based on the theory of Transknowletology, this paper takes the English translation of *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan* (a classic maritime text of the Ming Dynasty) as the research object, and systematically analyzes the unique value and operational mechanism of peritextual elements—including the title, preface, introduction, footnotes, and appendices—in promoting the international dissemination of Chinese maritime knowledge. It is found that the peritexts of this translation effectively construct and disseminate knowledge through strategies such as establishing academic authority, bridging cultural gaps, reconstructing historical contexts, enhancing critical thinking, and systematically integrating knowledge, which embodies the “truth, virtue, and beauty” principles of Transknowletology. This paper not only expands the theoretical perspective of translation studies but also provides methodological insights for the practice of translating and introducing Chinese classics to the global academic community.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Interpretation, Dissemination of Maritime Knowledge, Peritext, Transknowletology, *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan*.

1. Introduction

Transknowletology focuses on the translation of knowledge and the knowledge embedded in translation. It centers on the transformation of local knowledge into global knowledge, explores the behaviors, relationships, movements, and laws governing cross-linguistic knowledge processing, reconstruction, and re-dissemination, and explicitly proposes a methodology integrating three rational practices based on the principles of “seeking truth through authenticity, establishing meaning through virtue, and crafting discourse through beauty” (“truth, virtue, and beauty”) (Yang, 2021: 2). In this complex process of knowledge circulation, the text itself does not exist in isolation; paratext, as a strategic tool, plays a crucial bridging role.

The concept of “paratext” was first proposed by French literary critic and theorist Gérard Genette in 1979. He categorized paratext into peritext and epitext. Peritext refers to such elements as the title or the preface and sometimes elements inserted into the interstices of the text, such as chapter title or certain notes (Genette, 1997: 5). Wang Shuhuai points out that peritextual elements in translation can enhance readers’ understanding by supplementing factual and evaluative materials, express translators’ attitudes, document translators’ choices of translation strategies, and improve the attractiveness of a book through visual elements (Wang, 2024: 105).

Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan was written by Fei Hsin, an interpreter and an educator in Cheng Ho’s fleet on the third, fourth, fifth and seventh expeditions. It details the geographical locations, products, customs, and political systems of countries along the route to the Western Oceans (Fei, 1954; Zhang, 2005: 72). It provides invaluable first-hand historical materials for studying Ming Dynasty international relations, cultural exchanges, and trade interactions, and its research value has been widely acknowledged in academic circles. Since the late 19th century, partial chapters of this work have been translated into English and French; however, most of these translations are incomplete, suffer from quality issues, and generally contain simplistic annotations. In the 1970s, British scholar J. V. G. Mills translated the entire text based on Feng Ch’eng-chün’s annotated version (both *ch’ien-chi* and *hou-chi*). After Mills’ death, German scholar Roderich Ptak integrated research findings from Eastern and Western academic communities, edited and revised this translation, added annotations, and published it in 1996 as *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan: The Overall Survey of the Star Raft* (Fei, 1996). Wade notes that this translation “overcomes these deficiencies and provides an integrated English text of the work, alternate readings from variant editions, and annotations which draw on works in eight languages. It also includes the most detailed bibliography to date of works relating to Chinese maritime relations with Southeast Asia during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries” (Wade, 1997: 407). The academic value of this translation has been widely recognized – according to WorldCat data, it is collected by over 80 libraries across 13 countries and regions. Mills also translated Ma Huan’s *Ying-yai sheng-lan* (Ma, 1970); Chen Hsin-hsiung comments that this translation “integrates the achievements of previous sinologists and draws on the research results of Chinese scholars, representing a culmination of sinological studies on Cheng Ho” (Chen, 2005: 931). Together, these two translated works have opened a crucial window for Western readers to understand ancient Chinese maritime culture and promoted the mutual learning and exchange of maritime knowledge between China and the West.

As a vital carrier for the international dissemination of Ming maritime knowledge, the academic value of the English translation of *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* lies not only in the cross-linguistic conversion of the main text but, more importantly, in the implicit yet critical role of its built-in peritextual system in helping Western readers comprehend ancient Chinese maritime knowledge. From the perspective of Transknowletology, the translation history of such classic documents is itself a microcosm of cross-cultural knowledge dissemination. As a strategic tool for translators to regulate knowledge transmission, the operational logic of peritext deserves in-depth investigation in specific studies. Therefore, this paper first sorts out the textual value and research status of *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* and its English translation, laying an academic foundation for exploring the knowledge dissemination function of its peritexts.

2. Literature Review

Previous studies on *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* and its translation mainly center round the following aspects:

2.1 Nautical History and Geographical Studies

Zhang Jian (2025) ranks *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* alongside *Ying-yai sheng-lan*, *His-yang Fan-kuo chih*, and Cheng Ho’s Nautical Chart as the “Three Books and One Chart”, recording Cheng Ho’s voyages to the Western Oceans, emphasizing its significance for studying the history and geography of Asia

and Africa in the early Ming Dynasty. Zhou Yunzhong (2010) verified the historical fact that Zhang Xuan accompanied Yang Min's fleet on a mission to Bengal and was buried in Chittagong; Shi Ping (2015) argues that Cheng Ho visited Malacca during all seven of his voyages; Xi Fuyu (2018) discussed Hou Xian's five missions to remote regions and the debate over his involvement in Cheng Ho's voyages – these textual researches help clarify historical ambiguities. Mao & Zhou (2007) note that the "Three Western Oceans Books" detail foreign geography, climate, products, customs, religious cultures, and nautical technologies such as compass navigation and celestial navigation. This not only demonstrates the geographical value of *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan* but also reflects the breadth of ancient Chinese understanding of the outside world and the achievements of Ming nautical technology.

2.2 Cultural Exchange and Trade Studies

Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan provides rich details for research on cultural exchange and trade. Ren & Yang (2023) studied the records of ceramics in the book, revealing the development and trade methods of ceramics in the early Ming Dynasty and highlighting its value in economic history and material cultural history. Chen Zhiming (2015) adopted an anthropological perspective to analyze Fei Hsin's interactions with foreign cultures, exploring the human geography of Southeast Asia and the lives of Chinese communities there. Zhang Zhuping (2010) compared the "Three Western Oceans Books" with *Jinghuayuan (The Destiny of Mirror Flower)* to discuss the records of social customs, expanding the research dimensions of *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan*.

2.3 International Dissemination and Translation Studies

Cheng Ho studies in Europe and America usually revolve around *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan* and other related documents; prominent scholars in this field include William Frederick Mayers, J. J. L. Duyvendak, Paul Pelliot, and J. V. G. Mills (Chen, 2005). Pelliot's *Les grands voyages maritimes chinois au début du XVe siècle* covers the version, collation, voyage dates, and route research of *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan*, providing key materials for reconstructing 15th-century nautical history and Sino-foreign exchange history (Pelliot, 1935: 20-35). Pereira (2019) also points out that the geographical knowledge and nautical technological developments recorded in the book during Cheng Ho era deserve special attention. Wu Congzhu et al. (2020) analyzed the culture-preserving translation strategies of Mills' English version; Wade (1997) emphasized the academic value of its detailed annotations and references. Wadow (1997) affirmed Ptak's professional competence as an authoritative scholar in organizing Mills' posthumous manuscripts, praised his cautious handling of the translation and detailed annotation work, and noted the Confucian cultural perspective of the original work and its era-specific characteristics in judging foreign customs. These studies highlight the importance of translation annotations for understanding the original text. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a close reading of the translation—especially its peritext—to explore the pathways of its cross-cultural knowledge construction and engage in dialogue with contemporary "Belt and Road" studies, thereby uncovering the practical implications of historical experiences (Weisser, 2018).

Based on the above research status, this paper intends to break through the traditional research paradigm focusing on textual linguistic conversion from the micro-perspective of Transknowletology. By comprehensively analyzing peritextual elements such as titles, prefaces, introductions, footnotes, and appendices, it systematically explores the strategic operational logic of these peritexts in the Western dissemination of Ming maritime knowledge. This aims to fill the academic gap in systematic peritext research and provide new ideas for the translation and study of ancient Chinese scientific and technological documents.

3. The Knowledge Construction Function of the Peritexts in the English Translation of *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan*

The peritexts of this translation serve as a crucial tool for editors and translators to process and reconstruct knowledge, as well as an important resource for readers to understand this Ming maritime

classic. The multiple elements include title, preface, introduction, footnotes, and appendices, with the main functions of each part as follows:

3.1 Title: Presentation of Theme and Cultural Connotation

The title appears on the cover and title page, undertaking the basic functions of “identifying the work, designating its subject matter, and playing up the work” (Genette, 1997: 76). As can be seen in the translated title: “Hsing-ch’a Sheng-lan: The Overall Survey of the Star Raft,” its primary function is to present the theme and cultural connotation, thus enticing the targeted reader.

The first part adopts Wade-Giles romanization to transliterate the Chinese title, based on multiple considerations: first, academic standardization—retaining the original pinyin form not only facilitates scholars in tracing the original text but also more accurately identifies the translated Chinese document, ensuring precision in academic citations. Second, cultural authenticity—transliterating the Chinese title maximizes the preservation of the original work’s “Chinese identity,” emphasizes its cultural background and historical context, and avoids excessive Westernization. Third, ambiguity avoidance—compared with literal translation of the Chinese title (which may lead to the loss of unique charm and the risk of multiple interpretations), the transliterated form provides a stable and unambiguous reference, safeguarding the uniqueness of the original title.

The second part of the title interprets the core meaning of “Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan”: “The Overall Survey” corresponds to “sheng-lan,” meaning a comprehensive and vivid survey of a place or thing, conveying the nature or genre of Fei Hsin’s work as a geographical record and travelogue. Mills skillfully uses the term “survey” to objectively reflect the classic’s detailed records of the social landscape of countries visited by Cheng Ho’s fleet—this choice is accurate and thoughtful (Ji & Liu, 2021: 104). “The Star Raft” corresponds to “Hsing-ch’a,” a poetic and mythological term literally referring to a vessel that can carry people between heaven and earth, implicitly denoting long-distance voyage ships. Mills interprets it as “the flagship of the representative of the Emperor” (Pereira, 2019: 356). This translation not only preserves the mystery and grandeur implied by “Hsing” (star) but also embodies the tool attribute of “Ch’a” (raft or ship). This imagery aligns with the grand voyage of Cheng Ho’s fleet and further implies that these voyages were as distant and full of unknown exploration as traveling across the stars—revealing the cultural connotation of the original work, which is both a pursuit of “truth” and “beauty” in Transknowletology.

3.2 Preface: Presentation of Background Information and Research Orientation

Genette argues that “providing information about the creation of the work” is “the basic role of the prefaces (more modestly called ‘notices’ or ‘introductions’) supplied by editors of scholarly editions, who retrace the stages of the work’s conception, writing, and publication and move on logically to a ‘history of the text’ and an account of their own editorial decisions (establishment of the text, choice of pretexts and variants, documentary and critical notes, and so forth)” (Genette, 1997: 265). The preface to the English translation of *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* was written by editor Ptak, focusing on presenting Mills’ academic background, research interests, and the value of the translation, laying a foundation for readers to accept this work.

The preface first shapes Mills’ image as an expert in “Asian maritime history.” Ptak emphasizes Mills’ strong interest in the history, geography, and ethnography of coastal Asia and in all matters related to Asian navigation and nautical technology—with a particular focus on the Malay world, the South China Sea, and the countries around the Indian Ocean. This focus is based on multilingual literature including Portuguese and Chinese books and documents; the Chinese literature covers nautical treatises, maps, official histories, and various accounts of Asian ports and countries, all closely related to Cheng Ho’s seven expeditions and Ming maritime trade. The preface also highlights Mills’ achievements in relevant fields, such as his papers published in *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal*

Asiatic Society and his annotated English translation of *Yingyai Shenglan* (supplemented with research on nautical affairs, cartography, and Chinese place names). Additionally, Ptak recounts the process of organizing and publishing Mills' posthumous manuscripts (Fei, 1996: 7-8). These back stories enhance the narrative nature of the preface, allowing readers to perceive the academic value and cultural significance behind the translation and finally accept it. At the same time, Ptak openly acknowledges potential shortcomings of the translation—this attitude of “seeking truth” further enhances the credibility of the translation.

3.3 Introduction: Content Framework and Discourse Path

As is said in 3.2, the introduction to the present translation provides solid support for it by sorting out the textual lineage of *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan*, justifying the rationality of the translation, and constructing an academic context.

First, the introduction systematically sorts out the surviving versions of *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan*, dividing them into early versions with “a *ch'ien-chi* segment and a *hou-chi* segment” and later editions with “either four *chüan* or one *chüan* only” (Fei, 1996: 9). It emphasizes the value of Lo I-chih's version (an early edition) in terms of historical material completeness and notes that the Feng Ch'eng-chün annotated version selected by Mills is based on this edition. Meanwhile, it marks important differences between this version and other early editions and includes the later *Chi-lu hui-pien* version (ibid: 10). This sorting helps readers understand the reasons for the translator's selection of a specific original text and provides key references for subsequent version comparisons and textual research. Second, Ptak criticizes Rockhill's translation (based on a later edition) for obvious translation errors, emphasizing that Feng's annotated version is closer to the original versions of these works (ibid: 20) —justifying the necessity of translating based on Feng's version. Additionally, the introduction clearly states that the translation only covers the prose content of the early editions, excluding poems and later revisions — this selection effectively avoids misunderstandings caused by version confusion. Finally, the introduction demonstrates a macro perspective in constructing the academic context: it integrates Fei Hsin's life story, the dissemination history of *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan*, Chou Fu-chün's revisions, Kuei Yu-kuang's collation, and research findings from Chinese and foreign scholars such as Pelliot, Duyvendak, and Mills, placing the translation within the overall framework of Ming maritime exchange history and historical geography research.

This introduction itself is a process of “seeking truth,” promoting the “inheritance, revision, and innovation of knowledge.” Through textual research, it establishes the knowledge legitimacy of the text, confirming *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan* as a core document of Ming maritime exchange history; at the same time, it demonstrates rigorous research paradigms such as version comparison and textual tracing, providing methodological guidance for ancient book collation. As an intermediary for cross-cultural knowledge translation, the introduction bridges the cognitive gap between China and the West, integrating Chinese documents into the global academic framework. Furthermore, by raising unresolved questions and analyzing version differences, the introduction inspires new research directions, promoting the upgrading of knowledge from collation to innovation. However, the introduction also has limitations: its complex romanization and high degree of specialization may make it difficult for general readers to fully understand; its dismissal of the value of poems also seems overly absolute, ignoring their literary value and role in cultural dissemination.

3.4 Footnotes: Supplementary Explanation and Knowledge Extension

The primary function of footnotes is to supplement textual explanations, provide detailed information, interpretations, and necessary background knowledge, and occasionally include the author's self-corrections or satirical intentions. Taking the English translation of *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan* as an example, its footnotes not only assist readers in deeply understanding the original text but also construct three layers of relevant knowledge systems through knowledge extension.(See Figure 1)

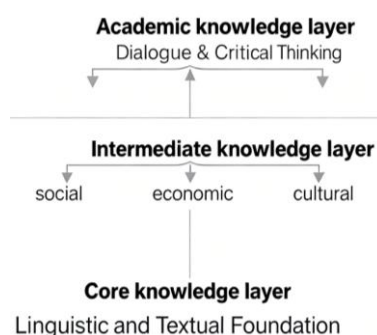


Figure 1 Three-tier Knowledge Layer constructed by Footnotes

The translation contains a total of 398 footnotes; this study selects 347 of them – i.e., footnotes in the main text (the *ch'ien-chi* -Part One and *hou-chi* -Part Two) (see Table 1) – for statistical analysis. These footnotes cover multiple dimensions, including linguistic and textual interpretation, products and trade, geographical and place name textual research, navigation and ships, social and cultural customs, and religion and beliefs. The quantitative distribution of different types of footnotes directly reflects the focus of the original work in content recording, as well as the key concerns of translators and even the academic community (especially Sinology) regarding *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan*, and the knowledge system processed and reconstructed therefrom.

Table 1: Footnote types in the main text of *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan*

Type	Count	Footnote Examples		
		Original text	Translated text	English Annotation
1. Products and Trade	108	棋楠香在一山所产 (Fei, 1954: 2)	Calambac incense is produced on one mountain.	Calambac (ch'i-nan-hsiang, chia-lan-hsiang, etc.): the finest kind of all lign-aloes; used in medicine; one of the most expensive commodities traded in the Far East; exported to China and Japan; frequently mentioned in Portuguese and Dutch sources of the seventeenth century (Fei, 1996: 34).
2. Geographical and Place names	93	宾童龙国 (Fei, 1954: 6)	The Country of Panduranga (Pin-t'ung-lung kuo)	Panduranga is located on the shores of the Sedonnon and its tributary river (Fei, 1996: 37).
3. Social and Cultural Customs	76	婚姻遇合，情意不忘，终乖人伦理 (Fei, 1954: 6)	When they marry or meet a partner, affection is not neglected; when they finally separate, moral principles [are observed].	The version chosen here, reminds of the Champa segment in <i>TICL</i> : There it is said, local women would board foreign ships to find mates; when the ships left, the women wept, and when the men returned in the following year, the women would be together with them (ou-ho) as before. The women would also offer food and clothing if the men were in distress (Fei, 1996: 38).

4. Linguistic and Textual Interpretation	62	不解正朔 (Fei, 1954: 2)	They do not understand New Year's day.	The end of the year or a month? Mills originally translated <i>cheng-shuo</i> like <i>yueh-shuo</i> (the first day of the moon) and seems to imply the latter. Most <i>HCSL</i> versions as well as Rockhill's translation are, somewhat ambiguous, here (Fei, 1996: 35).
5. Navigation and Ships	4	统领官兵二万七千余人, 驾使海舶四十八号 (Fei, 1954: 1)	To take supreme command of more than twenty-seven thousand government troops and forty-eight seagoing ships	It is not clear whether Fei Hsin stated the numbers of ships and men correctly (Fei, 1996: 33).
6. Religion and Beliefs	4	目连所居遗址尚存 (Fei, 1954: 6)	The remaining foundation of Mu-lien's residence is still preserved.	Mu-lien: Maudgalyâyana, Buddha's famous disciple. Several Chinese texts allude to him in their chapters on Pin-t'ung-lung but the reason is not understood. Perhaps there was a story in which Mu-lien begged for food in this place (Fei, 1996: 38).

Although there are only 62 footnotes on “linguistic and textual interpretation”, they form the basic interpretation system constructed by the translator and the editor for the original text itself. They include semantic discrimination of ancient Chinese vocabulary, textual differences between different versions (including comparisons between Mills' translation and Rockhill's translation), and transcription rules for transliterated words and proper nouns (e.g., “ch'i-nan-hsiang, chia-lan-hsiang” corresponding to “calambac”). Their core purpose is to address the accurate understanding of the text (“seeking truth”), laying a linguistic foundation for the interpretation of knowledge in other dimensions. This constitutes the core knowledge layer constructed by the translator and the editor (see Figure 1).

Second, the footnotes on “products and trade” are the most numerous, totaling 108. They involve local products, core trade commodities, scales, circulation routes, and market demands between Ming China and Southeast Asia as well as the coasts of the Indian Ocean. Through these footnotes, Ptak compensates for the brevity of descriptions in the original text, helping readers reconstruct a comprehensive picture of Southeast Asian trade in the 15th century. For instance, the footnote on “calambac incense” as shown in Table 1 not only explains its medicinal value but also cites Portuguese and Dutch documents, embedding isolated product information into the global trade network and enhancing the academic value of *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan* as an economic historical source. The 93 footnotes on “geographical and place-names” integrate historical geography, overseas geography, the evolution history of place-names, and ancient navigation routes. They pursue “truth” in and extend the 15th-century Chinese spatial cognition of the “Western Oceans,” introducing it to the world. Together with footnotes on “navigation and ships,” they form part of ancient Chinese maritime knowledge. Liu Yingsheng once explored Cheng Ho's voyages to the Western Oceans and Sino-foreign maritime exchanges under the title “An Open System of Nautical Scientific Knowledge,” arguing that “his achievements in the voyages to the Western Seas were built on the foundation of Sino-foreign maritime

knowledge exchanges before the early Ming Dynasty” (Liu, 2017: 84). Similarly, geographical knowledge and specialized nautical knowledge derived from Cheng Ho’s maritime practices have attracted the attention of Chinese and foreign scholars; these footnotes serve as a platform for the exchange of Chinese and foreign maritime knowledge to a certain extent. As for footnotes on social and cultural customs, and religion and beliefs, they present the social behavioral logic of different civilizations (including diet, clothing, marriage customs, funeral customs, local languages and so on) by extending documents and conducting cultural comparisons based on Fei Hsin’s observations of various countries along the route. For example, regarding the marriage customs of Champa, Ptak cites *Tao-i chih-lüeh* (*Notes on the Relations and Trade of China with the Eastern Archipelago and the Coasts of the Indian Ocean during the Fourteenth Century*), revealing the intertextual relationship between documents; as to the custom of women in Champa “boarding foreign ships to find mates” (Fei, 1996: 38), he supplements information about women’s assistance to men in distress, enriching the sociological connotations of the text. These footnotes integrate multidisciplinary knowledge to form a three-dimensional interpretation of historical and cultural phenomena, constituting the intermediate knowledge layer constructed by the translator (see Figure 1). Hou Jie (2025) found that Walter Henry Medhurst’s English translation of *Hai-tao i-chih* (*The Chinaman Abroad: A Desultory Account of the Malayan Archipelago, Particularly of Java*) truthfully conveys ethnographic “pure” knowledge, expresses the customs of various ethnic groups with goodwill, and showcases the beauty of exotic scenery through elegant language. Ptak’s investigations similarly embody the “truth, virtue, and beauty” principles of Transknowletology.

The knowledge network constructed by the translator as mentioned above also includes echoes and dialogues with academic traditions, reflected in the citation and discrimination of previous research in the footnotes (see Figure 1). In footnotes on navigation and ships, Ptak’s questioning of the scale of Cheng Ho’s fleet (Fei, 1996: 33) demonstrates his critical thinking. Based on Feng’s annotation (which consults *Ying-yai sheng-lan*, *Biography of Cheng Ho in Ming shih*, and *Ch'ien-wen chi*) and Pelliot’s *Voyages*, Ptak doubts Fei Hsin’s statement on troops and ship numbers. This shows Ptak’s prudent attitude, prompting readers to reflect on the complexity of historical records and examine ancient Chinese maritime history more objectively. In footnotes on religion and beliefs, the annotation on “Mu-lien” (Maudgalyâyana) (ibid: 38) acknowledges the ambiguity of documentary records and proposes possible legendary backgrounds, avoiding overinterpretation while leaving room for subsequent research. Additionally, the comparison between Mills’ translation and Rockhill’s translation is full of critical thinking. These dimensions connect the history of Chinese and foreign Sinological research, translation history, and international academic consensus, making the footnotes not only interpretations of the original text but also inheritances and integrations of academic accumulations. This process of “seeking truth” helps target readers in Western academic circles understand the value of the original work within the existing research context, constructing a network of academic history and cross-cultural communication.

3.5 Appendices: Supplementary Materials and References

The appendix section of the English translation of *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* not only supplements and extends the main text but also concentrates Ptak’s academic rigor and knowledge construction strategies. Its six appendices enrich the knowledge system of the translation from different dimensions.

The “abbreviations” section lists the abbreviations and full names of important documents cited by Ptak in the preface, introduction, and footnotes, covering historical documents from Ming Dynasty, academic journals of Oriental studies and Asian studies, as well as related monographs and reference books. For example, “YYSL = *Ying-yai sheng-lan*” is concise and clear, avoiding lengthy full names, improving text conciseness, and facilitating readers’ reading. The “Bibliography” section includes both Chinese primary sources such as *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan chiao-chu*, as well as translations and research results by Chinese and Western scholars on Sino-Southeast Asian nautical history, historical geography,

and cultural exchanges—providing a solid foundation for translators and editors to construct the relevant historical and cultural background. The “Chinese Characters” section is a Chinese-English glossary of proper nouns, categorized in alphabetical order, including place names, personal names, products, and weights and measures. It effectively breaks down the understanding barriers for non-Chinese readers and promotes knowledge transmission. The “Index” section, with English terms as search entries, covers various place names, personal names, products, concepts, and events in the translation, accompanied by page numbers or footnote numbers to facilitate readers’ quick information localization. The fifth appendix is a map of the 44 places described in *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan*; it provides specific geographical references, helps understand voyage routes and trade knowledge, and promotes the cognition of Ming China’s foreign exchanges. The last appendix lists three academic works on the theme of “the South China and Maritime Asia” published by Harrassowitz Verlag, covering the history, trade, and cultural exchanges of Southeast Asia—aligning with the theme of *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan*.

In terms of function, these appendices assist in knowledge construction and understanding: the abbreviation list and bibliography clearly outline Ptak’s research context and knowledge lineage; the Chinese-character and English indexes form a two-way search mechanism, reducing the difficulty for readers to acquire and understand knowledge in a cross-cultural context and ensuring the accurate reconstruction of information in the target culture. The map illustrations visualize abstract geographical information, effectively compensating for the limitations of textual descriptions and helping readers understand the content. Yue Feng and Chen Zeyu once stated that “the in-depth meaning of ‘virtue’ is to facilitate communication”—this is the “virtue” of translators (Yue & Chen, 2022: 69). Additionally, the comprehensive appendix system enhances the academic authority of the translation, providing clues and starting points for subsequent research and making it more than a simple textual translation but an open knowledge platform. Finally, through multilingual search tools and intuitive geographical information, the appendices effectively lower the threshold for non-Chinese readers to access and understand ancient Chinese maritime knowledge, enabling *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* to be utilized and studied by a broader international academic community—thus promoting the global dissemination and dialogue of traditional Chinese maritime knowledge.

4. The Knowledge Construction Strategies of the Peritexts in the English Translation of *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan*

The peritextual system of the English translation of *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* not only supplements information but also embodies Ptak’s knowledge construction and dissemination strategies. These strategies complement each other, jointly building a multi-dimensional knowledge dissemination system and effectively promoting cross-cultural communication of Ming maritime knowledge.

4.1 Establishing Academic Authority and Knowledge Legitimacy

The academic authority and knowledge legitimacy of a translation are the ethical cornerstones of knowledge translation (“truth”), directly influencing its acceptance and influence in the target culture. The “Preface” to the English translation of *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* emphasizes Mills’ academic background and multilingual research capabilities in the field of Asian maritime history; the “Introduction” sorts out the textual lineage and criticizes the flaws of Rockhill’s translation; and the “Abbreviation” and “Bibliography” in the appendices jointly construct a trustworthy academic image—making the translation more persuasive and influential in knowledge dissemination. This construction of academic authority demonstrates the professional competence of editors and translators, upholds the ethics of knowledge translation, and ensures the responsibility and reliability of knowledge transmission.

4.2 Cultural Decoding and Cross-Cultural Bridging

Cultural differences are the biggest obstacle to cross-cultural knowledge dissemination. The title of the English translation of *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* adopts a combination of “Wade-Giles romanization +

free translation”: it preserves the cultural identity of the original text while facilitating Western readers’ understanding of its core meaning; the footnote system provides detailed explanations and contextualization of culture-specific items, demonstrating the translator’s efforts to bridge cultural gaps; and the multiple indexes in the appendices provide convenient search tools for non-Chinese readers, reducing the difficulty of understanding ancient Chinese proper nouns and enabling them to freely explore the knowledge in the text. These strategies jointly construct a cross-cultural cognitive framework, effectively bridging the cognitive gap between the source culture and the target culture. Such translation that facilitates cross-cultural understanding is a “good” translation in Transknowletology.

4.3 Multi-Dimensional Context Reconstruction and Knowledge Extension

The original records of *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* are concise, making it difficult for Western readers to fully understand the underlying historical and cultural context. The introduction to the translation places *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* within the overall framework of Ming maritime exchange history and historical geography research, integrating research results from Chinese and foreign scholars to provide readers with the macro background needed to understand the text; the footnotes construct a multi-dimensional knowledge network covering products and trade, geographical and place names, social and cultural customs, etc., enabling readers to understand the text more comprehensively; and the map illustrations in the appendices intuitively present the geographical locations described in the book, helping readers better understand the world depicted in the text. These strategies jointly construct a three-dimensional historical scenario and academic context, supplementing and extending the information of the original text and assisting readers’ understanding.

4.4 Critical Examination and Knowledge Verification

As a historical document, *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* may have limitations in its records. Through critical annotations in the footnotes (such as Ptak’s questioning of the scale of Cheng Ho’s fleet and his marking of ambiguous or contradictory records in the literature) and the introduction’s criticism of the flaws in Rockhill’s translation, the translation demonstrates the translator’s cautious attitude towards knowledge selection and presentation. At the same time, it guides readers to reflect on the complexity of historical records and encourages them to examine historical documents from a critical perspective – thus understanding ancient Chinese nautical history more objectively. This is precisely the “seeking truth through authenticity” advocated by Transknowletology.

4.5 Systematic Integration and Reader Guidance

The peritexts of the English translation of *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan* are not a simple accumulation of individual elements but an organic unity. The title attracts readers’ attention; the preface builds readers’ trust; the introduction provides a macro framework; the footnotes delve into detailed explanations and knowledge construction; and the appendices expand and improve the knowledge system. These five elements echo each other, jointly constructing a progressive knowledge understanding path and knowledge production field, effectively guiding readers to in-depth understanding and utilization of the ancient Chinese maritime knowledge carried by *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan*. Through this chain-like dissemination, knowledge is more effectively transmitted and internalized, ultimately achieving cross-cultural understanding and dialogue – conforming to the “truth, virtue, and beauty” principles of Transknowletology.

5. Conclusion

Based on the theory of Transknowletology, this paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the operational mechanism of peritext in the cross-cultural flow of knowledge in the English translation of *Hsing-ch’a sheng-lan*. It is found that the peritextual system of this translation is not a simple supplementary component but embodies the “truth, virtue, and beauty” principles of

Transknowletology through strategies such as establishing academic authority and knowledge legitimacy, cultural decoding and cross-cultural bridging, multi-dimensional context reconstruction and knowledge extension, critical examination and knowledge verification, and systematic integration and reader guidance. It effectively bridges the knowledge gap between the source culture and the target culture, greatly enhances the academic value and effectiveness of the translation, and contributes significantly to the global dissemination of Chinese maritime knowledge. In the process of promoting excellent traditional Chinese culture to the world, we should fully recognize and strategically utilize peritext—enhancing the academic value and readability of translations by establishing academic authority, conducting cultural decoding, and reconstructing historical contexts.

This study has certain limitations. First, it focuses solely on the English translation of *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan* edited by Ptak, lacking comparisons with other translations or versions, which limits the generalizability of findings. Second, the analysis of peritextual elements relies heavily on textual interpretation, with insufficient empirical data on how target readers perceive and utilize these elements. Third, the study emphasizes academic and cultural dimensions but overlooks the impact of practical factors such as publishing contexts and dissemination channels on peritext's knowledge-dissemination function. Future research could address these gaps through comparative and empirical approaches.

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