
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Translation Up to Cultural Coexistence: A Study of Foreignness Preservation in the Chinese Translation of *Things Fall Apart*

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| ABSTRACT

Translation is a crucial vehicle for cross-cultural communication and constructing meaning across linguistic boundaries. At the heart of this process is how "Foreignness" is accommodated or preserved within the target language system. While African literature has gained prominence within global literary discourse in recent years, it continues to occupy a marginal position in the Chinese literary landscape in terms of readership and translation volume. This marginalization is further entangled with the asymmetrical power relations between China and Africa, which complicate efforts to faithfully preserve cultural distinctiveness. Using Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as a representative case, this study explores the preservation of Foreignness in its Chinese translation through the lens of Translation UP. It adopts an analytical framework that considers the translator's agency, prevailing translation norms, and audience reception to evaluate strategies employed in maintaining cultural specificity. The findings indicate that, despite the peripheral status of African literature in China, the translator actively resisted cultural homogenization. The translation retains a significant degree of cultural authenticity through transliteration, annotation, metonymic substitution, and adaptive methods. This signals an increasing openness within Chinese cultural discourse and reflects a shift toward more ethically engaged translation practices.

| KEYWORDS

Foreignness; *Things Fall Apart*; Translation UP, Igbo culture

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1. Introduction

Foreignness, which is often referred to as "otherness," "heterogeneity," or "exoticism," presents a persistent challenge in translation, particularly within the realm of literary translation, where the recognition, understanding, and faithful rendering of linguistic and cultural difference in the source text (ST) are of great significance. As cultures engage, interact, and even collide, these exchanges can spark creative growth, allowing each culture to renew and enrich itself. However, the process of preserving Foreignness in translation is not uniform; outcomes often vary significantly due to the unequal power relations between different linguistic and cultural groups. Such imbalances frequently result in the selective and uneven renderings of Foreignness across languages.

The concept of Translation UP was proposed by David Bellos(2011), an American linguist, in his renowned book *Is That A Fish in Your Ear?* to describe the asymmetrical power relations in the translation process. It can be seen as a type of long-standing phenomenon in translation rather than a systemic translation theory, that is, a translational direction from which a somewhat peripheral language/culture to a "central" language/culture. Indeed, it is believed that the Foreignness in the process of

Translation UP will go through inevitable reduction, filtering, and rewriting as a way to cater to the cultural norms in the TL system.

This paper explores how Foreignness, particularly that of a culturally peripheral source, is preserved in the Chinese translation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Specifically, it asks: How can the translator maintain the integrity of the Foreignness in a cross-cultural context marked by asymmetrical power dynamics? What challenges arise in this process, and what strategies can be employed to address them? Finally, the study seeks to assess the extent to which Foreignness can be preserved in the target text and what this reveals about broader translation ethics and cultural positioning.

2. Foreignness in Translation

2.1 To receive the Foreign as Foreign

Foreignness in Translation can be understood in three primary senses. First, it denotes difference, positioned in binary opposition to "Same". Second, it signifies "other" or "alien", as in references to "foreign lands" or "other places." Third, it represents the unusual or exceptional, often manifesting at the linguistic level where translators encounter syntactically unfamiliar expressions (Xu, 2003, p. 277). Corresponding to these three interpretations, Foreignness is expressed through three distinct categories: linguistic difference, cultural disparity, and ideological estrangement, each with its multidimensional nature. Diachronic translation studies have also unveiled various transformations of Foreignness, such as literal Translation, Foreignizing Translation, word-for-word rendering, and Overt Translation

By its very nature, Translation endows language with new layers of meaning and significance through its engagement with Foreignness. Xu Jun (2003), a renowned Chinese scholar in translation studies, emphasized in his *On Translation* that "for translation studies, Foreignness is an issue of particular importance." Philosophical concepts such as "the Other" and "différance" are also deeply intertwined with the idea of Foreignness, forming the basis for the necessity of Translation. Cultural systems evolve through contact, integration, and sometimes conflict with other systems—that both demand and are facilitated by Translation. Translation becomes a crucial vector for linguistic innovation and intercultural development when it preserves cultural and linguistic differences. Therefore, A translation that preserves differences has indeed become one of the main pathways for language innovation.

As Berman (1984, p. 16) notes in his renowned essay *Translation as the Trails of the Foreign* which Venuti translated, he stressed that Translation can be seen as an experience in two senses: In the first place, it establishes a relationship between Self-Same (Propre) and the Foreign by aiming to open up the foreign work to us in its utter foreignness. In the second place, Translation is also a trial for the Foreign since foreign work is uprooted from its language ground. Berman deplors the general tendency to negate Foreignness in Translation by the translation strategy of "naturalization", which would also have similarities with Venuti's "domestication" later. The proper ethical aim of the translating act, says Berman, would be to receive the Foreign as Foreign.

In *The Translator's Invisibility*, Venuti expands this critique by examining the enduring asymmetries in global translation practices, particularly the dominance of Anglo-American cultural norms since the 17th century. He argues that translators have historically favored fluency and transparency to meet the expectations of Anglophone readers, reinforcing cultural hegemony and ethnocentrism. In opposition to this, Venuti calls for a strategy of foreignization over domestication, aligning himself with Schleiermacher's proposition that the translator should "send the reader abroad." This approach functions as a cultural intervention, drawing attention to the linguistic and cultural alterity of the ST rather than erasing it.

2.2 The Power of Construction Behind Foreignness

In China, Lu Xun was already ahead of his time in proposing a translation theory similar to that of Venuti. He stressed the *yangqi* (洋气) of literary translation, and his firm adherence to conveying yangqi is reflected in his advocacy for "hard translation" (硬译) and the consistent application of this principle in his translation practices. The above term, "hard translation" refers to a translation method that "follows the original sentence structure and even word-for-word translation" (Lu, 2005, p. 204). This method manifests in various forms in the translated text, such as preserving the original sentence patterns at the formal level, retaining heterogeneous cultures at the content level, and reproducing the "vigorous and concise tone" at the stylistic level. For the "well-educated" readers, he stated, "I have always advocated '宁愿信而不求顺'" (Luo & Chen, 2009, p. 346). The introduction of Foreignness through translation exerts significant cultural and intellectual impacts on the target language system. Meanwhile, Foreignness provides the impetus for the internal construction within a language, introducing new expressions and concepts into the target language system and facilitating its development. Lu Xun emphasized that "hard translation is conducive to the construction of a new language and literature in China, thereby fostering a new culture and cultivating new citizenship" (Luo, 2016).

Goethe advocated for a third kind of translation, believing that readers would eventually become accustomed to other cultures through a process of recognition, filtration, adjustment, and acceptance of the Foreign (Duan, 2008, p. 85). Humboldt also stressed that translators should be faithful to the heterogeneity in the original text, using it to enrich and develop the German language, enabling it to fully absorb foreign linguistic and cultural influences, thus promoting the self-renewal and self-improvement (Guo,2022, p.37). Venuti proposes an "ethics of difference," which encourages "greater respect for linguistic and cultural differences when writing, reading, and evaluating translations" (Venuti, 1998, p. 6). Therefore, recognizing and preserving Foreignness in translation is imperative for enriching and empowering all languages and cultures, which stand as pillars of language and cultural development.

2.3 Previous Studies on *Things Fall Apart*

"In Africa, the medium of literary expression is not only the writer's mother tongue but also the dominant European languages imposed on African indigenous languages during the colonial process and colonialist culture" (Gyasi, 2003). With numerous African tribes and mixed cultures, the language issue has become a primary concern in African literary discourse. Therefore, the first question African writers consider is which language to use for artistic creation to expand their readership and influence. Although the English left by colonial rulers reminds Africans of colonial atrocities and racial prejudices, Achebe believed that English could unite people of different ethnic groups and promote communication and mutual understanding. For this reason, Achebe opposed replacing English with African languages, arguing that this would lead to division and civil strife in post-independence Nigeria (Zhai Naihai, 2024). Thus, Achebe's choice to write in English rather than Igbo was not just a personal preference but largely a consideration of realpolitik.

This book is the masterpiece and representative work of the author Chinua Achebe. It depicts the changes of the Igbo tribes before and after the arrival of British colonists and reproduces the tremendous impact of Western colonialism on African traditional society. *Things Fall Apart* is also a quintessential postcolonial novel from West Africa, which mainly revolves around a tragic hero named Okonkwo, a leading character who endured inner struggle and shock when facing the British colonialists. "Through the narrative, Achebe describes the richness and complexities of Igbo culture and society, articulating an insider's sense of the African experience (Umeanowai,2023). Since its publication in 1958, it has been translated into 61 languages, exerting a profound impact worldwide. Currently, there are altogether five Chinese translations of the book (《瓦解》、《支离破碎》、《黑色悲歌》、《分崩离析》和《这个世界土崩瓦解了》)。Among them, the first and fifth translations are by the same translator, Gao Zongyu, and enjoy the highest circulation and influence here in China. Therefore, this article will select Gao Zongyu's translation for a comparative analysis of the original and its Chinese translation.

Things Fall Apart is one of the earlier research objects in African literature in China. In 1963, Gao Zongyu's translation was published in the second issue of *World Literature* (a Chinese journal). Subsequently, the author published a complete translation of traditional Chinese characters. In May 1977, Tong Li published an article titled Nigerian Writer Chinua Achebe and His Major Works in the fifth issue of *Foreign Literature Trends*, which briefly introduced and commented on *Things Fall Apart* (Du Zhiqing, 2015, p. 123). In recent years, research on *Things Fall Apart* has mainly focused on three aspects: first, studies on the characters in the book, with a focus on the protagonist Okonkwo's contradictory and chaotic tragic life (Booker, 2003; Zhu,2013; Li & Zeng, 2017); second, the exploration of the book's thematic ideas (Gyasi,2003; Duan,2008; Yu, 2012; Du,2015; Liu Minjie, 2022); and third, a prescriptive analysis of different translation version of *Things Fall Apart* from various theoretical perspectives (Du,2015; Babai,2017; Yang,2020; Oji,2023; Zhang&Umeanowai,2023). Relevant research on *Things Fall Apart* has further promoted the interpretation of African literary works in China, especially those from West Africa, and has gradually drawn attention to the peripheral position of African literature.

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, utilizing close reading and textual analysis of two selected texts to examine the translation strategies adopted in rendering the source text into the target language.

3. The Analysis of Foreignness in *Things Fall Apart*

In *Things Fall Apart*, Foreignness can be broadly categorized into linguistic and cultural dimensions. The linguistic level of Foreignness displays a dual nature, manifesting between the Igbo indigenous language and English, as well as between English and Chinese. The cultural level of the Foreignness consists of elements such as Igbo cultural customs, religious beliefs, dietary habits, indigenous cultural metaphors, and unique humorous expressions. Among these, the transmission of Foreignness at the linguistic level is the most immediate and primary challenge faced by every translator and translation theorist. While, Foreignness in the cultural level is also reflected through the linguistic level. For instance, Igbo culture values physical strength and masculinity, while care, gentleness, and compassion are seen as feminine traits that are deliberately suppressed and rejected. Thus, it is an ultimate insult for them to be labeled as "effeminate".

Additionally, the text frequently mentions specific religious terms such as "evil forest," "priest," and "untouchable," which the translator has more or less preserved in the translation process. Therefore, The study hereafter categorizes Foreignness in *Things Fall Apart* into three primary types: the first pertains to the linguistic aspect of the Igbo ethnic group, encompassing the translation of geographical names, personal names, and tribe-specific terminology; the second consists of unique elements of the indigenous culture, which can also be termed as indigenous cultural metaphors (Yang, Z. Y., 2024); The last one is religion and tribal customs, such as the religious rituals and eating habits of the Igbo people which also belong to the Foreignness in the cultural aspect. The following sections will provide a detailed analysis of these three types of Foreignness.

3.1 Foreignness at the Linguistic Level

Things Fall Apart possesses a significant number of Igbo indigenous languages, indirectly informing readers that although the book is written in English, it narrates the story of an African primitive tribe. Based on the author's rough statistics, there are 67 geographical names and personal names with obvious Igbo characteristics in the text. It should be noted that although personal and geographical names belong to the linguistic level, they also carry, to some extent, Igbo cultural metaphors. The Foreignness at the linguistic level is not entirely separated from that of the cultural level. This section mainly analyzes how the translator handles foreignness at the linguistic level, whether there is a tendency to retain foreignness, and the final presentation and effect. The author selects 20 representative nouns for brief analysis (Table 1). Unlike other simple personal names or place names, the selected Igbo names below all carry more or less their own unique cultural connotations.

Number	ST	Author' s explanation	TT	annotations
1	Kola	none	柯拉	yes
2	Ekwe	none	埃桂	yes
3	Udu	none	乌都	yes
4	Chi	personal god	守护神	no
5	Kwenu	none	桂努	yes
6	Chukwu	God	神	no
7	Oracle	God	神	no
8	Agabale	Oracle	神	no
9	Obi	Hut	奥比	no
10	Egwugwu	none	假面舞蹈队	no
11	Ogene	none	锣	no
12	Nna Ayi	none	嗯那-阿依	yes
13	Cassava	none	卡萨瓦	no
14	Nne	mommy	妈妈	yes
15	Ezeani	priest of the earth	地母	no
16	Ani	the earth of goddess	地母	no
17	Foo-foo	none	糊糊	no
18	Osu	outcasts	贱民	no
19	Tie-Tie	rope	绳子	no
20	Ogwu	medicine	巫药	yes

Table 1: Some Selected Igbo Names from *Things Fall Apart*

Literary names are often imbued with culture-specific images and have distinctive cultural connotations (Xu, 2020). For the translation of such languages, Gao Zongyu basically chose transliteration, preserving the characteristics of indigenous languages to a certain extent. Transliteration, also known as "transcription," refers to the process or result of using one writing system (such as Latin letters) to represent another writing system (such as Chinese characters) (Fang, 2013:49). Gao Zongyu's choice of transliteration for Indigenous languages was not merely to avoid mistranslation but to adopt a more direct method to preserve the heterogeneity in the original text. A significant semantic gap between Igbo and Chinese makes it impossible to approach the translation directly from the semantic level. Therefore, it is wise to prioritize transliteration for Foreignness at the linguistic level. In contrast, one can refer to Fu Donghua's treatment of *Gone with the Wind*, where the translator almost entirely simonized the geographical names and personal names, adding Chinese-characteristic suffixes such as "tun" (屯), "jun" (郡), and "zhen"(镇) to geographical names and translating all personal names into the Chinese surname-name format. This showcases that Gao Zongyu was also able to consciously distinguish the Foreign elements during the translation process and retain the exotic flavor as much as possible.

Gao Zongyu's translation of Igbo tribal idioms is also commendable. For vocabulary that Achebe did not explain in the original text and is unique to the Igbo culture, Gao Zongyu explained them to readers in the form of annotations. For example, in the original text, the tribal chief of Umuofia rallied his people by shouting "Umuofia kwenu" (Achebe, 1958:3). Achebe directly used the indigenous pronunciation to represent this slogan that embodies the martial spirit of the Umuofia people. Gao Zongyu translated it as "Umuofia's Kwennu" and added an annotation below the translation: Kwennu represents a shout of agreement and apology. (Gao,2008,p.10) This approach quickly allows readers to associate it with slogans and thus understand the martial spirit of the Igbo people. The annotations in the translation depend on the translator's correct judgment of the cognitive context and cognitive abilities of the target readers (Cao, 2005,p.88). Annotations such as "Ekwe is a wooden drum," "Udu is a ceramic luo(锣)," "Ogene is a type of luo," (Gao,2008,p.6) and "Obi is the living room of the head of the household" (Gao,2008,p.13) are objective, reasonable, concise, and accurate, facilitating readers' understanding of Igbo culture without interfering with the translation. Therefore, Gao Zongyu largely retained them at the linguistic level and preserved the exotic flavor of the original text through certain translation techniques.

3.2 Foreignness in Culture Level

Sapir and Whorf once pointed out that language is not merely a tool for thinking and communication but also a reflection of social and cultural consciousness. Culture possesses coherence and persistence (Liao, 2000,p.177). The culture of any nation is formed over a long period of accumulation, with relatively distinct and stable characteristics that are not easily changed. The culture-specific meanings often encoded through metaphors, allusions, and dialects, present significant difficulties in translation. These elements represent the essence of Foreignness, deeply embedded in the social, cultural, and poetic space of a given linguistic community. For the translator to accurately capture these dimensions, both linguistic sensitivity and cultural insight are required. This section explores the notion of Foreignness in the Igbo culture as depicted in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. It critically examines how the translator, Gao Zongyu, addresses these cultural particularities. The analysis is organized into four dimensions: proverbs, culture-loaded terms, humorous expressions, and religious and tribal rituals

3.2.1 Proverbs

Proverbs occupy a central role in Igbo linguistic and cultural expression. Their prevalence is partly attributed to the historically oral nature of Igbo society, in which metaphorical and symbolic language served communicative and mnemonic functions. Achebe himself famously remarked that "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten," signaling their significance in articulating social values, ethical norms, and communal wisdom. The Igbo language and culture are deeply rooted in the use of proverbs; like other cultures, they use words to express universal truths. Therefore, Igbo proverbs represent the Igbo people's perspective on life and are an accumulation of their belief systems and practical experiences. In *Things Fall Apart*, proverbs are frequently used to convey philosophical insights and life principles. For example:

1) ST: He who brings kola brings life.

TT: 带来柯拉的人也带来了长生不老。

2) ST: Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten.

TT: 成语格言不啻是棕榈油, 可以把他所说的话消化下去

3) ST: If a child washed his hands, he could eat with kings.

TT: 一个孩子只要把手洗干净, 他就可以同皇帝和长者一起吃饭。

Proverbs possess a unique standing in every culture and pose significant challenges in translation. Often, translators adopt domestication strategies to facilitate comprehension among target language readers. However, this undoubtedly diminishes the proverbs' appeal in their original context and disrupts the cultural structure of the source text. In the three examples cited above, Gao Zongyu largely retains some cultural references unique to the Igbo culture. For instance, the kola nut is regarded as a symbol of peace and longevity. As a gesture of politeness, guests present kola nuts to their hosts to express gratitude. Example (3) represents Achebe's interpretation of his ethnic culture; the Igbo do not have so-called kings (emperors), but individuals with high prestige in the tribe are referred to as elders. These individuals are generally skilled in farming and fighting. Gao Zongyu translates "kings" as "emperors," transforming them into rulers familiar to Chinese readers, and this indeed involves a certain degree of domestication. Proverbs present a dual challenge: while they are integral to conveying cultural specificity, their unfamiliar imagery and syntax often require adaptation for target readers. Gao Zongyu's strategy reflects an attempt to balance cultural fidelity with accessibility.

3.2.2 Culture-Loaded Terms

Culture-loaded terms refer to words, phrases, and idioms that signify unique entities within a particular culture, reflecting the distinct activities and practices accumulated by a specific nation over the course of its long history (Liao Qiyi, 2000,p.232). These terms often embody the essence of national culture and contain numerous elements of The Foreign culture, making it difficult to find equivalent expressions in another language and thus posing significant challenges in cross-cultural translation. The following examples illustrate Gao Zongyu's handling of such terms in *Things Fall Apart*.

1) ST: Okonkwo said yes very strongly, so his chi agreed. And not only his chi but also his clan too.

TT: 奥贡喀沃大声说“是”，他的守护神只好表示赞成。而且不止他的守护神赞成，整个氏族也都推崇他。

2) ST: It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow.

TT: 这种新宗教的诗歌，不知怎的，像是触到了他的心灵深处。

3) ST: You do not know what it is to speak with one voice.

TT: 你们不懂同声相应、同气相求是什么意思。

In the second example, the Igbo metaphor of “marrow” is rendered as “心灵深处” (deep in the heart), which enhances comprehension for Chinese readers but loses the distinctive cultural metaphor of the Igbo nation and diminishes its cultural heterogeneity. However, Chinese culture rarely involves cultural imagery related to marrow, and replacing it with the heart indeed enhances the readability of the translation. Similarly, referring to Example (3), the phrase “like minds think alike” originates from *The Book of Changes*, expressing that people with similar interests and aspirations naturally come together. Gao Zongyu uses a Chinese idiom to explain the cultural imagery in *Things Fall Apart*, weakening the heterogeneous elements in the original text.

It can be seen that retaining Foreignness at the linguistic level is relatively easy, but doing so at the cultural level presents numerous difficulties. Enhanced readability not only makes the translation smoother but also improves the acceptance of the target readers, thereby facilitating the dissemination of the translation. However, improving readability undoubtedly greatly reduces and weakens the heterogeneous elements in the original text. Translators often find themselves in a dilemma in as such that employing a direct translation may confuse target readers due to their lack of relevant cultural background knowledge, while domestication may result in the loss of cultural characteristics and style. Therefore, to achieve a balance and retain heterogeneous elements as much as possible, translators need to improve not only their professional competence but also that of readers, enhancing their intercultural competence and fostering a deeper understanding between cultures.

3.2.3 Humorous Expressions

It can be argued that the conveyance of humorous expressions from the original text to the translation is one of the most challenging aspects in translation. Humor is among the most culturally bound and one of the most difficult elements to translate. Successfully rendering humor requires not only linguistic dexterity but also a deep understanding of both source and target cultures. In *Things Fall Apart*, humor often functions as social critique or irony, and Gao Zongyu's translation demonstrates various degrees of success in capturing these elements:

1) ST: You told us with your own mouth that there was only one god. Now you talk about his son. He must have a wife, then.

TT: 你刚才亲口对我们说，只有一个上帝。现在你又说他的儿子，那么，他一定有个老婆了。

In this excerpt, the original text is marked by irony and skepticism, reflecting the Igbo community's resistance to the Christian missionary's teachings. The phrase “with your own mouth” emphasizes a tone of confrontation and disbelief, while “now you talk about his son” and “he must have a wife, then” use *reductio ad absurdum* to mock the internal inconsistencies perceived in Christian theology. The Chinese translation retains much of the original structure and irony. However, given the limited familiarity of most Chinese readers with the Igbo belief system and tribal deity classifications, the deeper layers of cultural irony may be obscured. The phrase “他一定有个老婆了” (he must have a wife, then) may read as humorous or illogical rather than ironic and subversive. Without contextual annotations or explanatory strategies, the rhetorical force of the original may be partially diluted. This points to a broader challenge in translating culturally embedded irony across asymmetrical cultural systems, where the translator must balance semantic fidelity with cultural intelligibility.

2) ST: The Oracle said to him: “Your dead father wants you to sacrifice a goat to him. Do you know what he told the Oracle?

He said, Ask my dead father if he ever had a fowl when he was alive.

TT: 神对他说，你死去的父亲要你供奉一只山羊给他。你猜他怎么回复神，他说：问问我死去的父亲，他生前可曾有过一只家禽。

The translator here smoothly conveys the humorous expression of the original text, successfully translating its sarcastic tone. Igbo society values both farming and martial spirit, and a father who is unaccomplished may be despised by his children. Obiako simultaneously mocks both the deities and his deceased father in this context.

3) ST: The story was always told of a wealthy man who set before his guests a mound of foo-foo so high that those who sat on one side could not see what was happening on the other, and it was not until late in the evening that one of them saw for the first time his in-law.

TT: 人们爱说这个故事：一个有钱的人在客人面前把糊糊堆得很高，以至于坐在对面的人看不见发生的事情，有一个客人直到了夜里才发现坐在对面用餐的晚到的客人就是自己的老丈人。

This passage illustrates a culturally embedded form of storytelling rooted in traditional communal eating practices in many African societies. The humorous anecdote is built upon the image of a massive heap of foo-foo (a starchy staple food), symbolizing generosity, communal sharing, and the close-knit nature of traditional gatherings. The punchline is that a man fails to recognize his own in-laws until late in the evening because the foo-foo mound obscures his view, which relies on the cultural norm of multiple people sharing the same dish. The Chinese translation retains the general structure and humor of the original, adapting the scene in a way that remains intelligible to the target audience. The translator effectively conveys the exaggeration (把糊糊堆得很高) and the delayed recognition (直到了夜里才发现) that underpins the anecdotal humor. However, some subtle cultural elements may be lost without contextual explanation such as the significance of communal eating, the symbolic hospitality of a large mound of food, and the cultural meaning of belated greetings during shared meals.

However, this example demonstrates the translator Gao's adeptness in rendering culturally situated humor while preserving the narrative tone. His approach exemplifies an adaptive translation strategy that prioritizes functional equivalence, allowing Chinese readers to grasp the comedic and cultural essence of the original text despite differing socio-cultural norms.

3.2.4 Religion and Tribal Rituals

Religious beliefs and tribal rituals in *Things Fall Apart* provide critical insight into the spiritual worldview of the Igbo. Their accurate translation is crucial to preserving the cultural integrity of the text. Gao Zongyu's translation of these elements tends to favor fidelity, often supplemented by explanatory additions:

1) ST: When a man was afflicted with swelling in the stomach and the limbs, he was not allowed to die in the house. He was carried to the evil forest and left there to die.

TT: 一个人要是害了肚子和四肢鼓胀的病, 是不允许他死在房子里的。人们把他抬到凶森林里, 让他死在那里。

"Evil forest" is translated into the "凶森林 (Xiong Senlin)," which is a forbidden place in Igbo tribal culture. The Igbos believe that misfortune, they must be left to rot on the ground without a funeral or reburial. This is the first time the "evil forest" concept appears in the text. Gao Zongyu accurately conveys the original meaning to readers, setting the tone for the religious customs of the Igbo tribe.

2) ST: We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth, without whose blessing our crops will not grow."

TT: “我们同我们的伙伴和平相处, 敬重我们伟大的地母, 没有她的保佑, 我们的庄稼是长不起来的。”

The Igbo people attach great importance to farming. Before planting any crops in the ground, people must not quarrel or fight with neighbors for a full week. This excerpt is from an Igbo female priest. The protagonist, Okonkwo, hits his wife and daughter during Peace Week, which is a disrespect of the gods and the Earth Mother. The beginning of the article gradually and skillfully explains the Igbo tribe's cultural and religious customs to readers through the protagonist's words.

3) ST: He was a person dedicated to a god, a thing set apart--a taboo forever, and his children after him.

TT: 贱民是被奉献给神的人, 是被隔离的一群——他们本人, 以及他们的后代, 都是不可接触的。

The translation of "osu" as "贱民" (pariah) and the expansion of taboo-related content effectively contextualize Igbo religious customs for the Chinese reader. At the same time, the translator subtly introduces the conflict between Igbo spirituality and Christianity, capturing the ideological tension that underpins much of Achebe's narrative. The term "untouchable" here mainly stems from the fact that pariahs were regarded as inferior by the Igbos and expelled from the clan; free people were prohibited from sharing the same roof with them. In this regard, the Igbo tribe had already clashed severely with Western missionaries and colonizers. On the one hand, locals burned down Christian churches out of anger; on the other hand, some Igbo youths began converting to Christianity, holding regular gatherings and worship services, and advocating for equality among all people.

Generally, when a peripheral culture is translated into a rather dominant culture, many unique expressions and cultural metaphors in the source text are bound to be lost. However, after a detailed analysis of Gao Zongyu's version of *Things Fall Apart*, it is found that the translator can identify and retain the Foreignness in the original text to a certain extent. The translator uses translation techniques such as transliteration and annotation to preserve the Foreignness at the linguistic level. Although there is a certain degree of domestication in handling cultural heterogeneity, a considerable amount of exotic charm is still retained while taking readability into account. In particular, the preservation of the Igbo religion and tribal rituals fully reflects their unique ethnic characteristics.

It is generally believed that when translating foreign texts, the rather dominant cultures mostly adopt a domestication strategy, while the rather peripheral cultures adopt a foreignization strategy (Li Hongman, 2003: 107). However, it is overly reductive to categorize a translation solely along the axes of literal versus free translation or domestication versus foreignization. Such binary distinctions fail to capture the detailed decision-making involved in a translator's work. A mature translation exhibits an

internal coherence and reflects the translator's strategic preferences within a specific socio-cultural and ideological context. Gao Zongyu's translation of *Things Fall Apart* is a representative example of such maturity. It consciously resists the hegemonic discourse of postcolonial dominance by preserving cultural specificity and Otherness elements, thereby challenging the assimilationist tendencies often embedded in mainstream translation practices.

4. Conclusion

The fundamental pursuit of translation is to strive for communication and mutual learning among the languages as a way to preserve the diversity of cultures. Preserving and displaying Foreignness in the TT is indeed a daunting and necessary task for every translator. Reducing or even effacing Foreignness in the ST may seem to be a shortcut for the dissemination of culture to some extent since it will cater to the expectations and reading habits of the readers in the TT. However, it is not conducive to the positive development and interactions among cultures in the long run. It also should be stressed that the inherent complex and unbalanced nature of the Foreignness, the long process of adjusting and accepting it is also inevitable.

After a detailed analysis of Foreignness in *Things Fall Apart*, the author believes that during the translator's process of overcoming the obstacles caused by Foreignness in translation, both the transformation and loss of Foreignness are inevitable. The acceptance of Foreignness is crucial in the long run, but it generally requires a process. It is worth affirming that Chinese attention to African literature and post-colonialism has significantly increased in recent years. It is necessary to deepen the understanding of Africa's unique tribal cultures further through translation and improve the translation, introduction, and dissemination of African literature.

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