

Foreignization and Domestication in the English Translation of Material Cultural Words in Manchu Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of the English Version of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness*

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Abstract: This study takes the foreignization and domestication strategies in translation theory as the core framework and combines text content analysis and case comparison research methods to focus on the translation practice of material cultural words in the English version of the Manchu intangible cultural heritage epic “Nisan Shaman.” The research finds that this translation presents a distinct strategy feature of “foreignization as the main approach and domestication as the auxiliary,” which is a rational decision made by the translator under the influence of multiple factors such as the goal of cultural dissemination, text characteristics, and reader acceptance. It forms a mixed model mainly based on “foreignization through transliteration + domestication through annotation.” The research indicates that in modern society, the translation of intangible cultural heritage needs to seek a balance between maintaining cultural authenticity and ensuring communication fluency. This combination of translation strategies also conforms to China’s important strategy of promoting “cultural going global,” and while promoting the sustainable development of intangible cultural heritage of ethnic minorities, it also promotes the international dissemination of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: Manchu intangible cultural heritage; Material cultural words; Foreignization; Domestication; *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness*

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1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the growing attention to the protection and communication of intangible cultural heritage worldwide, translation, as a bridge for cross-cultural dialogue, is playing an increasingly important role. As a Manchu, I am proud to hold that Manchu culture has added a brilliant touch to the 5,000-year

splendid history of China and further promoted the spread of Chinese culture to the world. The Manchu people boast a wide variety of intangible cultural heritage, among which epics represented by *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* not only carry shamanistic beliefs and ethnic history but also contain a large number of unique material cultural words, such as specific sacrificial utensils, costumes, and ritual instruments. As the bearers of deep cultural connotations, the translation quality of these words directly determines the effect of cultural connotation transmission. Although academic research on the translation of intangible cultural heritage is on the rise, systematic studies on the translation strategies of material cultural words in Manchu intangible cultural heritage texts are scarce. Based on this situation, this study takes the English version of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* as the research object, focuses on the translation practice of its material cultural words, and probes into the motivations for the adoption of the strategy of “foreignization as the main approach and domestication as the auxiliary,” its practical manifestations, and communication effects. What factors influence the choice of this strategy? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these translation practices in conveying the cultural essence and ensuring communication effects? Therefore, this research is not a pure translation studies analysis, but a practice that integrates my personal cultural identity into academic research. Through rigorous textual analysis, I intend to explore how to better “protect” and “inherit” the cultural genes and spirits of my ethnic group in cross-linguistic transformation.

2. Theoretical foundation, motivations for strategy selection, and textual characteristics

2.1. Foreignization and domestication theories and their applicability

As a cross-cultural practice of understanding and reconstruction, a core point of translation lies in how to handle the differences between the source language culture and the target language culture. Lawrence Venuti, an American translation theorist, systematically elaborated the strategies of “Foreignization” and “Domestication,” providing a classic and explanatory theoretical framework for analyzing this point. In brief, the domestication strategy aims to pursue fluency and naturalness of the translated text, making the source text conform to the value norms and expression habits of the target language and culture, and narrowing the distance between the author and the reader. However, the potential risk of this strategy is that it may cover up cultural differences and even constitute a kind of cultural “ethnocentric violence” to a certain extent. On the contrary, the foreignization strategy consciously retains and highlights the “foreignness” of the source text. By introducing foreign linguistic forms, cultural images, and narrative logic, it “resists” the assimilation pressure of the mainstream culture of the target language, guides the reader to approach the author, and aims to promote respect and understanding of cultural others. The two strategies form a macro spectrum of translation strategies. Professor Li Zhenshuan further pointed out in his research on the translation of cultural classics that the choice between foreignization and domestication should be comprehensively considered in combination with text type, cultural communication goals, and reader positioning. For classic texts carrying unique cultural connotations, foreignization should serve as the foundation for safeguarding cultural subjectivity, while domestication can be used as a necessary supplementary means to avoid communication failure due to cultural barriers.

The application of this theoretical framework to the study of the English translation of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* is highly adaptable and insightful. Firstly, this epic is a highly “foreign” cultural text. The cosmic outlook, divine system, ritual procedures, and material cultural system of shamanism are significantly different from the cognitive system carried by English and deeply influenced by the Christian-Greco-Roman cultural tradition. Such fundamental cultural differences make every choice in the translation process—whether

translating “shengu (spirit drum)” as “Spirit Drum” or “Shaman Drum,” or translating “Yiermuhan” by literal transliteration or domestication as “King of the Underworld”—clearly reflect the translator’s explicit or implicit cultural stance, becoming a specific case for examining the integration of foreignization and domestication strategies.

Secondly, the material cultural words studied in this paper are the most concrete and concentrated embodiment of this cultural “exotic feeling.” These artifacts (such as ritual instruments and costumes) are not merely physical objects, but key nodes in the conceptual network of shamanism, carrying the profound cultural heritage regarding the sacred, purity, power, and cosmic structure. Translating them is by no means a simple word correspondence, but a cultural exploration and micro-practice on how to represent the cognitive system of other cultures. Foreignization strategies (such as literal translation and transliteration) attempt to “invite” readers to enter and accept this unique system; while domestication strategies (such as cultural substitution), to a certain extent, “retranslate” or “neutralize and interpret” this system to adapt it to the readers’ existing cognitive framework. Therefore, analyzing the translation of material cultural words in the English version of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* with the foreignization and domestication theories can go beyond the simple evaluation of translation skills and deeply understand the cultural considerations, information transmission, and identity issues behind the translation. This is not only the application of theories, but also the testing and enrichment of theories through specific texts, which can build a bridge between translation theories and the translation practice of ethnic minority classics.

2.2. Motivations for the adoption of “foreignization as the main approach and domestication as the auxiliary” in the English translation of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness*

As an important part of fine traditional Chinese culture, the external translation of Manchu intangible cultural heritage aims to show the world a true and three-dimensional ethnic cultural style and to realize effective cultural communication rather than simple linguistic conversion. Professor Li Zhenshuan emphasized that “the external translation of cultural classics is a manifestation of cultural confidence, and the choice of translation strategies should serve the long-term goal of cultural communication, rather than merely pursuing short-term reading fluency.” The material cultural words in *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* are the core symbols of Manchu cultural identity, such as “shengu (spirit drum)” and “ritual instruments of Yiermuhan,” whose cultural connotations are irreplaceable. Excessive adoption of the domestication strategy and simply analogizing them to similar concepts in Western culture will inevitably lead to the distortion and loss of cultural connotations. For example, translating “shengu” as “Shaman Drum” conforms to readers’ cognitive habits but weakens its core connotation as a “sacred medium for communicating with the three realms,” while the foreignization translation “Spirit Drum” highlights its spiritual essence through the word “Spirit” and retains the cultural uniqueness of Manchu shamanism. Therefore, it is held in this study that the strategy of “foreignization as the main approach and domestication as the auxiliary” should be adopted in translation to safeguard the subjectivity of ethnic culture and achieve accurate cultural communication.

2.3. Textual characteristics of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness*: Dual highlight of translation difficulties and research value

As a representative work of Manchu intangible cultural heritage, *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* has special and complex textual characteristics, which make it not only a precious heritage of ethnic literature, but also a research object that can integrate multidisciplinary perspectives such as religious studies, anthropology,

linguistics, and translation studies. It not only narrates the beliefs in nature and life, but also witnesses the hardships of cultural inheritance, revealing the beliefs in nature and life, and reflecting the tragedy and perseverance of cultural inheritance. From the perspective of religious studies, it details the cosmic outlook, divine system and ritual practices of shamanism, serving as vivid materials for the study of the primitive religious beliefs of northern ethnic minorities; from the anthropological perspective, it carries the historical memory, social organization form and cultural identity of the Manchu people, reflecting the lifestyle and spiritual world under a specific ecological environment; from the perspective of linguistics and translation studies, the dense occurrence of unique Manchu words, sacrificial expressions, material cultural words and ritual expressions in the text constitutes a complete yet closed meaning system. These characteristics determine that the translation of material cultural words in Manchu intangible cultural heritage needs to meet dual demands: first, “cultural fidelity,” that is, to fully convey the cultural connotations, symbolic meanings, and usage scenarios behind the materials; second, “comprehensibility,” that is, to avoid readers’ comprehension obstacles due to cultural unfamiliarity. The strategy of “foreignization as the main approach and domestication as the auxiliary” is a rational choice to respond to this core demand, which requires adhering to cultural authenticity through foreignization and lowering the comprehension threshold through domestication. While endowing it with high academic value, these textual characteristics also bring many unique translation difficulties: the large number of culture-specific items, the cultural uniqueness of the semantic system, and the inaccessibility of the religious ritual context all pose great challenges to the translator. However, it is precisely these difficulties that make the research on its translation practice go beyond the scope of simple linguistic conversion and become an academic window to deeply explore cultural translatability, translation ethics, cross-cultural interpretation, and communication mechanisms, thus highlighting the necessity and important academic value of this systematic research.

2.3.1. High sacredness and rituality

The narrative of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* is a dramatic performance of a complete shamanic ritual of “crossing to the netherworld” (going to the underworld) to rescue the soul. Every action (such as beating a drum and spinning), every artifact (such as a spirit drum, a bronze mirror, a bow and arrow), and every verse in the text strictly follow the ritual logic and have specific religious functions and symbolic meanings. For example, the “spirit drum” is not only a musical instrument, but also the shaman’s “mount,” and its drumbeat is a medium for communicating with the three realms. Such in-depth cultural information embedding makes translation no longer a superficial plot retelling, but a cross-cultural interpretation of a complex system of ritual knowledge. The translator must make a choice: to retain the uniqueness of the system to the maximum extent (foreignization), or to simplify and analogize it to a general ritual concept that is easier for target language readers to understand (domestication)? This choice directly affects the transmission of the text’s religious concepts and the historical and cultural value of the Manchu people.

2.3.2. Rich and systematic material cultural words

The text contains a relatively complete system of shamanic ritual instruments and costumes, such as “Yilantoli” (three bronze mirrors), “Bolang” (ribbons on the spirit skirt), and “Seweng” (referring to gods in general, which may also exist in material form). These words generally lack direct equivalents in English, forming a significant “lexical gap.” A trickier situation is that these words do not exist in isolation, but are interrelated and jointly constitute a symbolic system of shamanic power and Manchu characteristics. In the translation process, if

individual words are domestically translated in isolation (for example, translating all kinds of “Toli” simply as “mirror”), the internal differentiation and logic of the system will be destroyed, and the cultural information will become superficial and one-sided. This requires the translator to have profound cultural accomplishment and take careful consideration in strategy, or reconstruct this system by adding annotations, appendices, and other means, thus putting forward extremely high requirements for the application of translation strategies.

2.3.3. Necessity of explanation and risk of cultural deviation

The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness constructs a shamanic cosmic outlook of the three realms composed of “Heavenly Gods,” “Earthly Gods” (such as Mountain Gods and Tree Gods), and “Underworld Gods” (such as Yiermuhan). This system is completely different from the linear heaven-hell outlook of Western monotheism or the loose polytheistic system of Greek mythology. One of the greatest difficulties in translation is how to handle core divine concepts such as “Yiermuhan.” Simple domestication (such as translating it as “Pluto” or “King of Hell”) will lead to serious cultural misunderstandings and incorporate it into a completely different religious semantics. On the other hand, the foreignization transliteration (Ilmun Han) must be supplemented with a lot of explanations. The closed nature of this cultural system makes the translation of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* essentially a cultural guide that needs to be accompanied by a large number of introductions, annotations, glossaries, and so on, providing a typical example for studying how translation can serve as a tool for in-depth cultural interpretation.

To sum up, the three characteristics of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness*—sacredness-rituality, systematicity of material culture, and self-consistency of cosmic outlook—make its English translation face enormous challenges, but it is also the most theoretically valuable and practically significant topic in translation research. Analyzing the coping strategies for these challenges can not only specifically show the operational process of the foreignization/domestication theory, but also deeply reveal the complex and key role that translation can play in protecting cultural diversity and promoting in-depth dialogue between civilizations in the context of globalization.

3. A case study based on the English translation of The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness

3.1. Analysis of translation examples dominated by foreignization strategy: Adherence to cultural subjectivity

The main purpose of the foreignization strategy here is to resist the assimilation of the target language culture and preserve the independence and solemnity of the source text’s cultural system. This strategy is mainly used in dealing with core gods and sacred ritual instruments.

Case 1: Translation of “Shengu (Spirit Drum)”

“Shengu” (Enduri Tun in Manchu) is an irreplaceable core ritual instrument in shamanic rituals. It is not only a musical instrument, but also the shaman’s “mount” to the three realms, a medium for summoning gods, and a weapon for fighting. Its translation must convey this sacred attribute beyond ordinary musical instruments.

Foreignization translation: Translated as “Spirit Drum.” This literal translation strictly corresponds to “shen (Spirit)” and “gu (Drum),” directly linking the ritual instrument with supernatural power. It does not use the possessive expression “Shaman’s Drum,” which only highlights the instrumentality as a “drum used by shamans,” while “Spirit Drum” shapes it into a sacred entity with spirituality and independent existence.

This translation forcibly presents the concept of “spirituality” to readers, making them have to adjust their

cognition and accept a strange concept that is both material and supernatural, thus retaining the sacred core of the shamanistic view of artifacts in the English text to the greatest extent. If a more domesticated translation such as “Shaman Drum” or “Ritual Drum” is used, although it explains the user and usage scenario, it loses the core of “divinity,” and the ritual instrument becomes an ordinary professional tool or ritual prop, with its inherent spirituality and autonomy lost. The foreignization choice of “Spirit Drum” is the practice of “preserving differences” advocated by Venuti, expressing it in a foreignizing way, thus marking an irreplaceable “sacred domain” for shamanic culture in the English text.

Case 2: Translation of “Yiermuhan”—A positive interpretation of the underworld outlook

“Yiermuhan” (Ilmun Han) is the ruler of “Yeluli” (the underworld) in the shamanic cosmic outlook, which is essentially different from the “King of Hell” in Christianity or the “Pluto” in Greek mythology. He is not an evil god who punishes sins, but a ruler who governs the order of the world of the dead.

Foreignization translation: Adopting the transliteration “Ilmun Han” with detailed annotations. For example, when it first appears in the translation, it is annotated: “Ilmun Han, the ruler of the underworld (Yargi) in Manchu shamanism, whose realm is a neutral land of the dead, distinct in conception from the punitive Christian Hell.” This strategy is an advanced form of foreignization translation. The transliteration “Ilmun Han” first establishes its uniqueness as a specific cultural symbol and prevents it from being replaced by any existing Western words. The subsequent annotation is like a “cultural guide,” which not only simply explains the meaning, but also takes the initiative to conduct cultural interpretation and distinction: it clearly defines its jurisdiction as the underworld in shamanism, and specifically distinguishes it from the Christian “Hell.”

This treatment not only conveys information but also guides readers to transform their cognitive framework and understand different world outlooks from a perspective of cultural relativism. It can also be seen that the translator is striving to defend the right of expression of weak cultures in the face of strong cultures.

3.2. Analysis of translation examples dominated by domestication strategy: Balance of advantages and disadvantages of communicative feasibility

The domestication strategy is generally used to make the narrative more fluent and avoid excessive comprehension difficulties for readers, mostly in dealing with ritual details with low cultural load or overly complex and specific ritual details.

Case 1: Generalized translation of ritual actions

The original text may describe a series of specific ritual actions in detail, such as “holding a drum in the left hand, a whip in the right hand, spinning nine times to the east, and reciting the god-invoking song.” A completely literal word-for-word translation will appear trivial and interrupt the narrative rhythm.

Domestication translation: Generalizing it as “began the intricate shamanic ritual” or “performed the summons to the spirits.” This translation greatly improves the readability of the text, allowing readers unfamiliar with shamanic rituals to quickly understand the core plot of “a complex ritual being performed.” However, the disadvantages are obvious: the rich ritual knowledge is highly simplified, and it is difficult for readers to understand its cultural differences. Anthropological details such as the digital symbol of “nine times,” the cultural meaning of “to the east,” and the specific content of the god-invoking song are lost, and the cultural depth of the text is reduced to a general label.

Case 2: Image substitution of “Tashaha”

“Tashaha” (Tasha) is the guardian mythical beast of shamans, usually in the shape of a dog, but it is a specific spirit with divine status, not an ordinary animal or a general mythical creature.

Domestication translation: Free translation as “mythical hound” or “guardian beast.” Using “mythical hound” can make English readers immediately associate with familiar images, such as the three-headed dog of hell in Greek mythology, quickly establish cognition and ensure basic understanding. But the fatal problem is that the uniqueness of “Tashaha” as a proper noun and its specific position in the Manchu divine system are lost, and it is classified into the general category of “mythical animals.” It is equivalent to replacing a precise culture-specific item with a vague general concept.

3.3. Mixed and innovative strategies: Practical wisdom of the art of balance

In actual translation, pure foreignization or domestication is often difficult to cope with complex situations. The most enlightening are the various mixed and innovative strategies created by translators, aiming to strike a balance between “retaining exotic characteristics” and “making readers understand.”

Case: Compound translation of the character name “Yinjiang Shanman” and the ritual instrument “Toli”

First, let us discuss the character name “Yinjiang Shanman” (the protagonist of the story), which is often translated as “Nisan Shaman” or “the Shamaness Nisan.” This is actually a mixed model of “transliteration of proper noun (Nisan) + popular domestication (Shaman/Shamaness).” Although the word “Shaman” originates from the Tungusic languages, it has entered the English vocabulary through anthropological works and is an “accepted foreign word.” This structure not only highlights the uniqueness of the character through the transliteration “Nisan” but also provides readers with a cultural positioning through the somewhat familiar word “Shaman,” balancing recognition and comprehensibility. Then, looking at the translation of the ritual instrument “Toli” (spirit mirror), it is often translated as “the sacred bronze mirror (toli).” This is an innovative form of “domestication description (sacred bronze mirror) + transliteration of the original word (toli) as an appositive.” The first part describes it with the material (bronze) and function (mirror) familiar to English readers, and uses “sacred” to express its sacred nature to ensure basic understanding of readers; the second part adds the transliteration “toli,” like a cultural label, reminding readers that this object has an exclusive name and a unique cultural background, and also leaves clues for interested readers to understand in depth. This model of “descriptive domestication + transliteration label” skillfully balances communication efficiency and cultural fidelity. For some key concepts that cannot be transliterated, excellent translators will skillfully weave their explanations into narrative sentences. For example, instead of explaining “Yeluli” (the underworld) separately, it is directly translated as “prepared to descend into Yargi, the Manchu shamanic underworld” when describing the shaman’s journey. This “in-text annotation” with the annotation as an appositive achieves a seamless connection between foreignization and explanation (the Manchu shamanic underworld), which not only does not interrupt reading but also completes cultural interpretation, indeed belonging to an advanced usage of the mixed strategy.

4. In-depth motivations and evolutionary process of translation strategy selection

4.1. Multidimensional motivation analysis

4.1.1. Functional positioning of the translation and presupposition of reader identity

This is one of the most fundamental influencing factors. If the translation is mainly for academic research, such as an academic translation with a large number of annotations and presupposing that readers are scholars, students or cultural researchers, the translator will be more inclined to adopt the strategy of foreignization as the main approach, giving priority to ensuring the completeness and accuracy of cultural information, even if more transliterations and annotations are used. However, if the translation is for popularization and literary reading,

it will be more inclined to domestication or flexible mixed strategies, focusing on the readability and fluency of the story, and the ability to arouse readers' emotional resonance, thus simplifying or creatively transforming obscure cultural details.

4.1.2. Translator's identity attributes and translation purpose

Translations by Chinese domestic scholar Zhao Zhizhong ^[1] often carry a stronger awareness of cultural inheritance and justification, committed to showing the original appearance of the ethnic culture to the world, thus may be more inclined to adopt the foreignization strategy to highlight cultural uniqueness. In contrast, translations by some early Western sinologists or translators may be influenced by their historical background, cultural superiority, or specific social identities, and have shown a stronger tendency of domestication in history, even analogizing shamanic elements to Christian concepts.

4.1.3. Intratextual factors

As mentioned above, for core and highly culture-specific contents such as "spirit drum" and "Yiermuhan," the translation methods of foreignization or mixed strategies are mostly adopted in all kinds of translations; on the contrary, for some secondary, descriptive artifacts or actions, the flexibility of domestication treatment is much higher. In addition, the role of words in the narrative will also affect the strategy selection: for example, the translation of key props should be accurate, while the translation of environmental details will be general.

4.2. Diachronic evolution of translation strategies

A brief review of the translation history of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* can clearly reveal that the selection of its strategies is not static, but a dynamic process evolving with the changes of the spirit of the times, academic paradigms, and power relations. This evolution reflects the transformation of the Western world's cognition and attitude towards foreign cultures from curious examination to academic respect and then to equal dialogue, and also reflects the growth track of China's local cultural consciousness and academic subjectivity.

Stage 1 (18th–19th centuries to the early 20th century): "Oriental Spectacle" under colonial gaze and domesticated reconstruction

Most of the early introductions to *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* were made by Western missionaries, travelers, or scholars with colonial backgrounds, such as the records of the Russian expedition team. Translations at that time were deeply influenced by Orientalism and Eurocentrism. Translators often regarded shamanic culture as a primitive, mysterious, and even barbaric "spectacle," and the purpose of translation was often to satisfy Western curiosity about the exotic, or to take it as a sample of the "primitive society" to prove the superiority of their own civilization.

Strategic characteristics: A high degree of domestication, even distortion and appropriation. To make the ethnic text meet the expectations of target language readers, translators would extensively use the analogical framework of Christianity or classical mythology. For example, "Yiermuhan" might be directly equated with "Satan" or "Pluto," and the shaman's "journey to the netherworld" was described as a Dantean hell wander. Material cultural words were often generalized as strange and barbaric things, making their inherent religious system and cultural logic intentionally or unintentionally ignored or simplified. The prefaces and annotations of translations were often full of biased descriptions, strengthening the dual opposition between civilization and barbarism. Translation at this time was essentially a kind of cultural stripping and reconstruction, stripping the source text from its original context and placing it in a narrative framework easy for Western understanding,

which made the subjectivity of shamanic culture completely lose its expressive significance.

Stage 2 (Mid-to-late 20th century): “Cultural Specimen” from the perspective of disciplinarization and relativism

With the maturity of anthropology and folklore as modern disciplines and the popularization of the concept of cultural relativism, the attitude of Western academic circles towards non-Western cultures began to change. Translators, mainly composed of professional sinologists and ethnologists, began to treat *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* with a more rigorous and “scientific” attitude.

Strategic characteristics: The foreignization strategy began to increase, and the annotation system was initially established, but there was still a sense of distance as a “bystander.” Translators would consciously retain more transliterations or literal translations of culture-specific items in the source language, and also try to make academic explanations through footnotes, endnotes, or glossaries. For example, the word “Saman” would be retained instead of all being translated as “witch doctor,” and the difference between “Yargi” and “Hell” would be explained. However, the fundamental purpose of translation at this time was still to provide “objective” textual materials for disciplinary research, and the imagined readers were still people in the academic circle. Although the strategy tended towards foreignization, it sometimes appeared cold and distant, and the annotations focused on objective description rather than guiding readers to empathize or deeply understand its internal world outlook. The focus of translation shifted from “curiosity” to “analysis,” but the boundary between the subject and the object, the observer and the observed was still obvious.

Stage 3 (Late 20th century to the present): “Subjective Interpretation” in cultural consciousness and global dialogue

In recent decades, the deepening of globalization and the rise of postcolonial criticism have promoted real cross-cultural dialogue. More importantly, Zhao Zhizhong, a Chinese local scholar and expert on Manchu culture, has been deeply involved in the collation, research, and external translation of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness*. Their dual identity as “cultural bearers” and “academic researchers” has completely changed the power structure and discourse orientation of translation.

Significance of evolution: From domestication to foreignization, from distortion to respect, from “abstraction” to “subjectivization,” the translation history of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* itself is a condensed history of cross-cultural communication concepts. It clearly shows that the selection of translation strategies is by no means a simple technical issue, but also a profound reflection of the cultural pattern, academic ideology, and self-cognition in a multi-ethnic context of a specific era.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Research summary

Taking Venuti’s foreignization and domestication theories as the analytical framework, this study makes a detailed analysis of the translation of material cultural words and core concepts in various English versions of the Manchu epic *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness*^[1], and systematically discusses the complexity and flexibility of strategy application in the external translation of ethnic minority classics. The research finds that the selection of translation strategies is not an either-or choice, but an optimal choice after weighing multiple factors. For gods (such as Yiermuhan) and sacred objects (such as spirit drum) that constitute the core of cultural identity, foreignization strategies such as transliteration and literal translation with annotations are the foundation for safeguarding cultural subjectivity and sacredness; while appropriate domestication (such as

general description and generalization) of unimportant details or complex rituals is also a necessary translation auxiliary means to ensure narrative fluency and basic understanding. On the other hand, mixed and innovative strategies such as “descriptive domestication + transliteration label” are the core embodiment of translators’ translation wisdom. These strategies skillfully maintain a dynamic balance between “cultural fidelity” and “effective communication” in actual translation, which can further promote readers’ thinking and understanding of Manchu culture and help cultivate their cultural confidence.

5.2. Research value

The value of this study is mainly reflected in three aspects:

5.2.1. Theoretical aspect

This study successfully applies the macro foreignization/domestication theories to the micro analysis of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* ^[2], a text with rich cultural connotations. Through a large number of vivid translation examples, it vividly shows how theoretical concepts are applied, adjusted, and adapted in the face of specific cultural problems, providing solid case support for the research on the cultural dimension of translation theories.

5.2.2. Practical aspect

The research conclusions can provide clear strategic references and ethical reflections for the external translation practice of ethnic minority literature and even all texts with profound cultural connotations ^[3]. It reminds translators to conduct in-depth cultural research before translation, to distinguish the importance of cultural information, and to master various compensation techniques such as annotation and supplementary explanation proficiently ^[4]. At the same time, the study also emphasizes the importance of translators’ cultural stance and conscious awareness, calling on translation practitioners to be active cultural interpreters and bridge builders of dialogue, rather than just passive language converters ^[5].

5.2.3. Ethical and cultural political aspect

Through the analysis of “diachronic evolution,” this study elevates translation to the height of cultural representation and politics for examination ^[6]. It shows that high-quality translation is an important practice to resist cultural hegemony and promote equal dialogue between civilizations in the new era ^[7]. Under the strategic background of “Chinese culture going global,” this study takes *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* as an example to demonstrate that the success of “going global” lies not only in “going out,” but also in the posture and voice of “presentation,” which is of far-reaching significance for constructing a true, three-dimensional and comprehensive Chinese national cultural image.

5.3. Future prospects

This study mainly focuses on the translation strategies of written words, which provides a solid foundation for understanding the linguistic mechanism of cultural transformation, but also has certain research limitations. It is held in this study that translation is not only a static and intuitive comparison between texts, but also a dynamic cross-cultural communication behavior and a process of meaning reproduction. Therefore, it is proposed that future research can be expanded in a more systematic and interdisciplinary way in the following directions, so as to construct a more three-dimensional and comprehensive academic picture:

First, carry out empirical reception research based on readers to promote the scientization and refinement

of translation criticism. Current research mostly focuses on translator strategies and text comparison, but the attention to the terminal recipients of translations—“readers”—is still insufficient. In the future, rigorous empirical research can be designed, for example: conducting hierarchical questionnaires for different reader groups (such as translation researchers, ordinary literary readers, researchers and lovers of ethnic literary works) to explore the differences between the two strategies of “foreignization through transliteration + domestication through annotation” (e.g., “Ilmun Han [ruler of the underworld]”) and “domestication through free translation” (e.g., “Lord of the Dead”) in terms of cultural cognitive accuracy, reading fluency and emotional identification; using focus interviews to deeply explore readers’ image association and meaning interpretation of specific material cultural words (such as translating “spirit drum” as “Spirit Drum” or “Shaman Drum”); even with the help of advanced technology, objectively analyze readers’ attention distribution and comprehension approaches when reading annotated and unannotated texts. Such research can transform the evaluation of translation effects from theory and personal perception to empirical and specific analysis based on data and feedback, thus providing more objective justification for the selection of translation strategies and truly realizing the shift from “translator’s translation” to “reader’s translation.”

Second, pay close attention to the various adaptation methods and cross-media communication phenomena of *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* in the contemporary era, and expand the scope of translation research. In the new era dominated by visual culture and empowered by digital technology, it is obvious that the vitality of this epic is far beyond the paper text, and it has been regenerated through various media forms such as animation, documentaries, stage plays, online short videos, and even digital immersive art projects. Future research should go deep into these fields and systematically investigate the “cross-media translation” of shamanic cultural images: for example, in animation, how do the sound characteristics and visual effects of the “spirit drum” jointly show its sacredness? In documentaries, what kind of interpretive framework is formed by the lens language and voice-over commentary of ritual scenes? How do stage plays translate the abstract shamanic religious outlook and cosmic outlook through body movements, stage art, and on-site sound effects? These cross-media communications involve not only linguistic conversion, but also the fundamental communication of symbolic systems—from linguistic and written words to audio-visual language, spatial language, and even dynamic communication conversion. Exploring how these texts with rich translation forms are produced, disseminated, and accepted in globalization and digital communication, and how to coordinate the relationship between cultural authenticity and artistic creativity, local characteristics and global circulation, will be cutting-edge research at the intersection of translation studies with media studies, cultural studies, digital humanities, and other fields.

In general, this study takes *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* as a cultural perspective and systematically analyzes the complex dimensions of cross-cultural translation practice. It clearly shows that the fundamental mission of translation is not simple linguistic correspondence or cultural substitution, but to complete delicate and in-depth cultural transplantation and creative symbiosis in different linguistic and cultural environments. This process requires translators to be as rigorous as historians and as patient as gardeners. They must deeply understand the historical development background of the source language culture, its unique cosmic outlook, value system, and material symbol system, and carefully observe the cognitive characteristics of the target language culture, namely readers’ emotional experience, aesthetic habits, and meaning understanding methods.

Figuratively speaking, a successful translation is like cultivating a cross-cultural flower: its roots are deeply rooted in the fertile soil of shamanic culture represented by *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness*, absorbing the nutrients of faith, ritual and narrative from it; while the stems and leaves stretch in the sunshine and rain of the

target language, showing its original form through appropriate foreignization strategies (such as transliteration and literal translation with annotations), and realizing photosynthesis with the help of necessary domestication and creative interpretation (such as in-text compensation and image reconstruction) to promote understanding and growth. Ultimately, this cultural flower not only retains its distinct ethnic symbols and cultural genes, but also blooms in the new ecological environment where it is rooted with its comprehensible posture, bearing the fruits of dialogue and understanding.

This process from “transplantation” to “symbiosis” is full of tensions and challenges, which requires translators to constantly seek a dynamic balance between “faithfulness” and “expressiveness,” “seeking common ground” and “preserving differences.” However, it is this unremitting negotiation, creation, and adaptation that constitute the most core and vital practice in the communication between different civilizations. It goes beyond the superficial transmission of cultural symbols and is committed to promoting in-depth spiritual communication and meaning sharing. Therefore, the exploration of the translation of intangible cultural heritage such as *The Tale of the Nisan Shamaness* is not only to explore more accurate translation methods for the translation of ethnic minority cultures, but also to participate in shaping a global cultural ecological landscape where each beauty is appreciated and all beauties coexist in a concrete way. It is held in this study that this may be the most profound humanistic value borne by translation in the contemporary era.

Disclosure statement

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