

From “Seeking Aesthetic Similarity” to “Striking a Balance Between Domestication and Foreignization”: A Probe into Zhu Zhenwu’s Translation Philosophy

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Abstract As a leading scholar in contemporary Chinese translation practice and theoretical research, Prof. Zhu Zhenwu is distinguished by his profound erudition that bridges Chinese and Western scholarship. A prolific translator with mature theoretical insights, he has forged a unique academic paradigm through synthesizing ancient and modern wisdom while transcending disciplinary boundaries. His scholarly endeavors, based on a strong sense of cultural confidence and cultural consciousness, are nourished by traditional Chinese learning. This intellectual foundation enables his translation research to embody both deep-rooted indigenous convictions and profound humanistic concerns for world culture. A probe into his academic trajectory from translation practice to theoretical construction, the present paper aims at exploring his translation philosophy unique of its own. It is believed that his distinctive conceptual frameworks of translation studies can also reveal the developmental trends of contemporary translation studies.

Keywords Zhu Zhenwu; translation philosophy; aesthetic similarity; a balance between domestication and foreignization

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Introduction

As a cross-temporal and cross-spatial mechanism of dialogue, translation has always played an indispensable role in the history of human development, serving as a vital pathway for the symbiosis of world civilizations. In today’s world where literary

and cultural exchanges between China and the West are increasingly interconnected, it is imperative for us to consider how to redefine the translation of foreign works into our own culture and the export of our native culture to the world, as well as how to respond to the call of our times by exploring new interdisciplinary avenues in translation studies. These issues are, so to speak, critical for every translator and researcher. In this regard, Prof. Zhu Zhenwu [朱振武], a distinguished translator and researcher, has set an exemplary model worth emulating for the academia.

A Road Map of Zhu's Translation Philosophy: Interplay of Practice and Research

Zhu has been adept in integrating translation practice with scholarly research, producing a prolific body of translated works and monographs. What merits special attention is, unlike the long-standing tendency in Chinese translation academia to prioritize theory over practice, Zhu's approach has always exhibited a distinct "belt-and-braces" characteristic: he not only applies profound theoretical insights to guide his translation practice but also draws from rich practical experience to enrich theoretical innovation. His long-term commitment to translation practice has allowed him to develop unique conceptual understandings and therefore theoretical frameworks, ensuring that his translations both remain faithful to the original and bear a distinctive personal style. The self-contained translation philosophy developed through hard practice is a hallmark of a truly qualified and mature translator. It can be said that the very cyclical interaction between theory and practice forms the core axis of Zhu's academic trajectory. In a broader sense, this approach not only enables Chinese literature to absorb the essence of English literature, thus revitalizing the expressive power of the Chinese language, but also provides an illuminating methodological model for the translation of Chinese literature and cultural dissemination.

"Into-Chinese" Translation Practice: Wisdom Distilled Through Experience

As a prominent figure in China's translation and literary circles, Zhu is widely known and highly regarded among domestic readers for his translations of American popular fiction writer Dan Brown's series, such as *The Da Vinci Code*, *Angels & Demons*, *Deception Point*, *Digital Fortress*, and *The Lost Symbol*. Being celebrated for their encyclopedic knowledge, multi-perspective narration, gripping and captivating plots as well as entertainment appeal, Brown's works place high demands on translators as could be expected. When dealing with a versatile author like him, Zhu did not merely approach the original text with rigidity at the linguistic level, which would possibly undermine the artistry of language transfer. Instead,

the translator tried every means possible to avoid dry and literal translations, counterbalancing the linguistic charm of English with that of Chinese. He knows to the core that the significant differences between Chinese and English mean that ignoring the characteristics of the target language and the reading habits of its audience would undoubtedly diminish the aesthetic, poetic, and intellectual value of the original text.

In light of this, Zhu the translator has, from extensive practical experience, gradually distilled a unique “aesthetic similarity” principle. He believes: “Translation is not merely the conversion of languages but also the re-creation of aesthetics. Especially in literary translation, the ideal translation should provide target readers with an aesthetic experience similar to that of the original readers...Literary translation as a translation form of art reflects the translator’s aesthetic grasp of the original work’s ideological content and artistic style. It is not about formal equivalence at the word or sentence level but about the holistic absorption and reconstruction of linguistic information and aesthetic elements” (“Similarity” 2).

In other words, translators should not mechanically pursue equivalence in “dictionary meanings” but instead breaking free from the cage of superficial word-by-word correspondence. They must contemplate and grasp the deeper and implied meanings of texts, focusing on whether the translated versions can achieve aesthetic functions and associations in specific contexts that are analogous to the original. This pursuit represents a “high-level means of aesthetic reproduction” or “aesthetic reconstruction” which entails “the aesthetic subject leveraging their aesthetic faculties to eliminate temporal, spatial, and intellectual gaps, before fully entering a state of sublimation... and reshaping the beauty of the original text” (Liu 519-20).

In practice, Zhu has, through long-term exploration, consistently considered how to employ comprehensive translation strategies and methods such as adaptation, compensation, and recreation to reposition and reinterpret the aesthetic value of the original. His approach aims to preserve the beauty brought by those “heterogeneous elements” in the source language and then reproduce and reconstruct it in the target, striving for the greatest possible aesthetic similarity and resonance between SL and TL. By maintaining similarity in such factors as aesthetic imagery, conceptual recognition, thinking perspective...between the translation and the original, he creates translation versions that are on one hand, faithful to the content and style of the source text while on the other, conforming to Chinese reading habits. It is his unremitting endeavor that allows the translated works to attain a “second life” in the target culture, ultimately achieving profound alignment with the original at various levels. This pursuit of aesthetic functional similarity reflects the translator’s artistic

self-consciousness and cultural wisdom. As shown below in the table, translations that adhere to Zhu's principle of "aesthetic similarity" are particularly evident at three levels, namely, basic similarity, in-depth similarity, and creative similarity.

The Application of "Aesthetic Similarity" Principle in Zhu's Translation Practice

Different levels of Aesthetic Similarity	Aesthetic forms and functions	Examples (original version)	Examples (translated version)
Basic similarity	Transference of cultural images	It is your circus . (<i>The Da Vinci Code</i>)	得自己来唱这出戏了。 (《达·芬奇密码》)
	Rebuilding of rhyming	Publish or perish. (<i>Angels and Demons</i>)	不出版就出局。(《天使与魔鬼》)
	Addition of rhetorical devices	But each time he gave them a translation, the cryptographers shook their heads in despair . (<i>Digital Fortress</i>)	但每次他把译文交给密码破译员, 他们的头都摇得像拨浪鼓。(《数字城堡》)
	Tendency toward the application of four-character idioms/phrases	He squinted out at the lush green valley rising to snowcapped peaks all around them. (<i>Angels and Demons</i>)	他望了一眼四周, 近处是苍翠葱茏的山谷, 远处是白雪皑皑的峰峦。(《天使与魔鬼》)
In-depth similarity	Cultivating emotional resonance in TL readers	"what in the world is a Yale blue blood doing on the Crimson campus before dawn?" (<i>The lost symbol</i>)	"什么风大清早就把一个耶鲁蓝血刮到深红校园来了?" (《失落的秘符》)
Creative similarity	Achieving holistic correspondence in sound and sense	These lethal men became known by a single word- Hassassin —literally "the followers of hashish." (<i>Angels and Demons</i>)	这些杀手逐渐被人们称为"黑煞星"—字面意思即"嗜黑煞者"(《天使与魔鬼》)

It could be observed from the table that the "aesthetic similarity" tenet proposed by Zhu falls roughly into three categories: basic similarity, in-depth similarity, and creative similarity, each growing in significance. To begin with, basic similarity refers to the similarity in languages and cultures, including transference of cultural images, rebuilding of rhyming, addition of rhetorical devices and tendency toward the application of four-character idioms/phrases.etc. Next, in-depth similarity means cultivating emotional resonance between SL and TL readers, and last but the most important, creative similarity as the ultimate art of literary translation, aims at achieving holistic correspondence in both sound and sense, which is prized as a

stroke of genius.

To explore the underlying mechanism and principles of “aesthetic similarity,” it is of great necessity to make an analysis of the above examples. Above all, basic similarity finds its presence in the adaptive choice or transference of cultural images. As is shown in the example, Zhu’s translation succeeds in bridging cultural differences by replacing the English metaphor of a “circus” with the Chinese theatrical expression “唱这出戏 [act in this opera]”. It remains faithful to the original meaning—conveying both the sense of personal responsibility and the slightly humorous tone—while ensuring natural fluency in Chinese.

In the second example, publish or perish employs “alliteration” (p-) and near rhyme (-ish), creating a tightly knit rhythmic effect. The Chinese translation “不出版就出局 [If you don’t publish, you’re out.]”, while not replicating the exact alliteration or rhyming, achieves a similar phonetic compactness through consonant repetition (bù-chū-chū). The translation, as a result, compensates for linguistic differences by balancing consonant echoes, vowel patterns, and tonal dynamics, delivering similar rhythmic effect as the original.

The original phrase in the third example simply states that the cryptographers “shook their heads in despair,” using literal language without any figurative elements. However, the Chinese translation creatively employs the vivid metaphor of “拨浪鼓 [toy rattle drum]” to bring the scene to life. This culturally familiar image of a child’s shaking toy-drum makes the cryptographers’ repeated and frustrated motion of head-shaking far more visual and forceful for Chinese readers than a literal translation would achieve. By incorporating this everyday object into the description, the translation transforms a straightforward statement into a lively and engaging moment that resonates deeply with the local audience. The added metaphor not only enhances the text’s vividness and emotional expressiveness but also demonstrates how skillful localization can elevate a passage beyond mere word-for-word accuracy while remaining faithful to the original meaning, a solid proof of the effectiveness of Zhu’s aesthetic similarity.

The translation in the fourth example demonstrates a masterful use of four-character phrases/idioms (a quintessential Chinese rhetorical device) to elevate the original text into poetic expression. The paired phrases “苍翠葱茏 [verdant and luxuriant]” and “白雪皑皑 [brilliant white snow]” not only accurately convey the scenic elements of “lush green” and “snowcapped,” but construct, through reduplicated words and radical imagery, a layered landscape with lyrical cadence. Here, the four-character structure transcends mere rhetorical choice to become a cultural re-imagination of the original imagery—maintaining semantic fidelity while

attaining a depth of artistic conception, exemplifying the perfect marriage of form and content in literary translation. As a matter of fact, Zhu's E-C translation shows an evident tendency toward the use of four-character idioms, which originates from his profound understanding of traits of both Chinese and English. As pointed by professor Gu Zhengkun: "Chinese is an exceptionally descriptive language, while English is highly logical. As a result, Chinese tends to employ far more ornate modifiers than Indo-European languages. In other words, the Chinese language is inherently more expressive and aesthetically richer in artistic representation" (Gu 181). It is precisely because of Zhu's in-depth understanding of the advantages of Chinese over Western languages that he applies extensively aesthetically pleasing idioms and phrases, which strike the cords of the target readers.

Example five sees a remark made by Professor Langdon to his old friend Solomon, who had arrived unexpectedly. Dan Brown's purpose here is to highlight Langdon's character—a man of profound erudition, quick wit, and subtle humor. The translator here retains the expressions of "blue blood" and "crimson" as "蓝血 [blue blood]" and "深红 [crimson]" in the target, without changing them into "高贵 [noble]" and "哈佛 [Harvard]" simply because he intends to keep the exotic cultural flavor and the author's unique humor so as to convey to the TL readers the same emotion. As could be seen, the translation recreates the original's blend of incredulity and humor, bridging the emotional and cultural resonances of elite identity markers, and achieving remarkable cross-cultural equivalence in conveying a sense of institutional pride. Moreover, the metaphor "刮风 [The wind blows]" amplifies the emotional tension by suggesting sudden intrusion, making the speaker's astonishment more physically palpable than the original's static "doing." This multi-dimensional approach achieves perfect emotional resonance, ultimately creating a translation version that surpasses the emotional impact of the source text. As Zhu himself remarked: "Aesthetic standards vary across cultures, requiring translators to adapt flexibly. Such adaptation is not a compromise, but rather a means to evoke similar emotional resonance of aesthetic functions in different cultural contexts" ("Similarity" 2).

To crown it all, the last example stands as a classic case. The translation achieves a remarkable cultural transposition through its ingenious phonetic-semantic fusion in rendering "Hassassin" as "黑煞星 [black evil star]" where the character "黑 [black]," in the first place, not only phonetically mirrors the Arabic "Ha-" prefix but also establishes a foreboding tone with its connotations of darkness and mystery. Additionally, "煞星 [evil star]"—a concept deeply rooted in Chinese astrology referring to baleful stars that portend violence and death, perfectly encapsulates

both the lethal nature of these assassins and the mystical aura surrounding their legend. By combining the phonetic hint with this culturally potent metaphor, the translator embeds the foreign concept into China's rich lexicon of mythological terror, creating a term that resonates with the same ominous weight as the original. This linguistic alchemy results in a powerfully localized expression that feels simultaneously exotic and native, transforming historical assassins into figures of almost supernatural dread within the Chinese cultural imagination.

Judging from the examples aforementioned, we can arrive at a safe conclusion that extensive practice serves as the essential foundation for Zhu's mature and profound translation philosophy. And throughout this process, the pursuit of aesthetic excellence remains the driving force behind his translation work. As he himself said: "Under the enduring influence of traditional Chinese cultural cognition and aesthetic sensibilities, the Chinese language has developed a unique artistic charm characterized by meaning-dominant form, flexible conciseness, semantic richness within brevity, and harmonious phonology. These intrinsically interconnected features permeate all linguistic levels of Chinese and are deeply embedded in the nation's aesthetic consciousness" ("Similarity" 3). That is to say, only when translators can thoroughly convey the original author's thoughts, emotions, tonal nuances, and even rhythmic cadence can the textual beauty be fully manifested and genuinely resonate with readers. It is precisely with this approach that he has yielded numerous exceptional translations cherished by the public.

But Rome was not built in a day. Zhu's final adoption of "aesthetic similarity" as his core translation strategy is developed over a long time primarily driven by three key factors:

First, the translator's profound familiarity with the interplay between Chinese and Western languages and cultures underlies his masterful performance. Zhu's translations exude what we might call "the aroma of scholarly ink and paper" — a fragrance brewed through bilingual mastery and profound grounding in Chinese classics. Consequently, he advocates in literary translation to leverage the target language's advantages: employing idioms, proverbs, and colloquialisms with natural ease; incorporating rhetorical devices and rhymes wherever apt. In the meantime, as a specialist in English literature, he possesses an intimate mastery of the linguistic artistry, narrative techniques, and aesthetic particularities characteristic of English-language novels, which makes it possible for him to quickly grasp the heterogeneous SL elements and know well when and where to make adaptations in the TL. It is precisely his in-depth understanding of both Chinese and Western literary traditions that shapes his translation philosophy, which embodies critical

reflections on literary translation—not as fragmentary insights, but as a coherent, self-consistent theoretical system that guides himself in making deliberate choices in practice.

Second, the translator's anticipation of the target readers' aesthetic taste steers his direction. On the work of translation that spans languages and cultures, Zhu is not merely a conveyor of words, but a visionary who accurately predicts aesthetic expectations. An informative researcher and specialist as he could transcend temporal and spatial hurdles to gauge how target readers will receive the translated text. This foresight is no mere guesswork—it is an artistic act rooted in his profound understanding of both cultures' aesthetic traditions. As an accomplished scholar of English literature, his academic expertise grants him deep insight into the domestic book market, particularly the tastes of Chinese readers for translated Western works. Thus, his translations—through cultural transposition, rhythmic adaptation, and heightened literary sensibility—ensure the seamless transmission of aesthetic experiences, all finely attuned to contemporary readers' preferences. This insight stems not only from his scholarly rigor as a literary researcher but also from his comprehensive grasp of publishing trends, reader preferences (both domestic and foreign), patronage systems, and international distribution channels. It manifests in every stage: text selection, translation strategy, post-translation promotion, and critics' engagement. In translating Dan Brown, for example, Zhu's incisive analysis of the author's narrative style and aesthetic appeal play a pivotal role in sustaining Brown's popularity in China. His multifaceted identity as scholar, translator, cultural ambassador has been instrumental in the enduring success of these translations. To some extent, when Zhu recreates Brown's novels—whether with lyrical elegance, witty humor, or philosophical depth—he is, in essence, conducting masterful aesthetic expectation management.

Last but not the least, the translator's cultural consciousness in pursuing personal translation philosophies guarantees his success. A distinctive translation philosophy emerges when a translator moves beyond convention and develops a personalized approach that balances innovation with respect for tradition. This uniqueness may manifest itself in linguistic experimentation, narrative reconfiguration, emotional reinforcement and spiritual reconstruction as mentioned before in the examples, which requires a translator's persistent pursuit of "finding himself culturally, ideologically and aesthetically." This self-consciousness marks the evolution of Zhu's translation philosophy from mere techniques to true artistry, which not only reflects his cultural stance and aesthetic ideals but also elevates his translation into an autonomous intellectual endeavor with intrinsic value. Step

by step such a systematic translation philosophy inevitably crystallizes into a recognizable “Zhu-style” signature which on one hand, remains rooted in traditional notions of semantic fidelity, yet on the other transcends them, achieving a higher-order synthesis of aesthetic sensibilities. Through meticulous deconstruction of the source text’s artistic elements, he penetrates the linguistic surface to unlock the textual core—transforming translation itself into an act of literary innovation and at the same time developing his own methodology.

German functionalist scholar Christiane Nord once remarked that: “A translation should enable target-language readers to perceive the original’s style, artistic merit, and linguistic beauty, while enriching the expressive capacity of the receptor language. It must make readers understand why the source text deserves translation in the first place” (Nord 89). He therefore proposed the “loyalty principle,” arguing that a translation’s fidelity extends not only to the source text but equally to its recipients. In other words, a translation should never be a distorted shadow or echo of the original, but rather an autonomous artwork of equal stature—“a reincarnation of the source where the body has changed, yet the soul remains intact (Qian 77). Zhu’s translation manages, in this sense, to establish target-language expressions that optimally reconstruct the source text’s aesthetic functions and more importantly, become an independent aesthetic entity. His approach of “seeking aesthetic similarity” infinitely extends the original’s vitality, inspires future generations to re-engage with it, and opens new interpretive possibilities—profoundly embodying the notion that “translation is a miraculous encounter across history” (Xu 82).

“Out of Chinese” Translation Research: Theory Elevated from Studies

In addition to his translations and introductions of English literature, Zhu has also conducted a series of studies on the English translation of Chinese literature. This time, however, he does not focus on the translated works themselves but instead directs his attention to a unique and significant group of translators—sinologists—using them as the foundation for his research. It is because, over the past century of the westward transmission of Chinese texts, Western translators—from missionaries to diplomats to sinologists—have consistently been the backbone of this historical narrative. Although the group is not large in number, it has long occupied the center of translation discourse, exerting a profound influence. Zhu astutely identifies both the advantages of this translator group and the importance of this phenomenon to his translation research. He raises several key questions in this respect: what distinguishes the form and style of sinologists’ translations? What

motivates them to translate Chinese culture? What are the fundamental differences in translation strategies between sinologists and native Chinese translators? What deeper reasons underlie these differences? What kinds of misinterpretations and biases have emerged in their translations of Chinese texts? Are these mistranslations truly without merit? What is the ultimate purpose of studying sinologists' English translations of Chinese literature? And how can we fairly and justly evaluate the contributions of sinologists to the translation and introduction of Chinese literature (*Between Domestication and Foreignization* 3) ?

Driven by these questions, he embarked on a decade-long research journey, culminating in the publication of his sinological trilogy: *Sinologists and Contemporary Chinese Literature to the West*, *Sinologists and Ancient Chinese Literature to the West*, and *Between Domestication and Foreignization: How Sinologists Retell Chinese Stories*. The trilogy focuses on prominent sinologists from the English-speaking world who are actively engaged in translating Chinese literature, along with their translation works. By systematically examining their life tracks and academic development, it delves into the translation philosophies, strategies, styles, and errors in their renditions of both classical and modern Chinese literature. Framed within the interdisciplinary nature and socio-cultural functions of contemporary translation studies, the trilogy critically assesses the “out of Chinese” practices of Western sinologists. It offers a comprehensive, multi-dimensional, and systematic analysis of such core elements as the background, motivations, strategies, and deviations in sinologists' English translations of Chinese literature.

These three monumental works epitomize Zhu's translation philosophy, which is a crystallization of years of scholarly reflection and intellectual rigor. They serve not only as the definitive texts for understanding his translation theories but also as an exceptional lens through which the English translation of Chinese literature could be viewed in a clearer light. In the trilogy Zhu offers incisive discussions on core issues in translation studies—such as the relationship between form and spirit, the choice between literal and free translation, misreading and reconstruction, adaptation and retranslation, and creative treason—demonstrating the author's masterful command of translation theory while philosophically uncovering the cultural, historical, social, and creative dimensions inherent in sinologists' translations. By pushing the boundaries of the translation field further, Zhu establishes his own theoretical framework, ultimately revealing the fundamental truth of translation: No matter how painstakingly translators maneuver, adapt, or make compromises, they can never truly escape the dialectical interplay of “domestication and foreignization.”

Zhu's theory of "striking a balance between domestication and foreignization" refers to keeping an equilibrium between the two translation strategies of domestication and foreignization. On one hand, it requires fidelity to the source text, preserving its essence and spirit; on the other, it demands judicious adaptation of culturally loaded elements to convey core ideas in a reader-friendly manner, minimizing barriers of understanding. It is an inherently dialectical process, with countless variations and no one-size-fits-all solution—precisely why it calls for the nuanced judgment of translators who possess both extensive practical experience and mature theoretical insight. The theory proposed shows Zhu's understanding of translation is particularly profound and insightful since his notion of "domestication" does not imply capitulating to readers' expectations but rather ensuring that the foreign elements of the source culture are effectively communicated while moderately lowering comprehension barriers. Likewise, the concept of "foreignization" in his mindset does not mean rigidly preserving source-text features but instead gradually infusing the target language with fresh expressions—renewing its literary fabric while consciously retaining the original's authentic flavor.

When chewing Zhu's theory in practice over and again, translators will find it does hold water. The translation process witnesses, in fact, an eternal balance between "authenticity" and "aesthetic appeal." That is, translators must retain the source text's distinctive qualities while catering to readers' engagement, ultimately conveying the most admirable and thought-provoking aesthetic qualities of the original. Though achieving this balance is no easy feat, "authenticity" and "aesthetic appeal" should never be seen as mutually exclusive but rather as a dynamic unity that guides translation strategies. Preserving the "truth" of the source does not necessitate convoluted, unreadable translations, just as reconstructing beauty does not justify arbitrary liberties. To effectively disseminate the unique charm of Chinese literature among Western readers, translators must constantly navigate between these two poles, as Zhu recommends, and making context- and audience-sensitive decisions that harmonize "truth" and "beauty" in their renditions of poetic language. Judging from this, we can safely say that Zhu's academic vision of "striking a balance between domestication and foreignization" transcends traditional textual concerns, ascending to interdisciplinary levels encompassing culture, aesthetics, society, history, and communication. It reveals how translators can negotiate multiple constraints and contexts—bridging linguistic gaps while conveying cultural distinctions.

Though his research is highly academic, Zhu doesn't forget to elucidate

his viewpoints with an abundance of vivid examples from the sinologists' translation works. Take, for instance, the sections on "*The Divergence in Form but Convergence in Spirit in Hawkes' the story of stone* and "*Behind the Paradoxical 'Mistranslation'—A Study on Moss Roberts' Translation Strategies in the English Rendition of Three Kingdoms.*" The former illustrates how Hawkes elevates domestication beyond mere readability by "interpreting classics through classics" (e.g., invoking Greek mythology and Biblical stories to create multi-layered resonance for English readers), thus achieving the sphere of "cultural dialogue." The latter, on the other hand, showcases how Roberts transcends superficial foreignization, transforming it into a literary "defamiliarization" that revitalizes the target language—breaking conventions and infusing it with new vigor. Such balance of domestication and foreignization represents a hard-won epiphany, a state of natural harmony akin to the Daoist ideal of "unity between heaven and man."

Zhu's academic road map demonstrates that groundbreaking advances in translation studies often emerge from the perfect combination of theory and practice. The ceaseless interplay between the two not only charts the growth of an individual scholar's intellectual journey, but also embodies the intrinsic logic behind the maturation of translation studies as a discipline in China.

Anders-streben in Translation: Cross-Disciplinary Vision

For any discipline to achieve self-renewal and long-term development, it need borrow strengths from other disciplines, thereby breaking down barriers and facilitating interconnections. It is true of literary translation, in which a cross-artistic interpretive approach is highly recommended to guide researchers deeper into Chinese and Western artistic theories before employing "Anders-streben" (out-of-the-box thinking) in their work. In so doing can they expect to reread the complex and intriguing psychological cognition, emotional appeals, and aesthetic expressions in literary works, make novel interpretations of them from multiple dimensions and perspectives, and better still, effect a special resonance with readers as well as extend the horizon of translation studies.

As an eminent scholar in contemporary Chinese literary translation and research, Zhu sets great stores by this cross-disciplinary vision. In fact, his translation research represents, from the very beginning, a significant departure from conventional approaches through its profound engagement with cross-disciplinary activities. That is, his translation philosophy demonstrates distinct interdisciplinary characteristics as shown in his intellectual exploration in the study of American and British literature, African English literature, aesthetics, narratology, cultural-

sociology, and intellectual history, etc. His translations of Dan Brown's novels, for instance, go beyond the literary value of suspense fiction, to the exploration of religious semiotics and historical-cultural codes embedded in the texts. Likewise, in his trilogy of translation research on sinologists' works, his analysis, arguments and judgments not only incorporate modern Western translation theories and the essence of traditional Chinese translation discourse, but also draw insights from reception aesthetics, reader-response theory, sociology, communication studies, and other disciplines. This synthesis approach transcends the limitations of genre literature, infusing popular fiction translation with the depth of cultural studies and showcasing translation's interdisciplinary nature as a form of knowledge production. Step by step, it forms a holistic framework for his translation research—not as a mere layering of concepts but as a genuine cross-disciplinary proliferation of knowledge and as a result, elevation of minds on the part of recipients. This feature is manifested not only in his selection of translation texts but also in his multi-dimensional methodological application and theoretical construction, which form a unique academic paradigm.

Zhu's translation research is, first and foremost, persistently echoed by his long-time study of mainstream English literature, with American and British literature sitting at the core. As is commonly acknowledged in the translation academia "Translate what you research, and research what you translate," Zhu's translation work has been closely intertwined with his research focus of English literature, each informing and elevating the other. This complementary relationship can be strong felt in his choice of texts, his interpretative methods, and the theoretical frameworks he applies to both translation and literary analysis. For him, translation work remains an extension of scholarly engagement with literature and vice versa.

In translating English literature, he attaches great importance to the act of close reading, which entails a thorough inquiry into the text from its literary, historical, and cultural perspectives. In this sense, he actually takes translation as an effective means of critical interpretations of literature he studies, not just translating for the sake of itself. For instance, when translating Browns' novels, Zhu is at the same time an acute observer and critic of the stylistic innovations, thematic concerns, and philosophical underpinnings of the work, leading to his later publication of such monographs as *decoding Dan Brown* and *At-Home Code of Dan Brown and Others*. The abundant knowledge, insightful revelations, and witty comments that permeate his monographs and academic articles, together with his translation of Browns, all combine to present a panoramic vista of his mature thinking, marking his translation activities into a broader literary and cultural movement which in turn,

nourishes and enriches his mind in proposing unique translation skills and strategies that are distinctly Zhu. This approach aligns with the idea that a translator must first be a meticulous reader and critic. Zhu's scholarly essays on English literature often reveal the same depth of analysis that characterizes his translations. His research on the aesthetic creation techniques of Earnest Hemingway, John Grisham and Pu Songlin, for example, greatly influences his translation strategy of "aesthetic similarity" in later years, and his study of William Faulkner's narrative style of stream of consciousness innovates how he handles elusive, complex sentence structures and keeps a balance between domestication and foreignization to foster readability in his translations. In this manner, his academic work provides the theoretical foundation for his practical translation choices.

The relationship between Zhu's translation and research is reciprocal. Just as his literary studies guide his translations, the act of translating deepens his research as well. When asked about his view about translation and literature, he pertinently commented: "Foreign literature, much like translation, offers us a profound way to see the world from a different perspective. It broadens our horizons, liberates our minds, breaks down rigid conventions, and dismantles barriers. Close reading and deep absorption in the beauty of texts remain the foundational pursuit of literary and translation scholars. Therefore, as learners of foreign languages and translation, we should read voraciously, think critically, and strive to become insightful scholars of both—while remaining firmly rooted in our own cultural soil" (Qian and Zhu 22-23).

Indeed he has been doing what he said. In recent years, in particular, he has extended his academic horizon to the study of African English literature—a formerly virgin land of world literature. In this way, he serves as a pioneer, a path-finder, through his sweat, toil and blood, revolutionizing and redrawing the map of English literature research, at the same time absorbing, as a translator, nutrition from the large treasure trove of African English language and literature. For Zhu, translation is never a mere means of communication between two languages. Instead, when he makes a decision to plunge himself into the exploration of an undiscovered realm of African English literature, he as a matter of fact is challenging to expand the boundary of language recognition and explore the linguistic diversity long eclipsed by mainstream English literature. It is not a hunt for novelty, but academic adventure which involves trials and tribulations. More importantly, the research of African English literature, breaking loose from the so-called standard English, provides a translator like him with a different perspective to look at the cultural truth and power logic hidden behind the surface of language since the history and development of African English literature itself is a record

of rebellion against imperialism and colonization. In this sense, Zhu's research of African English literature as a translator is actually challenging the western centrism and hegemony, expanding the frontier of translation aesthetics and, in the final analysis, participating in the redefinition of global culture and politics. As he himself said: "Literary dissemination should never be a one-way or unilateral process, but rather a two-way flow involving mutual appreciation and reciprocal learning. It should not distinguish between mainstream and non-mainstream but should instead respect and reflect diversity. Consequently, literary research should neither take the form of blind veneration of one side nor uncritical adoption or trend-following of theories from certain countries, but should be grounded in their own local contexts, respecting cultural differences and national characteristics, and fully demonstrating an autonomous model of interactive mutual learning. Similarly, related translation activities should not be condescending or submissive, but should seek an optimal balance between domestication and foreignization, fully respecting the literary cultures of both the source and target languages" ("Mutual Appreciation" 50).

By combining a myriad of knowledge and disciplines in his research such as English literature, both Anglo-American and African, Zhu's translation philosophy reflects an interdisciplinary vision in theoretical construction. His translation practice and research display to us that groundbreaking theoretical advances in contemporary translation studies require one's courage and vision to break down disciplinary obstacles. Translation is, in his view, not merely a technical act of linguistic conversion but an intellectual exercise in cultural dialogue, one that must be understood within a broader scholarly horizon to fully appreciate its value and significance. This interdisciplinary quality is exactly what keeps his translation studies dynamically innovative and intellectually vital.

The Foundation of Zhu's Translation Studies: Cultural Confidence and Cultural Consciousness

The remarkable achievements Zhu has made in translation field are deeply rooted in his cultural philosophy. On numerous occasions, he has emphasized that his scholarly ethos is fundamentally grounded in "cultural confidence" and "cultural consciousness"—a conviction that has guided him in his academic pursuit. In his dictionary, cultural confidence is a strong belief in the value of one's own culture, the ability to engage with foreign cultures without losing cultural identity, and the rejection of blind Westernization. While cultural consciousness involves a deep awareness of one's cultural heritage, a critical reflection on how culture shapes translation choices, and an active effort to promote intercultural dialogue.

Being steeped in the scholarly atmosphere of traditional Chinese learning, Zhu holds dear Chinese language, literature and identity, which explains his staunch support for a “Chinese voice” in his translation research. In his view, his translation is not just about linguistic transfer but a witness to a balanced cultural exchange, which asserts the richness of Chinese culture while remaining open to global influences. Indeed, a profound love for Chinese literature, coupled with the pursuit of fostering discursive consensus and civilization sharing between Chinese and Western cultures, have always been the fundamental concerns driving the translator’s translation research.

Yet he is, from year-old rich experience, wise enough to realize that the dominant paradigms of world literary criticism today, whether in the West or elsewhere, still largely adhere to Western modes of thinking and theoretical frameworks, lacking independent perspectives. Therefore, it is imperative to anchor our scholarship in the standpoint of Chinese literature and culture, dismantle Western discursive hegemony, break free from conventional critical molds, and transcend cognitive boundaries. Only by doing so can Chinese scholars construct their own theories and discourse, repainting the map of world culture, and establishing a new system of world literature—one that fosters genuine civilization exchange amid diversity. This endeavor is expected to create China’s own critical discourse and theoretical frameworks, contributing to the realization of authentic global cultural diversity and the formation of a shared literary and cultural community. As early as 2011 in an interview, Zhu expressed his viewpoints: “Scholarly discourses from the Anglo-American world cannot substitute for Chinese voices. Our academics must ground their research in native cultural soil, strengthen cultural autonomy, and construct independent theoretical frameworks. While assimilating exemplary elements of global cultural heritage, we must recognize that the excellence of civilization is not the exclusive attribute of industrialized nations” (Zhu and Jiang 1).

His deep commitment to cultural confidence and cultural consciousness finds its presence in all aspects of his scholarship, particularly discernible in his research on translating Chinese culture abroad. Although his research focuses on English translations produced primarily by sinologists, his scholarly inquiry remains firmly rooted in Chinese literature. It is by adhering to the communication principle of “affirming one’s own cultural identity” that his research fundamentally addresses how to facilitate the global dissemination and development of Chinese culture, by means of critical reflection, proposed strategies, and practical approaches.

In his monographs and articles of Chinese literature “going global,” he

examines how sinologists have gradually absorbed and internalized the values, way of thinking, and life wisdom embedded in Chinese literature, while presenting China's charm to the world in their own distinctive ways. In addition, he exercises profound erudition and unique insights to reveal how sinologists reconstruct, reinterpret, and even elevate Chinese literary classics in ways distinct from Chinese native translators—particularly in capturing their spiritual essence, stylistic nuances, and poetic features. These “otherness” perspectives and expressive choices allow readers and researchers to grasp the philosophical depth, national character, and aesthetic value intrinsic to Chinese literature itself, rather than forcing its phenomena into Western literary traditions or theoretical frameworks. Through their translations, according to Zhu, sinologists open windows for the West to understand Chinese civilization, striving to rectify long-held misconceptions. This is exactly what Zhu truly hopes to tell the world.

“A core principle guiding my research on sinologists’ translation of Chinese literature is,” as he soberly points out: “While sinologists’ translation work is subjectively driven by the enrichment and development of their own literary traditions, it objectively facilitates the global circulation of Chinese literature and culture. Therefore, to truly bring Chinese literature and culture to the world, relying solely on sinologists is insufficient—greater participation from Chinese scholars proficient in foreign languages is essential, and collaborative Sino-foreign translation initiatives remain a viable approach. It necessitates a coordinated effort to consolidate and optimize translation resources, coupled with a paradigm shift in our conceptual understanding—recognizing the fundamental distinctions between ‘into-Chinese’ and ‘out-of-Chinese’ translation. Indeed, whether as writers or translators, only with strong cultural self-consciousness and a sense of social responsibility can we propel Chinese literature and culture further onto the world stage, generating academic contributions of lasting value” (Qian and Zhu 17).

His strong conviction in cultural confidence and consciousness also finds its compelling expression in his research of African English literature: “In the current landscape of world literature, both Chinese literature and African literature belong to Third World literature and face opportunities and challenges in their dialogue with the global literary sphere. During this dialogue, Chinese literature inevitably encounters the same processes of discursive and cultural transformation experienced by African literature. When Western countries award prizes to Chinese literature, their justifications often carry undertones of Western ideology and values, sometimes even leading to alternative interpretations that diverge from the works themselves. To construct a global expression for our national literature, practice

proactive cultural dialogue in Chinese literature, and enrich the diversity of world literature, we may glean insights from the developmental track of African literature” (Zhu and Li 182).

That is how he conducts his research on African English culture. When he deals with Africa through the lens of Chinese rather than Cambridge or Oxford, Columbia or any other western institutions (“Communication Mistakes” 147), the researcher actually builds direct and autonomous bond with Africa, casting off the shackles of the West and its postcolonial framework. It is in itself a vivid embodiment of cultural confidence against Western cultural hegemony. Meanwhile, African English literature offers him and his group a crucial mirror—an insight into African people’s resistance against cultural imperialism. The knowledge gained from the experience can, in turn, enlighten China’s own literary and cultural exchanges with the outside world. A new paradigm of cultural exchange—one that transcends Western centric literary standard is thus established. Such equitable cultural decoding not only diversifies the aesthetics of global literature but also offers alternative frameworks for interpreting China’s own culture.

What inspires us most is: when Zhu independently articulates the value of African English literature without Western mediation, he himself becomes a definer of cultural worth. That is, by engaging deeply with African English literature, Zhu the translator and scholar becomes a designer of a more pluralistic and equitable world literature.

Conclusion

From “seeking aesthetic similarity” to “striking a balance between domestication and foreignization,” Zhu’s translation philosophy has evolved from micro-level techniques to a macro-level theoretical system. His personal academic trajectory is also a mirror to translation studies: theory should not remain abstract dogma but must serve as a “navigator” for practitioners, while practice should pave the way for theoretical innovation. In promoting the Chinese edition of *The Da Vinci Code*, for instance, he went beyond textual translation to organize cross-media activities such as author dialogues and reader discussions. By integrating the author, translator, readers, and publishers into a dynamically interconnected network, he transformed Dan Brown’s novels into a cultural phenomenon in China, generating new modes of cross-cultural engagement. This expansion from “translating texts” to “translating cultural ecosystems” represents an advanced form of theory-practice integration.

What’s more, Zhu’s translation studies are deeply entrenched in his cultural confidence and cultural consciousness, offering a counterbalance to Western-centric

theories. His work affirms the value of Chinese translation traditions and promotes intercultural exchange on an equal basis, providing a model for translation practice that is culturally aware. By grounding translation in cultural self-awareness, Zhu's work ensures that China's voice is heard, but not just translated, in the global conversation.

We may find with ease that it is Zhu's profound understanding of this translation philosophy that bears significant implications for the global dissemination of Chinese literature. When Chinese literature encounters "cultural discount" in its overseas journey, translators and researchers must transcend textual consciousness and emphasize the crucial role of more paratextual elements, adopting a dynamic, adaptive, and mutually activating approach to translation. Such a perspective shared by Zhu offers a Chinese solution for constructing a global cultural ecosystem based on equal dialogue.

In a nutshell, Zhu's career exemplifies the inseparable bond among translation, literary scholarship, a variety of disciplines and above all, his research work. His translations are not isolated acts but extensions of his academic inquiries, just as his research is often inspired by the challenges he faces in translation. This interdependence highlights the intellectual rigor required of literary translators, who must be both artists and scholars. By viewing translation as a form of research and research as a foundation for translation, Zhu bridges the gap between theory and practice, setting his eyes afar, demonstrating that the two are not just connected but mutually constitutive.

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