



# Translator's (In)visibility in the Chinese Translation of *Eat, Pray, Love*

Jingjing Zhang

Department of College English, Zhejiang Yuexiu University, Shaoxing, China

Email: 20202104@zyufl.edu.cn

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## Abstract

The term *invisibility* was first defined by Lawrence Venuti to “describe the translator’s situation and activity in contemporary Anglo-American culture” (Venuti, 1995/2004) in his book *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation*. What he put forward together with this term were the two types of translation: domestication and foreignization, which are “culturally variable and historically contingent” rather than in a binary opposition. Drawing on the Chinese translation (《美食，祈祷，恋爱》) of an American memoir *Eat, Pray, Love*, this essay elaborates on the translator’s visibility and invisibility from both linguistic (lexical and syntactic) and cultural perspectives with analysis on examples. In this absorbing Chinese version, the translator tends to be *invisible* at syntactic level while *visible* in relation to cultural perspective as it is easy to follow although “highlights the foreign identity of the ST” (Munday, 2018). The translator could represent the foreignness of the source text in his/her own way, choosing to be either visible or invisible in translation. The case study also suggests that a foreignized translated work, with less idiomatic expressions from linguistic perspective, compared with domesticated translation, can be widely accepted as well as a domesticated one. I hope that the finding of the research may provide a reference to translators and researchers on literary translation and translator’s subjectivity.

## Subject Areas

Linguistics

## Keywords

(In)visibility, Linguistic Perspective, Cultural Perspective,  
*Eat, Pray, Love*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Literature Review about the Theory Applied

Since the 1990s, translation studies have begun to move away from a consideration of culture towards the empirical investigations and case studies. “The topic of the global domination of English today links up with a notion that developed into a household word in literary translation studies during the 1990s” [1]: “domestication” and “foreignization” discussed by Lawrence Venuti with invisibility hand in hand [2]. *Invisibility* refers to “the translator’s situation and activity”, particularly the present phenomenon “dominance of fluency in English-language translation” (ibid.). It is related to recognition for translation in a culture, the translator’s preference and the power network of publishing. Domesticating translation strategy usually makes the translator invisible by moving the author towards the reader, which may result in an “illusion of transparency” [2]. It is effective in making the translation widely accepted and better understood by its target readers. In contrast, foreignizing translation strategy, by moving the reader towards the author, offers an alternative approach through which target readers learn more about foreign culture, which is particularly important in literary translation. In a word, “The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator.” [2]

### 1.2. Background Information about *Eat, Pray, Love*

*Eat, Pray, Love: one woman’s search for everything across Italy, India and Indonesia* is a memoir written by an award-winning American writer and journalist, Elizabeth Gilbert. It has been published in more than thirty languages since its first publication in 2006 and a film based on it opened in August 2010. It has been ranked as the bestseller in *New York Times* for more than 200 weeks. Constituted of 108 short stories, this book is not only about Elizabeth’s cultural experience in different countries but also a journey to find a balance between worldly enjoyment and divine transcendence. Therefore, expressions relating to religion or ideology in the original which are full of wisdom make the translation work more challenging but worthwhile at the same time.

The 2018 Chinese translation of *Eat, Pray, Love* is based on the first Chinese version published in 2008 by He Peihua, the translator, with several amendments. Its republication and active demand ten years after its princeps is sufficient to show its popularity among Chinese readers. He Peihua is a translator from Taiwan, China. Her other translations include 《万物的签名》 (*The Signature of All Things*, also written by Elizabeth Gilbert), 《伊斯坦布尔：一座城市的记忆》 (*Istanbul: Memories and City*), etc.

Majority of the previous research concerning translator’s (in)visibility was based on the translations from other languages into English versions, while there is less study on literary works which are translated into Chinese. The former demonstrates that most translation works are domesticated in English literature. In this essay, I will focus on how the translator’s (in)visibility is revealed in

non-English literature, taking the 2018 Chinese translation of *Eat, Pray, Love* as a case study.

## 2. Translator's Visibility

All these “foreignizing elements” in the 2018 translation I am going to discuss from three perspectives in this section make the translator distinctly visible, and the Chinese version full of exoticism and more appealing to foreign cultural explorers.

### 2.1. Translator's Visibility from Lexical Perspective

What I would like to indicate here is that there are respectable abstract words in the original which only exist in a specific culture or religion, like Sanskrit. Majority of such words are purely transliterated according to their pronunciation, such as *montage* 蒙太奇, *seva* (selfless service) 歇瓦, *shakipat* (divine initiation) 沙克蒂帕, *antevasin* (one who lives at the border) 安特瓦信; Some Italian words are kept as in the original, like *lampascione* in example (1).

Eg. 1) ST (Source Text): She took me out to lunch the other day, and what we ate included not only lamb and truffles and carpaccio rolled around hazelnut mousse but an exotic little serving of pickled lampascione, which is—as everyone knows—the bulb of the wild hyacinth. [3]

TT (Target Text): 前几天她带我去吃午饭，我们吃的不仅包括松露羊肉薄片卷榛果慕斯，还吃了一种珍奇的腌制“lampascione”——众所周知——野生风信子的球根。[4]

*Truffles* and *mousse* are both transliterated in this sentence, and *lampascione* is not translated. However, it would not bring much difficulty in understanding on what the food is to Chinese readers, especially to young readers.

Eg. 2) ST: Among all the nominees on my Potential New Italian Friends List, I am most intrigued to meet a fellow named...brace yourself...Luca Spaghetti. [3]

TT: 在我可能的意大利新朋友候选人名单中，我最想认识的人名叫……请做好心理准备……卢卡·斯帕盖蒂(Luca Spaghetti)<sup>1</sup>。

In order to explain the funny case when the Italian word *Spaghetti*, which is a kind pasta, could also be a name, the translator kept the original form of the name in brackets in her translation, and explained its general meaning in footnote.

### 2.2. Translator's Visibility from Syntactic Perspective

English is a “subject-prominent” [5] language in which the subject is highlighted, and structured at the beginning of a discourse, while Chinese is a “topic-prominent” (ibid.) with a highlighted topic usually located at the end. Therefore, in Chinese sentence mostly follow the reason-result, or detail-general principle, while in English the opposite is true. In example 3), the Chinese edition just follows the structure in the source text in the form of result-reason.

<sup>1</sup>Spaghetti 中文意为意大利面，意式面食之一。[4]

Eg. 3) ST: I liked everything about the way this was happening. Not with an action—not with an attempted kiss or a daring move—but with a question. And the correct question, too. [3]

TT: 我喜欢这一切的发生方式。不是打算亲吻我，或采取大胆行动，而是提出一个问题，而且是正确的问题。[4]

### 2.3. Translator's Visibility from Cultural Perspective

The abundant gain of reading this memoir would be the foreign culture experience. Luckily, the translator kept this privilege appropriately for the target readers. She resisted “dominate values in the target language” and performed “an act of cultural restoration” [2], making her activity visible in the translation, and the readers “realize they are reading a translation of a work from a foreign culture.” [6] See example 4) & 5).

Eg. 4) ST: Because God never slams a door in your face without opening a box of Girl Scout cookies (or however the old adage goes), some wonderful things did happen to me in the shadow of all that sorrow. [3]

TT: 因为当神把门往你脸上摔的时候，也会打开一盒女童军饼干(管它谚语怎么说)；在这些哀伤的阴影之中，我也遇到一些美妙的事情。[4]

Girl Scout cookies selling is one the three major activities of Girl Scouts of the USA, the largest nonprofit making association for girls in America. Obviously, here the author is referring to a Western saying *When one door closes, another door opens* in a jocular or metaphoric way. In Chinese, there is a similar saying like “天无绝人之路.” (Heaven always leaves us some way out.)

Eg. 5) ST: ...she wonders aloud, “Why don’t people talk more about the Council of Trent?”...My sister is not a religious person. Nobody in my family really is. (I’ve taken to calling myself the “white sheep” of the family.) [3]

TT: ……她则大声地想知道：“为什么人们不多谈谈天特会议<sup>2</sup>？”……我的姐姐并非信教之人，我们家没有人真的是(我称自己是家里的“白羊”<sup>3</sup>)。

*Council of Trent* may be a completely cultural barrier to Chinese readers, even to English readers who are non-religious. Therefore, a related annotation is provided in the footnote that it was on Council of Trent that principle of abstinence for clergies and the Seven Sacraments were re-established. In this situation the readers will not get lost suddenly in reading due to this issue. In addition, white sheep is transliterated, though in Western culture, it has connotative meaning, referring to those who bring danger of humiliation to people around him or her, as the saying “there is a black sheep in every flock.” goes. In total, there are 47 footnotes in the Chinese version.

“The natural way to represent the foreignness of foreign utterances is to leave them in the original, in whole or in part.” [7] As shown in the examples above in section two, the target text is full of foreignness shimmering with exotic charm to Chinese readers.

<sup>2</sup>天特会议重新确立了神职人员要禁欲的原则以及七圣礼。

<sup>3</sup>相对于“黑羊”，即害群之马。[4]

### 3. Translator's Invisibility

As Venuti advocated, foreignizing translation is a “relative term that still involves a degree of domestication since it translates a ST for a receiving culture” [6]. In this section, the translator's invisibility is more obvious at syntactic level than at the other two levels.

#### 3.1. Translator's Invisibility from Lexical Perspective

Words which are related to food and religion in the original are basically transliterated according to their pronunciations in the Chinese version. Yet if a corresponding one or a counterpart of some word is available in Chinese language, He also applied the domestication strategy.

Eg. 6) ST: This is why I have been alone for many months now. This is why, in fact, I have decided to spend this entire year in celibacy. [3]

TT: 这就是我已独处数月的理由。事实上，这正是我决定这一整年都过单身生活的原因。[4]

Concerning the context, the two sentences in original are progressively related: from *alone* to *celibacy*. The word *celibacy* here refers to the second of its meanings: either an unmarried status or abstaining from sexual relations *because of religious beliefs*. The Chinese version of it *单身* (*single*) seems to describe the connotation in a more general way.

Eg. 7) ST: Giovanni is my Tandem Exchange Partner. That sounds like an innuendo, but unfortunately it's not. All it really means is that we meet a few evenings a week in Rome to practice each other's languages. We speak first in Italian, and he is patient with me; then we speak in English, and I am patient with him. [3]

TT: 乔凡尼是我的“语伴”。这词听来颇具影射意味，可惜不然。它真正的意思是，我们每个礼拜在罗马此地见几个晚上的面，练习对方的语言。我们先以意大利语交谈，他迁就我；而后我们以英语交谈，我迁就他。[4]

The translation of “Tandem Exchange Partner” in its previous versions was literally translated into “串联交流伙伴”，a confusing phrase to Chinese readers. Here it simply means a partner to practice a foreign language. With this concise but expressive Chinese words “语伴” (Language Partner), the translation is easier for target readers to know the meaning of the original at a first glance even without reading the following contents. Also, “迁就” (to accommodate) in the translation is a proper choice here for the phrase *be patient with*.

#### 3.2. Translator's Invisibility from Syntactic Perspective

Although “in English-Chinese translating, the Chinese translation is more influenced by the English syntax and punctuation so that the one-to-one matchable pattern becomes predominant” [8] compared with Chinese-English translation, the translator illustrated a wise way of restructuring the sentence in Chinese so that target readers would “be inspired, moved, and aesthetically entertained in the same way as one reads the original” [9].

Eg. 8) ST: Imagine his surprise to discover that the happiest, most confident woman he'd ever met was actually—when you got her alone—a murky hole of bottomless grief. [3]

TT: 可以想象, 在与我独处时, 当他发现他所见过的最快乐、最有自信的女人竟然充满无底的哀伤, 他是多么吃惊。[4] [BT (Back Translation): You can imagine, when got me alone, when he discovered that the happiest, most confident woman he'd ever met was actually in bottomless grief, he would be so surprised.]

Eg. 9) ST: My body felt so alive and healthy from all these months of Yoga and vegetarian food and early bedtimes. [3]

TT: 这几个月的瑜伽、素食和早睡, 使我感到自己的身体如此健康有活力。[4] [BT: These months of Yoga and vegetarian food and early bedtimes makes me feel that my body is so alive and healthy.]

Different from strategies in example 3), translator restructured sentences in example 8) & 9) in translation by putting the precondition (*discovered that the happiest, most confident woman he'd ever met was actually a murky hole of bottomless grief*) at the beginning and the result (*so surprised*) at the end, and putting the reason (*months of Yoga and vegetarian food and early bedtimes*) at the beginning and the result (*feel that my body is so alive and healthy*) at the end respectively. It is in accord with the expression in Chinese language.

### 3.3. Translator's Invisibility from Cultural Perspective

As “Blum-Kulka note that there is a general tendency in translation to raise the level of explicitness, that is, increase the level of redundancy in the target text [10]”, He was not bounded by such tendency in her translation and demonstrated her versed attainment in Chinese literature. In this way, the target text is easy to follow and from this perspective, the translator became invisible.

Eg. 10) ST: For this same reason, when I pray, I do not address my prayers to The Universe, The Great Void, The Force, The Supreme Self, The Whole, The Creator, The Light, The Higher Power, or even the most poetic manifestation of God's name, taken, I believe, from the Gnostic gospels: “The Shadow of the Turning”. [3]

Translation: 同理, 在我祈祷时, 祷词的对象并非“宇宙”“太虚”“原力”“至高者”“全灵”“造物主”“灵光”“大能”, 或选自诺斯替教福音书中的、我认为最富有诗意的神名: “峰回路转的阴影”。[4]

峰回路转 (*Rounding a bend*) is a Chinese idiom originated from a famous ancient prose *The Roadside Hut of the Old Drunkard* [11] (translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang) written by Ouyang Xiu, a litterateur in Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) to describe the beautiful natural landscape of a mountain. The use of this idiom here seems to bring Chinese readers back to a Chinese context and results in the most abundant intention concerning the previous word *poetic*. Virtually, such examples are rarely found in the Chinese translation.

## 4. Conclusions

“The properly ethical aim of the translation act is receiving the Foreign as Foreign” [12], however, the majority of translated works nowadays are domesticated and most translators are invisible. That is not only because translation is “seen as derivative and of secondary quality and importance” [6] and “rarely considered a form of literary scholarship” [2], but also due to the power network of translation publishing. The publication of unabridged Chinese version in 2018 may be an indication that translation publishing is in China, where “literary freedom has never been comparable to that in Western democracies” [13], after experiencing a “market-oriented development from 2000 to 2009” [14], may provide more chances and possibilities for Chinese translators to be visible in translations in this and the coming new decades.

Being a mediator between the author and target language readers, “the translator has not only a bilingual ability but also a bi-cultural vision.” [15] Consequently, translator’s (in)visibility is reflected from both linguistic and cultural perspectives. The 2018 translation of *Eat, Pray, Love* re-entered the bestseller list with recommendations from several Chinese celebrities ten years after its first publication and demonstrated to some extent that “classical masterpieces live only in translation” [2]. It is undoubtedly an optimum choice for Chinese readers who are interested in foreign culture, particularly culture in America, Italy, India and Indonesia, and can be considered as a paradigmatic response to Venuti’s “Call to action”. As can be seen from the examples and analysis above, the translator of *Eat, Pray, Love* translated the original in a pretty wise way: domesticated the source text in terms of syntactic or textual levels to make it easier for Chinese readers to follow, while foreignizing the source text at lexical and cultural levels, leaving a vast space for target readers to learn and explore.

As literary translation has “received a certain degree of esteem among the literary public” [16], hopefully translator’s (in)visibility in this area, especially in English-Chinese translation, will attract more attention and consideration from both researchers and translators.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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