

Analyzing the Inevitability of the Plot of Things Fall Apart Through the Post Colonial Perspective

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Abstract: Based on the description of Igbo culture in *Things Fall Apart*, the father of African literature Chinua Achebe's work, this article analyzes the cultural characteristics of Igbo society and the inevitability of the development of the plot of novels under specific social contexts. It also provides a discussion of the complexities of the characterization of the main character, Okonkwo, including the symbolism and deliberation that the author assigns to him. Finally, we conclude that Achebe's attempt on overturning Western-centrism is not only for changing Europeans' attitude, but also for correcting his compatriots' recognition.

Keywords: Things Fall Apart, Post-colonial perspective, Igbo Culture, Africa Religion.

1. Introduction

As the father of African literature, the works of Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe have attracted widespread discussion and attention, both from the perspective of literary nature and social significance. He is a typical post-colonialism writer who began his writing career in order to giving a voice to Africans. In his narration, the tribal life in Africa shows its own colorful cultural heritage. One of his most famous works, *Things Fall Apart*, is the object of this discussion. [1] *Things Fall Apart* tells the stony life of tribal hero Okonkwo in the context of Igbo culture. At the beginning of the novel, Okonkwo's achievements and his past difficulties are skated over. The author focuses on the second half of his life when he gradually went to the trough of his life due to a series of accidents and struggles after obtaining a very high social status, and finally chose suicide.

Achebe creates a symbolic heroic image. His arrangements about the life experiences of other characters and the story ending have also caused wide discussions. People often use "destiny" to describe the inevitable. So is the plot direction in the novel the inevitable "destiny" of Okonkwo? Later, I'd like to discuss the profundity behind the plot setting in *Things Fall Apart*.

2. The Igbo Culture Washed Away by the Wave of Colonization

What Achebe has always wanted to emphasize in his work is that the Igbo are not as barbaric as many colonialism articles portray. [2] On the contrary, according to the details of the article, their society included many virtues that Europeans also aspire to.

First of all, the Igbo society is very cohesive. [3] Their unity seems to be exclusive, confined to one community. But when Okonkwo was evicted, his mother's family in another clan enthusiastically accept his family. It can be seen that the cohesion and composition of Igbo society is mainly based on the harmony and mutual assistance between families. This characteristic can also be found in the Okonkwo's individual family. He had three wives, but they did not envy each other. They support the whole family together with their inclusiveness as an microcosm of the Igbo society.

Secondly, the Igbo society also pursues justice and democracy. They do not wage war at will, but try to resolve it peacefully first. That's because they believe that only a war that Oracle deems righteous can be won. At the same time, they will decide cases publicly in a manner of the council of the elders. Egwugwu, dressed up by nine prestigious men, negotiate in a small house to solve tribal issues. In addition, the fairness of the judgments of the Igbo society lies in the fact that their laws will punish everyone equally, and more importantly, the laws of the Igbo society will improve and improve themselves.

Lastly, the values of the Igbo society are also quite positive. They pursue physical health and strength, and also appreciate a series of virtues such as industriousness and humility. They have their own value and philosophies about the world, and educate their juniors through proverbs and fable stories. [4]

At this point, it is not difficult to understand why Igbo society can be considered as a utopia. However, possessing such characteristic does not mean that the Igbo society is perfect. In fact, because the customs and culture of Igbo society were closely linked to the religious worldview of Africans, such a system maintained based on reverence for supernatural forces is as limited and weak as the tribe-men's restricted knowledge of the world at the time.

Religion is part that we need to focus on, as it is closely related to the "destiny" of many characters. Religion in Africa is more like the continual participation in traditions passed on from one generation to the next. [5] This feature is reflected in the Igbo religion, which makes faith not an autonomous choice for Igbos. Besides, with the proved relationship between religion and self-identity, it can be said that the self-identity of the Igbo people is forcibly shaped instead of gradually completed. [6] Some tribesmen did not understand the principle of their gods, especially those superstitious vices, but were compelled by fear and awe and had to conform to that particular way of life. [7]

If isolated African societies still have the potential for self-improvement and progress, then the colonizer invasion completely upsets the social balance sustained by religious dictatorship. The tolerance of the Igbo tribe towards the colonists led to the neglect of the beginning of believe crises, which eventually developed into social chaos. [8] The conflict between Christianity and indigenous religions also led to

confusion about the culture identity of the people of Igbo. The tribesmen who chose to convert to Christianity did not radically change their faith, but applied their long-lived experience in a religious society to another worldview. In other words, they still retain the habitual cognition influenced by long-term life in Igbo society. This incomplete transformation allow the converts to help colonial invasions and eventually contribute to the collapse of their societies.[9]

After analyzing the triggers of the developing plot of the stories, we are able to explain whether the plot of the novel is inevitable. In fact, there is no true or false about different religions, and there is no better or worse about two society. The only thing the arrival of European colonizers meant is that a collision occurs between these two alien cultures. In such a confrontation, Europe preemptively caught the dominated position. As a result, Africa could only passively face the ensuring problems. In a word, the intervention of colonists in tribes and causing social unrest is actually a historical inevitability, which can also be considered a part of the "truth" that Achebe wanted to present in his writings.

Here, I would also like to elaborate on the experiences of two characters, and combine the previous summary of the characteristics of Igbo society to prove that their experiences are indeed the "destiny" that's not changeable under the solidified Igbo civilization. Ikernefuna, as a hostage chosen by her own tribe, seems to be the starting of the series of tragedies. Ikernefuna's death was decided by the Oracle. In the traditional Igbo society without colonizers, Oracles were the most unquestionable principle.[10] As a result, Ikernefuna, who appeared early in the story, seems unable to escape the death. Ironically, the warm and inclusive atmosphere in Okonkwo's family allowed Ikernefuna to establish a deep friendship with the family members. This friendship eventually evolved into sense of contradictions and suspicions, and the most affected of which was Okonkwo's eldest son, Nwoye.[11]

Nwoye is a boy who is always blamed by Okonkwo for inheriting his grandfather's personality. Unable to meet his father's expectations, a deep rift just like which excited between Okonkwo's father and Okonkwo prevented both Nwoye and his father from understanding each other. Later, Nwoye found the possibility of unloading the heavy burden from Christianity, so he chose to convert to Christianity, which further worsened the father-son conflict. The contradiction between Nwoye and Okonkwo is actually the embodiment of the risks of the polarized values in Igbo society. Every man living in Igbo society is kidnapped by this collective pursuit, and their choice is either to conform to society's values or to become a "no title" that is despised by the public. It also explained why Nwoye chose to escapes the order of Igbo society after the colonists opened a window.

Of course, of all the characters's experience, the most fatalistic one is the protagonist's. In the next part, I will analyze Okonkwo's character and show why his tragic ending is also inevitable.

3. The Tragic Hero Belonging to the Igbo Society

Okonkwo is a character closely connected to Igbo society, and he can indeed be called as "hero" in terms of the traditional values of Igbo society. But just as Igbo society itself is not as rosy as it seems at first, Okonkwo is not perfect.

Igbo society is an overtly patriarchal society, and Okonkwo

is a classic patriarchal image. He was strong, hardworking, and famous, treating his family with a stern attitude. However, Okonkwo's heart is fragile. He is an unquestionably paranoid man who does not possess true intelligence and detachment. All his achievements were built on his fear of "tenderness" and "weakness." Okonkwo wasn't even afraid of defeat or the threat of white people, but he feared that he would become an agabla, a "woman," or an incompetent person like his biological father. As he does not want to admit his fear, he chose to cover up this feeling with hatred and anger.

Okonkwo is the most suitable figure to represent the Igbo tribe and its culture, as he is a "hero" character who relies on Igbo's special social system.[12] In other words, Okonkwo represents the isolated Igbo culture, with undeniable advantages, but also fatal shortcomings for foreign enemies. Therefore, when the traditional Igbo society dies, his era will also usher in the end. In the novel, Okonkwo, who wanted to organize her clansmen to attack the white people, sadly discovered that his once brave and warlike clansmen have become indecisive "women". This is because those supporting characters represent real people on history, who will hesitate and surrender, while Okonkwo is an abstract character.[13] He is the representative of the "era of men", the spirit of the times that will always keep charging forward, and the epitome of an old generation that has been abandoned. Okonkwo is like the once closed Igbo society, shattered totally by the wave of colonization.

In addition to being an individual case foreshadowing the ending of Igbo's society, Okonkwo's story also contain style of ancient Greek tragedy. If we compare him with characters like Achilles, we can see his similarities with the classic Greek heroes. Okonkwo's Achilles' heel is his character flaw dominated by fear. This resemblance seems to contradict the aforementioned statement that Okonkwo is a hero who belongs exclusively to Igbo. That's because Igbo's society itself embodies some of the characteristics of the ideal state of ancient Greek philosophy. As a result, the heroic image pursued by the ancient Greeks naturally coincided with some of Okonkwo's characteristics.

The Westernized plot design adopted by Achebe here may have been intentional. As he said when explaining why he wrote in English, only by writing in the language of the colonists could the colonists understand the meaning, only by writing in the framework of stories familiar to the West can his works attract the attention of readers in the context of European culture.[14] Then he can convey the core of his works and tell a story that belongs to Africans in a Westernized shell.

The last thing I want to discuss is the ending of Okonkwo. He chose suicide, which is an act despised by Igbo society and will be regarded as an affront to the goddess of the earth. Actually, I don't find Okonkwo's suicide surprising. Okonkwo has never been a devout believer.[15] He had previously been faithful because he had to conform to the values of Igbo culture if he wanted to get the success defined by Igbo tradition. In fact, even during the period of longing for success, he still couldn't completely disguise his disrespect for the earth goddess. When the fear, the undertone of his life, of his own cowardly tendencies outweighs his reverence for theocracy, he chose to vent his anger rather than calmly recall the precepts of peace. Since Okonkwo has never been pious, it is not surprising that he chose to die in a heretical way when he was disappointed in his people and gave up the pursuit of glory in their perspective.

4. Conclusion

Combined with the analysis of the full text, we can see that Achebe's seemingly dramatic ups and downs in *Things Fall Apart* actually contain careful thinking and setting. Under the common thrust of interlaced foreshadowing and given story background, it's inevitable for the plot to progress in such way.

It is worth noting that Achebe had never denied the development power that colonists brought to Igbo society, and he also objectively described the shortcomings of Igbo culture in *Things Fall Apart*. What he was trying to refute was not the historical fact that Africa had "failed", but the racist and discriminatory rhetoric.[16] From his writing, readers will realize that the Igbo culture is not backward, but has many similarities with the "civilized society" advocated by Europeans.

More importantly, Achebe's story will not only inspire European readers, but also his confused compatriots. He used an authentic narrative to call for the revival and reflection of national culture and express his thoughts on the future development of the country. The plot of his novel is inevitable because it is limited by a predetermined history, but the future of Africa is still full of possibilities. Achebe's desire to overthrow Western-centrism is not just for a fame in Westerners' perspective, but more for the awakening of his compatriots. Only when the colonized themselves are not trapped by the colonizers can they have a steadfast ideological basis to fight for equality, instead of being benighted and numb like the characters in the novel who are framed by the "setting".[17]

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