Post-Mao Chinese Literature as World Literature: Struggling with the Systematic and the Allegorical

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Abstract:

This paper presents the main critics and their arguments in the study of post-Mao Chinese literature as world literature. By applying Franco Moretti's methodology of "distant reading" and combing Shu-mei Shih, Jing Tsu and many other relevant theorists' points, it points out the limitation of concepts like "circulation" and "boundary" in the discussion of world literature. It argues that in the specific case of post-Mao Chinese literature vis-à-vis world literature, the dialectic struggle between international mobility and intranational accessibility is an inevitable difficulty. Both in China and abroad, this difficulty is the result of a single ideological construction—the reinforcement of the expected.

Keywords: China, Chinese literature, world literature, Post-Mao, allegorical

Introduction

World literature, as an academic field of literary studies, has been flourishing in the 21st century—an era that promises an unprecedented intensification of globalisation. Yet the concept of "world literature" itself has a history that long precedes the contemporary mode of globalisation propelled by multinational capitalism and information technologies. Two of the field-defining anthologies of world literature theories in Anglophone academia, *World Literature: A Reader* and *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, trace the idea of "world literature" back to the German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In China, the most influential theoretical anthology on world literature, *Theories of World Literature: A Reader*, edited by Yin Xing et al., also cites Goethe as the starting point of world literature theories.[1] Despite its theoretical self-contradictions and historical constraints, Goethe's "communicational" conceptualisation of *Weltliteratur* as literary works that circulate beyond national boundaries and have universalistic values for the whole of humanity has maintained its appeal (Wang, "Weltliteratur" 298).[2]

With such conceptual mobility across time and space, *Weltliteratur* is Edward Said's "travelling theory" par excellence ("The World" 226). However, apart from the glocalising cross-pollination of ideas

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[1] As the scope of the paper is focused on post-Mao mainland China and its politics of recognition in the international literary space, China in such a context always refers to the PRC (People's Republic of China, excluding Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau). Some overseas Chinese writers are also discussed but most of them were born and based in mainland China before they moved abroad.

[2] Many of these shortcomings, including the Eurocentrism and inconsistency of Goethe's examples, have been discussed by John Pizer (18-25), Jing Tsu ("World Literature" 163) and Zhang Longxi ("The Relevance" 242).

that such travelling theories can produce, many academics have also pointed to the heterogeneous elements of inspiration behind them. According to Jing Tsu, Goethe's *Weltliteratur* was inspired by his reading of a Chinese book called *Hao Qiu Zhuan*, a simple and popular romantic story that was "considered to be a lesser literary text". As she speculates, Goethe's reading of this novel was based more on his ethnographical and historical interest in China than its "literary value", which indicates that, right from the birth of the quasi-utopian idea of world literature, "the Chinese novel…is more Chinese than it is a novel" (Tsu, "World Literature" 164). Ironically, less than a decade after Goethe's proposition inspired by Chinese literature, China was defeated by Britain in the Opium War, with many more European invasions to follow. Since then, the meaning of world literature for Chinese writers/intellectuals has predominantly been a one-way struggle of adaptation and recognition. On one hand, ideas from the (outside/Western) world kept flowing into China as intellectuals from the late-Qing and early Republican era, such as Hu Shi, Lu Xun and Yan Fu, were heavily influenced by European notions of science, politics and aesthetics and sought to introduce them to (strengthen) China. On the other hand, many diplomats and writers in this era, most notably Chen Jitong and Zheng Zhenduo, were frustrated by how Chinese literature remained "the farthest in distance from the literature of the world" while also lamenting "the lack of proper recognition of Chinese literature by Western readers" (Zheng qtd. in Tsu, "Getting Ideas" 300; Tsu, "World Literature" 165).

The recent economic/political rise of China has revived the discussion of the role these intellectuals played in the formation of modern Chinese literature as world literature.[3] However, in a world where English now serves as the lingua franca, the "cultural deficit" between China and the Anglophone world still characterises the relationship between Chinese literature and world literature (Richardson 28).[4] In this sense, the situation now is not so different from that of a century ago. Leading intellectuals in China such as Wang Ning are still rigorously calling for more translations of Chinese literature into English as they regard it as an essential means for China to enter the sphere of world literature ("On World Literatures" 7; "Diasporic Writing" 121; "Word Literature and China" 20). As Paul Richardson and Bonnie McDougall point out by citing market statistics,[5] for China, as a populous country that is on its way to becoming the biggest economy in the world, there is a "baffling" discrepancy between its possession of hard power and its exercise of soft power, especially in the sphere of literary influence (Richardson 29; McDougall, "World Literature" 56). Wang also admits that "we cannot say that China is a cultural and intellectual power…Chinese literature and culture are still little known to the outside world." ("Diasporic Writing" 120)

Faced with this disappointing situation, one is propelled to ask: *why is it so difficult for modern Chinese literature to become world literature?* Apart from the lack of translations, many sinologists in the West tend to explain this discrepancy by criticising the quality of modern Chinese literature itself. One of the most prominent examples is Bonnie McDougall herself, who, in her systematic introduction to modern Chinese literature, calls it "depressingly mediocre" and links it to a form of "plagiarism" driven by "impulses to imitation." ("Fictional Authors" 228) Similarly, Stephen Owen, in his discussion on the topic of world poetry, laments that post-Mao Chinese poets are incapable of producing "good poetry" because their intention to "sell oneself abroad by what an international audience, hungry for political virtue…finds touching," and thus he states that such "self-victimisation" only results in their poetry resembling "poor Third

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3 Two of the most popular candidates for world literature from this era are Lu Xun and Qian Zhongshu. See Dooghan (226-263), Zhang ("Qian Zhongshu" 198-202) and Huters (210-27) for details.

4 Compared to the circulations of literature between different Anglophone countries or even different European languages, the issue of translation has a considerable amount of influence on this cultural deficit between post-Mao Chinese literature and the sphere of Anglophone literatures. Such dialectics between cultural deficits and the politics of translation can be situated within the larger debate on the "system theories" of translations studies, which posits very important power relationships between different literary systems but is beyond the scope of this paper. See Pym (200) and Venuti (132) for more details on these theoretical formulations.

5 For example, Richardson states that "in 2010, the UK sold nearly 1,800 copyrights into China and bought 170." (30) Similarly, McDougall, writing in 2014, states that for the Chinese authority and publishing industries, "any book that goes beyond 10,000 copies is considered a great success… only the Chinese classics enjoy such sales; translations into English of modern literature does [sic] not reach even these low figures." (McDougall, "World Literature" 56)

World imitations of poor translations of Western poetry." (29) In response, some Chinese critics, such as Liu Hongtao and Gu Mingdong, have pointed out that such harsh criticisms are driven by a kind of "Sinologism" that seeks to prioritize traditional Chinese literature over modern Chinese literature (Liu, "Chinese Literature" 4; Gu 42).

Indeed, as advocated by Zhang Longxi, Zhang Yingjin and Liu Hongtao, a much more productive approach to investigating this discrepancy is to focus on the working mechanisms of world literature and explore its structural constraints on Chinese literature that seek to enter or have already entered this space (Zhang Longxi, "The Relevance" 247; Zhang Yingjin 7-8; Liu, "Transmutation" 19). Following this approach, this paper discusses the position of post-Mao Chinese literature in world literature. It aims to expose how the Western/Anglophone literary authority and market wield different "technologies of recognition", especially "the systematic" and "the allegorical" that Shu-Mei Shih has highlighted, to confine post-Mao Chinese literature to a constant struggle between domestic authoritarian "literary governance" and "predetermined" interpretations and expectations from the West (Shih 18-9; Tsu, "Sound" 1).[6] Part One introduces the most significant recent definitions of world literature and their relevance to the post-Mao Chinese context, and in such discussions it seeks to broaden Shih's theorisation of "the systematic" through the two key concepts of "international mobility" and "intranational accessibility". Part Two then specifically focuses on the highly controversial idea about the third-world national allegory, and by participating in this debate it attempts to not only make clear the allegory's restrictive power but also its potential for appropriation and subversion that Chinese writers can actively exploit to simultaneously move into and move against the space of world literature. As a practice of what Franco Moretti calls "distant reading" that focuses on patterns, trends and literary "waves", this paper discusses a range of translated Chinese writers that have been active and influential in the post-Mao era ("Conjectures" 56). Some diasporic Chinese writers are also referred to as examples of how cross-cultural writers may employ various strategies to secure their influence in the sphere of world literature. Through these analyses and discussions, this paper argues that though Chinese writers face the intersecting oppression from different forces of expectations, awareness about the mechanisms of these politics may help them come up with strategies of resistance in their world-constructing creative processes. As this paper shows, in this regard, Chinese writers still have much to learn from diasporic writers in the West.

Part One: Textual Movements between Systems—International Mobility and Intranational Accessibility

In order to explore the reasons behind Chinese literature's difficulties on its "route to world literature", it is crucial to examine recent theoretical definitions of world literature (Liu, "Chinese Literature" 1). In his most influential work *What is World Literature?*, David Damrosch defines world literature as "all literary works that circulate beyond their culture or origin, either in translation or in their original language" and urges readers to rethink world literature as "less a set of works than a network" of associations, circulations and reception (8, 3). However, this generic focus on "circulation" and vague definitions of "origin" have left Damrosch's theory open to many challenges. For example, both Sowon Park and Karen Laura Thornber have used the example of East Asian literature to argue for a kind of "regional world literature" that can circulate widely without the necessary engagements with the Anglophone world (Park 8; Thornber 460-2). Damrosch himself also alludes to the problematics of positionality and conflicts within the sphere of world literature when he states that "the worlds of world literature are often worlds in collision." (14) With regards

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6   The term "Western" or "the West" in this paper refers to cultures of Europe and North America, especially the UK and the US as these two English-speaking countries are the major markets for modern Chinese literature in translation. Similarly, when "Anglophone" and "the West" are used interchangeably in this paper, it is not to ignore the many other European languages and conflate these two terms but rather to emphasize the significance of the English language as the primary target language of translation for Chinese literature to enter the sphere of world literature.

to such possibilities of "collision", conflicts or hierarchy in the seemingly cosmopolitan space of world literature, Franco Moretti's conjectures on world literature offer a much more straightforward explanation. In his "distant reading" of the patterns of the unequal flows of world literature, Moretti borrows the concepts related to centres and peripheries from Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory and states that, in the case of the modern novel, European literature has always served as a centre of influence, while other peripheral cultures always have to "compromise" between European literary forms and local materials as they struggle to move towards the modern novel according to "a law of literary evolution." ("Conjectures" 56, 58, 60)[7] He even goes as far as claiming that "movement from one periphery to another (without passing through the centre) is almost unheard of," and thus he would probably treat Park and Thornber's inter-Asian paradigm as a literary "sub-system" that does not operate at the level of global (therefore real) world literature ("More Conjectures" 75).

In Moretti's conjectures, China expectedly belongs to the periphery of world literature, and he cites Henry Zhao's study of late-Qing fiction as the proof that its peripheral status is categorised by "the encounter of Western plots and Chinese narrative" (63). To counter such a singular and reductive reading, Shu-Mei Shih is quite right to point out that Moretti's theory is "astoundingly neat" and that he cannot take "one scholar's work in English as the authoritative last word on the Chinese novel". She then lists many Qing-dynasty classic *xiaoshuo* (fiction) as counter-examples (Shih 19). However, the problem with these arguments is that they are discussing the positionality of Chinese literature vis-à-vis world literature by engaging only with nineteenth century texts, many of which were written before the Opium War and the Xinhai revolution. In Moretti's model, though "a limited discrepancy between material and literary hegemony" can exist, it is still the former that more or less determines the latter, and this corresponds, to a large extent, to Marx and Engels' consideration of world literature as a result of the expansion of bourgeois capital (Moretti, "More Conjectures" 78; Marx and Engels 16). Such materialist considerations are particularly useful in explaining modern Chinese literature's peripheral status and requires the contextualisation of this status in concrete socio-political terms.

According to Xie Ming, China's modernisation has at least three phases: the New Culture movement in the early twentieth century, the Marxist universalism in the communist era, and the post-Mao reform era with "the current process of global capitalism facilitating China's integration with the advanced West." (16) As briefly mentioned in the introduction, China in the first phase of its modernisation was more or less a passive recipient of Western ideas, and this inferior literary and intellectual position in the world has not fundamentally changed in the third phase after the economic reform. Devastated by the Cultural Revolution, China's "(re-)integration with the advanced West" in the 1980s was inevitably accompanied by frustrating realisations and confrontations with its economic and intellectual poverty. For Chinese writers, such frustrations had led to deep reflections on the communist era and reignited a "cultural fever" for Western literature and theories, which then formed the two fundamental elements of the "scar literature" and "root-seeking" movements in this era (Li, 110). Most of the translated Chinese writers that receive international attention now, including Mo Yan, Gao Xingjian, Ma Jian, Yan Lianke, Su Tong, Yu Hua, Jia Pingwa, Han Shaogong, Li Rui, Wang Anyi, Wang Shuo, Feng Jicai, Can Xue and etc., were or started to become active in this period. The continuing dominance of these writers over other Chinese writers in the sphere of translated world literature is a very indicative phenomenon, compelling one to ask: since China's socioeconomic situation has drastically changed since the 1980s, why is it still this generation of writers that dominates the space of post-Mao Chinese literature in the sphere of world literature?

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7   Yet it is worth noting that Moretti's borrowing is not a straightforward one as he does not subscribe to a consistent correspondence between politico-economic power and literary influence. For example, he treats Japan, which is categorised as a core country in Wallerstein's world system, as a peripheral country in the sphere of world literature because the modern Japanese novel is also a product of the combination of "raw materials of Japanese social experience and the abstract formal patterns of Western novel construction" ("Conjectures", 58). The contemporary discrepancy between China's hard power and literary influence (as a form of soft power) as mentioned before presents a similar case.

Indeed, in a sense, the current international reception of Chinese literature as world literature seems to be haunted by a force of belatedness that has failed to catch up with China's growing consumerism and diversity.[8] For example, except for some flash-in-the-pan sensationalist writers like Zhou Weihui and Chen Xiwo, younger generations of Chinese writers, who started writing in the 1990s and 2000s and have managed to achieve domestic successes, such as Zhang Yueran, Xu Duoyu, Li Shasha, Guo Jingming, Jiang Fangzhou, Yang Zhi etc., do not seem to receive the same level of popularity and acclaim even when their works are translated into English (e.g. Han Han, Feng Tang, Jiang Rong etc.). In addition, compared to the former group of old generation writers, whose works are often full of countryside landscapes and regional cultural references wrapped in unique, localised (often rustic) styles of the Chinese language, the language of these young urbanites is generally more congenial to translation into English. If world literature is indeed literature, as Damrosch has imagined, which "gains in translation", aren't these young writers supposed to gain more than those old writers can lose in such translations? (281) Or, in a theoretical sense, as Damrosch does not necessarily associate this "gain" with ease or translational fidelity, how might this loss of contexts and linguistic specificities be compensated by the politics of difference, which essentially constitutes the force of this translational "gain"?

What this belatedness suggests is that though most of the definitions of world literature in Anglophone academia link it to textual movements that "cross borders" to form some kind of "collectivity", or in Spivak's term "planetarity," this simple focus on movements is not enough to explain the working mechanisms of world literature as a governed space that is close to the centre and has precise thresholds for selection, especially for translated literature from the periphery (71). To help solve this problem, Shu-Mei Shih has called for a shift of attention to what she calls "technologies of recognition", which "refer to the mechanisms in the discursive (un)conscious…that produce 'the West' as the agent of recognition and 'the rest' as the object of recognition, in representation." She states that both academic discourses and the literary market participate in these "technologies of recognition", which include "the systematic," "the allegorical," "global multiculturalism" and "the exceptional particular" (Shih 17). In the case of post-Mao Chinese literature vis-à-vis world literature, her theorisation of "the systematic" is of particular relevance. Frustrated by some "poststructuralist-inflected Marxist" scholars' double standards towards non-Western literature, she cites Said's *Orientalism* and states that "antisystematic analysis is reserved for the West but 'omnipotent definitions', broad generalisations, and the imposition of systems and structures are reserved for the non-West." (18) In a way, Shih's idea of "the systematic," as a "technology of recognition" controlled by the West, is Said's Orientalist writ large: "the Orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else: he does this for himself, for the sake of his culture." ("Orientalism" 67) Following this associative line of arguments, one may infer that the Chinese writers of Mo Yan's generation gain recognition in the West because their writings, as (albeit problematically) placed in the categories of "scar" or "root-seeking" literatures, tend to be more collaborative with the reductive mechanisms of "the systematic." Just as Goethe read *Hao Qiu Zhuan* as first and foremost a CHINESE novel, these writers' (perceived) participation in these literary movements, which may just be organic intellectual responses to China's domestic political changes, nonetheless serves to not only make Chinese literature (and China) "manageable" and "decipherable" for the West, but also provide certain resistant and reflective political virtues that cater to "Western sensibilities and expectations" (Shih, 21).

In other words, the working mechanisms of "the systematic" that post-Mao Chinese literature encoun-

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8   Even though it can be argued that this force of belatedness is always present in the circulation of cultural products, especially when it involves translations and international publishing industries, what I focus on here is the exacerbation of this problem for post-Mao Chinese literature, caused by the working mechanisms or "technologies of recognition" of world literature as a hierarchical space of international literary governance. This point is discussed in detail in Part Two.

ters on its route to world literature tend to involve a demand for Chinese writers' literary resistance to domestic politics, especially with regards to the Cultural Revolution and the 1989 Tiananmen incident.[9] What such a demand often leads to is exactly the paradoxical "collision" between Chinese literature and world literature that Damrosch has hinted: many of the Chinese writers that are recognised in the sphere of world literature in the Anglophone world are banned or have works that are or used to be banned in China (14). Examples include all works by Gao Xingjian, all works by Ma Jian, most of Ha Jin's works, most of Anchee Min's works, Mo Yan's *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* and *The Garlic Ballads*, Zhou Weihui's *Shanghai Baby*, Mian Mian's *Candy*, Chen Xiwo's *I Love My Mum*, Jia Pingwa's *Ruined City*, Xinran's *Sky Burial*, Yan Lianke's *Serve the People!*, Wang Shuo's *Please Don't Call me Human* and many more.[10] Some of these translated books, such as *Shanghai Baby*, *Candy* and *I Love My Mother*, are even explicit in their collaboration/complicity with "the systematic" as they flaunt "banned in China" on their covers or back pages, seemingly a marketing strategy.[11] Similarly, some of these writers, such as Gao Xingjian, Ma Jian and Guo Xiaolu, are often, despite their own will or the accessibility of their works in China, labelled "dissent writers" by Western media.[12]

Therefore, considering that Chinese domestic politics is such an influential, or even integral, part of the working mechanisms of "the systematic", Shih's notion of "the systematic" should also be broadened to consider not only Western technologies of recognition but also domestic "literary governance" in China (Tsu, "Sound" 1).[13] That is to say, for a better understanding of the tension between post-Mao Chinese literature and world literature, the notion of world literature as only the circulation of literature is inadequate, and should be shifted to focus, instead, on the dialectics between international mobility and intranational accessibility embedded in the processes of such periphery-to-centre movements. On one hand, as mentioned before, simply translating intranationally accessible or popular Chinese literature into English rarely results in international success as most of these works would not (be allowed to) address the politics that the Western "systematic" demands. On the other hand, not only are many internationally mobile and successful Chinese works not accessible in China, but many authors of such works have completely moved their locations of writing and publishing to the West, which easily leads to comments like "Chinese authors write more efficiently for a world audience from outside their homeland than from within" being made (Richardson, 33).

The most prominent example is the Nobel laureate Gao Xingjian, who is the first Chinese-language writer to win the prize. After his plays were banned by the Chinese government, Gao fled to France in 1987 and became a political refugee, publishing his works in Chinese in Taiwan, and when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2000 he was already a French citizen and had started writing in French. As Julia Lovell has observed, many of his literary philosophies, such as the non-conformist ideas of "no-ism" and "cold literature," held great appeal to the Nobel committee, who praised Gao for his "universal validity." (8) Yet she

9   Indeed, apart from the scar literature related to the Cultural Revolution, reflective and critical works written by Chinese writers in exile (in the West) that deal with the Tiananmen incident have also created its own "genre", which Belinda Kong calls "Tiananmen fictions outside the square" (1). Expectedly, almost all the works of this "genre" are banned in China and therefore it can be said that in China, the Tiananmen incident is also part of the systematic, but rather than its affirmation, it is its negation.

10   Some writers' paradoxical "collision" took a slightly convoluted route as their works rose to fame both in China and the West after they were adapted into films that were banned in China. Examples include Yu Hua's *To Live* (turned into a banned film of the same name by Zhang Yimou), Yan Geling's short story "Xiu Xiu: The Sent-down Girl" (turned into a banned film of the same name by Joan Chen), and Su Tong's *Wives and Concubines* (turned into another of Zhang Yimou's banned films called *Raise the Red Lantern*). For a detailed discussion about banned films that propelled their source fiction works to success in China and abroad, see Lu (1-23).

11   However, it has to be noted that this "banned" label that co-opts censorship into a marketing strategy is in no way exclusive to the circulation of post-Mao Chinese literature in the West. One of the most influential examples of such co-optation is the "banned in Boston" label that was employed in the US from the late 19th century through the mid-20th century, effectively boosting the sales of the books, including those by Ernest Hemingway, Aldous Huxley, William Faulkner, D.H. Lawrence and many more, that carried the label. See Boyer (20) for a detailed account.

12   Such labelling can be easily found online, often contradictory to the writer's own position or simple facts. For example, Gao Xingjian consistently subscribes to a quasi-nihilist ideology that does not view literature as engagements with politics, and Guo Xiaolu has never been banned in China in any strict sense.

13   Jing Tsu's concept of "literary governance" is primarily about how the nation employs certain ideological tools and linguistic policies to regulate Chinese-language literatures in countries such as Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore, but this well-constructed term is borrowed here because such ideological/linguistic control of literature at the national level also applies to mainland China and its authoritarian system of literary censorship ("Sound" 1).

also points out that the Swedish academy's press release concerning Gao's prize disproportionately focuses on his two novels, *Soul Mountain* and *One's Man's Bible*, and a drama called "Fugitives," which are arguably the most political works of Gao in that they touch upon the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen incident (20). What Lovell alludes to is that a type of "the systematic" is at work here, and yet the reaction from the Chinese government was no less drastic: Xinhua News, which is often regarded as the mouthpiece of the Chinese government, reported that "it seems the Nobel committee has its political criterion for giving the prize for literature, instead of doing so from the angle of literature…this shows that the Nobel prize for literature has virtually been used for political purposes and thus has lost its authority." (Xinhua News, qtd. in Lovell 27) An immediate ban on publishing or discussing Gao followed, which has remained till this day. Gao himself, however, often categorizes his post-Nobel period as "the third phase of his life"—the phase of him as a cosmopolite, "a citizen of the world" (Gentz 138). Despite this outlook, he is still constantly facing questions about China, to which he responds that his life in China is finished and that he has no wish to return to a place that bans his books (Lee and Dutrait, 747). It seems that both the Chinese government and many of Gao's readers outside of China have completely ignored his works in French. Therefore, Gao's high status in world literature is full of irony: though his Nobel Prize cannot be completely separated from "the systematic" interpretations of China's politics, his "world" is one that completely excludes China. In a similar way, many other exiled writers, such as Ha Jin and Li Yiyun, have even rejected the Chinese language and express a sense of freedom in writing in a world language like English (Ha 117; Link, "China" 57).

These examples demonstrate that post-Mao Chinese literature often faces the double oppression of both domestic authoritarian "literary governance" and the demanding forces of "the systematic" for peripheral literatures in the West, and more importantly, they reveal to us that these two forces of oppression are not really the results of two different ideological constructions, but one. Despite the different social structures and agendas behind these forces, both the "literary governance" in China and "the systematic" of the West are about the reinforcement of the expected, cultural and political. But there are still some Chinese writers who, by reconciling international mobility and intranational accessibility, can successfully transform their works into world literature. The most successful writer in this regard is of course the other Chinese Nobel laureate Mo Yan, the majority of whose works are nonetheless foundationally involved in the "generalisable" and "decipherable" movements of scar and "root-seeking" literature. Indeed, as much as Mo advocates that "good literature is larger than politics", the intellectual debates about his collaboration with the Chinese censorship system and government have continued since his award in 2012 (Mo, "A Writer" 24; Link, "Does" 3; Liu, "The Reception" 1-3). Hence, even the occasional achievement realised in both modes would not completely erase the problematic dialectic between international mobility and intranational accessibility; Yet apart from gaining greater awareness about this dialectic, there are literary means and strategies that Chinese writers may employ to facilitate their mobility without compromising their critical power, as the following section about the Third World national allegory attempts to suggest.

Part Two: Oppression or Opportunity?—the Spectre of the Third World National Allegory

In her article, Shu-Mei Shih has also emphasised "the allegorical" as another Western technology of recognition that is of significant relevance for Chinese literature (21). As a response to Frederic Jameson's statement that "all Third World narratives are…necessarily…national allegories" (69), Shih views "the allegorical" as a mode of literary interpretation and/or production that relies on "a predetermined signified" prone to the First World's "stereotyped knowledge" about Third World nations.[14] She uses the example of

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14 It is worth noting that "First World" and "Third World" were terminological inventions of the Cold War period and thus their ideological suitability for describing post-Mao Chinese literature and the contemporary Anglophone world might be questionable, but these terms are still used in this paper not only because they have been consistently used in academic discussions about the national allegory since Jameson's article (65), but also because the uneven economic and cultural development these terms focus on is still very relevant to the unequal centre-periphery relations in Moretti's conjectures on world literature.

"the sensational trauma narratives about China's Cultural Revolution written in English by first-generation immigrants" to make the point that though Jameson's theory was intended to be a nostalgic critique of the loss of collective consciousness in the First World, his "omnipotent definition" of Third World writers has become "its own prophecy" as Third World writers now actively produce such national allegories "to sell in the global marketplaces." Such collaborative/complicit practices would, supposedly, negatively affect the literary quality of their works and confine Third World writing to quasi-Cold War stereotypes (Shih 20-1). The popularity of Cultural Revolution literature in the West, whether it is translated scar literature from China or Anglophone works written by Chinese immigrants, thus seems to be a powerful testament to the working mechanisms of both "the systematic" and "the allegorical" and their constraints on post-Mao Chinese literature as world literature.

Some postcolonial critics, such as Imre Szeman and Neil Lazarus, have defended the importance of the national allegory because they see it as a kind of "cultural revolution" that exposes the "First-Worldist" imperialism that has compelled the expressions of colonised "subalternity" to manifest in collective/national terms in the first place (Szeman 195-7; Lazarus, 103). By contextualising the rise of the national(ist) allegory in (anti-)colonial histories, they attempt to shift the theoretical focus from the First World's stereotypical readings of Third World texts towards the agency of the Third World writers in their resistant narratives. However, this contextual approach is perhaps more suitable for national allegories of Lu Xun's time, namely the first half of the twentieth century when imperialism and nationalism were still in an intensified struggle, than the post-Mao context, where the flows of global capitalism have more or less already ossified "the allegorical" into a commodified cultural delivery of (Third) world literature to the literary centre. In other words, even though "the allegorical" was born out of anti-colonial nationalist resistances that deserve to be acknowledged, its critical power has been considerably reduced as the literary centre appropriates it into collaboration with its technologies of recognition. For example, one may observe that possibly due to the (need to understand/manage the) rise of China, the force of the national allegory for Chinese literature in the West is now so strong that many non-PRC-background Chinese writers like Tash Aw are prone to write about China for their markets in the Anglophone world. But if "the allegorical" has inevitably been co-opted into the dominance of the literary centre over China and "Chineseness", are there still any ways in which Chinese writers may reclaim the critical power and resistant spirit embedded in the birth of the national allegory? Or rather, if the Western literary market is indeed so insistent on its attraction to national allegories, is there no way for Chinese writers to counter this confining technology of recognition without sacrificing either their critical integrity or their international appeal?

In dealing with the Western demand for Third World national allegories, diasporic writers writing about China while living in the West seem to be much more experienced in finding philosophies and literary practices that can help them retain their creative agency. Gao Xingjian's comments may again offer some unexpected insights here. His stance on the nation is clear and consistent when he says "I dislike this whole business of patriotism and nationalism" and "I am not prepared to assume the role of spokesperson for the Chinese, nor for the Chinese people." (Lee and Dutrait 746-7) Indeed, if "the allegorical" as tied to the nation is what Shih calls a "burden of collective representation," Gao's whole idea of "cold literature," a philosophy of "fleeing…to survive…for spiritual salvation", is about escaping such a burden to reach an affirmation for the individual self (Shih 23; Gao, "The Case" 8). However, constantly bothered with questions about his national identity after the Nobel Prize, he sometimes uses rather succinct but innovatively satirical ways to respond. For example, during a lecture he gave at Harvard University in 2001, he was again asked whether he "misses" China, and his response was "I am China. China is inside me, and *that* China has nothing to do with me." (Gao qtd. in Shen 4 original italics) The sentence "I am China" is, both literally and metaphorically, the ultimate national allegory. In such a context Gao uses it to affirm both the national and the individual, and yet by shifting "China," the grand socio-political

construct, to the "inside," he not only acknowledges the constraining and imposing nature of (the constant evocations of) such an allegorical construct, but also teases and subverts this nature at the same time. In a way, the subversive strategy in such a satirical response resembles that of the postcolonial palimpsest, which, by appropriating imposed stereotypes and (re)writing (counter-)narratives about the self, also simultaneously reinforces and refutes certain established identity categories and the (false) expectations they have created (Ashcroft et al. 144).

To demonstrate how this affirmative/subversive strategy of (anti-)allegorical identification works in literary practices, Xiaolu Guo's *I Am China* is perhaps the best example. As a mainland Chinese writer who has been writing and publishing in English after moving to London in the early 2000s, the title of Guo's latest novel might be viewed as a desperate invocation succumbing to the oppressive forces of "the allegorical" in Western literary markets. Such an interpretation is only half correct, because while the title "I Am China," like a postcolonial palimpsest, inevitably evokes and reinforces established literary mechanisms/expectations in the West, its excessiveness in doing so forms a satirical possibility that appropriates the commercial appeal of "the allegorical" without succumbing to its restrictive influence on the textual level. Contrary to a straightforward personified allegory, *I Am China* is a polyphonic novel that tells multiple intersecting stories of cross-cultural characters. The novel essentially revolves around the dislocated relationship between two Chinese lovers, Kublai Jian the underground Beijing punk and Deng Mu the artistic poet. But what complicates the story is that their relationship is presented to the reader through another central character Iona Kirkpatrick, a Scottish translator who, in her mysterious task in a London publishing house, discovers, translates and retells the lovers' ill-fated story from their letters. As the translated letters reveal, Jian became a political exile due to his participation in the Tiananmen incident. He suffered from his unfulfilled rebellious spirit as he wandered across Europe seeking for asylum, and in this process his relationship with Mu also became more and more dislocated and adrift. In her letters, Mu questions Jian about the political ideology of his punk music and regrets that his commitment costed them their happy mundane life. As a Scottish islander adrift in a disorienting London, Iona was deeply moved by Mu's love for Jian, but she was instructed by her editor to focus instead on Jian's Tiananmen story in the publication of the letters. This left Iona feeling even more disoriented in her troubled positionality between the publishing centre and the published periphery.

Hence, *I Am China* is not only Guo's literary attempt to shift between different modalities of the drifting subject and different possibilities for cross-cultural understanding but also her satirical reflection on the mechanisms of "the systematic" (with regards to the Tiananmen incident) in the English publishing industry. As for the title sentence "I am China", all three characters have uttered it in different ways on different occasions: Jian left behind a manifesto of the 1989 movement which includes the sentence as a democratic slogan; Iona recited the slogan in an absentminded trance after she finished the final translation; and Mu read out the sentence when she performed an appropriated version of Allen Ginsberg's poem "America", where the word "America" has been consistently changed to "China" (Guo, "I Am China" 363-6). All of them can be interpreted as allegories for China, but none of them functions as a "predetermined signified" that "the allegorical" demands (Shih, 21). Instead, this seemingly allegorical sentence is an indeterminate signifier that connects a wide range of socio-political experiences, including Chinese authoritarianism, the conflicts between the national and the individual, and cross-cultural (mis)understanding and (mis)appropriations. Through her awareness about "the systematic" and "the allegorical" and her satirical manipulation of literary characters and events, Guo is able to appropriate and subvert their oppressive forces and turn them into opportunities for securing her creative agency. Therefore, what *I Am China* shows is that in world literature, a text is not only one among many in the circulation of texts that is troubled by existing technologies of recognition, but also, the text itself can be a "world-making activity" that challenges these oppressive forces and turns "the

world" into "an ongoing, dynamic processes of becoming" instead (Cheah, 30).[15]

Indeed, both Guo and Gao have stated that writing is their "world" and that literary expressions, rather than political/cultural/national identities, constitute the primary mode of their "worldly existence." (Guo, "The Key" 1; Gao, "No-ism" 10) Therefore, it is likely that, similar to Judith Butler's formulations about performative political speeches, the Chinese identities that are manifest in their works are more strategic performances than passive fixed categories (1). As post-Mao Chinese presences in world literature, they perhaps are more familiar with "world literature" as Christopher Prendergast's site of "negotiation" than any Chinese writers in China (111). As cross-cultural writers, what their pragmatic performances in such "negotiations" often (aim to) produce is the flexible "double agency" that Tina Chen has deemed common in Asian American literature (9). For *I Am China*, this performative double agency manifests in the book's Chinese title *Zui Weilan de Hai*, which translates into "The Bluest Sea"[16]: the allegorical "I Am China" does not work for Chinese readers, so she uses the image of love, the sea, from her characters' letters to strike affective responses instead. Similarly, Gao Xingjian's double agency may be found in his passive participation in the anti-PRC sphere of "the Sinophone," which, despite its contested political ideologies, provides him a space of acceptance and solidarity (Shih 26).[17] That these writers have limited intranational accessibility in China is a pity, as the domestic side of "the systematic" can sometimes be more difficult to negotiate with than Western technologies of recognition.[18] Nevertheless, if the national allegory in the Western/Anglophone literary market does still haunt Third World literatures like Marx's spectre of capital(ism), the experiences of diasporic writers like Gao and Guo and their performative strategies to gain double agency can offer insightful lessons for post-Mao Chinese writers on their "route to world literature" (Liu, "Chinese Literature" 1).

Conclusion and Limitations

At the opening ceremony of the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2009, Mo Yan gave a speech entitled "A Writer Has a Nationality, but Literature Has no Boundary." Near the end of the speech, Mo expressed his hope for Chinese literature: "my next dream will be that one day, some young Western writers will say that their work is inspired and influenced by certain Chinese writers." ("A Writer" 24) Embedded in this dream is the century-old Chinese desire for more out-influence in the global literary sphere, which, as far as the current "cultural deficit" between China and the Anglophone/Western world is concerned, remains unsatisfied and thus still shrouded in the future tense. As this paper has attempted to point out, rather than simple textual movements/circulations that have "no boundary," the space of world literature, which is still located close to the Anglophone/Western literary centre, has placed many structural constraints on translated literatures from the peripheries. In the specific case of post-Mao Chinese literature vis-à-vis world literature, the dialectic struggle between international mobility and intranational accessibility is an inevitable difficul-

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15 This optimistic view, however, can be challenged by Sarah Brouillette's point regarding the postcolonial commercialisation of "consciousness". Using Salman Rushdie and J. M. Coetzee as examples, she argues that though postcolonial writers may demonstrate their consciousness and resistance against forces of "the systematic" or "the allegorical" in the global marketplace dominated by the West, especially by using self-reflexive writer characters as metafictional commentary on these forces, a materialist critique can reveal that this very "consciousness" itself has become a marketing tool that offers the cosmopolitan-oriented metropolitan readers in the West a degree of condolence that helps ease their (neo-)colonial guilt. From this perspective, Guo's novel, though against "the systematic" and "the allegorical" as it might appear to be, is not really "unsystematic". A full discussion of Brouillette's point needs to be situated in the dialectics between poststructuralism and Marxism, which is beyond the scope of this paper. See Brouillette (chapter 1 and 4) for details.
16 Though Guo's book is written in English and there is not a Chinese version yet, the Chinese title does appear alongside the English title in the 2014 editions of *I Am China*.
17 The Sinophone is Shih's theoretical formation about Chinese-language writings that are located in the literary margins of Chineseness, such as Chinese Malaysian literature, Singaporean literature in Chinese and Taiwanese literatures (23). Though Gao himself rarely mentions the Sinophone, many of the English translations of his latest works are subsumed under such categories. For example, his *Gao Xingjian: Aesthetics and Creation* was published in 2012 in Cambria Press's series "Sinophone World."
18 As mentioned before, all of Gao's works are banned in China, and though Guo's books are not banned, her later novels written in English enjoy only a limited reception in China.

ty caused by the intersecting oppressions from Western technologies of recognition and China's domestic authoritarian literary governance, which are different manifestations of a single ideological construction—the reinforcement of the expected. It has also been suggested that faced with such pressure, more world-oriented Chinese writers may focus on literature as a world-making activity and employ certain appropriative/subversive strategies to navigate their negotiations with world literature. But ultimately, for world literature to truly live up to its "conceptual openness," all parties in the textual movements, including nation states, literary institutions, writers, critics, publishers, readers etc., have to "expand our horizon and…change our views of the world and its richness in literature and culture." (Zhang, "The Relevance" 247)

As a practice of Moretti's "distant reading," this paper also has some notable methodological and theoretical limitations that future analyses and research may seek to reflect and improve upon. Firstly, the focus on generalisable literary patterns and trends has required the coverage of a wide range of Chinese writers and literatures at the expense of detailed investigations into the texts themselves, which might produce a variety of contradictory interpretations. For example, it can be argued that some of the writers mentioned as (perceived) representatives of the "scar" or "root-seeking" literatures, such as Mo Yan and Can Xue, have rather diverse literary techniques, themes and concerns especially in their later works. In such situations, rather than the issue of whether these different writers can be interpreted as representing a whole literary movement, the more pertinent question might be whose intention it is to generalise and categorise them and why. The tendency to (over-)generalise is one of the shortcomings of distant reading as a method, and it remains questionable to what extent writers and literatures can be reduced to neat categories or simple adjectives without close reading. Secondly, the suggestions with regards to the strategic performances of collaboration/appropriation/subversion that writers can consciously make may be criticised as a positivistic treatment of literature and creativity. Indeed, whether the author of world literature needs to have the world readership in mind when he/she writes is still a matter of debate, and many world literature writers, such as Gao Xingjian, would readily oppose the interference of any awareness about any reader or exterior structures in their creative processes.

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