

ISSN 2469-4576 (Print)

E-ISSN 2469-4584 (Online)

Vol. 2, No. 2, 2017

# Comparative Literature & World Literature

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# Comparative Literature & World Literature

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Volume 2 Number 2 2017

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2 P.M., 29<sup>th</sup>, Oct, 2017.

Vancouver, BC, Canada.

SG = Shi Guang | JS = Jerry Schmidt

## **Qing Poetry, Translation Principles and Literary Theory: An Interview with Professor Jerry Schmidt**

Jerry Schmidt (University of British Columbia)

Shi Guang (Beijing Normal University)

### **Abstract:**

Starting off with Professor Jerry Schmidt's looking back at his own academic career which was greatly influenced by lots of outstanding scholars and is full of delightful surprises, Shi Guang and Jerry Schmidt discuss a series of problems concerning the research status of Qing poetry both in China and the English-speaking world, basic principles of translating traditional Chinese literature, and literary theory's impact on Sinology or China Studies. Professor Schmidt also shares his research plans for the future.

**Keywords:** Qing poetry, translation, literary theory, Sinology, English-speaking world

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**SG:** At the very beginning, I want to know what makes you stay and insist on the traditional Chinese literature research area? You mentioned, in one previous interview, that you hesitated to choose Indology or Sinology as your life-long occupation when you were a student.

**JS:** For a long time, I was interested in learning foreign languages, particularly

as vehicles for culture. In high school, because I'm of German descent, I taught myself German and got some phonograph records to learn the language and then I started learning other languages. By the time I finished my high school courses, I thought I wanted to try and learn a really difficult language, so I thought Chinese was one of the hardest languages to learn and then I started studying Chinese. When I was studying German earlier, I became interested in German poetry and read Goethe, Schiller and other classical German poets. I got really interested in poetry, I never had that passion for poetry when I attended our English classes in school, but I really began to enjoy reading poetry. And then when I was studying Chinese at the University of California, Berkeley, I found a set of phonograph records and texts for the *Tangshi Sanbai Shou* (Three Hundred Tang Poems 唐诗三百首) with an English translation. Every night before I went to bed, I would read the original Chinese text to see if I could recognize the Chinese characters. If I didn't know the characters, I looked them up in a dictionary and then I read through maybe one poem if it was a short one, so I got really interested. Because I was born and raised in the countryside in the United States and I really loved living in the countryside, I was particularly drawn to "*Tianyuan Shiren*" (pastoral poets 田园诗人) and "*Shansui Shiren*" (landscape poets 山水诗人), you know some poets like Wang Wei 王维 (701?-761).

Then I read more and more poems as time went on after I got more knowledge of Chinese, but one thing I was struck with all along was how little we knew. Just listening to my teachers' lectures and hearing them speak and then going to the library looking for what had been published in English so far, I realized there were lots of things that Western scholars had to study and I also suspected that there were lots of things that Chinese scholars had to do too, and although they studied way more than we did. It still seemed to me that there are a lot of unknown periods. And as I went on, what really inspired me was that when I was looking through the stacks there at University of California, Berkeley, I found a book titled *Songshi Xuan* (Anthology of Song Poetry 宋诗选), however now I can't remember the name and author of this book, because that was a long time ago. At that time I thought this book might not be very interesting because all my teachers had told me that I didn't need to read "*Songshi*" (Song poetry 宋诗), because "*Ci*" (Chinese lyrics 词) is the most important form of that dynasty. I thought, well, okay, I was going to try it anyway. Then I took it back to my room where I was living at that time and started reading it. I felt like a whole new world opened up to me, because it was totally different from "*Tangshi*" (Tang poetry 唐诗). I was fascinated by it, because for example, a lot of the Tang dynasty's poets were very pessimistic, sometimes

like “*Wubing Shenyin*” (make a fuss about nothing 无病呻吟), but I found that Song dynasty’s poets were very humorous and loved life and it really appealed to me as I felt these poets were speaking directly to me and had a genuine love for nature, such as Su Dongpo 苏东坡 (1037-1101). So I began to wonder if, you know everybody held the belief that “*Songci*” (Song lyrics 宋词) was the only thing interesting in the Song dynasty and thus they ignored “*Songshi* (poetry of the Song Dynasty)”, there was something wrong with the way in which they were doing research. And then, at that point, if I wanted to explore periods after the Tang dynasty, maybe the Song dynasty should be the first to consider, but I should go right down to the Qing dynasty and even to the “*Minguo*” (Republic of China 民国) and read all this and see what poetry written in classical Chinese was like during these periods. Maybe there is nothing, because everybody tells me there is nothing or very little. However, after my experience with the “*Songshi*”, I’d better not believe everything people told me.

Then I did this and I just kept on doing this. Some of the other things that I discovered when I was doing my MA at UBC was that I became interested in Han Yu’s 韩愈 (768-824) poetry. When I mentioned the name of Han Yu, his “*Guwen*” (classical prose 古文) was commonly mentioned. However, I found his poetry was much more interesting than his prose works. In fact, I found it was absolutely fascinating, because a lot of things in it reflected his black humor and his very dark view of the world. It seems that so many things in his poetry were very similar to what I read in 20<sup>th</sup> century Western literature, such as the works of Franz Kafka (1883-1924). I thought how was it possible that Han Yu in the Tang dynasty held views similar to Kafka in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, so again I started to wonder, because when I talked to most of my teachers, they would say, oh, Han Yu, actually, he was not very attractive as a poet, he wrote a not-very-interesting combination of prose and poetry. However, I trusted my own feelings. Maybe I was wrong or my taste was bad, but that is when I started, I just kept going on and on.

I got particularly interested in the Qing dynasty, because every time I read “*Qingshi*” (Qing poetry 清诗), I found the works very interesting and creative. One of the first writers who made me interested in Qing Poetry was Huang Zunxian 黄遵宪 (1848-1905). I became interested in him at first, because he wrote a lot about oversea life, about places in San Francisco, England and so on. I found it was fascinating to see my own culture through these poems from the viewpoint of somebody else from a different culture. It was utterly fascinating, because they could see many things that possibly escaped me. Huang talked about some of the dark periods in American history, such as the anti-Chinese movement in California, back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I found all of these were fascinating. So, it just went on like that. One

of the nice things is that when I came to China, I always found somebody, although not so many, say that, “oh I also love Han Yu’s poetry”, or someone say “oh, Huang Zunxian was a famous diplomat and political reformer, and he also wrote some very interesting poetry”. So, I felt that the whole way of thinking about classical poetry in China was changing, particularly the younger scholars I talked with, even some of the older ones.

A scholar who really influenced me a lot, who has unfortunately already passed away is Qian Zhonglian 钱仲联 (1908-2003), I met him in Suzhou University. His student Ma Yazhong 马亚中 was teaching in this university too. Qian Zhonglian specialized in poems of the Qing dynasty, he told me that there were works of many important authors which I should read, so on and so forth. That conversation really got me excited because I just saw this huge field that would probably take me two or three lifetimes to research. In other words, it is something that I enjoy doing and will keep me busy. That’s basically how it happened and I started to read works of these different authors.

Right now, I’m studying poetry of Shanghai during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I’m also interested in learning more about Huang Zunxian’s life in the United States. No one has written detailed articles about it, they just used few things that Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929) and Huang Zunkai 黄遵楷 (1858-1917) wrote, but most of what they said is wrong. I knew it after I conducted some detailed research. For example, the date which was recorded by Huang Zunkai and then copied by Liang Qichao, of Huang Zunxian arriving in San Francisco was supposedly the same day the U.S. passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. It was wrong, and it took quite a bit longer for the U.S. to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act. Of course, that’s the really interesting thing that you could imagine being Huang Zunxian, as a Consul General and hearing about this anti-Chinese movement and seeing its effect on the local Chinese there and what effects it had on those Chinese who wanted to travel to the United States from Canada or directly from China. There was a debate about this bill going on in the United States Congress, involving the U.S. President of that time, Chester Arthur. It took months for it to be passed. At that time, the news was changing every day and finally the President of the United States had to decide whether he should sign the bill or not. You can imagine Huang Zunxian sitting there in his office every day, reading the English newspapers and contemplating what was going on. Every day there was a different story and you can imagine the stress and anxiety in his mind, because he could see all the terrible things right there in San Francisco in California. At that time, he had to deal with these things but he didn’t know what the U.S. government was going to do. Its policies, just as I say, kept on



changing, and there were new rumors every day. It is so different from the story that Liang Qichao told us, that is, when Huang Zunxian arrived America, the bill had been passed and he got to work furiously to combat it. However, that was totally wrong, because what he did was much harder. He was waiting there in suspense, not quite knowing what he should do, because he had no idea what the U.S. government was going to do. That's the real story and you might admire Huang Zunxian even more if you read the real story. Of course, I want to talk about the actions taken by Huang Zunxian when the bill was passed, rather than some rumors that Liang Qichao or Huang Zunkai passed on. That's a really interesting story. I think it is one of the most exciting things.

At that time, Chinese children were not allowed to study at California's public schools, and they were excluded entirely. Huang Zunxian, with the help of Consul Frederick Bee (1825-1892), who was an American, was able to force the state of California to allow Chinese children to attend public schools. I think it was an amazing victory, considering the fact it was done by just two men using the court system. Bee had received legal training and he knew how to use it. If Chinese paid taxes, why shouldn't their children be allowed to attend the public schools? They had paid their taxes, so it was totally their right. It was legal but they weren't allowed. It was also a very dangerous situation, because there were lots of people who would like to kill Huang Zunxian. He even had a poem written to Frederick Bee for his life being saved on one occasion. So, you can imagine the pressures and the difficulties that he had during his three years in the United States of America. That's an amazing story. I bet there are lots of books about Huang Zunxian, but unfortunately, they all repeat the same stories told by Liang Qichao and Huang Zunkai, which are totally wrong. I once read the original American newspapers and some of Huang Zunxian's unpublished writings and UVic's collection of Huang Zunxian's letters. All these items provide a very different picture from what you can know in his poems, including my earlier book about Huang. At the time I wrote it, I had no knowledge of those other available materials. You leafed through the newspapers of San Francisco day by day, as Huang Zunxian himself once did, and you can get a real picture of what he was thinking and what he was doing in those days. So, it is really a fascinating story.

Recently, I have been strongly interested in Huang Zunxian's predecessor, Chen Shutang 陈树棠. I just finished an article, which is going to be published in *Qingshi Luncong* (Tribune of Qing's History 清史论丛), a journal in Beijing. Chen Shutang was the Consul General before Huang Zunxian and he's also quite interesting. However, he is totally unknown in China, and there are just two short articles about

him written by people who attempted to discuss his career in Korea after he left the United States of America. In fact, he was a really important person in Shanghai. He wasn't a poet, and I tried but failed to find a collection of his poetry. He knew, however, a very famous poet at the time and now called Jin He 金和 (1818-1885). I was so happy to see that because it's widely accepted that Jin He was really an outstanding author who hasn't been studied fully. There is a section in Ma Yazhong's wonderful book on Late Qing poetry, but there is a lot more that should be done in the future. Of course, Professor Tsung-cheng Lin 林宗正 is also doing work on him. It will be good to see more studies on Jin He, because he's really an outstanding author.

**SG:** I heard that Professor Lin intends to translate Jin He's poems for the English-speaking world. I think this will be very useful for both Chinese and Western scholars.

**JS:** Yes, I believe so, it is very important to have English translations and studies on Jin He. Maybe someone might say he is not even interested in Jin's poetry, as it deals with the whole Taiping Rebellion, his own experiences and experiences of other people. However, it is utterly fascinating. Once you start to read his poems, you can't stop. It is great that someone wants to translate his poems, however, the problem lies in the fact that translating his poems is not easy, although, luckily, he didn't write poem in a style that was full of allusions, like Huang Zunxian.

**SG:** Let's talk about your research method. I know when you wrote your book about Huang Zunxian, in order to make clear a place name, "*Piao Di Sang*" (飘地桑), which is mentioned in Huang's writings, you spent a long time driving along the west coast of North America.

**JS:** Yes, it was a very interesting question and finally I was sure this place was Port Townsend. Now, it is a small place, but at the time, people thought it was going to be the terminus for the railway from the eastern United States to the Pacific coast. So, it was a place under great development, people speculated in real estate, just like Vancouver, or bought land with the hope of making money. Unfortunately, the government of the United States changed the plans, and they made Seattle rather than Port Townsend the terminus. But at that time, Port Townsend was a major seaport. People would go to Victoria from Port Townsend, and they would also use it as the very first stop in California. So, it was a very important place. Huang mentioned it several times, but I could never figure it out when I saw its Chinese name "*Piao Di Sang*". Finally, after I looked at the coastline when I drove along a couple times back and forth to California, it occurred to me that this must be the place, and Port Townsend was the only place that fit. You have to use your own imagination to

do this, and you need a passion for getting the story right.

I just hate quoting the words from someone else, such as Liang Qichao who got it wrong. For example, another story told by Liang was that the first day that Huang was in the United States, a whole band of Chinese were arrested for violating the so-called Cubic Air Act. According to this act, a certain amount of cubic feet of air was required per person, and if people lived in a place that was too crowded, they would be put into jail. Huang went to the San Francisco Jail, which was crowded with Chinese prisoners. Then, he told the policeman in charge that he was breaking the Cubic Air Act, because the jail was even more crowded than where they had been living before. According to the story reported by Liang Qichao, the police officer released all of those Chinese prisoners. I just don't believe this story, since I read all the newspapers from that period, and this story wasn't mentioned at all. At that time, a police officer doing anything kind for Chinese would be reported in the newspapers. People would be very critical and say that this police officer is not doing his duty and is being too kind to these people. The newspaper reporters frequently called Chinese "pagans", because most Chinese weren't Christians. If a Chinese consul general came and told a police officer to release Chinese prisoners, it would never happen. It made a nice story but it wasn't true. Liang always tried to overstate the real situation. In many times, he did not have evidence or look into the materials carefully, that's why some mistakes were made. However, unfortunately, all of us made the same mistakes in all books about Huang Zunxian and they give a false picture about what things were really like, which was a lot more difficult, because no one released those Chinese prisoners, and Huang constantly agonized about what was going to happen before the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, and after it was passed, he tried to deal with it. Because one of the big problems with the Act was that it was very ambiguous; for example, Chinese merchants were allowed to go to the United States and do business, but workers and laborers were not allowed. What was the difference between a merchant and a laborer? Sometimes it was very hard to determine if a person selling vegetables on the street was actually a merchant or a laborer. So, there were always court cases involving Chinese citizens, and Huang had to deal with them, feeling obligated to help these people get lawyers and follow the course of their court cases and try to provide material and evidence to help out those Chinese who had been arrested. Some jails were very dangerous places where Chinese would be mistreated. Huang had to provide solutions. It was a horrible and stressful job, terrible burdens were on him, but he did whatever he could and had a number of dramatic successes.

**SG:** I also read your book about Zheng Zhen 郑珍 (1806-1864) and knew that

in order to have a better understanding of Zheng Zhen, you personally went to Guizhou Province. This research method really required a lot of time and energy. What is the meaning of this research method for you?

**JS:** I think that when you attempt to figure out things written in the Qing dynasty or the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, you really have to go to the local place for a number of reasons. First of all, you meet people and scholars in the local places, many of whom know much more about the subject than people in Beijing or Shanghai. When I went to Guizhou, I met Huang Wanji 黄万机, who wrote *Zheng Zhen Pingzhuan* (Critical Biography of Zheng Zhen 郑珍评传), and Long Xianxu 龙先绪, who wrote the commentary to Zheng Zhen's collected poems. Both of them are really knowledgeable about Zheng Zhen. Long Xianxu just published a new book, and he was there collecting various titles and gave bibliographic information about Zheng Zhitong 郑知同 (1831-1890), the son of Zheng Zhen. Zheng Zhitong was also an outstanding poet, although not as great as his father. Besides, he was an excellent scholar of "*Wenzi Xue*" (philology 文字学). If I hadn't gone to Guizhou, I would never have met either of these men or visited the places that Zheng Zhen wrote about. I went right to his town and actually, I found his grave. I got some incense and made wine offerings to him. At that time, I found it very moving. I had a very emotional experience there, which certainly helped me finish the project. This project was a very hard one. It took a lot of work, and there were so many things I had to talk about in that book which I normally wouldn't have to worry about before writing a book on Chinese poetry. Just one example, Zheng Zhen wrote these wonderful poems about inoculating his grandson for smallpox. I had smallpox vaccinations myself when I was a little boy, but I didn't really know much about this disease and what was happening. But I realized that if I wanted to understand Zheng's poem, I had to do a lot of research on smallpox to figure out what he was actually writing about. I had to know this, because Zheng himself was very knowledgeable about medicine. His father was a "*Ru Yi*" (scholar-doctor 儒医) and he himself read a lot of medical books too. So, you have to do this extra reading. There is a lot of work to do, but it's certainly worthwhile.

**SG:** From Professor Chen Shixiang 陈世骧 (1912-1971), Yu Dacheng 于大成 and Li Qi 李祁 to Professor Ye Jiaying 叶嘉莹, you met so many outstanding scholars when you were a student. Can you talk about their influences on your research respectively?

**JS:** I never had any idea what I was getting into when I started studying classical Chinese literature. The first person who really inspired me was Yu Dacheng, who later became the Dean of Arts in National Cheng Kung University in Taiwan.

He came from Shandong Province, China and was one of the most energetic and knowledgeable teachers I ever met. He had a great sense of humor. He helped me to read the complete collections of poems of Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232), Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 (365?-427) and Xie Lingyun 谢灵运 (385-433). I was lucky, because there was a Stanford Center in Taiwan at the time and some of us had one to one classes with Yu Dacheng. What was more important is that I could see how he read and interpreted poems. He would talk about the allusions in these poems and the sources of verses and things that I hadn't thought about before. I was just amazed at how much he knew, I never realized that a Chinese scholar could know so much, or have such a tremendous amount of knowledge in his mind. That was the thing that just astounded me, I never had a teacher like that when I was in the United States or in Canada.

When I came to UBC, I was lucky to have Li Qi as my teacher, who wrote beautiful Chinese poems and was also quite knowledgeable about Western literature. She was sent to England due to the Boxer Indemnity and she was interested in Wordsworth's poetry and thus translated all of his *Prelude* into classical Chinese. At first, I thought that was a strange thing to do, but later I realized it is a beautiful translation and captures the spirit of Wordsworth. She had great sensitivity for poetry and also was happy that I was doing things that weren't completely conventional. For she was kind of rebellious herself in various ways. So, I appreciated that she was open-minded to things that I was doing.

I also was lucky that I had one-to-one classes with her when I was at UBC.

And then Professor Ye Jiaying. At the beginning, I was a bit nervous when Ye "laoshi" (teacher 老师) came, because I knew she had published many books on "Ci", and although I thought I'd like to read more "Songci", I was much more interested in "Songshi". I was afraid that she would tell me to do research on "Songci" for my Ph.D. dissertation and I couldn't quite imagine that. But when I started talking with her and told her that I was interested in studying Yang Wanli 杨万里 (1127-1206), she said there was no problem in that way and she gave me a lot of really valuable suggestions when I was doing that thesis. She was also extremely knowledgeable. When I read some allusions, which were difficult to me, I took them to her and she could identify that kind of thing immediately.

Of course, I should also mention Professor Qian Zhonglian, he was so open-minded and welcoming to me. When I was in China many years before, a lot of scholars sort of hesitated to have too much communication with foreigners, because they thought they might get into trouble. But Professor Qian was never concerned about that. Every time I went to Suzhou University, he would invite me into his

home and have a discussion with me for hours. I learned so much from him. He had such a huge amount of knowledge of classical Chinese literature, which was one of the reasons why I ended up studying Zheng Zhen. At the time, I was preparing a book about Huang Zunxian, and he said Huang was a really interesting poet but there were other poets possibly even better than Huang. He listed their names and Zheng Zhen was one of them.

I heard something about Zheng Zhen from professor Yu Dacheng who was very interested in poetry other than Tang poetry, he had done a lot of reading besides “*Tangshi Songci*” (Tang poetry and Song lyrics 唐诗宋词). He suggested some authors at that time and Yang Wanli was one of them, and Yang later became the subject of my dissertation. He said you had better read his poems. They are quite humorous and very imaginative. So, I started to read his poetry when I was in Taipei. At the same time, he said there was another author I should study seriously, that is, the Late Qing poet Zheng Zhen, who was one of the most outstanding authors in Chinese literary history. I had never heard of him before that time. He told me “*Zhonghua Shuju*” (Zhonghua Book Company 中华书局) just published his works and suggested me to buy a copy. He said I could leaf through it now, although I probably couldn’t understand it, because it was too difficult right now for me to read. I could do nothing but just keep it. I had that book on my bookshelf for many years, and then finally I decided one year I had better write something about this man. It was still difficult to read his works, but then I by chance I got an email from somebody who said Long Xianxu had published his commentary on Zheng Zhen, and if I wanted it, he would send me a copy of it to me, and he did it. I looked at that copy and thought this was exactly what I needed. With it, I could proceed to write my book. So, these people mentioned above really had significant influences on me and helped me to complete what I was doing then.

**SG:** It seems that what made you choose Zheng Zhen and Huang Zunxian as research subjects is a series of unexpected occasions.

**JS:** Yes, unexpected things. Huang was the most studied of all the Qing poets when I came to UBC, I mean 1960s-1980s. He had aroused interest because of his participation in the reform movement of the late Qing. There were various selections of his works and, of course, there was Qian Zhonglian’s detailed commentary on his poems. So, he was probably the best studied poet of all those late Qing poets, that’s why he was a bit easier to study than others. As for Zheng Zhen, at that time there was no research on him in China or here. There are still a lot of outstanding Qing poets who have no detailed commentaries on their poems, which is a great shame. I don’t know now how many people are able to do that, it’s a really difficult

task. With computers, it's maybe easier in some ways, but having it all in your head, the way like Qian Zhonglian, is a lot easier than fooling around with a computer. I discussed this with Qian, he said, as to identifying allusions, it helps that I've memorized so many books, but at the same time I have to make associations. That's not easy, because sometimes one allusion has connections with many other allusions. Qian himself, unfortunately, didn't know how to use computers, he had no technical knowledge at all, but he realized how useful it could be. I think he's right. There are few scholars as learned as Professor Qian or Ye "laoshi". If children can be trained and immersed in the traditional cultures when they're small, there is still hope, but it's very hard in the present education system. I mean children have so much pressure to take exams and do well in math and English, they can't really concentrate on classical Chinese.

On the other hand, when I talked with Qian, he told me he regretted that he didn't know English well enough and that he couldn't go overseas. At that time, he thought there probably was quite a bit of interesting material about Huang Zunxian, maybe in foreign libraries or in San Francisco. By the way, that's another reason why I went into this topic. I thought there was a good point to Qian's words. I think if he knew all these interesting materials I found, he would have been delighted. Another thing he mentioned to me is that he thought that perhaps Huang had a diary; he had heard about it but never found it. I've never been able to find it either, but I hope someone will, because it would be such an amazing diary. I found Qing-dynasty diaries are so fascinating to me. There's a scholar named Zhang Jian 张剑 in Beijing, who published one wonderful book about Mo Youzhi's 莫友芝 (1811-1871) diary and he used this diary to write *Mo Youzhi Nianpu Changbian* (Detailed Chronicle of Mo Youzhi 莫友芝年谱长编). It has very fascinating material about Mo Youzhi, who was Zheng Zhen's closest friend. For me, it is particularly interesting to see what life was like back in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of the things that I like most in this diary is Mo's first visit to Shanghai where he visited various technical institutions, factories and so on. You can find detailed descriptions of what he saw and how impressed he was, and then he left his own son in Shanghai at the "Jiangnan Zhizao Ju" (Jiangnan Machinery Manufacture General Bureau 江南制造局) to learn technology and calculus, which were something new in China at the time. It's just really interesting to read, you can get a really comprehensive picture of what a scholar's life was like. Mo was a knowledgeable person who was really concerned about Chinese future. These people like Mo and Zheng were not just scholars, they loved their country and wanted to help it become better and improve the living conditions of the people.

Zhang Jian is a very industrious scholar and did a tremendous amount of work on his book about Mo, he had to visit so many different libraries to find fragments of the diary, because the diary of Mo was never published as a whole, a little bit here and a little bit there, and then he put it all together. It gives you such a detailed picture of Mo's life. There's still so much to be done in Qing poetry, there are a lot of poets needing to be researched carefully. The whole Ming Dynasty is basically unexplored in the English-speaking world. I don't think there's any other literature in the world like Chinese literature. For example, in English literature, there's so many books about Shakespeare, but there are so many outstanding authors in China. That's a good thing because it keeps us busy.

**SG:** The next question I want to ask is about your translation. I noticed that for all your published books, the translated works are a huge part of them. Could you talk about your ideas and methods when you translate traditional Chinese literature?

**JS:** Translation is more of an art. When I was in China years ago, I gave a talk and then one of the graduate student asked me something about translation. He said you must get a lot out of reading books about the theories of translation and I said, quite honestly, I have tried not to read too much about the theories of translation. I was being humorous, I mean, I should read about it. Translation is about your feelings towards the work and of course your skills in handling the target language. My skill is not very good but at least I try hard to make sure my English translation can give the reader a feeling similar to that of the original poem. Translations, I think, are important, because in many cases they're the only contact with Chinese literature and its cultural tradition. In UBC, we have Asian Studies Department, we have students studying China, India or other countries. Some of them don't care about anything except the particular country that they're studying. Sometimes, they just ignore anything outside of the West or European traditions. I think that's really a great shame and they're depriving themselves of a good deal of pleasure and of models that they can compare and which maybe can increase their own understanding of Western culture.

In my view, having some knowledge of Western culture can help someone studying Chinese culture, and having some knowledge of Chinese culture or Indian culture can help us understand our own culture too. We're still living in a world that has, at least in the university, a Western bias. This bias, hopefully, will be changed, but it's been a long time since things are like that. For example, it seems that Asian Studies Departments haven't changed much, which is a great regret. I believe that having the translations available at least makes that more possible and that's one reason why I really am interested in translation. We talked about a lot of Chinese



poets which have never been translated, such as works of Zheng Zhen. Before I did that book, there's a few translations here or maybe very little was done, and even Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1798) too. Arthur Waley's book on Yuan Mei has some wonderful translations, but except for this book, there was very little. Like Huang Zunxian, I thought it was particularly strange. When I worked on Huang and his poems, I talked to some Western historians studying late Qing, but they weren't interested in Huang, because he wrote poetry and historians shouldn't be interested in poetry which isn't a proper form of historical material. I found some Chinese saying that, even though China has the tradition of "*Shishi*" (poetic history 诗史), it's very strange that these foreign scholars of China couldn't understand the connections. In fact, Chinese poets frequently wrote about historical events and their experience of particular events. If you want to understand the "*An-Shi Zhi Luan*" (An-Shi Rebellion 安史之乱), you should read Du Fu's (717-770) poetry.

**SG:** I notice you often use the word "enjoyable" to describe your ideal translation, could you talk about the exact meaning of this word?

**JS:** It's something that probably can only be explained from an individual view. If you read a translation and it holds nothing valuable to you, then it obviously has at least failed you. Maybe you're the reason for this failure, but in many cases, the reason is the translation. You should have some sort of emotional response to the translation. It doesn't have to be joy necessarily, if it brings you to tears, that's good too. If it makes you laugh, that's good too, or if you feel like your spirit is lifted or opened up in some way, that's good too. I think the problem with a lot of Chinese poetry translations into English is that they read sort of like Chinglish, strange English. This kind of translation tries to follow the exact syntax of the Chinese original poem. You just can't do that, it doesn't work from the standpoint of a reader, unless the reader wants to use the translation as a crib to understand the original Chinese, then that might be of some use. So, I don't think that's a right approach for translation.

**SG:** When I listen to your words, I just remember a very interesting fact. The Chinese government organized many scholars to translate Chinese classics into English, but it seems that the effect is not very good. What is your opinion of this phenomenon?

**JS:** I think the problem is that translating something into a language that is not your native language is very difficult. There are very few people who can do that well. Although those translations are readable, generally they are not very moving. I can't do translation like my teacher Professor Li Qi did, translating Wordsworth into Chinese, because it would be a total failure. I don't even want to give it a try,

because I know that it couldn't be compared with the beauty of the original in English. I think some of the translations published in China are very good, for example, *Rulin Waishi* (The Scholars 儒林外史), translated by Yang Xianyi 杨宪益, is a quite beautiful translation. He did it well, because he knows both English and Chinese very well. But most of these translations don't work very well as translations. The best thing is a collaboration, I think, between a native English speaker who also reads classical Chinese but maybe doesn't have to know it with a profound knowledge and a Chinese scholar who knows English and is also able to put Chinese into English or whatever target languages. Some really knowledgeable scholars in China really know the text well, so we can discuss the difficult parts with them when translating Chinese literary works. However, at the same time, it's very hard to arrange this kind of collaboration, although I think that could be a very fruitful path to follow. It's very hard to arrange, because, you know, getting two scholars together to work on something is even harder for a government. Governments have no idea about who's available or who might be interested in it or who has the time to do it or something like that. So, it is very hard teamwork. If the Chinese government can make more opportunities available in terms of funding things like this, it might work well. But I am not sure how useful it will be, you've got to have the right people working together, and selecting the right people is very important. What happens is that those people who have the best connections with the government tend to get the projects although they might not be the best people to complete them. I mean that this is not just a problem of the Chinese government, for all governments share the same problem. So, that could be a really major difficulty.

**SG:** Someone says poetry is lost in translation, do you agree with it?

**JS:** I don't totally agree with that; I mean there are some translations which really do capture the essence of the original works.

**SG:** Will you encourage your readers to read original texts?

**JS:** Maybe translation is a bad substitute but it is still a substitute. Most readers in the West don't have time learn Chinese, especially classical Chinese, and they will hopefully be encouraged to read good translations. After all, translations help us understand each other. After I published my book in English about Qing poetry, I got quite a few emails from students who said "oh I read your book on such-and-such and I'm interested in doing this", they asked me for suggestions about their work. There was a young scholar Bibiana from Roma University, I saw her in Shanghai this summer and she was actually working on Jin He. She said that she had got interested in it because she was reading something I had written, which made me quite happy. I've also had other people writing such things and saying that

they could read something and also wanted to study other aspects hopefully related to my research. I think that's one of the things that translations can do, to make it easier for someone to get into the topic. I mean the number of people doing research on classical Chinese literature, unfortunately, isn't that large in the West right now, but there are more and more students becoming interested in this area every year. Some of them certainly have been influenced by me and something in my works or by some other scholars in this field. The research of Qing poetry is a new thing but it's developing quite quickly. I've noticed that more and more things are written in China and more and more graduate students are doing related dissertations, this is a very pleasing beginning and I'm not the only person responsible for that. I've just played a very minor role in it. People like Qian Zhonglian and his students in China have greater impact on this. I think it's a great shame that Qing poetry has been ignored for such a long time. With the May Fourth movement, everything was re-defined. When I was in China a few years ago and talked to some young high-school student, they asked me what I was doing. When I said I was studying Qing poetry, they looked at me with amazed faces, all they knew was "*Mingqing xiaoshuo*" (Ming and Qing vernacular fiction 明清小说).

**SG:** In my opinion, this phenomenon perhaps is the result of the idea "*yidai you yidai zhi wenxue*" (a particular genre for a particular period 一代有一代之文学).

**JS:** Of course, this idea has the very pernicious influence on our understanding of the history of Chinese literature. "A particular genre for a particular period", that was certainly strongly influenced by earlier Western writings, but the idea has been totally forgotten in the West. Only people who study the history of Western criticism pay some attention to it, while this idea controls the whole public education system in China from university down to grade school. Its control in the university starting to crumble, although in grade schools and high schools it is still prevalent. This kind of idea is deeply influenced by Darwin's theory. The followers of this approach attempt to create a scientific theory of literature, which is one of the craziest things I ever heard of. I mean, what is scientific literature? It was also strongly influenced by the racism and nationalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was something that dominated the thought of a lot of people at that time. They thought that modern culture was a creation of white people, anybody who was different must be inferior and they should all obey what white people told them to do.

**SG:** Here we move to another question, I notice that you use the word "terra incognita" for a few times, but I am not sure if it is French or Latin. Why did you choose this word to describe the research areas you intended to study and why did you choose to do your research in "terra incognita"? As we all know, exploring the

“terra incognita” is really difficult because there are not so many research resources for you.

**JS:** This is a common Latin expression used in English, and it means “unknown land”. It is a great shame that younger scholars don’t study Latin anymore and the school system stopped teaching it, because classical Western culture is also very rich. So many things created by the Romans are still influencing our daily life, such as ideas, systems and aesthetic concepts. As for the difficulties, we encounter in “terra incognita”, I was lucky, because when I became interested in Zheng Zhen, someone published his poetry’s commentary. This situation was similar to what happened when I attempted to write my book about Huang Zunxian. Another important thing is that China started opening up at that time, which made it possible to go to China and learn from Chinese scholars. You know, for a long time, it was impossible to go to China. I was lucky I could seek assistance from a lot of excellent Chinese scholars, such as Qian Zhonglian etc. So that was good fortune for me.

**SG:** I frequently wonder about the research situation for Qing Dynasty poetry in the English-speaking world, could you tell us your impression of it?

**JS:** It is certainly much better than before and more and more people are working on it, but it’s certainly still considered to be marginal. Most scholars studying classical poetry still tend to concentrate on the literature of the Tang dynasty or writings of the pre-Tang era, so when I attended conferences, it was hard to find academic conferences about later poetry. There was a time in Germany a few years ago when almost all of us were working on poetry from the Qing Dynasty or the Republic of China which were written in the classical language, but such conferences are rare. The number is certainly increasing, and I think it will continue to increase too, because there are so many things that can be done and people are desperate to find new PhD topics. It’s true, it’s more challenging but it’s much more fun to write the first PhD dissertation about something that nobody has ever done before. It’s very exciting for being the first one. I think that’s an experience that a lot of Chinese students have now. When I talk to professors about who is doing what, I get the picture that there are more and more people working on the Qing dynasty’s poems. The situation here is similar, but it’s more limited in North America, it’s moving along and I’m sure that within the next 50 years or so, we’ll have some sort of more complete understanding of the Qing dynasty.

**SG:** We talk so much things about Qing dynasty’s poetry, I am curious, for you, what’s the most important and attractive part of Qing dynasty’s poetry?

**JS:** There are a lot of attractive things in this area, one of these things which I didn’t expect is a kind of spirit of rebellion and questioning of tradition. For exam-

ple, I read Yuan Mei's poetry, and the way he questioned tradition was unexpected. In one of his passages where he said that if we looked at *Lun Yu* (The Analects 论语), we realized that very little was actually written when Confucius was alive and that it is very hard to know what the book really tells us about Confucius. That's like a Christian in Europe saying that if we look at the Bible, we can't really know very much about Jesus. It's a very dangerous thing to say, if you had said that in early Europe, you probably would have been burnt on the stake. China was more tolerant, but it still could be dangerous to question the classics an orthodoxy. Yuan Mei was not afraid of saying things like that. I found this quite exciting. The spirit of rebellion, of not following ancient models and trying to do something new is very attractive to me. It is also a common thing that I find in Qing poetry at least from the Qian Long 乾隆era, I suspect there's a lot more in the early Qing period. I need to do a lot more reading and further study, but I just found so much in the 19th century now. I don't know if I can get out of the 19th century very easily for quite a while, but there are just so many interesting things to study.

**SG:** Have you ever imaged to drink with your research objects or to be their friends?

**JS:** I would like to carry their books around and be their "shutong" (a boy serving in a scholar's study 书童). I know maybe I am not really anything more than that, but I would certainly like to sit at the table where they are talking about their work over the same period and be able to hear their conversations. I probably wouldn't be able to understand it, but I think if I'm living in that part of the universe, I'll be able to understand any language I want to understand and that would be very nice. I think Zheng Zhen must have been a really likable person. He was a wonderful father, you see the way he treated his son, even though his son sometimes didn't behave very well. He was a wonderful husband, he didn't have any concubines, he didn't patronize prostitutes as far as I know and he loved his wife. You can see it from his poetry, he loved his wife dearly and he wrote some really wonderful poems about her. I don't think he ever did anything improper. Zheng Zhen seemed to be wonderful to his friends, he did so much to help people, so I wouldn't mind meeting him sometime in the future. Of course, he also would be a good teacher, just like some of the teachers I had but even better, because he was able to write all these wonderful creative poems.

I've gone to Shatan 沙滩, hometown of Zheng Zhen, and I saw his tomb and I saw it needed some weeding. I think probably his descendants go there about once a year. There were many farmers nearby, and I borrowed one famer's "Lian Dao" (sickle 镰刀) and went there to do a little bit of weeding and to make some offer-

ings to him. I just found the whole experience so pleasing because finally I could do something for Zheng Zhen, even though he didn't live inside the tomb, I was still happy to show my respect and love. That's a really moving experience. I even felt his presence there, although I regularly didn't believe in such things, but I did feel a kind of presence of him when I was doing it, so maybe he was there. I wasn't really quite sure whatever produced that feeling, but it certainly inspired me to continue to do work on his poetry. Back then, people in Guizhou were so friendly and so helpful, maybe because it was place with not so many foreigners. They seemed to be very eager to help out anybody who went there, and of course the fact that I was interested in a local person was another reason. I would be happy to go there again.

**SG:** When you prepared to publish your book of Zheng Zhen, some scholars suggested you to use Walter Benjamin's (1892-1940) or Pierre Bourdieu's theory to research Zheng Zhen. You disagreed with those suggestions and insisted that it was not proper to subject Chinese literature to Western theories. However, my question is the "modernity" is also a Western term, why did you choose it as your book's keyword and what is the exact meaning of this word in your book?

**JS:** What I found about Zheng Zhen and his followers was quite surprising. I didn't expect to see it back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for a lot of these things struck me as being modern, but I couldn't understand what were the sources of that and I couldn't understand what were the resulting effects. So, when I did some reading about Western theory of modernity, I discovered that some scholars we tended to be very rigid in their use of theory. They have a certain theoretical approach and they tend to use that to force everything into the same mold. I think this kind of approach is a dead end and probably more harmful than helpful. However, one idea about modernity theory that I found attractive suggests that we cannot really talk about modernity as a universal, but rather we should expect modernity to differ from culture to culture. There may be some common points, one of which is the doubting and questioning of tradition. I think that if we look at the development of the modernity of a culture, we would find that highly likely. If you are going to become modern, if you need to change with the changing world, you have to abandon parts of the tradition, and there is no way of getting away from that. So, I think there is a Chinese modernity different from a Western modernity. I believe this is a very useful idea. It is necessary to look at materials about the theory of modernity and to understand what they suggest. At the same time, I want to protect my freedom. I think that it would be very bad if I just choose one particular modernity theory and stuck with that. This is what has occurred in recent years, a lot of people sticking in their studies with a particular literary theory or something taught by their teachers or learned

by themselves in their earlier research. They have adhered to that for a long time. I think you must have an open mind, as I said, I don't want to say that my research would be motivated by theoretical constructs, but it does not hurt to look at them if they seem to have some connections with what you are doing.

**SG:** Could you talk about your opinion about the theoretical research tendency in Sinology and China studies?

**JS:** At least, we should question the obsession with contemporary literary theory that seems to rule a lot of the writing about literature nowadays, not just in the West but even in China. I have the feeling that at least some scholars in China prefer to read literary theories written by some French authors (e.g. Derrida) or something like that rather than reading the *Shi Pin* (Critique of Poetry 诗品) or the *Wenxin Diaolong* (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons 文心雕龙) or similar works. I think that all of them are certainly worth reading, but I think if you go to extremes in either way, you are more likely not to serve your readers very well.

**SG:** Some scholars, like Grace Fong 方秀洁, Li Wai-yee 李惠仪 and Qian Nanxiu 钱南秀, in the English-speaking world use the theory of feminism to research traditional Chinese literature, which refreshes our idea of poetry history, you also did some research on Yuan Mei's female disciples. What's your opinion of this research trend?

**JS:** I think it's great. It allows us to have communication with those authors whose works we have never read before. Some female authors are even better, because they wrote wonderful poetry. It's a shame to exclude them from the authors you want to read just because we think females should not write. If we read their works, we will discover how good they are. Professor Fong has done some very valuable work in that area, but I have not done much in this area. However, I did work on Yuan Mei's female disciples. In my book about Zheng Zhen, I considered that Zheng Zhen's sympathy for females and the importance he gave females in his writing are strong points of his modernity. I think that certainly is something occurring in a lot of cultures, becoming the modern age gives increasing importance to females. In this case, I think Zheng Zhen saw this, partially because he loved his mother so much. I mean his mother was basically the foundation of his family, those people who wrote about him said that without her there would not have been a Zheng Zhen. That is because his father was a doctor, but he would not accept money for any medical treatment he provided to patients, and, thus, he had a meager income. The only way through which his father could keep his family alive was by farming, which did not pay very well. His father also liked drinking, but he was not as economically productive as his mother was. His mother spent all the time spin-

ning, weaving, and looking after the household, and making sure that everything was done well. So, women were really important in Zheng Zhen's family. In a lot of his poems, particularly those poems from the Taiping period, you will find that the most heroic people described in the poems are frequently women, and the men are frequently inferior to them. This may reflect the reality of the age, because in such a period of distress and warfare, women may have been able to cope with that better than men, although men were tougher and better fighters, but women knew how to survive and keep their family members alive. The research of scholars like Grace Fong is very useful and can give us a more complete picture of the Qing dynasty.

We really need to understand the evolution of Chinese society and of the family in the Qing dynasty. This is something that I was struck with when I studied Yuan Mei. He slept with his grandmother until he was a teenager and she died of old age, he was greatly influenced by his grandmother and mother. His father was away most of the time because he worked for various officials as an assistant. I think a lot of families at that time were dominated or controlled or kept together by women. The idea of the patriarchy probably is incorrect, particularly for women families. I noticed these changes, the relations between men and women seemed to be changing, more and more people, like Yuan Mei, had female disciples, which was not possible before. Zheng Zhen taught his own daughter how to write poetry and later his daughter became an excellent poet. Women were considered important. They could receive education and do whatever they wanted. Anyway, they could do a lot of things which only men were allowed to do before. That fact was acceptable, suggesting the family and the whole society had changed. Almost all of the historians have talked about the conservatism of Chinese society and the backward status of women. However, from these real examples, that view doesn't seem to fit the widely accepted narrative. I think a great deal of research still needs to be done.

**SG:** We talk about theory a lot in China studies, whether in China or the West, and we are more theoretical in our approaches. How can we use theory in a proper way?

**JS:** I think that's a good question, but also a difficult one to answer. We certainly shouldn't just turn around and ignore theory. For example, when I talked about modernity, I read a fair amount of material on that question to get some ideas as to what people were thinking about modernity-related questions. Some people are studying China specifically, while others, even if they are not interested in China, attempt to study the whole question of modernity in general. I always hate to read books based on nothing but theory. Those books might miss a lot of things and are not very useful to most readers. Another thing that I talked about in my book on



Zheng Zhen was the question of science and technology, which I suppose I could have related to theory, but I discovered a number of times in the Qing dynasty, particularly in the case of late Qing authors, that authors were frequently interested in science and technology. In some cases, Western science and technology were introduced to them at that time. In many cases Chinese science and technology were important. This was a tendency going back to at least the Song Dynasty. Some of the things were quite startling. For example, Zheng Zhen wrote poems about pollution problems. I was so surprised when I read that, because it is like things that I was reading back in the 1960s. I noticed the poems in which he wrote about the smallpox vaccination of his grandson, which was something I didn't think anybody ever wrote about earlier in Chinese literature. He also identified some of the major problems of technology. He said our technology could be used to improve people's lives which is an important idea, but he also correctly pointed out how technology could be used by the wealthy to make themselves wealthier and to make the poor even poorer. He pointed out the problems of what could go wrong with technology. For example, he saw the lead mining in Yunnan Province where there was terrible pollution from the mining and refining of lead ore, all the trees had died and most of the animals had disappeared, the people there were subject to lead poisoning, providing images of a really terrifying future. I found all this quite surprising, because I hadn't read anything like it, in Europe at the time, even though the pollution was even worse in Europe. I was quite surprised when I saw it in China, in the 19th century. It's sort of theoretically pre-industrial, but in fact, it's pretty much like a modern industrial country.

Back to the theory question, I would agree that one should use whatever is helpful, if Western theory provides useful models and information, that's fine, but you should not become obsessed with it. You have to keep some sort of balance. It is also very important that you definitely have to understand Chinese theory. If you're studying an author, you have to find out what the author wrote about his or her own poetry and the poetry of other people. I think that that sometimes gives you some of the most valuable insights for understanding authors and things that they wrote or their friends or contemporaries wrote. If you ignore that, your research can't be done in a satisfying manner. All I want to do is use whatever theoretical model I need, whether from the West or China. The theories of Chinese literature are mainly found in "*Shihua*" (poetry talks 诗话). There is a theory that can be extracted from the critics' comments, it reflects a certain approach to poetry, and there are different ways of expressing ideas. Chinese don't tend to like orderly treatises, but I think you can certainly understand the way that the poets read poetry and what

they thought good poetry was by reading their comments. They may not state this in such an orderly and organized fashion as a Western critic would have in the 19th or 20th century, but it still has great value. If we ignore that, I think we're ignoring a really important part of the author.

**SG:** Could you talk about your research plans in the future?

**JS:** That all depends on how long I will live, I want to do a lot of things. First of all, I'm working on my Shanghai project, trying to understand more about what happened in Shanghai in the 19th and early 20th century. At the time, Shanghai was a center of influences from outside and also was a center of a dynamic Chinese culture. It is quite fascinating to see what was happening there and the reactions of people born in Shanghai and many people who went to Shanghai particularly during or after the Taiping rebellion, people like Jin He. I'm particularly interested in Yuan Mei's grandson, Yuan Zuzhi 袁祖志 (1827-1898?) who was a fascinating person and I've been doing work on him for a time, I might even do a book about him. I haven't made up my mind on that, but that certainly would be one way to comprehend the literary traditions in Shanghai during his lifetime. Also, I want to fully understand what Huang Zunxian did in the United States, I've got a lot of materials on his activities, many unstudied things from newspapers and I just need some time to go through it all. I have written a seventy-page article about Chen Shutang, Huang's predecessor, which probably will eventually be the first part of a book. The first article about Huang will discuss things from the time when Huang arrived San Francisco up to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. The second one will deal with what Huang Zunxian had to do after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. I did publish one article about how Huang helped the Canadian Chinese. These two things above are what I intend to do right now. I certainly would like to do research on more poets of the Qing dynasty. But like I said, that all depends on time and health.

**SG:** Thank you so much for your time, I really appreciate that you gave me so much of your time to do this interview, I gained a lot from our conversation. I hope you can keep healthy and I'm looking forward to reading more of your academic writings in the future.

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### **Author Profile:**

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Jerry Schmidt is Professor of Asian studies in the University of British Columbia (UBC). He gained his doctorate working with Professor Ye Jiaying at UBC,

and his research focuses on classical Chinese poetry with an emphasis on Qing-dynasty poetry. His publications include *Within the Human Realm: The Poetry of Huang Zunxian, 1848-1905* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), *Harmony Garden: The Life, Literary Criticism and Poetry of Yuan Mei, 1716-1798* (Routledge Curzon, 2003) etc.

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## Contemporary Chinese Fiction in the Context of World Literature

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**Abstract:**

As we know that modern Chinese fiction formed its unique tradition largely under the Western influence or inspired by world literary masters. In this sense, we should say that Chinese literature is part of world literature. But unfortunately, largely for lack of excellent translation and critical discussion and promotion, modern Chinese fiction is not so well known outside of China. Actually there have appeared quite a few excellent Chinese novelists in the contemporary era. Apart from the Nobel laureate Mo Yan, Jia Pingwa, Yan Lianke, Liu Zhenyun, Yu Hua and Ge Fei are the best of these contemporary authors. Their excellent works should be viewed as part of world literature, which should not be neglected by either comparatists or by those engaged in the studies of world literature. Even in the face of the challenge of high technology and internet, fiction still exists and is appreciated by quite a few readers and scholars.

**Keywords:** modern Chinese fiction; contemporary; world literature; globalization

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When we discuss contemporary Chinese literature, we cannot but deal with world literature, especially Western literature, as modern Chinese literature formed a unique tradition under its influence. The same is even truer of contemporary Chinese fiction although China does have its own tradition of fiction like that of poetry.

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Unlike the case of classical Chinese literature, in which poetry once ranked the top among all literary genres, fiction in the history of modern Chinese literature has always been dominating literary production and circulation, ranking the top among all the genres. Also, fiction always attracts the critical and scholarly attention both in China and elsewhere. It is a widely recognized major literary genre that has long been practiced in a “glocalized” Chinese context although it has been largely influenced by its Western counterpart. Thus it has the quality and qualification to have equal dialogues with both its traditional precursor classical Chinese fiction as well as its Western counterpart. In this sense, I think it absolutely necessary to start with the very intriguing theoretical concept world literature, in the context of which we could discuss contemporary Chinese fiction in a historical and critical way.

### **Modern Chinese Fiction as Part of World Literature**

Modern Chinese fiction has been viewed most open to the outside world, for during the period of 1919-1949, if we accept the old periodization of Chinese literature, all the major Western literary currents, academic thoughts and cultural trends flooded into China through large-scale literary and cultural translation. After that time, till the late 1970s when China started opening up and practicing economic reform, Chinese literature was almost isolated from the outside world. While domestic literary historians always call Chinese literature of that period, till the present era, as contemporary literature, I try to cross the artificial border between the modern and contemporary periods, viewing Chinese fiction of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as modern fiction while viewing the fiction in the new century as contemporary one. Although some overseas sinologists have done substantial research on the fiction writing of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I think it still far from enough. I always think that even the periodization of modern Chinese literature is somewhat problematic. So now it is necessary for me first to re-examine modern Chinese literature from a global and theoretical perspective as it has always been under the Western influence since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or more exactly, after the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement

in 1919 when a new Chinese literature started in a completely different direction, moving gradually toward the world and merging with the mainstream of world literature. Obviously, among all the literary genres, fiction has played a vital role in flourishing modern Chinese literature. Thus I view modern Chinese fiction as part of world literature, or more exactly, world fiction.

As a matter of fact, the traditional writing of modern and contemporary Chinese literary history has a fatal shortcoming, that is, those politically oriented literary historians always identify literary history with political or ideological history, thus neglecting the internal logic and law of development of literature and culture proper. The two high tides of the modernist movement in 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese literature have evidently proved this. So I simply combine the two periods as an “expanded” modern period, including all the literary phenomena since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. But my emphasis is chiefly laid on contemporary fiction writing. Furthermore, some of my discussions even point to the fiction writing of the new century.

As is well known, Chinese literature has a long history with splendid cultural and aesthetic heritage. But along with the swift development of the West after the Renaissance, Chinese culture and literature were for a long time “marginalized”. Upon entering the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese literary scholars have more and more realized this “marginalized” position that Chinese literature has in the broad context of world literature. That is why they called for large-scale translation of Western literary works, mostly translation of Western novels, and cultural and academic thoughts viewing this as the best way of getting China out of the isolated state. Undoubtedly, such an effort made to translate Western literature, especially Western novels, did promote the process of internationalization or globalization of modern Chinese literature, making Chinese literature of this period have a different look from its literary tradition, farther and farther away from its tradition and closer and closer to world literature.

It is true that only around the May 4<sup>th</sup> period did such an “overall Westernization” reach its high tide although Lin Shu (1852-1924), Liang Qichao (1873-1929), Lu Xun (1881-1936), and Hu Shi (1891-1962), had already called for translating as much as possible Western literature and cultural and theoretical trends before that time. Among all the translated literary works, fiction occupied the largest amount. That is to say, modern Chinese fiction has developed almost completely under the Western influence, according to Lu Xun whose fiction writing is especially indebted to his reading of some hundred foreign fictions plus a limited knowledge of medicine (Lu Xun 507). The two Nobel laureates writing in Chinese are largely influenced by their Western masters: Gao Xingjian (1941-) is most indebted to the

theatre of absurdity and existentialist philosophy and literature as he himself was a French literature major while studying in the university, and Mo Yan (1955-) has been most inspired by two of his modern and postmodern Western masters: William Faulkner and Garcia Marquez. The novel writing technique and various new devices practiced by the Western modernists, postmodernists and historic avant-gardists have permeated in Chinese writers' creative consciousness and unconsciousness, becoming part of Chinese writing techniques and creative practice.

The same is true of many other modern Chinese writers. They would rather admit that they were inspired by Western literature than by traditional Chinese literature. This is also one of the important reasons why some conservative scholars severely criticize the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement for starting a sort of cultural "colonization" and linguistic "Europeanization". But today's scholars of modern Chinese fiction, no matter what attitudes they might take toward the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, will probably not be suspicious of it as the beginning of modern Chinese literature, especially fiction writing.

### **Modern Chinese Fiction in the Context of World Literature**

It is said that Goethe put forward his concept "Weltliteratur" under the inspiration of a Chinese fictional work as well as some of Indian and Persian literary works. Although the Chinese work *Hao Qiu Zhuan* (*Hau Kiou Chooan*) Goethe had read as the first Chinese novel,<sup>1</sup> as well as some other Chinese literary works of minor importance, is far from being viewed canonical Chinese literature, it still inspired him to put forward his utopian conjecture of "Weltliteratur":

I am more and more convinced that poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men....I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise everyone to do the same. National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach (quoted in Damrosch 1).

Obviously, Goethe here uses poetry to refer to all the literary genres. But unfortunately, Goethe had not got access to better Chinese novels like *Honglou Meng* (*A*

1 This is the first Chinese novel of gifted scholars and beautiful ladies (written by Mingjiao Zhongren sometime in the 18<sup>th</sup> century) in the modern sense, whose first English translation done by Thomas Percy as *Hau Kiou Chooan* in 1761, and then by John Francis Davis as *The Fortunate Union*.

*Dream of Red Mansions*) and others, or he would have been even more astonished at the remarkable achievements made by eminent Chinese novelists. Due to the fact that Chinese literature before the 19<sup>th</sup> century was seldom influenced by literatures of other countries, but even so, China still had close relations with the world. Chinese people in the ancient time even viewed their country as the “Middle Kingdom” (zhongyang diguo), and China was also called the kingdom of poetry as the Tang poetry was most flourishing in the history of Chinese literature, while in Europe it was still in the “dark” Middle Ages. But unfortunately, due to the later rulers’ inability to govern the country well and corruption, it was not long after that China became a second-class feudal and totalitarian country. As compared with Chinese poetry, Chinese fiction is much less important in the history of classical Chinese literature. But it still inspired Goethe, and the concept “Weltliteratur” was first theorized by him with the help of his reading and dynamic understanding of Chinese fiction.

But unfortunately, Chinese literature has long been “marginalized” on the map of world literature. Domestic scholars usually think it a matter of translation. But I hold that apart from inefficient translation there are other factors to prevent Chinese literature from being circulated and popularized in the world. In this aspect, the current situation of book market is by no means good. We can easily find that contemporary Western literary works and those of humanities are largely available in Chinese translation and sold extremely well. But books of the similar titles authored by Chinese writers or scholars can hardly be circulated so well overseas. Sometimes, the Chinese authors or humanities scholars have to apply for funds to pay the publication expenses. So today’s young people do admire Western thinkers and writers much more than their Chinese counterparts. I think there are some reasons behind this phenomenon.

First of all, due to the prevalence and ideological intervention of Orientalism, Western audience has some long-lasting bias against the Orient and Oriental people, including China and Chinese people. To many of them who have never been to China, the country is both poor and backward even now far from a civilized country. Thus Chinese people are uncivilized far from the elegance of Western people. Since they are not well-educated and civilized enough, how could they produce excellent literary and humanities works?

The second reason might be the disability and absence of excellent translation. As is known, foreign language teaching in China has been a big educational enterprise out of which great profits are made by quite a few publishing houses. But the fact is that most of the Chinese college students and teachers, including those



of the English major, can only read English books or newspapers and have simple daily communications with native English speakers. Thus very few of them could translate Chinese works into excellent and publishable foreign languages, especially into excellent English.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, even when they have translated great Chinese literary works into English or other major foreign languages, their versions are either not appreciated by native speakers for the foreignizing elements or unable to be circulated in the target book market.

Here I just take the two English translations of *Honglou Meng* (*A Dream of Red Mansions* by the Yang couple, and *The Story of the Stone* by David Hawkes et al.) for example.<sup>3</sup> Judging by the linguistic faithfulness, the former is much better, but judging by readability and elegance, the latter is far more elegant. As Chinese literary scholars and translators, we should solve the problem of how to effectively translate excellent Chinese literary works into elegant and idiomatic English so that these works could reach the broad reading public in the English speaking countries.<sup>4</sup>

The third reason lies in this paradox. We now live in a postmodern consumer society, in which serious literature and other high cultural products are severely challenged by the rise of popular culture and consumer culture. Since classical Chinese literary works of high aesthetic quality are far from the reality of the current consumer society, they may not be attractive to contemporary readers even if English translations are available. As far as modern Chinese literature is concerned, since it has largely been developed under the Western influence, it can hardly be compared to its Western counterpart even when translated into English or other major foreign languages.

Last but not least: the position of modern Chinese fiction on the map of world literature also depends on the critical and scholarly studies of it. The publication of C.T. Hsia's *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (1961) has made tremendous influence on both overseas studies of modern Chinese literature as well as on the

2 In order to change this biased attitude, I edited a special issue at the invitation of *European Review* and published in the journal. The special issue is titled *Rediscovering China: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (co-edited with John Aldrich). Cf. especially my "Introduction," *European Review*, 23. 2(2015); 173-179.

3 *A Dream of Red Mansions*, trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, 4 vols. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2001), first published in three volumes in 1978-1980; *The Story of the Stone* (the first eighty chapters translated by David Hawkes and last forty by John Minford, Penguin Classics or Bloomington: Indiana University Press, five volumes, 1973-1980).

4 Cf. Wang Ning, "Zhongguo wenxue ruhe youxiao di zouxiang shijie?" (How Could Chinese Literature Effectively Move toward the World?), *Zhongguo yishu bao* (*China Art Gazette*), March 19, 2010.

scholarship of mainland China and Hong Kong and Taiwan after its being translated into Chinese. Although we might not agree with Hsia's radical critical comments on some of the Chinese writers and their works, his book has after all promoted modern Chinese fiction in the English as well as international sinological world. But such eminent sinologists are indeed very few. Therefore we need more research works on this topic without which we cannot make modern Chinese fiction known to the broad international reading public. Let alone make it occupy a place on the map of world literature.

### **Present-day Chinese Fiction and World Literature**

In discussing contemporary Chinese fiction in the context of world literature, we should first of all redefine contemporary Chinese literature. Unlike most of my Chinese colleagues, I always think that contemporary Chinese literature should start from the end of the Cultural Revolution in the year 1976, because as I have mentioned above that modern Chinese literature, especially fiction writing, formed under the Western influence. So we usually say that there was an "overall Westernization" in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century till the 1920s. And after 1976, especially after 1978 when Deng Xiaoping became the actual top leader of China's party and state and China started the economic reform and opening up, there appeared the second high tide of "overall Westernization", in which Chinese literature has been more and more open to the outside world in an attempt to move toward the world and become part of world literature. In this aspect, Mo Yan's Nobel Prize winning marks the real beginning of contemporary Chinese literature's moving toward the world and becoming part of world literature. But Mo Yan is only one of the many eminent Chinese novelists whose literary achievements could be viewed as important as his. Since I have discussed Mo Yan elsewhere (Wang 2013, 2014), I will, in this section, just briefly discuss several other best known Chinese novelists who have a wide international reputation and who are most promising to become the future Nobel laureates.

Yan Lianke (1958-), as one of the best known contemporary Chinese novelists after Mo Yan, is also regarded as the most promising candidate for literary Nobel Prize largely due to his wide international reputation and influence among both domestic and overseas scholars and critics. From March to April 2014, he delivered several lectures at about ten North American universities, including Harvard, Yale, Duke and UC Berkeley, where various activities were held in honor of him. Although he has won lots of domestic literary prizes, it is since the early 21<sup>st</sup> century that he has been increasingly well known and having a wide international reputa-

tion. Like Mo Yan, Yan Lianke has been influenced by modern Chinese literature but more profoundly influenced by modern and postmodern Western literature. But unlike Mo Yan, Yan Lianke has a stronger consciousness of theory with a burning interest in and profound attainment in Western literature and literary theory. He once said very frankly that he likes such Western literary masters as Kafka, Faulkner and Garcia Marquez so much so that he especially appreciates their masterpieces like “The Metamorphosis,” *The Castle*, *The Sound and the Fury* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. That is, although he became well known very late, yet from the very beginning of his writing career he aimed very high: not only writing for domestic readers, but also for readers of other countries and linguistic and cultural environments. Thus he deals with the fundamental issues concerned with all the people in the world. And only in this way has he produced excellent works of allegorical significance and aesthetic value. Although he is regarded by the critical circles as a “master of the absurd realism,” he does not care for this designation. But to my mind, it is correct that the contemporary Chinese critical circles usually think that Yan is particularly good at creating various absurd and even surrealist stories. These stories usually have absurd plots and comic characters full of parodic and black humorous colors. Readers could laugh at their absurd behaviors but express implicit sympathy toward them, for they are nothing but victims of the society. Since he admires Kafka so much so that he even imitates his style in a creative way, he has finally won the Kafka Prize as a reward. In response to the critical view that Yan’s works are full of absurd and unbelievable plots, he says, “It is not that my works are absurd but life proper is full of absurdity.” Western readers and literary critics cannot but think of what Samuel Beckett responded to his French readers on the similar occasion. But Yan echoed his French master in the Chinese context, which indicates how close his works are related to world literature.

But on the other hand, the stories Yan Lianke tells, like what are told by Mo Yan, have exclusively happened in China and full of Chinese elements. Through his idealistic imagination and superb depiction, these fragmentary stories are of universal significance, easy to be understood by readers of other countries or cultural and linguistic environments through translation. Like his Chinese precursor Lu Xun who sharply criticized the evil character of Chinese peasants of the Republican period, Yan even more profoundly criticizes the evil sides of contemporary Chinese peasants who want to be rich at the expense of selling their blood. So it is not surprising that Yan is often compared with Lu Xun apart from being compared with Kafka, his Western precursor. What is more, critics have also found some utopian idealistic tendency in his writing. That is, he has a burning desire to create a land

of idyllic beauty without suffering, which is obviously a cosmopolitan ideal. All the above characteristics of his fiction writing are easily recognized and understood by his Western readers and critics. That is why his fiction has attracted the critical and scholarly attention of American academia being viewed as among world literature. As we all know that one of the most important principles formulated by the Nobel Committee is that the candidate should have written excellent literary works of “idealistic tendency”. We should say that in the current postmodern society known as consumer society, commercialization dominates people’s life and work, and literature is often reported to be “dead”. Those who once had strong interest in literature cannot but complain that the present world is becoming more and more realistic with less and less idealistic sentiment. Under the impact of commercialization, literary market has been increasingly shrinking. Today’s young students would rather read online popular works than spend much time in the library reading canonical works. One often hears such a question: What is the use of studying literature as well as humanities? Despite all the above, Yan Lianke still maintains his elite literary position and produces one work after another and teaches literary criticism in an elite university. I do think that his devotedness to literary creation and high culture will sooner or later be rewarded like his colleague Mo Yan.

Yu Hua (1960-) is probably the most influential and best known contemporary Chinese novelist, only next to Mo Yan, or as well known as Mo Yan from an international point of view, with his important works translated into English, French, German, Russian, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian, Korean and Japanese. His writing has also long attracted the critical and scholarly attention, especially from overseas sinologists. In the mid-1990s, I was invited by the international journal of postmodern studies *boundary 2* to write an introductory article to its special issue on postmodernism and China, I, in discussing the metamorphosed versions of Chinese postmodernity, spent some space discussing Yu Hua although he was at the time a newly rising Chinese avant-garde novelist of postmodern tendency (Wang 1997). Another prestigious American journal of comparative literature *Modern Language Quarterly* also published an article discussing an important novel of Yu Hua (Liu 2002), which is very rare in the English speaking world. Although Yu is younger than Yan, he became well known earlier than the latter. Early in the 1980s, Yu Hua had already published short stories or novelettes in almost all the leading Chinese literary magazines and was regarded as one of the most representative novelists in contemporary Chinese avant-garde fiction, which according to me is one of the postmodern versions in Chinese literature (Wang 1992). Zhang Yimou’s adaptation of his novel *Huozhe* (To Live, 1993) has certainly expanded Yu Hua’s

international reputation and influence. It has promoted his novel of the same title in both domestic and international book market. In addition, Yu Hua's work has also received a number of international awards, including literature and art Knight Medal of France and some prestigious literary prizes in Italy and Australia as well as many other domestic and international literary awards due to his superb fiction writing.

In April 2004, when I was visiting Duke University, I was invited by my friend Fredric Jameson to participate in his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party at his home. To my surprise, Yu Hua was also invited. And Jameson paid particular attention to Yu's literary creation comparing his writing with that of Lu Xun's.<sup>5</sup> If we say that most of the well-known Chinese writers only attract the critical attention of the sinologists, Yu Hua, is one of the very few contemporary Chinese novelists who have attracted the scholarly attention of Fredric Jameson, a leading Marxist theorist and literary scholar in the West. No doubt Yu Hua was influenced by modern Western literature from the very beginning of his literary career. In one of his personal letters to me on September 16, 1990, he openly declares that he is more influenced by modern and postmodern Western literature than by Chinese literature. He said that he was very grateful to those Chinese translators who have produced excellent translations of the best foreign literary works. But he thinks that if a writer wants to write an excellent work of eternal value he cannot but suffer from "loneliness" devoting to writing like Kafka and Joyce (Wang 1992: 147). To him, the literary works that have most strongly influenced and inspired him are not those of classical Chinese literature, let alone modern Chinese literature, but rather, those (Western) world literary masters. Yu said openly,

[W]hen writers of our generation started to write, what influenced us most were translated novels. Classical Chinese novels influenced us much less, let alone modern (Chinese) novels. I always think that the construction and development of a new Chinese language owe the greatest debt to those translators, who have found a middle way between Chinese and foreign languages: they have expressed in Chinese the spirit of foreign literature, but they have also enriched the Chinese language itself (Yu and Pan 6).

As compared with Mo Yan and Yan Lianke, Yu Hua is not so productive, but he is particularly good at a narrative of delicateness and subtlety. He often uses pure fine

5 Since Yu Hua's oral English is not so good, I served as an interpreter when Jameson talked with him.

narrative, breaking the daily language order, organizing a self-contained system of discourse, which is very appropriate for scholars to analyze from a narratological perspective. In addition, his works also construct one after another strange, bizarre, hidden and cruel textual worlds which are independent of the external and real world, to achieve the verisimilitude of the literary text. These characteristics are easily recognized that his writing has been influenced by his Western postmodernist masters. Today's literary critical circles think that Yu Hua's works in the 1990s are different from those produced in the 1980s, which find particular embodiment in his masterpieces like *To Live* and *Xu Sanguan Maixue Ji* (*Xu Sanguan Selling Blood*, 1998) and which are closer to life proper. He, with a plain folk attitude, shows a kind of indifferent attitude and persistence of power, providing another method of historical narrative. Among Yu Hua's literary themes, we surprisingly find that he seldom writes about love, but death is one of his important and frequently written themes. He often describes death in a cold and indifferent tone like his Western precursor Earnest Hemingway.

Jia Pingwa (1952-) is a typical author of all the eminent contemporary Chinese novelists whose writing has the most remarkable local flavor. That is, his works are colored with most striking national characteristics, and even his narrative language has a striking northwestern characteristic and strong accent, with dialects appearing now and then in his works, which are thought of untranslatable. Even so, it does not prevent his works from being circulated well in international book market. His works have so far been translated into some ten languages and made considerable influence among overseas literary scholars. He is best known for his novels like *Fuzao* (*Impetuous*, 1987), *Feidu* (*Deserted City*, 1993) and *Qinqiang* (*Qinqiang Opera*, 2005), for which he has won such prestigious literary awards both at home and abroad as the Mobil Pegasus literary award bronze (*Impetuous*), the French Femina Prize for Literature (*Deserted City*), the *First Dream of the Red Mansions* award and the seventh Mao Dun Literary Prize (*Qinqiang Opera*). Jia is believed to be one of the very few contemporary Chinese literary geniuses, with most rebellious and creative spirit and extensive influence. He is also one of the very few Chinese novelists who could be recorded in the history of Chinese as well as world literature with his unique and outstanding literary achievements. He started his literary career as early as in the 1980s, but it was the publication of his *Deserted City* that brought to him both great reputation and controversy. Critics generally think that Jia's writing is both traditional and modern, both realistic and lofty, with his language sincere and honest, and his heart full of towering waves. These are undoubtedly reasons why his works have such massive force. His works, characterized by microscopic

narrative and meticulous detailed description, successfully depict the true state of ordinary people's daily life, and the changes in rural China faced with contradictions and confusion, full of affection of description and interpretation of pure feelings. There is no noise and commotion under his pen, but hidden in the sad, lively behind, is the loneliness.

*Qinqiang Opera* is generally regarded as his masterpiece, but it also has the most striking national characteristics of all his works. Jia, through the evolution and change of a so-called Qingfeng Street during some twenty years, describes a sort of mortal illness and death, joys and sorrows of the fate, and vividly recreates the shock and changes in the history of China's social transformation. His narrative perspective is very unique. With delicate plain language, the novelist writes in a "dense fleeting way" about the profound changes in the traditional pattern in the era of reform and opening up and the rural values, and interpersonal relationship. Between the lines he devotes a deep feeling to and thinking about the rural status brought about by the social transformation to his hometown. Coming from the Northwest Plateau, Jia makes his works full of local flavor, and even the language filled with striking national characteristics. It is just these nationalist characteristics that have paved the way for him to move toward the world. We often say that the more nationalistic it is, the more can it move toward the world. But I do not think this idea adequately true. The correct expression should be like this: with more national characteristics, a work is more likely to move toward the world with the help of translation, for if the translation is not good it will not make it possible for the work to have cosmopolitan significance, but rather, it may well make the originally well-written works become eclipsed. Along with the translation of more of Jia's works, his value and significance will be increasingly recognized.

Among all the contemporary Chinese novelists, Liu Zhenyun (1958-) has steadily developed his writing career and been rising quickly in the past few years of the new century. He was actually known for the representative of the "New Realistic Fiction" in the early 1990s. Although he has later constantly innovated in his narrative techniques and artistic skills, he almost always follows this path steadily, and has eventually become one of the best contemporary novelists of wide international reputation, only next to or even a match to Mo Yan. His novels have been translated into more than 20 languages, which not only cover all the major Western languages, but also have a wide range of influence in the Arabic language and cultural environment. He has won a variety of awards both in the Eastern and Western literary world. His representative novel *Yiju Ding Yiwanzhu* (*One Sentence Equals to Ten Thousand Sentences*) devoted his great effort to writing a masterpiece, with an an-

cient literary style and concise language, full of irony and humor and vivid descriptions. The reason why the novel won the Mao Dun Prize in Literature to a large extent reflects the strong humanistic concern of the author. Liu Zhenyun thought that there are two stages in literary creation. The first is that when writing experience is not rich in the early years of his career, he often likes to describe complicated things with complex sentences and narrative techniques. But when the author's life experience is richer and more mature, he will turn to philosophical reflection on things. On the other hand, when he started writing, he was very easy to rely on his first reaction, that is, intuition. This advantage is that the rhythm of writing is easy and smooth. And once the writing experience and life experience are rich, it is not only the first reaction, but also the natural transition to the second and even the third reaction that enable him to write excellent works. These are not merely out of his own experience but also represent the truth of literary creation. Liu Zhenyun's remarkable creative talent enables him to write with Lu Xun's lyrics on all kinds of characters, including government officials and those intertwined with power. As a novelist, Liu is extremely good at "transforming all the real things into textual truth" thus realizing the aesthetic ideal of the "New Realistic Fiction". Of course, as a contemporary writer, Liu, like his predecessors, has strong realistic mission, and at the same time, he also has a sense of commonality, and he is more concerned about a sense of "return to civilians" or "return to reality". It is also an important reason why his novels are always welcomed and attached importance to by both literary critics and as well as scholars. Recently, Liu Zhenyun's novel, *Wo Bushi Pan Jinlian (I Am Not Pan Jinlian)* has caused extensive repercussions and critical responses which have undoubtedly helped enlarge his influence and reputation. Liu is currently still energetic and increasingly productive, so I am sure that he will produce more excellent works of eternal value and wide international significance.

As one of the earliest avant-garde novelists in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Ge Fei (1964-) was not very productive, but he has accumulated both knowledge and experiences and become increasingly productive since the beginning of the new century. Although he is thought of being influenced by Western postmodernist literature in his early career, yet he is actually more concerned about the historical and social change and vicissitudes of life in the past hundred years. From the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, he began to brew the idea and planned for his ambitious work, and since 2011 he has published his ambitious *Jiangnan Sanbuqu (The Trilogy of the South of the Yangtze River)* composed of three novels, which has turned out an epic series of novels. He sticks to the elite consciousness of literature and art and aesthetic value while describing with a thick brush strokes the historical changes and the intrinsic



spiritual development path of the Chinese society in the past hundred years since the start of the Republic of China in 1911. So it is not surprising that Mo Yan called Ge Fei's Jiangnan trilogy as the second dreaming of mountains and rivers which "inherits the novel *A Dream of the Red Mansions*", because "the hero of the novel Tan Gong is the Jia Baoyu in the present reality". This is obviously the conclusion Mo Yan has drawn from the perspective of the history of Chinese literature. But in my opinion, if we observe it from a broader horizon of world literature, I should say that Ge Fei's trilogy is a spiritual process of modern Chinese intellectuals' "epic" which could be compared with Garcia Marquez's *A Hundred Years' Solitude* to which he is obviously indebted. But the difference between the two lies in that Marquez describes in a "magic realist" method the things that may not have happened in the world, while Mo Yan goes a step further with a "hallucinatory realist" method to represent the inevitable factors contained in the impossible things. Then Ge Fei, through the characters' desire to establish a sort of "Datong world" which is mingled with another character's infatuation of "the land of peach blossom spring", expresses the author's cosmopolitan tendency and universality of aesthetic ideal. This is where Ge Fei's writing is closer to the idealistic spirit formulated by the Nobel committee. After being awarded the Mao Dun Literary Prize, Ge Fei expressed implicitly that "a life without literature is too boring."<sup>6</sup> I think it a very firm belief that all the serious writers and literary scholars have special liking for literature. In this aspect, Ge Fei has set a good example.

### **Chinese Fiction in the Future: Moving among World Literature**

Now, let us come back to the current state of Chinese literature in the new century although I have already discussed briefly some of the novels published in the past seventeen years. Frankly speaking, behind the flourishing appearance, there are quite a few factors which make us worried about the present state and future of Chinese literature. With the strong impact of globalization on the production and circulation of elite Chinese literature and art, people are no longer so interested in serious literature as they used to. That is, they spend more time in reading online and interpersonal communication than reading print books. Nowadays we almost hear the bad news every day that more and more physical book stores have closed along with the rapid development of internet. It is true that internet has provided us with more conveniences to get access to various sorts of information and knowl-

6 Cf. Cheng Xi and Qu Tian, "Ge Fei: a Life without Literature Is Too Boring". [http://news.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/news/4205/2015/20151012172802401366549/20151012172802401366549\\_.html](http://news.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/news/4205/2015/20151012172802401366549/20151012172802401366549_.html)

edge as well as literary works. But to a young student, it is still a great challenge for him to select what are worth reading among masses of books and data. We are very much upset that literary works are no longer so attractive to present-day young people, especially to the university students. They are only attractive to and circulated among some eminent writers and critics who still maintain a sort of elite position. More writers, especially those writing and reading online, devote their time and energy to writing for market and a bigger popular audience. Today's writers and literary critics do not want to guide ordinary readers' reading, but rather, try in every means possible to cater favor to them. Some writers even boast their writing speed and royalties they have got. This is obviously an international phenomenon which has made such eminent literary scholar like J. Hillis Miller very much upset. But he still believes that literature should survive contemporary commercialization and high technology and devotes to literary studies (Miller 2015).

As a Chinese literary critic and comparatist, I often worry about such a situation: Can contemporary Chinese writers produce great literary works with such an impetuous creative attitude and mentality? The answer is seemingly negative. But after Mo Yan was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012, some eminent Chinese novelists have seen the hope. The novelists I have discussed in the above section are certainly most promising candidates as future Nobel laureates. They are still working hard to write their novels not only for domestic readers but also for a wider international audience. But if they want to aim at such a high honor, they must sink in the heart, get rid of all kinds of interference, so as to produce great literary masterpieces of eternal significance and value. On the other hand, as literary critics and comparatists, we should discover those really excellent works and their authors so as to introduce them to international literary scholarship and critical circles, at least to the English readers and literary scholars. But unfortunately, such translation and introduction are so little that even those well known modern and contemporary literary works and their authors in China are little known to the English speaking world. Along with the swift development in Chinese economy, to build a great cultural China has also become a task for us literary and humanities scholars. Since there is no such authoritative literary prize in China which could be compared with the Nobel Prize, we have to attach greater importance to the latter. There have appeared some promising things: members of the Swedish Academy have more and more closely observed some prominent Chinese novelists and their excellent works; quite a few prestigious Western presses have organized translations of great Chinese novels; some far-sighted English journals, like the editors of *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Comparative Literature Studies*, *Neohelicon*, etc., have invited

distinguished scholars to edit special issues discussing contemporary Chinese literature with regard to world literature.<sup>7</sup> We are sure that the second Nobel laureate will appear in China in the years to come.

It is no doubt that there are other important Chinese novelists whose works have already been and will be translated into English and other major international languages, such as Tie Ning (1957-), Li Rui (1950-), Su Tong (1963-), Wang Anyi (1954-), Xu Xiaobin (1953-) and Bi Feiyu (1964-). It is good that they are exclusively novelists, which shows that novel is the most important and popular genre in contemporary China although the country used to be a “kingdom of poetry”. Some of these novelists have been studied by international scholars and Ph.D students. These great efforts will certainly contribute a great deal to the internationalization of contemporary Chinese fiction. About one hundred and ninety years ago, Goethe, after reading some Chinese novels of minor importance, conceptualized the term *Weltliteratur*. Now to write a history of world novel should not neglect the existence and influence of Chinese fiction.

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7 It is true that in recent years, more and more attention has been given to Chinese literature and culture. Apart from translations of Chinese novels organized by some Anglo-American publishers, I myself have been invited to edit quite a few special issues on Chinese literature and culture for such Euro-American journals like *Neohelicon*, *Narrative*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Comparative Literature Studies*, *Modern Language Quarterly*, *Telos*, *ISLE*, etc.

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# Worlding Literary History of Modern China

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## Abstract:

In the “Preface” to the newly-edited *A New Literary History of Modern China* published by Harvard University Press in 2017, David Der-Wei Wang put forward a new “beginning” of modern Chinese literature. As one of the new “starting points,” he offers the year 1635 when the Confucian scholar cum Catholic convert Yang Tingyun (1562-1627) and the Italian Jesuit missionary and scholar Giulio Aleniset (1582-1649) redefined *wenxue* according to concepts inherited from both Jesuit doctrine and classical Chinese learning in the late Ming Dynasty. Prof. Wang is inspired by Martin Heidegger and applies his coined term “Worlding” to the interpretation of Chinese literature, which is the study of modern Chinese literature not only “with” but also “in” the point of view of the world; at the same time it is also the study of the “modern aesthetic significance” of modern Chinese literature with the language, style and literary performance in the “worlding.” It can be seen as a new interpretation of modern Chinese literature and will have a profound impact on future studies.

**Keywords:** David Der-Wei Wang, *A New Literary History of Modern China*, modernity, “starting points”, “Worlding”, *wen*, *shi*

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**A great history must be a literary history.<sup>1</sup>**

Shen Congwen / David Der-Wei Wang

David Der-Wei Wang edited *A New Literary History of Modern China* published

1 See discussion in Wang, David Der-wei. *The Lyrical in Epic Time: Chinese Intellectuals and Artists through the 1949 Crisis*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, Chapter 3.

by Harvard University Press in 2017. It won't be long before the publication of the simplified Chinese version. This volume encompasses a spectacular collection of articles contributed by 143 scholars of the United States, Europe, Asia, mainland China, and Taiwan. With its wide spectrum of topics and thought-provoking statements and assertions, the comprehensive evaluation of this work still remains to be seen. My focus will dwell on Prof. Wang's "Preface" which is the integration of ancient and modern perspectives, the combination of Chinese and foreign sources, the interweaving of the perpendicular and horizontal dimensions. With "rethinking the conceptual framework and pedagogical assumptions that underlie the extant paradigm of writing and reading literary history," (Wang 1) the "Preface" will certainly invite more dialogue from now on. Upon my initial reading, I was impressed by the following parts: the questioning of May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919 as the beginning of the history of modern Chinese literature, the new interpretation of literary modernity in China, the theoretical elaboration of "worlding literary China" and the interesting discussion of texts of different genres as literary discourse, all of which signify the demonstration of this book as a new way in opening up of the domain of discourse for the discussion of modern Chinese literature.

Literary history contains a comprehensive understanding of professional scholars in the same field for the literature within a given period. Therefore, it is necessary to define the beginning and the length of the period, which reveals the nature of it. It is also necessary to define the dimension of the space, which is usually within the national boundary in the modern era. The length of modern Chinese literature is not very long, roughly one hundred years, but it's full of fierce conflicts and considerable controversy defining its nature. In a sense, the period and nature of modern Chinese literature are defined by Chinese contemporary literature. Since Chinese literature after 1949 is defined as "the literature of New China" with specific political implications, the literature prior to that must assume a name defined according to the arrival of the new era. Obviously, because of the connotation and nature of the history of Chinese contemporary literature, modern Chinese literature has been assigned the significance of the origin of modernity with its anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism and provided the necessary logic continuity for the socialist revolutionary significance of Chinese contemporary literature. Because of the radicalization of modernity between the 1950s and 1970s, especially due to the influence of the extreme left wing, the connotation of the definition of modern and contemporary Chinese literature is somewhat narrow without recognition of its richness and diversity. In 1985, Huang Ziping, Chen Pingyuan and Qian Liqun first proposed the concept of "Chinese literature of the twentieth Century" (Huang 3)

with an attempt to diagram the history of modern Chinese literature in a more holistic perspective of time. This concept will undoubtedly integrate the contemporary with the concept of “modern” in contrast to the integration of the modern with the concept of “contemporary” in the 1950s and 1960s before the cultural revolution. In application of the modern enlightenment to the literary historical narration, the term “twentieth century” is adopted to unite the “contemporary period” with the “modern period” as a whole. In the construction of “socialist literature” since 1949, “world literature” was regarded as the bourgeois literature and was totally rejected. The proposal of the concept of “Chinese literature of the twentieth century” was an attempt to place Chinese modern literature in the context of world literature as well as to embrace it with the modern world as a standard and ideal reference. Chen Pingyuan later explained: “When we put forward ‘Chinese literature of the twentieth Century’, it is different from other claims such as ‘The Hundred Years’ Chinese Literature (1840-1949)’, ‘The General History of Modern and Chinese Literature’. It is not only a division of literary history, but also a grasp of the history of Chinese Literature in the twentieth century as an inseparable organic process, which involves the establishment of a new theoretical model.”(Chen 4)

Later, Chen Sihe and Wang Xiaoming in Shanghai put forward the idea of re-writing the literary history in 1988, which was obviously under the influence of the study of modern Chinese literature abroad, such as Xia Zhiqing’s *The History of Modern Chinese Fiction*. Of course, the reformation and innovation of modern thoughts in the 1980s in China brought forth a direct impact. The change of the trend was the demand of the times; therefore the change of the compilation of the history of literature was no exception. Since the 1990s, the publication of the history of modern Chinese literature and the history of Chinese contemporary literature in mainland China burst forth in an endless stream. According to statistics, there are no less than 70 books, however with few breakthroughs. Along with the discussion of “Modernity” in Chinese academic circles, the domain of the discourse of the history of modern Chinese literature has also rapidly expanded its theoretical connotation and aesthetic perspective, among which Prof. Wang’s “repressed modernity” is, among others, undoubtedly the most challenging and inspiring one. It shook the Chinese convention of the narration of the literary history once again after Xia Zhiqing’s *The History of Modern Chinese Fiction*. Xia’s contribution lies in the highlight of the forgotten and the neglected writers while Wang’s is to re-establish the standards of modernity. With the new connotation of modernity rewritten by the literature of the late Qing era, the significance of modern and contemporary literature in China completely changed.

If the publication of *Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction* was Prof. Wang's partial rewriting of modern Chinese literature in his personal style, then his edition of *A New Literary History of Modern China* is the comprehensive rewriting. In *Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction*, Prof. Wang attributed the decadent tradition, the spectacular fantasy, the refined sentimentalism and the diversified tastes to the clues of aesthetic modernity at the beginning. The used-to disregarded failure and leftover so became the origin of modernity, which expresses, in Baudelaire's term, the heroic will of time in the fleeting, ephemeral experience. The aesthetic modernity is quite different from, even contrary to, the dominant force later defined as modernity of social history. Therefore it seems that the late Qing era is not necessarily the origin of modernity, rather there exists only the repressed modernity for a long time. For an extended period of time scholars in the Chinese academic circle have not been aware of Wang's ambition that Chinese modernity has a more profound and broad origin, a self-generated one. So, what is modernity? Whose modernity? They all become new issues.

For a long time we have neglected to ask: since modernity is "repressed," then when is the origin of its generation? Obviously, there is neither "origin" nor "center" according to deconstruction. But still our imagination of history cannot be repressed by the deconstructive strategy. There must be a beginning and an end of the existence as in the case where astrophysicists have never given up the exploration of the origin of the universe. Artificially or arbitrarily, there must be a "starting point" of the modernity of China. History without a "starting point" is unimaginable as well as incomprehensible. Now with the publication of *A New Literary History of Modern China* we suddenly realize that the "repressed modernity" has been lurking as the mysterious loong with concrete head and tail over a long history of two or even three hundred years. Many years ago, Ouyang Jianghe wrote in a poem entitled "Fashion Shop":

.....Are you fascinated about the feet of stitches?

Or the scheme of rhymes? Sichuan embroidery, or the embroidery of Hunan? With leisure

Not always recalling with an idle pen. The love about the south of the Yangtze River

Is foreshadowing like palindromes waiting for you in the north: peach blossoms outside

the stitches of plum blossoms inside.(Tr. Zheng Che)



With poetic diction skillful enough to stitch the history, the culture and the mood of the time together, the rhetoric of the poem is impressive and the charm of it is delicate. Of course, the content and style of the poem is a little sentimental and elaborate, which may not be a suitable analogy for such a grand and challenging academic effort of Prof. Wang. Besides, Prof. Wang will not agree with my choice of the adjectives such as “elaborate” , “grand” and “sentimental” to describe his “repressed modernity.” What I want to highlight is the literary expression of Prof. Wang in his theoretical exploration.(Chen 201-202) The literary charm, especially the fascinating classical charm, is what is lacking in my engagement of literary criticism in China and deserves my sincere praise. Of course, Prof. Wang’s literary criticism is not lacking in vigor and tenacity with implicit strength of character. Indeed, I can feel Prof. Wang’s concern and worry with his fusion into the research of the history of modern Chinese literature. His handling of the complicated issues of the history of modern Chinese literature with ease is the best evidence of his strength of will as a leader among his peers. With courage and determination, he spent more than 10 years guiding no less than 150 scholars of different countries to complete this masterpiece with the breadth and depth of history, which is the embodiment of Prof. Wang’s firm and indomitable spirit. Though its academic contribution should be left to fuller evaluation in the future, this work is undoubtedly worthy of respect for its extremely laborious and time-consuming efforts.

Indeed, the most challenging as well as controversial opinion of *A New Literary History of Modern China* is that it traces the “starting point” of literary modernity back to the year 1635, “when the Confucian scholar *cum* Catholic convert Yang Tingyun (1562-1627) set to redefine *wenxue* according to concepts inherited from both Jesuit doctrine and classical Chinese learning.”(Wang 20) “Finally, we look forward in time through visions of the future”(Wang 21)with “the science fiction writer Han Song (1965-)'s *2066: Mars over America*.”(Wang 33) *A New Literary History of Modern China* “is intended for readers who are interested in understanding modern China through its literary and cultural dynamics. At the same time, it takes up the challenge of rethinking the conceptual framework and pedagogical assumptions that underlie the extant paradigm of writing and reading literary history.”(Wang 1)

This proposal of the “starting point” of Chinese literary modernity is undoubtedly bold, for it challenges the concept of Chinese modern history, modifies the modern transformation of Chinese history and opens up a new domain of discourse in the discussion of Chinese modernity. This is the earliest proposed “starting point” of the origin of the modernity of literature in China. Sporadic arguments that the modernity of Chinese literature originated in the late Ming Dynasty are not un-

common, but it is the first time to rewrite and rename Chinese modernity on such a large scale. The argument about the origin of modernity in China is also derived from the various disputes of the origin of Western modernity. The intellectual origin of Western modernity is usually marked by the rise of the French Revolution and the European Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century. The social origin of Western modernity comes from the globalization of commercialism, the emergence of the industrial revolution and the formation of the metropolis as the center of social activities. But many researchers have traced the germination of modernity back to the “longue durée” of the sixteenth century (1350~1650) proposed by the Annals School with Fernand Braudel as its leader. The end of the sixteenth century marked the beginning of the great navigation, and the British East India Company was founded in 1600. In 1640, the British parliament passed The Grand Remonstrance, which is usually regarded as the beginning of modern world history. Obviously, this year could be regarded as “the origin of modernity.” However, this is not the earliest year to mark the beginning of the modernity of the West. Some scholars in modern theology are willing to locate the beginning of modernity from theological sources. Michael Allen Gillespie identified the origins of modernity in the late Middle Ages in *The Theological Origins of Modernity*. Another more famous view came from Toynbee, who saw 1475 as the beginning of modern times, and 1875 as the beginning of the turmoil of postmodern times. Obviously, Prof. Wang’s identification of 1635 as the beginning of Chinese modern literature is really a clever choice. It is five years earlier than the beginning of the history of the modern world. These five years are very important, for in this case the origin of Chinese modernity is neither outside that of the world nor influenced as the other by Western modernity. It is not in accordance with Oswald Spengler’s observation that the willing man leads the fate while the unwilling man dragged away by it. China has its own destiny, and Chinese literature has its own strength! In this book Prof. Wang moved the location of the origin of Chinese modernity back to Chinese history, which is a dialogue between China and the West, and it demonstrates China’s vision and embrace of the world. Of course, the conversion of Yang Tingyun to Christianity is not in accordance with authentic Chinese tradition, even beyond the boundaries of the orthodox. But if it were viewed as the Chinese first meeting with the world with an open mind, it would be a different story. Isn’t the discovery of the world, to discover the wider humanity as well as to discover the progress of human communication, the most fundamental connotation of modernity? In 1617, just a few years before 1635, Jin Ping Mei (Chinese: 金瓶梅, translated into English as *The Plum in the Golden Vase* or *The Golden Lotus* ) was published and is now known as the earliest mod-

ern Chinese novel. At the beginning of fifteenth century, the population of China was about sixty million, while in the sixteenth century it reached 150 million, but it declined sharply around 1644. Therefore there are pros and cons for the choice of 1635 as the beginning year of Chinese modernity. In 1640, which was regarded as the starting point of the modern world, Britain was involved in the struggle between parliament and monarchy that lead to the defeat of the king. Apart from that, around 1635 China is still suffering the political darkness full of corrupted officials, deteriorating with the widespread famine full of destitute people because of an abnormal cold spell. The situation does not change until 1644 when the Manchu army conquered Beijing through the strategic fortress Shanhaiguan and began the Manchu rule of the northern nomadic people over the central plains of China with the dominance of the Confucian culture for thousands of years. However, the modernity of the late Ming Dynasty can be regarded as a very dynamic and fascinating domain of discourse, especially in the cultural and aesthetic sense.<sup>2</sup> In this way the origin of modern Chinese literature is no longer in simple opposition to the modernity of May 4<sup>th</sup>, or that of the enlightenment, but to seek the primary source from China itself. The proposal that Chinese tradition generates modern culture takes up the challenges of the concept of a “world system” by Immanuel Wallerstein---the diffusion from the core to the edge to challenge. It is undeniable that this breeding is no escape of the influence of the world, for example, the introduction of Christianity, the great discovery of geography, the influx of silver as well as the beginning of international trade. Since I haven’t read the book, the above comments are my comments on Prof. Wang’s choice of 1635, whose significance in the discussion of the modernity of Chinese literature or the origin of modern Chinese literature is undoubtedly a very challenging and controversial point of view.

In fact, Prof. Wang did not just arbitrarily decide on this year, nor did he seek the social and historical source for literature’s “modernity.” He did provide multiple entries for the discussion about the origin of modern Chinese literature, which enable the coexistence and accommodation of many choices of timing. In his view, the late Ming Dynasty is just one of the options, for at that time the concept of “literature” coined by Yang Tingyun out of the collision between western classical ideas introduced by Christian missionaries and traditional Confucian poetics is very similar to that of literature in the modern sense. Additionally, Prof. Wang borrowed from the previous related discussions of some famous Chinese scholars, such as Zhou Zuoren

2 Some scholars have discussed the decadence of the late Ming Dynasty, which can be regarded as one of the aesthetic features of modernity. See Tuo Jianqing. “Dacendent Aesthetic Style and Chinese Modernity in the Late Ming Dynasty”.

and Ji Wenfu, who respectively, from the perspective of humanism or from a revolutionary standpoint, traced the beginning of modern Chinese literature to the new literature in the seventeenth century. Prof. Wang points out:

As such, the “beginning” of modern Chinese literature suggests both a moment of genesis and a retroactive discovery. Another possible beginning point is 1792. That year witnessed two apparently unrelated events: Lord George Macartney’s (1737-1806) diplomatic mission to China, and the publication of Cao Xueqin’s (1715-1763) novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. However, when juxtaposed, the two events shed new light on each other. Whereas the Macartney mission (1792-94) raised the problems and promises of modernity, particularly of foreigners in the central kingdom, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* created a world that encapsulated late imperial Chinese culture at its height, one that signals the beginning of the ending of a civilization; hence the rise of anticipatory nostalgia.(Wang 20)

The year of the publication of *Dream of Red Mansions* is just another possible beginning. Prof. Wang did not deny the year 1919, which was “recognized” in the mainland China as the beginning of Chinese “modernity.” Obviously, at present in the academic circles of the mainland, few people persist in the idea that “May 4<sup>th</sup>” marks the beginning of modern China, for in that case there would be the serious reduction of the domain of discourse of Chinese modernity, which is not welcomed by the large number of researchers in this field. In fact, if the beginning of modern Chinese literature is no longer decided from political history, but from the perspective of a modern interpretation of historical, literary and aesthetic concepts, it is undoubtedly wise and constructive to open the scope of timing. Of course we need to discuss and clarify the historical and theoretical presuppositions. In any case, the proposal put forward by Prof. Wang offers a new starting point in research.

There is another important view in the “Preface” worth noting, that is, when he explains his modern Chinese literary thoughts he emphasizes the concept of “worlding.” If the choice of the year 1635 is to modify the origin of modernity of Chinese literature from the point of view of time, then “worlding” is to reexamine modernity from the point of view of space. Instead of the influence of Foucault, the proposal of the concept of “worlding” indicates Martin Heidegger’s influence. The verbalization of the word “worlding” is implicit for Heidegger while it becomes explicit in Prof. Wang’s application. In Heidegger’s view, the world is constructed and exists eternally in a constantly shifting state of becoming. Prof. Wang quotes that

“worlding” is a complex and dynamic process of ever-renewing realities, sensations and perceptions through which one incessantly works to access “the Open of the world.”(Wang 17) From this point of view, “Modern Chinese Literature,” as a thing “present in its thinging from out of the worlding world.”(Wang 17) Its existence is free outside of our naming with its own origin, which allows Prof. Wang to adjust the starting point. This echoes Husserl’s idea---Go back to the thing itself. Since the most important starting point of modernity is to return to the thing itself, to maintain the initial state of things, to maintain the heart of history, people can certainly go back to a far earlier origin. Isn’t there a possibility that modernity beginning in 1635 is a more authentic date? On the other hand, “modern Chinese literature” is a thing named after many perceptions and is called to becoming in the worlding. Obviously, Heidegger’s discussion of “worlding” is in the sense of existentialism, which is the unity of the four worlds of the sky, the earth, the God and the human. Prof. Wang did not fall into Heidegger’s speculative philosophy. Otherwise things can not be realized and the authenticity of modern history can not be proved in this sense. What lie in Prof. Wang’s mind is things in the “worlding” and things in history. “Worlding” is not a state of things coming into the world by themselves, but in the historical conditions. Prof. Wang writes:

“Worlding” describes the conditions of being-in-the-world in relation to the foregrounding and evolvment of things as such. The conditions are less fixed essences than conduits of differences between verbal, written, and mental concepts. According to Heidegger, it is poetry that brings the world and things together in a topology of being, “gathering into a simple onefold of their intimate belonging together.”As discussed above, *wen* points to a multitude of artifacts, locations, or encounters that manifest the world over time. *wen* is not a sign so much as an articulation of the meaning of the world through a set of correlating ideas, objects, or doings.(Wang 18)

“Worlding” in history is “being” in the sense of empiricism and materialism. In the study of modern Chinese literature, Prof. Wang does not simply borrow Heidegger’s thoughts, but instead carries on the “creative” transformation. He regards “worlding” as the aesthetic expression of the transformation of Chinese literature from ancient to modern times. The hidden effort is to distinguish the modernity of Chinese literature from that of western literature. Clearly, Prof. Wang is very cautious on this issue, only touching upon it without further elaboration. In addition to “the dialectic of truth versus fiction” as the drive of western modernity, Prof.

Wang holds “modern Chinese literature implants itself at every level of human experience, forming an ever-amplifying orbit of manifestations that are imaginatively evoked and historically embedded.”(Wang 22) In the process of the literary representation of the changes in the world, the literary mind drives or generates various forms, genres to record itself, the world, the life experience in all aspects as well as the beliefs, which is the extraordinary significance of China’s literature entering into modernity.

Prof. Wang’s concept of modern Chinese literature is not limited to the traditional genres. He pays much attention to diversified ones, manifesting the rich spirit, emotion and soul of modern China: “The mutual illumination between *wen* (literature) and *shi* (history)” is what underlies Prof. Wang’s editorial vision. He stated passionately,

“How to reflect the dialogue between *wen* (literature) and *shi* (history), or history of poetry in a narrow sense in Chinese tradition remains a central concern of *New Literary History*. Through the essays, I intend to configure a world in which literature of myriad attitudes, styles and levels, is brought to bear on history, and history is similarly brought to bear on literature [...] The purpose of each essay is to elicit the historical significance of that event, as represented through literary texts or experiences, be it in terms of its particular circumstances, long-term relevance, or its contemporary resonance or dissonance.”(Wang 11)

Out of the longing for modernity of Chinese literature, Prof. Wang made the largest possible planning in the “worlding” for modern Chinese literature, which has four dimensions: architectonics of temporalities; dynamics of travel and transculturation; contestation between *wen* and mediality; and remapping of the literary cartography of modern China.

Obviously, *A New Literary History of Modern China* opens up the domain of discourse of modern Chinese literature in the following four aspects: the origin of modernity, the diversity of literary genres, the highlight of the literary mind, the mapping of literary cartography. Many aspects of the book will arouse the great interest of the academic community and inevitably trigger fierce debates, such as the broad theoretical scope, the rich diversified expression, the sharp individualistic interpretation, the novel weird resources, etc. In the discussion of the modern Chinese literary world, there has been no exciting topic for a long time except for some malice which has done harm instead of construction. *A New Literary History*

*of Modern China* is a more profound rewriting, which rewrites not only the modernity of Chinese literature but that of China with such a close linkage between the literature, the history and the history of ideas. It is the writing of the “consciousness of the present” that highlights what has been buried or forgotten in the past and explodes “the continuum of history” and “historical materialism.”<sup>3</sup> Its significance is self-evident: to what extent Chinese modern experience promotes or changes the global spread of modernity? In this sense, *A New Literary History of Modern China* is seeking a more independent and renewed spiritual history for Chinese literature, as well as for Chinese culture in the world and in the modern process of globalization.

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3 This is inspired by Walter Benjamin “To put to work experience with history—a history that is originary for every present—is the task of historical materialism. The latter is directed toward of consciousness of the present—which explodes the continuum of history.” Walter Benjamin. *Selection Writings*. eds. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 262.

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# Reading Tao Yuanming/Tao Qian: “Twenty Poems about Drinking”

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## Abstract:

Tao Qian’s “Twenty Poems about Drinking” have been read as autobiography, and as being about his life as a recluse and about drinking. In my paper, I analyze the twenty poems as forming one narrative unit, in order to show that the subject of the poems is about poetry, just as much as it is about drinking, and I discuss their implications for a poetics of Tao Qian.

**Keywords:** Tao Qian, Hightower, Ashmore, poetry, wine

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Robert Ashmore’s study of Tao Qian (365?-427) has been instrumental in putting into perspective the life and work of this great Chinese poet, his indebtedness to the ancient past as well to his historical present, which has made it possible to capture the more subtle implications of his poetry. Most of all, as the title of his book indicates, *The Transport of Reading*, he has drawn attention to the implications of “reading” as “a mode of transport” not only to better understand Tao Qian but also to determine how reading had an impact on his poetry: “how Tao Qian created a distinctive and original poetics out of the materials provided to him by traditions about text and reading” (Ashmore 4). His approach is for the most part historical but it provides a useful background to place Tao Qian’s poetry into perspective and to eliminate many of the misconceptions and hypotheses that have been made on his account.

In this essay I would like to emphasize another aspect of “reading” on which Ashmore only touches indirectly since it is not his main focus. I mean a close reading of these poems to the extent that my non-existent knowledge of Chinese will allow me and “transport” me. I would like to read Tao Qian’s “Twenty poems about Drinking,”<sup>1</sup> as if they were English poems, aided by the translation and the com-

1 Hightower translates the poems as “Twenty Poems *after* Drinking” (my emphasis) because he believes that Tao could have only written them “after” drinking wine, which is understandable.

mentary of established sinologists as James Hightower (henceforward as H), whose translations seem to me to be the most adequate of those I have read, but I also take into account the translations and commentaries of Ashmore and A. R. Davies.

One of the key aspects of Tao Qian's poetry, which Ashmore points out, is the uncanny ability to write from the present, as if the poems were happening as we read them, as though Tao Qian were speaking directly to us, "in which the time of the poet's experience and the time of the poetic expression seem to merge in the spontaneous here-and-now of the reader who feels addressed by the poem" (Ashmore 15). In these instances, he writes, "it is often difficult to pin down whether the scene is to be read as reported from the present or as happening in an envisioned ideal future" (Ashmore 15). He draws our attention, in particular, to poem #14 which he cites as an example of "spontaneous conviviality":

Old friends who appreciate my ways,  
carrying a jug, have got together and come.  
Spreading brushwood mats, we sit beneath a pine,  
A few pours later, once again we're drunk.  
These geezers' talk is wild and lacking order;  
the sequence for filling up our cup is lost.  
No longer aware there's such a thing as "I" ...  
how should I know what things should be esteemed?  
Distantly, I lose track of where I'm going;  
in wine there is a depth of flavor.

For Ashmore, the poem is a version of the poetic theme of "summons to the recluse" where the poet invites the reader away from the comfortable life of the city to the conviviality and pleasures of the life of a recluse in the country. As he points out, Tao Qian's use of the solitary banquet is a version of this theme: "The text of the poem rather than being voiced as a summons into a realm alternatively of rustic or of cosmopolitan fellowship, becomes itself both the deferment and the potential site of recovery of a form of fellowship that exists from the outset solely in the experience of reading" (Ashmore 24)

Conviviality and wine drinking is not just tied to reading and interpreting texts, as Ashmore indicates, but also to writing poetry. We are told that drinking is something that the poet likes to do a lot, and references to him as a drunk are common in all commentaries, but he also likes to write poetry and it is in his poetry that we

know of his drinking. The act of writing poetry and drinking seem to go hand in hand, although for a critic like Hightower the two cannot occur together, but one must follow the other, and this is why he translates the title of these poems as “Twenty poems *after* drinking wine” (my emphasis). Understandably, one cannot write poetry while drunk, only after. However, Hightower’s distinction has greater implications. Although his reading is logical, it is also literal and non-poetic. While this is not generally the case with his commentary, his view presupposes a notion of poetry as biography, as imitation of life from which one can bridge the gulf between poetry and history.

If the twenty “Poems about drinking” appear to have been written at random and under the influence of wine there is nothing in these poems other than what Tao Chien tells us in the *Preface* or in the poems themselves to make us believe it. Although not all the twenty poems may be the original ones, commentators have acknowledged that at least the first and the last poem, as well as most of them, seem to fit well together. Tao Qian seems to have privileged a type of poetic composition in a series which may contain only a few poems or, as in this case, as many as twenty, or to combine poetry with prose. Whatever the case, it is misleading to privilege one poem from the series over the others, as is sometimes done when poem #5 is singled out from the rest. Even though all the poems may not be those originally intended, they have a continuity of their own and are easily read as a single narrative. There are only a couple of poems that do not fit within the narrative, which may very well be those that were added later. In this paper I will consider all twenty poems as constituting a whole narrative under the general theme of “Poems about Drinking” to show that these poems are about poetry, just as much as they are about drinking, and what this implies for a poetics of Tao Qian.

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### *Twenty poems about drinking*

*Preface.* In the Preface to the poems, Tao tells us that in the evening he has taken up drinking “some excellent wine” in the company of his shadow, “until suddenly I find myself drunk,” and he has written a few poems for “my own amusement.” He has “no more in mind than to provide a diversion” (H 124). Very understandably, Hightower views these statements as stating nothing more than what they say, that “they are the reflection of the moods of a man with few friends, time on his hands, and wine to drink” (H 125). However, these are not just the reflections of anyone but those of a great poet who has had a great impact on future gen-

erations of poets like Wang Wei, Li Po and Du Fu; a poet who while he may have idled away his time in drinking he also wrote a conspicuous amount of poetry to become one of the best known Chinese poets of all time, which is why we still read him today. If these poems were just the occasional musings of a drunk we would not be reading them today. Although Hightower knows that Tao is a great poet, he does not take him seriously as someone who can write on important issues of his times and can be careful about what he writes. Passing for a drunk is a technique of dissimulation that future poets like Li Po or Du Fu imitated, sometimes only too well, but their drinking did not stop them from writing great poetry. In these poets, drinking and writing poetry are closely related so that drinking and writing poetry are, sometimes, one and the same action. While there is no doubt that Tao Qian may have had a predilection for wine, drinking wine has another function in these poems which is not tied to drinking but is the distinctive trait, the essential quality, that differentiates the poet, or the sage, from the civil servant, the moralist from the ignorant masses. Tao Qian's "Poems about drinking" are poems about poetic truth because only in poetry and in drinking, truth is revealed.

## I

Decline and growth have no fixed time,  
Everyone gets his share of both:  
Master Shao of the melon patch  
Used to be Lord of Tungling,  
Cold weather alternates with hot  
And so it is with human lives ...  
Intelligent men understand  
And are beset no more with doubts.  
When chance brings them a jug of wine  
They take it gladly as night comes on.

The first poem is introductory and announces the theme of Change: how "decline and growth have no fixed time" and how everything and everyone is subject to change. The maxim stated in the first two lines is demonstrated by the example of "Master Shao of the melon patch" who was once the Lord of Tungling and now he grows melons. The point seems to be that although change is inevitable and natural like cold and hot weather, "Intelligent men understand" and accept change and are not distraught over it. The *topos* of the intelligent men recurs in some of the other poems and it refers to men like Tao Qian, that is, to poets and wise men who drink

wine. In later poems Tao explains more clearly who these men are but he concludes this first poem in very much the same way that Du Fu late poems do by radically shifting from the initial serious statement about the human predicament to a more lighthearted and mundane conclusion: “When chance brings them a jug of wine/ They take it gladly as night comes on.”<sup>2</sup> The poem ends with an invitation to drink and to forget.

For Hightower the poem “ends by recommending a stoical acceptance of fate ... tempered by recourse to the wine bottle” (H 125). Although this may well be true, it seems banal that a great poet would suggest that the bottle is the only solution, not only because it would take away from the wisdom of the sage, but also because it is not a solution. What we have here, instead, is an example of how everything is subject to change, even this poem, which can arbitrarily shift from the serious to the ludicrous, from poetry to drinking wine, or vice versa. Intelligent men understand and are not overly concerned by it. They reach for a jug of wine and find contentment in it. In other words, the poem performs in the form of allegory the very truth that it states. It shows that poetic language, like human life, is subject to change and that even meaning can change from one line to the next. This is the truth that intelligent men understand, namely, that there is no truth and that everything is subject to change, even poetry.

In this case, wine does not function as a means to forget the ups and downs of life, which would be the choice of the non-intelligent man, but implies acceptance of whatever life has to offer. If one is offered a jug of wine one should not refuse it; one should accept it gladly, especially “as night comes on.” If once we held a very important position, such as Lord of Tungling did, and now we find ourselves working in a melon patch we should not despair but accept what is given to us. Those who do not accept their condition because their aim remains higher, they are not only not being wise but theirs is an unrealistic attitude toward life, which makes them victims of Change. In reading poetry, as in drinking wine, one has to accept the fact that understanding means that there is nothing to understand.

Poem #2 seems to question Confucius’ teachings on doing good as opposed to evil, because good will not be rewarded. He quotes the examples of Po-i and Shu-ch’i, who, Hightower tells us, are “favorite examples of Confucian examples of unselfishness and loyalty” (H 126). They left home so that their brother could inherit the fief, and were also faithful to the “fallen” Shang dynasty but their unselfishness and loyalty went unrewarded. All the talk about good and evil, writes Tao, is only

2 For Du Fu’s shift from the poetic to the mundane see Verdicchio.

empty talk: “What’s the point of all the cant they talk?” In this regard, Hightower quotes from Tao’s “Lament for Gentlemen Born out of their Times” where the virtues of Po-i and Confucius’ disciple Yen Hui went similarly unrewarded: “*I fear that this teaching is no more than empty words*” (H 126, my emphasis). Tao Qian’s target seems to be Confucius’ wisdom that this behavior, even though apparently noble and virtuous, is entirely unrealistic. When the social order does not function according to his moral tenets the only choice and consolation for his disciples is to stand firm: “The gentleman is firm in adversity; the mean man in adversity goes all to pieces” (H 126). Steadfastness in adversity seems to be the only consolation for the unrealistic attitude of the Confucian gentleman.

Tao also mentions Jung Ch’i-ch’I, who as Hightower suggests, “[is not] an appropriate example of goodness unrewarded” (H127). He is mentioned in poem #11 as a sage: “Old Man Jung is said to have been a sage” who was “always hungry his whole life long.” In poem #2, his only consolation, and that of others, seems to be that their names will live a thousand years; in poem #11, Tao questions the value of this reward. Is future recognition worth a life of deprivation? What do we know when we are dead?:

They may have left behind an honored name  
But it cost a lifetime of deprivation.  
What do we know, once we are dead and gone? (#11)

Tao concludes poem #11 by saying that one should follow one’s heart and not follow accepted views. This last notion seems to draw the line between the examples of the Confucians Po-i and Shu-ch’I and the sage Jung Ch’i-ch’i. The former followed “accepted views,” those of Confucius, and were disappointed, the sage Jung did not. He was pure all his life and was happy in his condition, “plucking his lute and singing” (H 127). Whereas to be remembered may be for Po-i and Shu-ch’I a worthwhile reward, for Jung, who was happy in his condition, it did not matter if his name would be remembered in a thousand years. This is probably why Tao, in poem #2, and in poem #11, just mentions him by his surname, Jung. The last two lines of poem #2 only apply to those who follow Confucius’ doctrine and not to the sage. The Confucian adept must be “firm in adversity,” the sage does not know adversity. He lives in the present and accepts change. As Tao indicates in poem #1, the sage or the intelligent man is not beset by doubt, when chance brings him a jug of wine he takes it.

Poem # 3, as Hightower points, is certainly a reference to Chuang Tzu’s “The

world has lost the Way, and the Way has lost the world. World and Way have lost contact with one another. How can a man committed to the Way prosper in the world, and how can the world prosper in the Way?" (H 128) Tao's critique focuses on man's inability to follow his own impulses. He would rather follow the dictates of the majority and pursue the rewards offered by a social reputation and posthumous fame. Hightower believes with other commentators, and understandably so, that "the addiction to wine is incompatible with reputation." (128) However, it is unlikely that this is what Tao Qian has in mind here. The implication seems to be, rather, that those who care for a career do not care for themselves, for their "body," and are afraid to lose themselves in wine. As Tao writes in poem # 14, in wine the ego disappears: "Aware no more that our own 'I' exists."

Tao implies that what gives value to the body is "just this single life" which is as brief as a "lightning bolt." He questions the choice of those who strive for fame and fortune but do not appreciate life; those who follow the dictates of society instead of their instincts. The ego is what drives men to seek fame and to endure suffering for the reward of being remembered and appreciated by posterity. The ego is what drives us to excel and gives the illusion that we can prolong life through fame rather than be content with what we have and to share what we have in the company of friends. This is the Way which has been lost. Men have exchanged the Way for the world's way, for reputation and for social acceptance. They are intent on gaining fame and fortune without realizing that the world is only a "dream-illusion" (#8) and its promises are only empty words.

Poem #4 is probably one of those poems that were inserted later. It is usually read as an allegory of Tao Qian's condition who has sought shelter and refuge, "like a bird lost from the flock," far from home, with no support, until he finds shelter. The poem highlights the firmness and steadfastness of the pine that alone can provide shelter and unfailing shade, and alludes to the strength and fortitude of the recluse who has chosen not to pursue fame, who is alone and content with himself. The symbol of the lonely pine, to which Tao Qian recurs often throughout these poems, is stripped of its foliage and of everything except the steadfastness of its resolve. The image of the bird "lost from the flock" alludes to those who, like Tao, have made a similar resolve to move away from the flock, and who finally find shelter with a pine, a "resting place."

The poem is also this resting place. Once the Classics and the Way can no longer be relied on, the only refuge for those who seek shelter will be Tao's poetry for centuries to come: "And in a thousand years will never leave."

## V

I built my hut beside a traveled road  
 Yet hear no noise of passing carts and horses.  
 You would like to know how it is done?  
 With the mind detached, one's place becomes remote.  
 Picking chrysanthemums by the eastern hedge  
 I catch sight of the distant southern hills:  
 The mountain air is lovely as the sun sets  
 And flocks of flying birds return together.  
 In these things is a fundamental truth  
 I would like to tell, but lack the words.

The fifth poem is the one most often quoted and contains in a few lines Tao's life-philosophy: "You would like to know how it is done?" For Hightower, "It conveys admirably the detachment and repose of the great Recluse who makes his home among men yet remains uncontaminated by the world" (H 130). The poem defines seclusion as a state of mind. Even in a crowd the poet can be a recluse and be a thousand miles away from where he is. The simple act of gathering chrysanthemums can transport him far away to the southern hills. One can almost smell the mountain air which is lovely when the sun sets and the birds return together to the nest. This fundamental truth is very simple and cannot be expressed in words but not because of any failure on the poet's part. This is a truth that all poetry conveys and every sympathetic reader understands it. It is not a doctrine, like Confucius', written in words that men learn by heart in order to be guided by them. It is a poetic truth that cannot be taught but only intuited.

Poem #6 brings up the difficulty of telling right from wrong, especially when times are bad and people praise or blame according to what is believed by the majority. This is not the case with the intelligent man, or with the "men of understanding," who stand alone and are contemptuous of the vulgar crowd. These men know the difficulty of telling right from wrong and abstain from passing judgment. They withdraw from the world like Huang and Ch'i rather than accept compromise. Hightower adds a sarcastic note to this example saying that the intelligent man "would be as little worried by political vicissitudes as by the changes of fortune that plague the individual; he simply prefers to do his drinking in retirement." (H 133)

Hightower's translation of poem #7 is somewhat ominous. He reads it to imply that Tao collects chrysanthemums and floats them in wine "to prolong his life and also to forget death, suggesting a certain lack of confidence in the efficacy of his



concoction” (H 134). But in his view, Tao drinks chrysanthemum wine not so much to prolong life but, on the contrary, to leave it: “To strengthen my resolve to leave the world.” Other versions of this poem do not imply a sense of gloom and doom but refer to the forgetfulness that drinking chrysanthemum wine brings: it will help him leave “behind all worldly emotions” (Lily Pao-Hu Chang); the wine “Will free my mind from all the worldly powers” (Wang Rongpei), or the “luscious wine” will help him drift farther from the world: “The farther I drifted from the world” (Tan Shilin). The poet’s resolve to leave the world is not meant literally, in a physical sense, but in the sense that the wine will help him leave the social world for the world of a recluse or, as he puts it, for a new life.

Poem #8 may be another of those poems like poem #4 that was inserted later. It employs the symbol of the pine and makes it clear that it stands for the poet whose true nature and essence lies hidden. No one is aware of the “hidden beauty” of the pine until all the other trees are killed by the frost and it is the only one left standing. The poet, whose symbol is the pine, is described lifting a jug of wine and gazing into the distance, just as we saw in poem #5 where “I catch sight of the distant southern hills.” Like the pine, the poet is born in the “midst of dream-illusion” and it is only when these are dispersed that the loftiness of the poet is revealed. His knowledge that the world is but a “dream-illusion,” that nothing is real, or of everlasting value, makes the poet choose to stand alone rather than strive to “submit to dusty bonds?” or to seek fame and fortune that are illusory.

In poem #9 we get an insight in what Tao Qian means by “wine.” When a farmer with a heart of gold comes with a jug of wine to try to persuade him, or to bribe him, to return to the world he has rejected, he refuses it. This wine is not the wine of friendship or the wine that distinguishes the intelligent man from the gentleman, the civil servant. This is the wine of compromise and conformity. This wine is meant to distract him from himself and from his chosen Way, and to bring him back to the fold. The poet is “out of tune” with the world and it would be foolish to go against his inclinations: “To go against oneself is a real mistake.” No amount of wine could make him do that. For him, there is no turning back. Once the farmer has understood, Tao can sit down with him and drink the wine in friendship and as a token of hospitality.

Poem # 10 follows up on the previous poem and tells of when the poet went against his inclinations and took a “trip” to the social world forced by “hunger” for fame and reputation. However, he realized that it was not worth the money and the effort, and returned home.

Poem # 11 targets Confucians, once again, with the examples of Master Yen,

who was Confucius's favorite disciple (H 140) and Old Man Jung, the sage who was mentioned in poem #2. Yen is an example of the man who seeks honor and fame, Jung was always hungry. Was their life of deprivation worth the renown they received after death? Since we don't know what happens when we die, for Tao it is best to follow one's heart. We can indulge ourselves all we want but when the moment to die comes we cannot take it with us. When we die we all go the same way, naked. A man should think for himself and not follow "accepted views," or follow others.

Poem #12 gives the examples of Chang Chang-kung and Yang Chung-li who served in office but eventually resigned. Yang Chung-li seems to have resigned and then gone back. Tao's lesson is that when we have decided to leave the life of an official we should no longer have second thoughts. This is a lesson that Tao Qian learned himself. All talk is idle, one must follow the dictates of one's heart: "Let's have no more of all this pointless talk! / I prefer to follow my own course."

Poem # 13 occupies a key position within the series of twenty poems. Here Tao explains the inner conflicts that assail him from time to time, to which he alluded in the previous poem. In this allegory the poet acknowledges his two conflicting selves: one is the moralist who does not drink, the other drinks alone too much. One feels that he ought to have a career, make money and support his family, the other feels he ought to follow his heart and his inclinations, and stand firm in his resolve. These two conflicting and contrasting selves laugh at each other but they don't understand each other. The conventional and career bound self appears very stupid, while the drunken self is wiser because he is detached. The poem is an example of what Tao in poem #5 called the fundamental truth of being "detached," of taking one's distance, that is, the ability of the intelligent man to double himself, to see both himself and his other.

As Tao indicates throughout these poems this characteristic is associated with drinking wine, with being drunk, because only in this state one can be detached and understand that the world is only a dream-illusion. In the last two lines of the poem, the drunken guest seems to have gained the upper hand over the conventional self. Tao's advice to the drunken self is to light the candles when the sun goes down." As Hightower points out this is an invitation to drinking. "Light the candles' amounts to saying: "Keep on drinking" (H 144).

Poem # 14 explores the importance of drinking as the poet sits by the pine tree drinking with his friends, talking and drinking. Drinking wine abolishes all egos and all hierarchies. There are no more differences and no one is judgmental of others: "Aware no more that our own "I" exists/How are we to value other things?" In

wine they lose their ego which is responsible for their illusions and their dreams of fame and fortune. In wine they realize that they are all equal and that they will die the same way, naked. This is the “profundity” that Tao finds in wine.

In poem #15 the poet reflects on the insignificance of man with respect to the “vast” universe and on the brevity of life. As he pointed out in poem #1, he reiterates that man has to resign himself to his fate, to getting old and to dying. Most of all, one has to resign oneself to the idea that one did not achieve all the dreams he had in his youth: “Unless we resign ourselves to whims of fate/ It’s just too bad for what we started with.”

Poem #16 continues the conceit of the previous poem. Tao writes about “what he started with.” He says that “[he] had no taste for worldly things” and devoted his whole life to the Classics. However, he has not accomplished anything with his life, as he should have, if he had followed the dictates of the Classics and become a Confucian gentleman and a civil servant. Hightower points out that this poem is “first of all a confession of failure” (H 147). However, the lines are ironic because they refer to the failure of becoming a Confucian gentleman, which Tao Qian criticizes throughout these poems. Hightower adds that Tao knew that Confucius had only contempt for the man who at 40 or 50 had not accomplished anything with his life. (H 148) This failure, instead, is Tao’s success for not having been seduced by a life of fame and fortune, for which he has only contempt, and for having followed his heart and his inclination. The Classics and Confucius, with their notion of clinging “to firmness in adversity” only brought him suffering and grief. As he no longer has a companion like Meng-kung (“a convivial drinker”) (H 149) to drink with, there is no one who can understand him, and nobody with whom to share his feelings.

Poem # 16 was supposed to illustrate the maxim at the end of poem 15 that we must resign ourselves to the whims of fate and accept that we may not end up doing what we wanted to do early in life. From poem #16, it is clear that whether by whim of fate or by choice, Tao Qian did not end up a Confucian. Within this context, the last line of poem #15 is ironic: It’s too bad for what we started out with, if we are Confucian!

Poem # 17 probably belongs to those poems that were inserted later as it does not really fit within the narrative of the twenty poems. Once again it is an allegory of the poet’s condition stifled by the ignorant masses symbolized by a “hidden orchid” choking among the weeds. The beautiful orchid can only be recognized when a “liberating cleansing breeze” arrives to release its perfume and one can tell the rare plant from the weeds. This is the liberating breeze of Tao’s poetry which alone identifies and distinguishes him from the others. The last four lines tell of how Tao

lost his old (Confucian) road by sticking to the Way. Now that the poet is “awake” there is no turning back: “The bow’s discarded when the birds are killed.”

Poem #18 gives the example of Yang Hsiung/Tzu-yün, a great scholar, poet and philosopher of the Han dynasty, who “had a natural taste for wine” but did not have the means to buy it. He had to depend on “sympathetic friends” who could provide it for him in exchange for his advice. Yang Hsiu always obliged them except for one time when he chose to be silent, when he was asked “about aggression.” Hightower explains that “aggression, *fa kuo*, meant, specifically, an attack on a foreign state. Tao’s conclusion in the last two lines is that “the good man obeys the promptings of his heart/ And shows or is silent as the times require.” The critical difficulty, however, in this simple and straightforward poem, as Hightower explains, is how to reconcile this episode with the fact that Yang Hsiung had a “reputation as a turncoat and apologist for the usurper Wang Mang” (H 151). The solution, as Hightower suggests, but not very convincingly, is to attribute lines 7-8 to Liu-hsia Hui. However, Tao seems to imply that Yang Hsiung was a good man and although he liked wine he knew when to keep silent.

Poem #19 recapitulates the story of the poet (as in # 10 and # 16) who driven by hunger left his farming ways to take up the life of a civil servant to feed his family. He had reached the age one should enter service, and he was ashamed for his lost ideals. However, the reference here does not seem to be to Tao’s ideals, as Hightower suggests, but to his lost Confucian ideals he had growing up, as he writes in poem #16. In that poem, which complements poem #19, we are told that in his youth Tao took delight in the Classics but he had not done very much with his life until he was forty. Poem #19, tells of his decision to leave the service and to return to his “lonely” lot. Tao gives the parallel example of Yang Chu who when faced with a similar decision stopped and wept because he was unable to decide. Tao, however, had no problem knowing what road to take, although the rewards for leaving office were not the same. Unlike Yang Chu, Tao had “no royal gifts to squander,” he was happy with just drinking cheap wine: “Cheap wine will serve my purpose just as well.”

## XX

The sages flourished long before my time,  
In the world today few preserve their truth.  
Tirelessly he worked, the old man of Lu,  
To fill and patch and make it pure again.  
Though while he lived no phoenix came to nest,

Yet briefly rites and music were renewed.  
In Lu his subtle teaching came to an end,  
And the flood swelled to the time of reckless Ch'in.  
The *Odes*, the *History* ... what were their crimes  
That they should be reduced one day to ashes?  
Careful and devoted, the old greybeards  
Truly served the cause with all their strength.  
Why is it now that in these later times  
The Six Classics have not a single friend?  
All day the hurried carriages dash by  
But no one comes to ask about the ford.  
If I fail to drink to my heart's content  
I will be untrue to the cap I wear.  
Still I regret the stupid things I've said  
And hope you will forgive a man in his cups.

In the last and concluding poem, Tao sums up his critique of Confucius and his followers as he has done all along. Although Confucius, “the old man of Lu,” worked, tirelessly, to make man whole and virtuous again, his subtle teachings came to nothing. With his death his teachings died with him. Under the Ch'in Emperor Shih-huang-ti, the Classics were even burned. Confucius' followers, “the old greybeards,” tried in vain to revive his ideas, but today nobody reads the Classics anymore, and no one is interested in what these works have to say. In this final poem, Tao makes no apology for describing himself as loving to drink wine, because otherwise he would have been untrue to himself, or to his cap. The cap, Hightower points out, can either refer to “the cloth turban from his head through which he strains the wine” or to his Confucian cap. (H 157) The reference to the cap, however, is ironic because it is the Confucian cap that Tao never wore and that he used only to strain wine. The poem concludes with an apparent apology. Tao regrets the “stupid things” he has said and asks to be forgiven. Hightower quotes Ku Chih who agrees that “Tao is pleading drunkenness in extenuation of the many offensive things he has said in these poems.” (H 157) However, Tao's apology is clearly rhetorical. To be drunk means to be himself and to speak his mind; this is what his poetry is all about.

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My analysis differs from the conventional and established readings. The poems are usually read as a celebration of the Confucian Classics, Confucian scholarship

and above all, the Sage himself. (H 155) Hightower, for instance, interprets the last lines on drinking as Tao's despair at the bad times in which he lives and at the decline of the Classics: "If at the end he abandons himself to drink, it is clearly in despair at the bad times, not a rejection of the properties" (H 155). He argues that this last poem, as the other poems in the series, is self-serving, that Tao Qian was solely concerned about his posthumous fame: "T'ao Ch'ien was very much concerned with the name he was going to leave behind him, and he was just as ready to leave a written record of his life, though his medium was poetry rather than history" (H 41, 1968). He claims that Tao wrote similar poems throughout his life "complaining about and celebrating his life in retirement" so he does not know why he would not do the same in a series of poems "with a misleading title, a disclaimer for a preface, and a conclusion begging pardon and pleading drunkenness as an excuse?" (H 42, 1968) His hypothesis is that Tao must have felt that "he had written something subversive and was afraid of getting into trouble" (H 42, 1968). He believes that Tao did not become a recluse out of religious reasons either Buddhist or Daoist. His retirement is "essentially Confucian" (H 42, 1968) It is the "gesture of a man who, on ethical grounds, cannot come to terms with the world, and so becomes a recluse who renounces all further dealings with officialdom" (H 42, 1968)

Hightower does not believe that Tao is actually a threat to the system, but his existence is "a rebuke to those in power," "because he feels himself to be morally superior" to those who accept a post in society: "so much so in fact that his superior virtue would be sullied by contact with them." This "holier-than-thou attitude" is not one calculated to endear a "professional recluse." Tao accepted his posts from time to time when it came from a dignitary too "august" to refuse or when "it was accompanied by marks of favor too loaded with prestige" that he had no choice but to accept, but for a while. (H 42, 1968) "The important thing is that he was not always free to refuse, because refusal was a positive act of criticism that placed the recluse in a precarious position" (H 43, 1968) When Tao is finally seen as a Recluse, this meant that he was "a man who felt himself too good to serve, even when asked to. (Most men did not wait to be asked)" (H 43, 1968). Probably Tao was sincere in refusing posts that did not really attract him, what was harder to renounce, according to Hightower, was "the chance to play an active role in society, to make a name that would be worthy of his distinguished ancestors" (H 43, 1968).

Hightower does not seem to have much respect for Tao Qian. He believes that he was an hypocrite: "No wonder when the offer came, he (figuratively) rushed to the door, pulling his gown on wrong side out in his haste, only to decline politely when it turned out to be nothing but the same old chance to 'join the muddy game'"

(H 43-44, 1968). “It is the intrusion of these brief moments of weakness, of regret, of dissatisfaction with the life he deliberately chose, that introduces the ambiguity and complexity into these poems.” “This is certainly the work of a man who, if he found a solution to his problems, did not find it an easy one to live with” (H 44, 1968).

A.R. Davis’s reading of the “Twenty poems about drinking” and of Tao Qian’s place in history is somewhat similar to Hightower’s. He interprets the last lines of poem # 20 to mean that “if I do not believe that the course I have chosen is the right one, I am untrue to my Confucian principles (symbolized by my Confucian scholar’s cap) [...] I am sorry for my wavering and ask forgiveness for my failure to see the issues clearly” (Davis 105). However, Davis believes that Hightower was far too influenced by the “general atmosphere of suspected political innuendos with which the Chinese commentators have described almost all of T’ao Yuan-ming’s works” (Davis 106). He does not believe that Hightower represents T’ao position accurately, when he writes that Tao rebuked those in power, or that those in power found it a rebuke. (Davis 106) But he does believe that the title of the twenty poems, as Hightower translates it, is appropriate since the title refers to “the poet’s anguished brooding on the true course for the Confucian scholar-official in an age where the Way is lost” (Davis 105).

A more appropriate reading of Tao Qian, less historical but more focused on the poetry, which departs qualitatively from both those of Hightower and Davis, is Kang-I Sun Chang’s whose focus is mostly on Tao as the poet who was “unappreciated and misunderstood by critics and poets alike for hundreds of years to come”, and still is. (Chang 5) He believes that the reasons can be found with his style of poetry which differed qualitatively from the accepted poetic style of the “hsuan-yen poetry” (neo-Taoist poetry), a philosophical poetry, the reflection of an intellectual movement called “pure conversation” (ch’ing-t’an) in vogue in the third century. (Chang 50)

For Chang, Tao Qian brings to the poetic tradition more than a restoration of classical lyricism: “His poetry is the expression of the total person. This individuality permits him to treat subjects in ways different from his contemporaries” (Chang 12). Poetically, he stood alone and was judged by a set of criteria that were directly opposed to his own literary taste, for instance, his simple and unadorned style, plain and straightforward. (Chang 13) Also unusual is his frequent use of questions followed by answers which gives his poetry “a quality of living presentness through directly imitating daily discourse” (Chang 15). This stylistic originality, his more elastic and syntactical free play, is an expression of his individuality: “For T’ao is

an individual working against the tides of his time, and his ordinariness is itself a sign of self-expression” (Chang 16). In his view, Tao’s poetry is “poetic autobiography “ without being autobiographical in the literal sense but rather, “one of ‘self-biography’ that addresses the problems of self-definition figuratively” (Chang 16). The goal of this self-biography is to “express a consistent desire to define his ultimate self-realization in life” (Chang 16). The other function of Tao’s poetry is “to touch the heart of the reader with the power of universality” with which the reader can identify. “Poised between the poles of factuality and fiction, T’ao Ch’ien turns Chinese literature into something more complex and multifaceted” (Chang 16). For Tao to write poetry is to achieve immortality or rather to find” understanding readers in future generations” (Chang 32).

Stephen Owens is at the other extreme. He believes that Tao Qian is not the naïve and straightforward poet that he claims to be. (Owen 81) His fields and gardens are no more than a setting for creating the image of a naïve self. In Owen’s view, the Preface to the “Drinking Wine poems” are nothing but a ruse to deceive the reader that he is not after fame, and that his friends are entirely to blame for circulating these poems: “hence we have an *amicus ex machina* to perform this disreputable task” (Owen 81). For him, Tao is essentially a self-centered man who does not believe about anyone but himself and his future fame: “And he passionately desires that we recognize and always remember the calm dispassion of his mind, that he has no concern for us at all. He has nothing to say to our kind” (Owen 85).

Robert Ashmore holds a somewhat different view of Tao Qian and of his relation to Confucius and Taoism, and it has to do with the “loss of authenticity that brings the era of Fu Xi and Shen Nong to an end,” which some tried to revive, including Confucius. (Ashmore 106) Since Confucius’ death “the world has labored under the double privation, both of its original state of authenticity” and the person of Confucius, who was able in part “to alleviate the world’s inauthenticity” (Ashmore 106-7). Having failed in his search to find the Way, Tao Qian turns to drinking as a last resort. The meaning of the last two lines of poem #20 rests on how we read the term *shu* which can be either rendered as “indulgence” for Tao’s drinking or as “sympathetic understanding” of what Tao’s drinking means within the tradition of the sage. Ashmore tends for the latter meaning of *shu* as empathy which “made more plausibly the way drinking and producing poems are linked throughout the ‘Drinking Wine’ set,” and as they express “a concern to redress the loss of authenticity and purity that once prevailed in the world” (Ashmore 107-108). “Tao Qian’s poetry takes his place [Confucius’] at the end of this tradition, in an age that offers no way through to the ethical expression of this concern other than a purely



negative steadfastness in adversity --- and no way through to its textual expression other than the seemingly purposeless poetic language of the drunken hermit” (Ashmore 108). “The ethical concealment of the poet is thus matched by the expressive concealment of his language; properly understanding the latter requires that we understand the former, via the moral and hermeneutic capacity of *shu*, or ‘sympathetic understanding.’” “Only by doing so,” continues Ashmore, “can we perceive the fundamental unity of concern that links the apparently frivolous behavior and inconsequential words of the drunken poet with the entire ethical, hermeneutical, and political project of classicist scholarship, for which in this period Confucius himself was the emblematic figure” (Ashmore 109). He also argues, against Zhu Ziqiang, that Tao Qian’s thought is “essentially Taoist” (Ashmore 152). As for the references to the Classics and to Confucius, he believes that Tao is not expressing himself “in an incoherent or contradictory way but that he is translating a familiar set of themes and concerns from the hermeneutical thought of his age into lyric form” (Ashmore 153). For him “Tao Qian took full advantage of both clusters of association in creating a poetic language in which the task of understanding the poem becomes a matter of understanding both the concealed intrinsic worth of the poet and the poet’s own readerly insights into the meanings of the sage and the legacy of the classics.” To read Tao, for Ashmore, is “to read the poet reading the classics” (Ashmore 198-99)

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In my view, the picture that emerges from these twenty poems on drinking is not that of a drunk, but of a poet who uses the poetic persona of a drunkard to convey his poetic message to the reader, independently of whether he was a drunk in real life. The act of “drinking wine” seems to be a special feature of the wise or intelligent man as distinct from the Confucian or civil servant who thinks with the majority, is ambitious and aspires to posthumous fame. In these twenty poems “wine” means much more than the liquid one drinks to forget or to get drunk on. In these poems, “wine” is a figure of speech that characterizes a way of being, a way of following one’s own inclinations, a way of asserting one’s individuality that sets the poet apart from the majority. Wine, as the poet uses the word, is where truth lies and, as he states in the concluding lines of poem #14, in wine there is “profundity,” that is, in *Vino veritas*, or, as they say in Chinese, “*jiu hou tu zhen yan*,”: “After we drink wine, we tell the truth.” Drinking wine is what allows Tao Qian to speak openly and directly as he does, because the words of a drunk cannot be taken seriously. Tao was so successful in his dissimulation that even to this day commentators believe that he was a drunk.

At the level of poetic representation Tao’s dissimulation characterizes the twen-

ty poems as allegorical, that is to say, the reader cannot read literally the story the poet is narrating but has to go beyond its literal sense to the (allegorical) meaning that the words try to convey, as when in poem #5 the poet claims not to have the words to express what, in fact, he has just expressed and which we can read if we “read” between the lines what he wants to say or if we share a similar experience.

Poem #5 also brings up another important aspect of Tao Qian’s poetics: the concept of distance or separation, which is the way the poet can be both present and distant at the same time, “with the mind detached, one’s place becomes remote.” A “detached mind” is not constrained or saturated by the present but it is also and always “remote,” beyond the present. At the level of poetic representation the possibility of the mind to distance itself from itself translates as irony, or self-irony.<sup>3</sup> In this vein, in poem #13, Tao writes about his two “guests,” his two selves, which are always in conflict with each other. This ability to see himself as other, as a double, characterizes not the only the duality inherent in Tao’s persona but also the ironic dimension of these twenty poems, if not of his poetry as a whole. An instance of this duality is present in his own name which was originally Tao Yuanming but was later changed to Tao Qian which means “in hiding.” Whereas Yuanming is the birth name, “ch’ien” or Qian is his chosen name which denotes “remoteness,” his concealed self, and one of the two guests that likes wine. Yuanming is the Confucian self, the self of his youth, which he failed to live up to according to Confucian ideals; Qian, instead, is the reclusive self, the one who follows the Way. The twenty poems can be read, as I have tried to do, as an account of Tao’s “failure” to fulfill his youthful wish to become a Confucian, to be Yuanming, and the reasons why, by following his instincts, or his heart, he chose to stand alone, to become Qian who likes wine, because only in wine can Qian forget Yuanming.

Wine is a form of detachment and a way of becoming aware that life, as Tao Qian says in poem #8, that life is just a dream-illusion. This is the fundamental truth that these poems try to convey and that cannot be put into words but only communicated through images, allegories, figures of speech, and which can only be understood by those who share a similar experience, who listen to their body and their impulses, and, above all, who drink wine.

Tao knows that he is “out of step”: “It’s my nature keeps me out of tune,” but also that to do otherwise is an error: “To go against oneself is a real mistake/.../ There is no turning back my carriage now” (#9). Tao’s place in the world is similar to that of the orchid hidden among the weeds, which can only be discovered by

3 The notion of separation is central to the late poetry of Du Fu. Beside my article, see also Eva Chou, *Reconsidering Du Fu*.

a “liberating cleansing breeze” (#17). Another name of this “liberating cleansing breeze,” which differentiates him from the masses, the “weeds,” is poetry. It is only by reading his poetry that we realize how Tao Qian is different from the Confucians and the civil servants he rebukes; it is only then that we realize the “hidden” (chi'en) genius that springs forth from a man whose only past time is, seemingly, drinking. The function of Tao's poetry is to be a “liberating cleansing breeze” to those willing to listen and to read him. Poetry is Tao's Way, not the Taoist Way, as critics have pointed out. Poem #17 records his discovery as an awakening: “Awake at last.” His decision to return to his hut and farm is a decision to turn to poetry, to become a poet: “Awake at last, I thought of turning back.” Once his mind is made up there is no going back: “The bow's discarded when the birds are killed.” Hightower has difficulty with this poem. He believes that it is, “Not one of the more successful poems in the series” (H 151), and that if anything “this poem is the most clearly political” but also “one of the least clear” (H 150). Indeed, just as all poetry, this poem is political, not in the literal sense, but in the sense that poetry, as the breeze, has the liberating effect to free man from the limitations imposed upon him by a Confucian work ethic that fosters conformity and promises social advancement to the detriment of one's individuality and self-reliance.

The essential difference between my approach and that most of the scholars mentioned here is that my approach to Tao's poetry is not literal. Perhaps this is the distinguishing trait that differentiates a Chinese and a Western approach. When Tao writes that he just wrote these poems for his own pleasure and never meant to publish them, I understand this as a poetic device, just as I believe, differently from Hightower, that all Tao's talk about his drinking is only a metaphor for writing poetry. Mine might be the more naïve view since these scholars of Tao Qian know better what poets like Tao meant when he wrote. On the other hand, there are also critics like Chang who are willing to see that the difficulty of reading Tao's poetry is the result of deviating from the accepted norm. Whatever may be the case, the sole contribution that a Western reading can provide, perhaps, right or wrong, is the benefit of a difference.

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# REVIEWS

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*Transcultural Lyricism: Translation, Intertextuality, and the Rise of Emotion in Modern Chinese Love Fiction, 1899-1925*. Jane Qian Liu. Brill, 2017. ISBN: 9789004301313. 241 pp.

Kate Costello (University of Oxford)

The recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in the creativity inherent in translation, and yet the field of translation studies remains mired in a torpid discussion on equivalence, originality, fidelity and plagiarism. Jane Qian Liu's book *Transcultural Lyricism* offers a refreshing perspective on translation and creativity in the context of early twentieth century Chinese love fiction. Liu effectively circumvents this debate by focusing on instances of translation and intertextuality as key junctures in a changing landscape of emotional expression. Central to Liu's argument is the figure of the writer-translator, an important but often overlooked critical category within modern Chinese literature. By emphasizing the split role of the writer-translator, Liu foregrounds the slippages between translation and literary creation.

*Transcultural Lyricism* proposes a continuum of textual production between translation and creation, coining the terms *translated creation* and *creative translation* to represent the extremities of this spectrum of authorial practice. Drawing on the work of a broad range of authors including Bao Tianxiao, Li Dingyi, Lin Shu, Zhou Shoujuan, Su Manshu, and Yu Dafu, *Transcultural Lyricism* offers a cogent framework for rethinking the sticky questions of influence, adaptation and borrowing. Moving beyond the tired question of originality, Liu's analysis squarely refocuses on the relationship between literary creativity and borrowing, using the transformation of emotional expression as a focal point. Liu mobilizes the Chinese conception of *huwen* 互文 (intertextuality) to critique and supplement the field of intertextuality studies. In doing so, she traces the development of affective modes of expression including love, sorrow, longing, admiration, as well

as authorial strategies used to either heighten or subvert the emotional climax of a narrative.

Underpinning this approach is the question of multilingualism, a topic that has seen a great surge of interest within both translation studies and comparative literary studies in the recent years. While not explicitly addressed, the implications of multilingual competencies lurk just beneath the surface throughout *Transcultural Lyricism*, and Liu's nuanced approach makes a valuable contribution to the discussion of the multilingual author in the Chinese context. Unlike the majority of conversations on multilingual or translingual authors (as represented by the seminal works of Steven Kellman, Suresh Canagarajah and Gustavo Pérez Firmat) that focus overwhelmingly on the split loyalties of the author, the writer-translators discussed here suffer no such conflict of allegiance. Instead, their multiple language competencies (real or imagined, in the case of Lin Shu) serve primarily to enrich their own creative prospects by offering them access to a wealth of foreign texts to adapt, intertextualize and appropriate.

The key innovation in this approach is that the focus on the author as writer-translator allows Liu to treat both translations and literary creations with equal weight. Instead of treating these two types of literary production as a set of binary processes, Liu emphasizes the common strategies that underlie their creative processes. By combining the approaches of translation studies and intertextuality, the book emphasizes the process of creation rather than the product, revealing a fluidity between translations and literary creations. This spectrum is further complicated by the changing conception of authorship during the first quarter of the twentieth century when, as Liu argues, it was common practice both to disguise one's own creative work as a translation as well as add one's own rhetorical and narrative flourishes to translated works. Liu's painstaking work addresses the complexity of authorial and translational practice at the time, meticulously tracing sources of influence and instances of intertextuality, both with Western and traditional Chinese texts.

In some cases, such as with Li Dingyi's supposed translation of *Perils of Fair Ladies*, a careful examination of Western archives reveals that the 'original' text, and indeed the 'original' author never existed. When dealing with instances of fabricated translation or pseudotranslation, as Liu terms it, *Transcultural Lyricism* does not restrict itself to discussing authorial intent or what is to be gained by disguising one's own work as a translation. Instead, care is taken to treat these occurrences as decisions with aesthetic as well as political import. In examining the slippages between translation and creation, Liu proposes the juncture between appropriation and adaptation as a site of historical import. Seizing on these instances of *psuedo-*

*creation* or *pseudotranslation* (translation disguising itself as creation and creation disguising itself as translation, respectively), Liu traces the changing landscape of emotive expression, considering these sites of rupture as key points of transformation. Building on the legacy of Haiyan Lee as well as important work by Perry Link and Leo Ou-fan Lee, Liu explores the history of melodrama and Romanticism in early Republican fiction. Drawing on David Wang's conception of lyricism, Liu proposes the term *transcultural lyricism* as a critical framework from which to "parse, analyse, and describe the very process of influence" (3) that shaped the development of emotional expression in Republican love fiction.

Through her careful inclusion of key figures of the so-called Butterfly School as well as more equivocal figures such as Su Manshu and Yu Dafu, *Transcultural Lyricism* explores the strategies that author-translators use in cultivating new modes of emotive expression. The inclusion of Yu Dafu is a tribute to the versatility of this approach, one that in turn begs the question of how the categories of pseudocreation and pseudotranslation might shed new light on the work of other May Fourth writers.

*Transcultural Lyricism* joins the ranks of *Translingual Practice* and *Lin Shu, Inc.* in bringing translation studies into the broader conversation on modern Chinese literature. Liu's clear, accessible language and well-articulated critical framework will prove a valuable resource for scholars working on Bao Tianxiao, Li Dingyi, Lin Shu, Zhou Shoujuan, Su Manshu, and Yu Dafu, as well as those looking to gain a broader perspective on the shifting currents of emotive expression. The emphasis on the fluidity between translation and literary creation offers not only a much needed intervention into our understanding of authorship in the early twentieth century, but provides an incisive critical angle just as suited to the often ignored intersections of translation and authorial practice in the late 70s and early 80s.

*Transcultural Lyricism* offers a succinct analysis of developments in the fields of intertextuality and translation studies, accompanied by a cogent critique of their shortcomings in the Chinese context. By drawing on examples from Chinese love fiction in the first quarter of the twentieth century, Liu is able to critique the Eurocentric focus of these theoretical frameworks without sacrificing their critical edge. Her work is an invaluable resource both for students and scholars of Chinese studies looking to glean new critical tools for analysis, as well as for Europeanists seeking to better understand the changing conception of authorship in early twentieth century China.

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**Author Profile:**

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Kate Costello is a doctoral candidate at the University of Oxford, specializing in modern Chinese literature and culture. Her doctoral project examines the relationship between bilingualism, language games and word play in experimental literature. Paying special attention to the creative manipulation of sound, script, and syntax, her dissertation examines the playful, devious and irreverent ways that bilingual competencies manifest themselves in experimental writing. Her other research interests include translation studies, linguistics, film, and critical theory.



*Gatekeepers: The Emergence of World Literature and the 1960s*. William Marling. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. ISBN: 9780190274146. 232 pp.

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Over the past nearly twenty years, scholars such as Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti and John Pizer have devoted their scholarly attention to the discussion of world literature with conceptual, theoretical, historical, practical and pedagogical approaches, and consequently, made world literature a major topic of debate for literary scholarship. Such an academic phenomenon may cause people to ask themselves why world literature was never this popular before, after all, Goethe had already coined the term *Weltliteratur* back in 1827. In other words, what elements contributed to its reemergence? William Marling's new book, *Gatekeepers: The Emergence of World Literature and the 1960s*, is one key contributor in shedding some light on this very same issue.

As a former award-winning journalist and an active scholar in American letters who has had much experience in conducting research abroad in Spain, Austria, France and Japan, William Marling points out that world literature is not only a literary invention, but rather the result of a collaborative effort. Basing his analysis on Pierre Bourdieu's literary-sociological notion of *field*, Randall Collins' notion of *interaction rituals*, and David Damrosch's notion of *world literature*, Marling utilizes the term "gatekeepers," by which he means "agents," including "scouts and literary entrepreneurs"(2) who "have acquired the cultural resources to be aware of the literary artifact's possibilities beyond its home field."(5) Furthermore, Marling argues that the appearance of this figure contrastingly differs from "the older, romantic notion of authorship, of isolating genius," pointing out that "success in World Literature is about gatekeeping." (1)

In the book's introduction and conclusion, and in its main four chapters, Marling analyzes the cases of several such gatekeepers in relation to the work of four writers: Gabriel García Márquez, Charles Bukowski, Paul Auster, and Haruki Murakami. In Chapter One, "Gabriel García Márquez: Gatekeepers and *Prise de Position*," Marling draws from Bourdieu's reading of Flaubert's *A Sentimental Education* as well as the concept of *Prise de Position* in order to examine Márquez's success in the field of world literature. Marling argues that as a Columbian journalist and film reviewer constantly wrestling with an autocratic government, Márquez developed a literary style that highlighted both local color and political connotations. However, through various gatekeepers, such as "the first reader," "the salon," "the

leader writer or patron,” “the agent,” “the hegemony government,” “the translator” and “the reviewers,” Márquez’s work was de-politicized in the shape of a modern biblical history of “the family of man,” before going on to be regarded as a grand-master of the literary genre which came to be known as “Magical Realism.”

In Chapter Two, “Charles Bukowski and the Entrepreneurs of World Literature,” Marling shows how the German-born American author Charles Bukowski’s writing about the lower classes, women, sex, alcohol, and the drudgery of everyday life dovetailed with the needs of the left-leaning political landscape of the 1960s. Bukowski’s work was published by John Charles Bryan, who ran an ad newspaper and let Bukowski “[propose] a weekly column to be called ‘Notes of a Dirty Old Man’”(49) which made his name “[reach] a large public”(49-50) and allowed him to be noticed by the adult literature publisher Essex House. After that, Bukowski was “discovered” (10) by patron and literary entrepreneur John Martin, a book collector who encountered Bukowski’s works in a magazine and sought more poems from him. Furthermore, another literary entrepreneur, as well as translator, Carl Weissner, who was running an avant-garde magazine in Germany between 1965-1969, noticed Bukowski in 1968, and eventually translated twenty-eight of Bukowski’s works. This brought his name to attention abroad, first in Germany and then in France, where Bukowski gave a reading tour later and sparked a literary fever around him. In this chapter, Marling also discusses the role played by Bukowski’s page on Wikipedia in both its German and France versions, since “there is no doubt that Wikipedia is a gatekeeper in the electronic age.” (67)

In contrast to the first two authors, the next two belong to a younger generation and they received a better formal education during the 1960s. In Chapter Three, “Paul Auster: ‘Bootstrapping’ and Foreign ‘Exile,’” Marling describes how as a graduate student in Comparative Literature, Auster established his first reputation as “a gifted, sensitive, learned translator of contemporary French literature, especially poetry” (99-100) in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when French literature and theory received prominent critical attention in America. His literary writing “would go on to make small waves” but not yet at the level of “the phenomenon he would [later] become.” (100) That did not happen until the French publisher Actes Sud, ran by the couple Hubert Nyssen and Christine Le Bœuf, translated him. Nyssen was raised within the counterculture of the 1960s, and was eager to introduce modern foreign literature to France. Meanwhile, Le Bœuf was a translator who felt an instant connection with Auster’s works. Their translation and publishing of his work opened the gates for Auster’s reputation to grow in France during the late 1980s, and at last led to what Marling terms “Refracted Reputation,” (100) as a celebrity, a price win-

ner, and a modern world literature author from America.

In Chapter Four, “Haruki Murakami: The Prizes, Process, and Production of World Literature,” Marling goes on to examine how world literature is entangled with the act of translation, prizes and literary production. Just like Auster, Murakami also attended university in the 1960s and is familiar with contemporary Western culture. He earned his early recognition through not only translating but also through befriending contemporary American authors, such as Raymond Carver and John Irving. Along with this type of cultural capital, Murakami included in his writings abundant references to, and quotations from, American literature and Western culture. Blessed with great timing, such writing coincided with the Japanese financial boom of the 1970s and 1980s, when not only companies invested their excess financial capital into the literary prize system, which also played a major role in the process of Murakami’s ascension to fame in Japan. It also coincided with “the Japanese government’s policy of the 1980s known as *kokusaika* internationalization” which provided his novels with a great environment in which to enter into global circulation, because in Marling’s understanding, Murakami’s body of work actually “‘Japanizes’ American culture” and “even resells this Asianized version of Western popular culture to China and Korea, where his novels are successful.” (124)

At the end of each chapter, Marling adds a “Coda,” in which he discusses a case that is somewhat similar to that of the author discussed in each chapter. For Márquez, he gives the counter example of Rigoberta Menchú, a Latin American author discussed in Damrosch’s work. For Bukowski, there is Diane di Prima, who published works on the theme of sex in the 1960s. For Auster, the case is that of Lydia Davis, the first wife of Auster, and the person who “shared the same experiences, met the same people, and worked together at translating and in small presses” (112) with him. Lastly, for Murakami, the counter example is Banana Yoshimoto, who is well-known in Japan and whose works have been translated into several languages. In these Codas, Marling tries to analyze why they have not been more successful in the realm of world literature, and in doing so underscores the important function of the gatekeeping process in the creation of world literature canons.

This book shares some similarities with Pascale Casanova’s work. However, in contrast to hers, Marling’s study gives us a more contemporary and material view of the making of world literature, and a clear depiction of how the institutionalization of scholarship and the monopolization of publishing has impacted world literature during the last half century. While Casanova gives us an aesthetic and political analysis of the Paris-oriented world literature, Marling points out in the “Conclusion” that “World Literature from the 1960s onward begins to align itself with” (11) those

gatekeepers, and in its last stages, makes itself Anglophone. Moreover, Marling has astute insights into analyzing how gatekeeping that is external to the texts is, nonetheless, actively participating in the process of literary invention, as his four cases illustrate. We should notice that this type of analysis had been announced by Casanova in her studies regarding “the World Republic of Letters,” but I doubt she has yet fulfilled it.

There are perhaps two main interrelated flaws in this book. The first one is the problem of the name and nature of the subject matter. The title of this book hints at the critical importance of the 1960s in relation to world literature. However, the four cases studied show that the emergence of world literature encompasses a “gatekeeping process from 1960-2010.” (9) That is to say, it is not an event rooted exclusively in that decade. This is shown clearly in the chapters dedicated to Auster and Murakami, where the element of the 1960s exists only in the authors’ college experiences. The second flaw, I suppose, is that the argument of this book falls short due to a lack of analysis of the conditions of world literature before the 1960s. After all, we should notice that there was already an economic and marketing dimension in Goethe’s and even Marx’s understandings of *Weltliteratur*. This omission indicates that Marling’s 1960s were perhaps only an updated case of the dynamics in Goethe’s or Marx’s era. Furthermore, if we would like to talk about the “emergence” of world literature, the translations of world literature in Asian countries such as China and Japan that started in the late 19th century or even earlier should not be overlooked. As such, Marling offers the reader a thorough explanation of an America-centric vision of the 1960s as a gate to world literature, instead of dedicating some of his attention toward early 19th century Western Europe or late 19th and early 20th century East Asia and their relation to the formation of contemporary world literature.

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**Author Profile:**

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