

Translation and the Reconstruction of World Literature: Wang Ning's World Literature Theory

Liu Dan & Xiong Hui

Abstract: As one of the most influential comparatists in China, Wang Ning has taken the lead in updating the world on new advances in literary studies in China and initiating equal conversations with Western comparative literature scholars from a global perspective. More importantly, Wang, from the vantage point of being a Chinese scholar, has brought about a new notion of world literature under the aegis of cultural globalization that challenges Eurocentrism on multiple fronts. Two questions are central to his notion of world literature: first, how we reconstruct the western centric notion of world literature; and, second, how we remap the landscape to encompass marginalized national literatures. Translation, as a medium for literary exchanges, emerges as the key to Wang's reconstruction of world literature. He advocates that we use cultural translation as a means of deconstructing the prevailing Ecocentrism to carve up legitimate places for disadvantaged national literatures, so that they can be readily accounted as an important part of world literature. His theory showcases a strong national stance and a deconstructionist attitude. Taking Chinese literature as an example, he argues that good translation necessarily contributes to better cultural images, which in turn can upend the current hierarchy of literatures, consequently help position national literatures in world literary system. In this light, translation, the bedrock of Wang's theories, sheds light on how national literatures can be a significant part of world literature.

Keywords: world literature; translation; national literatures; cultural globalization; discourse

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标题: 翻译与世界文学的重构: 王宁的世界文学观管窥

内容摘要: 王宁是中国最具国际影响力的比较文学学者之一, 他不仅率先向世界文坛展示了中国文学研究的前沿成果, 而且用朝向世界的视野与国际比

较文学专家展开平等对话；更为重要的是，在文化全球化和欧美中心主义遭遇挑战的时代语境下，王宁从一位东方学者的身份和立场出发，提出了崭新的世界文学观念，这包含两点：一、重构世界文学的路径和策略；二、弱势民族文学如何突围并进入世界文学的行列。其中，翻译在王宁的世界文学观中扮演着重要角色，它是各民族文学交融的中介，是实现世界文学重构的关键环节。王宁的世界文学观无疑具有浓厚的民族性和解构色彩，他主张通过文化翻译来解构欧美文化中心地位，为所有处于弱势地位的民族文学在世界文学版图上开掘出合法的生存空间；并以中国文学的发展为例，认为弱势民族只有加强自身文学的对外翻译才能更好地展示并建构自我文化形象，改变当前文学地位的不平衡状态，从而确立本民族文学在世界文学中的地位和身份。翻译是王宁世界文学观念建立的根基，为各民族文学走向世界提供了参考和启示。

关键词：世界文学；文学翻译；民族文学；文化全球化；话语权力

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World literature as a concept is discursively constructed. European literature dominates the map of world literature, whereas African literature and literatures of the Middle and Far East have been marginalized and overlooked. Following World War II, when more nation-states became independent and their economies began flourishing, Eurocentrism seemed to disintegrate with the process of globalization. In this context, where should world literature go? As a scholar from a country with a long history and rich cultural tradition, Wang Ning re-examines translation's paramount significance in the reconstruction of world literature, timely enhancing discussions about the relationship between world literature and national literatures.

1. Translation and World Literature Reconstructed

The concept of world literature has been constructed differently over time. In today's globalized and post-colonial context, in which cultural Eurocentrism has been increasingly deconstructed, Wang's intellectual quest raises two central questions. First, how, by the means of translation, can national literatures find their legitimate places in the oeuvre world literature? Second, how can translation help gauge and reconstruct the ecosystem and order of world literature?

Starting from the common literary aesthetics, Wang believes that "translatability" is a yardstick for deciding whether a work can be considered as world literature. Accordingly, world literature, as a fluid concept, is constantly constructed and

enriched through translation. David Damrosch, Harvard University's Bernbaum professor of Comparative Literature, assumes that the term "world literature," instead of being merely used for the purpose of evaluation, denotes a unique type of literary production, distribution, and reception. He argues that "*world literature is writing that gains in translation*" (emphasis original) (Damrosch 281). However, Wang believes that world literature is a result of "literary evolution" (Wang, "'World Literature' and Translation" 26), which can be regarded as a process that involves "production, circulation, translation and critical selection in different languages" (Wang, "World Literature and the Dynamic Function of Translation" 5). Unlike Damrosch's concern that world literature is partly a result of translation, Wang pays more attention to the dynamic function of translation in the process of constructing world literature. According to him, it is the dynamic literary evolution rather than the static, translated texts that makes world literature more clearly manifested as "not a set canon of texts" (4) but a constantly evolving concept. This leads to what Wang has described as the third form of world literature as a process of cross-cultural/language communication. In other words, without translation, literatures produced on the ground of cultural relativism can only be published and circulated within the national borders, losing the possibility to gain a foothold in world literature. Thus, it is evident that national literatures can become world literature through translation.

Hence, arises the immediate question: what kind of work can and should be translated? The answer lies in the work's quality as much as in the complex standards of selection. Only those texts that are selected by the translator are eligible for consideration as world literature. However, selection of a literary work is largely determined by whether it possesses some properties that pertain to the common aesthetics value, which points to what we call "translatability." World literature, in a nutshell, denotes literary works with common aesthetic qualities and far-reaching significance. Its two essential qualities are "transnational" and "translational," both of which are indispensable and mutually constitutive (Wang, "'World Literature' and Translation" 26). How can national literatures break their linguistic and cultural boundary and travel to other languages and cultures? And how can they be understood and appreciated by readers in different languages and cultural backgrounds? These are important questions to ask. Arguably, translation plays a vital mediating role in making transnational literatures become part of world literature. Without it, national literature might remain "dead" to the canon of world literature. Thus, by means of active rewriting and creative manipulation, translation greatly contributes to the canonization of world literature. To demonstrate this, Wang takes China's literary translation as a convincing example. Meanwhile, he

expounds that translation, especially with its mediating and rewriting function, is essential for a national literature, one which aspires to break through regional restrictions, and become part of world literature and be accepted by other nations. It is the same for ambitious writers. To this end, Wang singles out Chinese translations and discussions of Henrik Ibsen's plays during the May Fourth period and their adaptation into contemporary theatrical performance in China as a vivid example (Wang, "'Translated' and 'Constructed' Ibsen: Ibsen Metamorphosed in China" 55-59). Indeed, Wang's "translation" is not the literal meaning, or the simple "equivalence" of textual information championed by some linguists. Rather, it necessarily involves elements of rewriting and even readaptation known by cultural scholars. What is worth further exploration is that it is not the translator or the readers' aesthetic demand that determines the translation of a certain literary work. Instead, it is political ideology which ultimately matters. It renders a translated text, somewhat "transformed" compared with the original, into a suitable work for the target country. In other words, the original work takes on a new meaning before it is widely circulated and well received in other languages, and subsequently recognized as a canonical text for a certain era of its original country.

Hence, it is clear why Ibsen's plays, renowned for modernism and avant-garde experimentation, were "translated" into realist works regarded by Chinese readers as canonical world literature. It is worth pondering whether Ibsen's plays would still be received so highly as part of world literature in China, if the translators did not rewrite them during the May Fourth period when Chinese society urgently called for enlightenment and social criticism. Further, regarding modern Chinese literature, Wang comments, "those translated works are often regarded by today's scholars as an integral part of modern Chinese literature. In fact, they become 'modern Chinese literary classics' that are different from both traditional Chinese literary works and modern Western ones" (Wang, "'Translated' and 'Constructed' Ibsen: Ibsen Metamorphosed in China" 52). This quotation can be interpreted in two ways: first, translated works, often incorporating elements of rewriting and creation, bring modern elements to Chinese national literature, and can be regarded as an integral part of national literatures; second, translated works, which might have subjected to rewriting, differ from both traditional national literature of the target languages and the original work. Thus, they become a fresh literary form, making it possible to reconstruct world literature classics. Therefore, translation has contributed remarkably to the innovation and globalization of national literatures. The modern form of national literatures read today would not exist without translation. Similarly, Western literature or literatures of other nation-states can never break through

barriers of languages and cultures before being transformed into world literature.

Wang has also demonstrated the translator's importance in the construction of world literary classics. Literary translation is a complex creative activity. Necessarily, the translator must creatively rewrite the original work according to the cultural needs of the target languages. In some sense, such translation "determines" the fate of national literatures, for it can improve a literary work in the translation. There are numerous such instances worldwide. For example, Shakespeare's plays, after being successfully translated into Chinese by Cao Weifeng, Zhu Shenghao, Liang Shiqiu and Fu Guangming, found immense favor among generations of Chinese readers. In the case of British literary history, Edward FitzGerald, with his marvelous translations, "resurrected" the ancient Persian poet Omar Khayyám's *Rubáiyát* into masterpieces. Ezra Pound's rewriting of Chinese and Japanese poems, which has long become famous in American literary history, is another illustrious example. Hence, a good translator is vital to enable national literatures to enter the canon of world literature. However, inadequate translation may be harmful, for the translated text might lose its original significance and value in a foreign cultural context, remaining obscured in the forest of world literature. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's conceptualization of "the translator's agency," Wang argues that the translator can endow the work with a "continued" life, reconstruing "an afterlife" for the original text before it achieves a canonical standing in the target language. As Benjamin claims, "Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife" (Benjamin 73). Informed by Benjamin's theory, Wang believes that the translator takes on multiple roles simultaneously: a judge of a work's literary value, an intimate reader of the original, and a dynamic interpreter and re-writer. In this regard, the translator takes charges of the fate of a work in the foreign cultural contexts. Wang asserts, "A good translator may well improve a work or even render it canonical in the target language, while a bad one may ruin it and destroy its potential for canonization in that language" (Wang, "'Translated' and 'Constructed' Ibsen: Ibsen Metamorphosed in China" 55). In addition, influenced by Jacques Derrida's deconstructive translation theory, Wang points out that a single translator only has limited influence in this regard because translation is "always an incomplete process that can be perpetually advanced by successive generations of translators." A literary work has to be retranslated before it can be canonized as part of world literature. For Derrida, a particular translator's role is limited. His deconstructive translation theory holds that translation can never be the same to the original. Yet we cannot deny that

translation provides the original work with a continued life and more living space. Given this, we cannot ignore the translators' positive roles in the canonization of world literature.

The construction of world literature involves the travel of literary texts, which is inseparable from creative translation. National literatures become globally celebrated world literature only by breaking through cultural and regional boundaries. Without it, national literatures might remain in the blind zone or "dead" to other cultures and consigned to their peripheries. "World literature is thus by no means a fixed phenomenon but a traveling concept," Wang contended ("World Literature': From Utopian Imagination to Aesthetic Reality" 4). Thus, how can literary texts achieve their world travel? Apparently, the role of translation cannot be overlooked. Without the hard work of Chinese translators, it would not be possible for English, French, German, Russian and Japanese literature, among others, to travel to China. Similarly, without English translators, Chinese and Japanese literature in the East cannot travel to the West either. It is through the translators' bridging role that some works have gained more potency in a foreign cultural environment and thus, are regarded as classics by readers in target countries. On the contrary, inadequate translation can ruin even what have been considered as the best in the canon of national literatures. With artistic significance lost during the translation, such works have no "continued life" to speak of. Given this, translation determines how far a literary work can travel as much as it shapes its international influence. It also decides the difference between texts of world literature and national literatures, revealing the connections as well as distinction between the two. As Wang maintains, the travels of "world literature" are "two-way." World literature can travel from the West to the East, and vice versa. In an essay delving into the cultural background of Goethe's "world literature," Wang believes that Goethe's conceptualization is closely linked to his reading of many translated literary works outside Europe, including Chinese and Persian literatures that were widely regarded as unimportant by European cultural centrists at that time (Wang, "The Two-way Travel of World Literature" 15-16). Indeed, only those works that profess world qualities can "travel" by means of translation. That is, the worldly characteristics and translatability of world literature complement each other. The higher degree of the common aesthetic value is a prerequisite for a text to travel. Translatability, in a similar way, determines whether it is practical for such travels. After all, any literary work that aspires to transcend national and linguistic barriers must rely on the intermediary translation. In short, without translation there is no travelling text, and without texts that travel there is no world literature.

By virtue of translation, world literature has multiple versions in different national cultures and languages. Through this process, a deconstruction of Eurocentrism can be conducted, resulting in a new ecosystem of world literature. In Wang's view, world literature has already moved beyond the realm of utopian imagination into the realm of aesthetic reality. This stage has seen world literature take on greater connotations and richer forms of expression, as it is no longer restricted to literatures in English, Chinese, or other national languages. Wang argues:

Cultural globalization has brought about both homogenization and diversity at the same time, and during this process, the intervening role translation has been playing is impotent. Through the intermediary function of translation, world literature can be found in different versions in different countries, thus dispelling the myth that there is a single 'world literature'. (Wang, "'World Literature': From Utopian Imagination to Aesthetic Reality" 3)

Wang's remarks mean several things. First, it recognizes the intervening function of translation in reducing the homogenization of world literature. For example, without translation and its role in the dissolution of West-centrism, audiences around the world might read Shakespeare and Milton's works only in the original English. For non-English national literatures, linguistic and cultural obstacles difficult to overcome in term of entering the forest of world literature is one thing, and the other thing is that even if they do have been received well by readers of other cultures, they can only be read in their "original form and authentic flavor." Although this seems to respect the original work, it actually reduces the possibility for the work to travel further in other languages. Second, Wang fully affirms that translation is constructive for the diversity of world literature, thus deconstructing West-centrism. Precisely because of the translation boom in national literatures, the monopoly of powerful nations on world literature has been broken. Therefore, readers worldwide can access Shakespeare in translated versions in languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic and many more. Thus, world literature, exemplified by Shakespeare, takes on much richer forms. However, the multilingual and multi-version literature produced by translation is only the surface. Diversity of world literature is primarily driven by the myriad demands and interpretations offered by different ethnic groups. Their rewriting in the process of translation to meet national needs, and different emotions and aesthetic pursuits, are the underlying causes for the true diversity of world literature.

In a nutshell, Wang argues that there is no world literature in its entirety without translation, and national literatures can only circulate locally. Translations, rewriting, and creative manipulations may transform an original work and make it “alienated,” but they also enable the work to travel further into cross-cultural space and to gain an “afterlife.” However, Wang is also clear-eyed about the limitations. Such as, aside from the limitations imposed by political and cultural ideologies, translation does not guarantee the inclusion of national literatures in world literature. A literary work’s quality, or, more specifically, its “translatability,” is the ultimate criterion for recognition within world literature.

2. Translation and Chinese Literature as World Literature

In discussing the reconstruction of world literature from the perspective of globalization, Wang uses Chinese literature as an example to explicate how marginal literatures can become a part of world literature. While Wang acknowledges that translation facilitates the integration of national and world literatures, he also believes that it is important to shift the imbalance inherent in literary translations. To do so, the disadvantaged and small nations must improve translations of their own literatures to build better cultural images. So that, as a result, their literatures can gain a position among the family of world literature.

Translation, as evident, has changed national literatures and their ways of expression, for it makes the narrative mode of national literatures closer to that of world literature. A good example is the development of modern Chinese literature. Numerous intellectuals who had received cultural enlightenment initiated Western modernity into China through translation since the late Qing Dynasty. Such translation experiences and resulting texts provided fresh writing resources for Chinese modern writers, who created works departing from both the Chinese traditional and Western literary conventions. This leads Wang to make the following argument: When writing the literary history of modern Chinese literature, we must fully recognize the importance of translation. However, this form of translation was not the conservative word-to-word renderings. Instead, it was a cultural transformation using language as a medium. Through this large-scale cultural translation, a new literature was born which contributed to the construction of a type of transnationalism.(Wang, “‘World Literature’: From Utopian Imagination to Aesthetic Reality” 7) Thus, Wang re-interprets the innovative importance of translation in Chinese literature and culture. From a cultural perspective, he illustrates how translations have preceded the spread of Chinese literature as an important part of world literature. Thus, he goes beyond earlier scholars who

examined translation's role solely from a linguistic perspective. Wang undoubtedly hits the nail on the head with his emphasis on the language media. For example, in the case of cultural exchanges and dialogues between Chinese literature and foreign literatures, it was precisely the language media obtained in the translation process that had created fresh expressions in modern Chinese literature. In turn, such new expressions had affected how Chinese literature were written. As a result, the modern Chinese, as a more open form, has claimed legitimacy as a language of literary creation. Furthermore, what Wang values most in translation is not its impact on Chinese language and literature per se, but its influence on the capability of Chinese literature to interact with world literatures. Turning away cultural conservatism about "Westernization" or "colonization," Wang appreciates the rich possibilities translation can engender in terms of Chinese literature's admission into world literature, especially the language transformation it has generated. More specifically, translation, as he conceives, has refined Chinese literature's qualities as part of world literature as much as it has enhanced the chances for exchanges between the two. In this sense, the New Culture Movement initiated by Hu Shi has far-reaching implications. On the one hand, it has helped writers to follow their hearts and write what they wish; on the other hand, it has also opened up the language channel for Chinese literature to enter the stage of world literature. Additionally, it has helped in the translation of foreign books into Chinese. Had translators stuck with Yan Fu's practice of rendering Western languages into classic Chinese (that is eternally monosyllabic), translated texts would have largely slipped into oblivion. Hence, some scholars contend that the ultimate purpose of the "vernacular movement" during the May Fourth period is not to ask people to write articles in everyday speech. Rather, it intends to "make Chinese a language that is translatable and capable of translating other languages, so that we can clearly hear the voices of the world and understand their meanings in impeccable ways" (Jingze 229).

Translation introduces modern and cosmopolitan elements to national literatures, which are increasingly integrated into the oeuvre of world literature. From the late Qing dynasty onwards, Chinese people have been on a progressive journey of learning from the West—ranging from scientific objects, institutional systems to cultures. A large number of Western literatures and theories have been enthusiastically translated into Chinese. Such a boom shows no signs of abating, leading some scholars to voice their concern over the so-called "Europeanization"

or “colonization” of the Chinese language.¹ In other words, “Chinese literature has become more and more open to the outside world in an attempt to become part of world literature” (Wang, “Contemporary Chinese Fiction and World Literature” 585). Moreover, globalization has brought about increasingly close exchanges between China and the rest of the world. Against this background, Wang contends that telling good Chinese stories in the mainstream English builds up positive national images to circulate abroad. Essentially, this process is a kind of “cultural translation and representation.” Translation in this case includes not only the transmission of information between languages but also the “inter-semiotic translation” between images and significations (Wang, “Translation and the Construction of National Image and Overseas Communication” 2). At the same time, translation, as a means of cross-cultural interpretation, plays an increasingly important role in the process of Chinese literature’s international dissemination. It can contribute to “the efficient promotion and international circulation of Chinese literature and culture” (Wang, “Translation and Cross-cultural Interpretation” 5). In short, Chinese literature gains more opportunities to become part of world literature by means of translation. The closer it is to the mainstream of world literatures, the more dialogues it will have with literatures of other nationalities. In the end, it helps in projecting Chinese literature’s global influence as an important part of world literature.

Wang has amply illustrated this point in his article commemorating the centenary of the May Fourth New Culture Movement, arguing that “without translation of foreign literatures, there would be no New Culture Movement” (Wang, “Translation’s Indispensable Role in China’s Modern History: From the New Culture Movement to the New Era of National Rejuvenation” 13). Inversely, without the intermediary role of translation, Chinese modern literature, arts and humanities research are possible to spread worldwide. China’s translation history, with its rich experiences, serves as an acute reminder for nowadays intellectuals. We should not rely on a mode of word-to-word translation or interpretation that over-emphasizes the signification if we want to successfully translate our literary works and humanities academic works for an international reader republic. Only creative translation can “make the spiritual essence of Chinese culture be accepted globally” (13). If we blindly stick to traditional translation modes trapped in outdated

1 For example, Yu Guangzhong once said: “Many translators have subconsciously worshipping English. In their translation, they blindly imitate English grammar to the extent of making silly mistakes. If things go on like this, would not our beautiful Chinese become a colony of English language?” See Yu Guangzhong. *On Translation*. Beijing: China Translation & Publishing House, 2002. 59.

standards, we will encounter unsurmountable obstacles in Chinese literature's international dissemination. It is only through creative translation that Chinese literature has become more cosmopolitan, engaging in dynamic conversations with other world literatures. As such, a large number of contemporary writers, including Mo Yan, Jia Pingwa, Ge Fei, Li Er and others, have found their way into the world, attracting many Western readers.

Moreover, translating foreign literatures into Chinese has played a pivotal role in drawing Chinese literature closer to and making it a part of world literature. However, at this stage, our priority should be "translating Chinese literature into foreign languages" so it can reinforce its place in the family of world literature. Following the revitalization of Chinese society, politics and economy, Chinese culture should develop in ways that can be reflexive of China's status as one of world's "major power." To this end, Wang suggests, we should "resolutely shift tack in translation. Although, we previously focused on the translation of foreign literatures to Chinese, but at this moment, our top priority should go to the translation of Chinese texts. By means of excellent translation, Chinese cultural theories and intellectual thoughts can attain their due place among the forest of the world's excellent works" (Wang, "Change the Direction of Translation and Make the World Understand Chinese Literature"). The translation of Western books since late Qing dynasty has brought about changes in Chinese literature, making its expression and content closer to these of world-literature classics. However, Chinese literature has to be translated into other languages so that it can be known, read and appreciated by foreign readers, and recognized as an organic part of world literature. Therefore, the focus of our present work, aside from pushing on introducing foreign masterpieces into China, should be translating and introducing excellent Chinese literary works to foreign countries, thus "gradually shifting the direction to focus on translating Chinese literature into other major languages" (Wang, "Cultural Studies and Translation Studies in the Age of Globalization" 10). In Wang's view, what holds back Chinese literature from achieving a better position in world literature is its insufficient translations. Compared with Chinese scholars' huge amount of work introducing Western literatures in large numbers, few foreign scholars are committed to translating Chinese literature into their languages. Some Chinese scholars and translators indeed are doing this work, but they fail to generate warm responses in Western audiences, which has enormously slowed down Chinese literature's integration into the family of world literature. Despite our considerable progress in English education, only a small number of scholars are able to translate our excellent Chinese works for wider distribution in the West. There are

few Chinese scholars who can write for Western journals. The lack of adequate translation has become a bottleneck hindering Chinese literature's integration into world literature. Thus, it is crucial to train professional translators so more Chinese literature can be successfully translated into major foreign languages. To relieve translation pressure, this should be the top priority. If we primarily introduce and translate foreign literary works into Chinese at the expense of translating Chinese literature, it will harm the ecosystem of world literature. This also applies to the fact that major countries in Europe and America only export their literatures to third-world nations rather than importing literatures from developing countries. With the sufficient help of excellent translations, Chinese literature will spread worldwide quickly. However, it is crucial, Wang argues, that translation should be capable of deconstructing the centrality of European and American literatures, creating a better ecosystem for world literature.

Undoubtedly, translation bridges Chinese literature and the outside world, but while translating Chinese literature to foreign languages, we must avoid the phenomenon of "talking only to ourselves." Rather, we should stay open to suggestions of foreign sinologists. A nationalist complex is evident in Wang's theories regarding world literature. He constantly speaks out for Chinese literature and other national literatures in the East, calling for the rise of Chinese literature in the world. But how can Chinese literature achieve such a worldwide breakthrough? Can we just rely on cultivating more translation talents or on improving the translation quality? Obviously, this is not a problem that will be easily solved as China becomes a major economic power, nor the solution is as simple as merely improving foreign translations. In the process of translating Chinese literature, "we need foreign sinologists' cooperation and assistance, which can help to implement the strategy of 'local globalization' so that Chinese literature can be better received by the rest of the world" (Wang, "'World Literature': From Utopian Imagination to Aesthetic Reality" 8). Wang emphasizes this point in "World Literature and China": "By cooperating with foreign sinologists, we have greater chances to effectively promote Chinese literature to the world, making it an inseparable part of world literature" (21). Why does Wang credit such an importance to overseas sinologists? Wouldn't their intervention undermine the literary subjectivity of Chinese works? In fact, Wang's proposition reflects his broad horizon and professionalism as a scholar. He pays attention to and emphasizes the difference between translation principles adhering to Western translation and publishing circles and upheld by the Chinese side. To the core, he admonishes us to follow translation's inherent laws. Western and Chinese readers have different horizons of expectations, which

determines the difference in the selection of texts as well as translation strategies. Indeed, it is difficult to satisfy foreign readers' expectations through translations of Chinese literature without the participation of foreign sinologists. As far as the translation of Chinese literature is concerned, we need international readers' opinion to help us select suitable materials and to inform our translation process, so that the translated works can be successfully published and well received before circulating widely. Practices such as self-centered translation without considering foreign needs will harm Chinese literature's international growth. They might fall into a kind of wishful thinking while translated works get a cold response from the readers of the target country, thus restricting the "circulation" of Chinese literature abroad.

Once translated into foreign languages, Chinese literature travels beyond the borders, and its reception is no longer decided by Chinese aesthetic standards. Rather, it is constantly constrained by the cultural context of the target countries. Given this, we should seek help of foreign scholars who can advise us on many aspects such as selection of text, cultural mutation during the translation, publication, circulation, and others. If we do not heed to their suggestions, our translation will not fulfill its potential. This is testified by the fact that some books translated into English only by Chinese participants are not welcomed by many foreign readers. Therefore, Wang insists, "while maintaining our independence, we should also develop a mode of Chinese-foreign cooperation in translating Chinese literature" (Wang, "On the Feasibility and Possibility of Chinese Literary Theory to March Towards the World" 46). Chinese literature must be translated before it can travel abroad, and during translation, foreign sinologists' opinions should be consulted, ensuring that the translated works are well received by foreign readers, shining brightly in the galaxy of world literature.

An internationally renowned comparatist, Wang has been known for his great vision and sense of responsibility as a Chinese scholar. He is convinced that Chinese scholars should shoulder the responsibility of promoting "the translational turn in cultural studies." As an interdisciplinary field, translation studies in China has not been clearly identified as a self-sufficient and systematic disciplinary. But this does not deny its disciplinary attributes. In the wake of the cultural studies crisis, translation studies, propelled by sophisticated research, has become an important means of stimulating cultural studies. Influenced by André Lefevere (1944–1996) and Susan Bassnett (1945–), translation studies has gained access to the broader "cultural" space after moving out of the shackles imposed by language and signification. Postmodern scholars such as J. Hillis Miller (1928–2021) and Gayatri C. Spivak (1942–) are determined to undermine and break Western-

centrism in cultural studies, bringing the field to a new stage that highlights east-west dialogues or literatures' two-way travels. This will inevitably usher in a "translational turn" in cultural studies. The paradigm shift in cultural studies and the mission of translation studies have led comparative literature scholars to focus on cross-cultural exchanges. Consequently, their language proficiency and cultural competence have been challenged, for they must learn eastern languages and cultures. In this case, how can the translational turn of cultural studies within the scope of world literature be realized, and how can we eliminate of West-centrism to achieve west-east conversations on equal ground in the postmodern context? Given that Western scholars are facing the linguistic dilemma, Wang, from the vantage point of Chinese comparatists' linguistic capability and the current development of Chinese translation studies, asserts that Chinese scholars can better solve the problem to advance the translational turn in cultural studies. In the early years of the new century, he wrote: "In view of the enormous progress made in translation studies, which has already become a well-established field, we are fully capable of proclaiming to the international academic community that Chinese scholars will initiate the translational turn in cultural studies" (Wang, "Theorizing Translatology: Toward an Interdisciplinary Approach" 10). He further suggested that China should shift from consuming borrowed foreign theories to producing them. Wang's vision thus reflects his deep national feelings and high cultural expectations.

In addition to having a global view and a sense of responsibility, Wang's research interests are simultaneously local and transnational. Essentially, he argues, substantial and adequate translations constitute the solid foundation upon which we can facilitate the integration of Chinese literature into the world, and during the translation process, foreign experts should be consulted as well. Such views, undoubtedly, can benefit the literatures of disadvantaged nations striving to gain a place in the forest of world literature.

3. Translation and World Literature within a National Context

As a comparatist from China, Wang's theory of world literature undoubtedly has a strong national color. This sense of national belonging manifests majorly in his own cultural identity. His strong identification with Chinese traditional culture, which he strives to inherit, is the emotional grounds upon which he places his extensive international participation in the discussions of frontier topics regarding translation theories. He promotes a reconstruction of the ecosystem of world literature by translating more disadvantaged national literatures into mainstream languages, thus carving a legitimate space for national literatures of small countries to survive and

flourish in the map of world literature. Also, drawing on influential scholarship in the field of translation studies, Wang has formulated his own theories regarding translation and world literature.

The development of comparative literature and cultural criticism has led to a shift in translation studies. Comparatists, when examining the factual connection between two national literatures, readily consider how translation shape the text's dissemination and reception in a target language. Starting from this, they add a dose of comparatism to translation studies. In essence, influence study in the domain of comparative literature depends on the reception or creative interpretation of the translated work by readers in the target country. This process can cause variation to the original work. Following the boom of cultural studies and postcolonial theories, "scholars of translation studies pay more attention to phenomena rich in cultural studies elements, such as representation, hegemony, manipulation, gender, race, colonization, identity, etc., greatly promoting a cultural turn in translation studies" (Wang, "Comparative Literature and the Cultural Turn of Translation Studies" 19). Wang's conceptualization of translation originates from his extensive readings of translated works by scholars at home and abroad. He not only builds on established scholarship, but also combines his own research experience with the realities of Chinese literature to develop groundbreaking critical discourse. For instance, Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" has inspired him to recognize the vital role played by the translation process and the translator in determining the fate of work in the target country. From Derrida's deconstruction theories, he learns the complexity of evaluating translations. He also profoundly sympathizes with the "foreignizing translation" theory uphold by Lawrence Venuti (1953-), which is to deconstruct the centrality of English culture (Wang, "Deconstruction, Postcolonial and Cultural Translation" 51). In Wang's opinion, Venuti's theory has accelerated the disintegration of English-speaking countries' dominance over translation. In defending national literatures' status and agency, such a theory helps them to gain a foothold in the English-speaking world. However, it is Lefevre and Basnett who have influenced Wang the most. These two are the leading figures of the "translation studies school." In *Constructing Culture: Essays on Literary Translation*, they introduced the concept of the translation turn in cultural criticism. Wang resonates strongly with this concept. He believes that it is a rebuttal to Anglocentrism in cultural studies, and at the same time, taking translation as departure point, it brings cultural studies to a broader cross-cultural context. Clearly, Lefevre and Basnett's translation theories have profoundly influenced Wang's understanding of the translation process: the "manipulation" pertaining to translation is indispensable

for a national literature to be accepted by readers of other countries and to enter the palace of world literature. Having established a closer connection between concepts of world literature and translation as an intermediary, Wang has provided world literature with a profounder theoretical foundation and practical value.

Further, Wang suggests, national literatures will unavoidably suffer some loss in translation, but as long as these can resist or deconstruct Western discourse, and ultimately make the translated work achieve a global influence, the loss can be considered as worthy and positive. Therefore, a strong national complex underlies Wang's world literature studies. He is good at tracing Western studies of Chinese literature and other oriental national literatures, making them a possible cornerstone for building a dialogue between Western and Chinese literatures, from which he unfolds his exploration. For instance, Wang fully endorses the "conversational" studies advocated by J. Hillis Miller, a famous American comparative literature scholar. Miller transmitted his theoretical works to China through speeches and publications. Additionally, he actively engaged in direct dialogues with Chinese scholars and readers. He was willing to revise and update his theories whenever he found them flawed, making them more widely adaptable in the end. Chinese scholars should follow Miller to initiate conversations with their international counterparts, so that they can introduce Chinese literary and cultural masterpieces to the world. Instead of a one-way mode of importing Western literature to China, Chinese literature and culture should also be exported so it can be received and appreciated by international readers. Why does Wang approve Miller to such a high degree? The reason is that Miller has dismantled a mode of one-way travel noted by Edward Said's (1935–2003) in his "Travelling Theory." As Said reveals, literatures and theories travel mostly from the privileged West to the disadvantaged East. In contrast to Said, Miller clearly recognized the two-way and conversational characteristics of this kind of travel. Thus, with rapid rise in economic power, China will play an increasingly important role in the international community. Chinese scholars, equipped with skills and capability to converse with mainstream international experts, should take on the historical mission of helping Chinese literature going global. In achieving this, Sino-west cultural exchanges will stop being "one-way" and "unbalanced."

As far as translation is concerned, Chinese literary or theoretical works, when traveling abroad, will definitely encounter many "metamorphoses," "variation" or "misinterpretations." What Wang values in such a progress is its potential to deconstruct the monopoly of Western discourse. In addition, he advocates the "two-way travel" to overthrow the West's dominance over and manipulation of the East.

He writes:

Translation, as an intermediary, will cause metamorphoses to happen to Chinese theoretical works travelling to the West. In other words, part of their inherent ideas and aesthetic spirit might suffer and even get lost. However, such variation and loss are not a failure at all if they can push forward the continued dialogue between Chinese and Western literary theories. (Wang, "Theory Transmission: from One-way to Two-way" 127)

Indeed, various nationalities in the world translate different literatures to learn from each other and during this process, mistranslations "for my own use" are unavoidable. Such practices have positive implications when viewed from the perspective of literary exchanges. Wang elaborates further:

Any theoretical work, once mediated by translation, will undergo misreading or mistranslations. From the flip side, it can lead to new development, or help this theory, albeit in its transformed forms, to travel to another languages and cultures. If the variated version of this theory can help it to gain an "afterlife" in the target country, the translation should be considered more meritorious than harmful. (Wang, "Translation of Theory and Its Transformation" 5)

Translation, despite the risks of variation, is the only way for a national literature to travel to other languages. In some sense, compared with indifference and zero contact, "mistranslation" or "variation" is far more conducive to cultural exchanges and mutual understandings. It has to be admitted that it takes time for the West to understand and appreciate Chinese literature. Yet, a small step can change the whole picture in the end. Step by step, the West can gradually develop the capability to enjoy part of the eastern literature, and from there, it will not be long before they appreciate eastern culture as a whole. As a result, West and East can have dialogues on equal grounds.

Furthermore, Wang's conceptualization of world literature is grounded in his distinctive academic background as much as on a unique cultural context. It is forward-looking, firmly situated within a national framework and yet deconstructive in terms of challenging West-centrism. As a scholar from a third-world country, in the traditional sense, Wang configures world literature in ways obviously different from that of Western scholars since Goethe. His re-discussion of world literature is not just a reiteration of an old topic. Rather, he answers the urgent

call to reconsider it in the new age. Wang believes, following the unstoppable cultural globalization, cultural studies will “break the confinement posed by the mode of ‘West-centrism’ and ‘Anglo-centrism’”. In its wake, other languages, national/ethnic cultural traditions as research objects will gain increasing critical attention” (Wang, “Cultural Construction of Translation and Translation Turn in Cultural Studies” 7). For example, China, a country with its ancient history and rich culture, should be accounted as important and indispensable in the field of cultural studies. For a long time, scholars tend to equate “world literature” with foreign literatures either in academic discussions or during textbook compilation to the extent of excluding Chinese literature at all. As a corollary, they have denied Chinese literature opportunities to have conversations with other national literatures on the same platform. How can an anthology of world literatures, edited by Chinese scholars, exclude literary works of their own nation? This puzzles many. It certainly is tied to mode of thinking largely influenced by cultural Eurocentrism. Faced with such an embarrassing situation, Wang proposes the idea of “reconstructing the Chinese version of world literature” (Wang, “The Chinese Version of World Literature” 133). His aim is to make more and more Chinese literary works to be included in authoritative works such as *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* and *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*. As well, he urges Chinese scholars to publish anthologies of world literature according to their own standards. Ultimately, he hopes for a Chinese version of world literature with a considerable dose of Chinese aesthetic elements. Wang claims, cultural globalization will undermine “Anglocentrism” and its cultural monopoly. He further suggests, “Along with English, other major languages will play increasingly important roles in future cultural exchanges. As China’s comprehensive national power grows, so too does its cultural value. In this context, Chinese as a major language will become increasingly popular” (Wang, “Cultural Construction of Translation and Translation Turn in Cultural Studies” 8). Wang has the foresight to see the future of world literature and cultural development. His cultural identity as a scholar from a relatively marginalized country in the East is indeed the starting point to reconceptualize world literature. But what is more important is that he has eliminated the narrow vision of Eurocentrism and the idea of the East and the West as a binary. He situates his thought within the globalization context in which many emerging nation-states have arisen both in economic and cultural fields since the end of World War II. Essentially, his formulation of world literature is based on the dynamic dialogue and exchange on the ground of equality. In today’s globalized world, language barriers are no longer a hindrance to literary creations as exchanges

have increased intensively. It is impossible for a national or ethnic literature to thrive within a single cultural milieu and without interactions with the outside world. An interdependence of this kind also enables national literatures to go global, contributing to the prosperity of world literature. For this reason, translation has become increasingly important.

According to Wang, foreign translations can facilitate the travel of marginal national literatures to other languages and destabilize the centrality of European literatures before a remapping of world literature is possible. Further, in the wake of globalization, translation has become more and more essential to the construction of world literature that takes two different paths. On the one hand, Euro-American literature, enjoying a dominant position, is expanding throughout the world, resulting in an increasingly homogenous literary landscape. On the other hand, marginal cultures are trying to break through hegemonic cultures and find a place in the mainstream to diversify world literature. In fact, no matter what path is taken, the construction of world literature closely depends on translation's negotiating and intermediary roles. From a postcolonial perspective, translation is considered responsible for deconstructing Western cultural centralism and for redrawing the map of world literature. Likewise, Wang argues, "as globalization accelerates, translation's intermediary and coordinating roles will become growingly prominent" (Wang, "Translation and Translation Studies in the Age of Globalization: Definitions, Functions and Future Directions" 8). Globalization has brought opportunities for Chinese literature and cultures to be translated into other languages and go global. Moreover, The translation of Chinese literature can contribute to world literature's reconstruction in at least two aspects. First, it enriches world literature in terms of craftsmanship and aesthetics, when the translated Chinese literary works become an organic part of world literature, especially in the postmodern age of multicultural dialogue and exchanges. Second, it sets out to deconstruct Euro-American centrism, striving for a more equal context for constructing world literature. In some sense, translated Chinese works can make the predominant Euro-American literature more "hybrid," (Bhabha 227) to use the term by Homi K. Bhabha (1949–), thereby undermining its centrality and dominance over world literature. Doing so can create a more egalitarian cultural milieu for world literature. Given the paramount importance of translating national literatures in the construction of world literature, how can Chinese literature achieve its goal of going global? Wang has proposed three paths. First, Chinese scholars who have studied abroad or ethnic Chinese scholars overseas can write in English, rather than turning to translation, to introduce and promote Chinese culture and

literature. They are very “promising” in terms of contributing to Chinese literature’s global spread. Second, translation experts who are immersed in both Chinese and foreign cultures and languages must be trained as a priority. We should also publish translated works in established international journals or with famous publishers. This is an effective way to attract foreign readers’ attention to Chinese literature and culture. Furthermore, Chinese scholars should publish their research in international journals as a way of participating in the international community of literary studies. By doing this, we can make our voices heard, contributing to Chinese literature’s global circulation and reception. Wang calls this mode “voyaging out in a borrowed boat.” Obviously, these three paths also apply to other national literatures. Yet whatever route to take, translation, or at least the “cultural translation” formulated by Wang and others, is the essential key. All this demonstrates the irreplaceable role of translation in the reconstruction of world literature.

Finally, it should be noted that Wang’s reconceptualization of world literature, which is firmly grounded on his national stance, is not a matter of short-sight vision or narrow-mindedness. On the contrary, it fully showcases his grand vision and broad-mindedness. To some extent, it is this conspicuous national identity that makes Wang a spokesperson of marginal literatures in the world. His various efforts to construct a new landscape of world literature have strong practical significance and far-reaching historical influence. In this regard, Wang’s configuration of world literature serves as a sharp reminder for scholars worldwide, urging them to rethink the location and development of national literatures as well as to reconsider how to construct a more dynamic and democratic international literary relationship through translation under the aegis of globalization.

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