Chinese Literature as World Literature

Wang Ning
Tsinghua University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University

When talking about Chinese literature as world literature we should first of all confront two issues: historically, Chinese literature was regarded as world literature due to Sino-centrism; nowadays, Chinese literature should be regarded as an integral part of world literature, although it has been "marginalized" due to the mode of thinking of Eurocentrism and Western-centrism. Then, we could deal with the two-way relationship between Chinese literature and world literature: Chinese literature moving toward the world, and world literature recognizing and including Chinese literature. Undoubtedly, the advent of globalization has more or less broken through old-fashioned Eurocentrism, enabling China to benefit in the process. Cultural globalization has also enabled literary scholars to reflect on the old issue of world literature in a new context, in which world literature certainly means different things, and thereby should be remapped. So it will be endowed with some new significance in a new era. As Chinese scholars of comparative and world literature studies, what shall we view as world literature from our own perspective? In this aspect, such eminent Euro-American comparatists as David Damrosch and Theo D'haen have offered their definitions or descriptions of world literature, but largely referring to the Western practice, seldom dealing with non-Western literature.[1] This is what the present article will go ahead with, based on their previous efforts. Obviously, we do not want to follow the Eurocentric mode of thinking as we did in the past decades. Therefore, it is necessary for me to redefine world literature first from a Chinese perspective.

World Literature and World Literatures

As in the case of modernity, which has already manifested itself in diverse forms

Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée
CRCL SEPTEMBER 2016 SEPTEMBRE RCLC
0319–051x/16/43.3/380

in different countries, there is no such thing as a singular form of world literature.[2] The utopian concept of "*Weltliteratur*," conceptualized by Goethe in his conversation to Eckermann, was later developed by Marx and Engels as a sort of cosmopolitan means of bourgeois intellectual production. It is one of the direct consequences of cultural globalization. Actually, in the *Communist Manifesto*, co-authored by Marx and Engels, world literature has already expanded its narrow domain to the entire scope of intellectual and cultural production and circulation. From a disciplinary point of view, world literature is one of the sources of the newly-rising discipline of comparative literature in the latter part of the nineteenth century, which aimed to break through the separation of individual national literature studies and explore the factual relations between different national literatures. But during the past hundred years, world literature has been largely coloured with certain Eurocentric or, later, Western-centric characteristics. Many people simply view European literature as world literature, as there have indeed been numerous eminent writers in Europe who have had tremendous influence worldwide. Or, world literature studies have been practiced by a few elite comparatists within a very limited sphere. It does not truly cover the various aspects of literary studies, nor does it include the various national literatures beyond Europe and North America. Although world literature functioned as the early stage of comparative literature, according to Franco Moretti, "comparative literature has not lived up to these beginnings. It's been a much more modest intellectual enterprise, fundamentally limited to Western Europe, and mostly revolving around the river Rhine (German philologists working on French literature). Not much more" (54). After all, world literature as a theoretical concept has been travelling across time and space through translation and finally culminated in the current age of globalization. Although in the present era, literature and literary studies, challenged by various forms of popular culture and consumer culture, are often reported to be "dead," world literature, on the contrary, has flourished more and more. It has attracted the attention of not only literary theorists and comparatists, but also scholars of national literatures who are not satisfied with only narrow-minded individual national literature studies. It has more or less helped comparative literature move out of its crisis, and helped literary studies in general step into a much broader cross-cultural context. Over 180 years ago, the great European thinker and literary master Goethe conjectured this utopian concept of *Weltliteratur* out of the inspirations he acquired from reading some minor Chinese and Oriental literary works, but today, we are discussing issues of literary studies in general. It has undoubtedly proved that it has gone far beyond the geographical limitation of Europe and North America on the part of Euro-American scholars, and far beyond the boundary of China on that of Chinese scholars. It has close relations with Chinese literature.

Obviously, Goethe's access to literatures of the Eastern part of the world is largely accidental, with the help of translation. Although Goethe himself understood many languages, they were exclusively Western languages. Fortunately, he could gain access to some Chinese and Indian literary works through their English and French transla-

tions. The discussion of world literature by Goethe and Eckermann actually bridged the gaps between world literature and all the individual national literatures, including Chinese literature. Since one cannot necessarily read all these literatures in their original languages, translation plays an indispensable role in reconstructing various versions of world literature. Due to the dynamic intervention of translation, anthologization, and critical studies, world literature, or, we would rather use the plural form, world literatures, have already enjoyed different versions in different languages and cultural contexts. With the particular intervention of translation, some works of national significance have become part of world literature, while those that undergo no translation can only remain "marginal" or even "dead" in their own languages and cultural contexts. Thus, to be considered among world literature, a literary work of national renown should be first of all transnational and translational. In the process of transnationalization and translation, a literary work may well undergo certain metamorphosis or transformation in another language and cultural context. Its new

significance and "continued life" or "afterlife" might well be brought about by means of this sort of cultural translation.

Now, one question is raised: Does world literature only refer to literature in its traditional elite sense? If not, what else does it refer to? As Moretti summarizes, "world literature cannot be literature, bigger. [...] It has to be different. The *categories* have to be different" (55), as different people think of it in different ways. So his point is this: "world literature is not an object, it's a *problem*, and a problem that asks for a new critical method: and no one has ever found a method by just reading more texts. That's not how theories come into being; they need a leap, a wager—a hypothesis, to get started" (55). In today's context, world literature is obviously an issue-driven topic that attracts wide theoretical attention, discussion, and even debate among scholars of national and comparative literature studies. To start off further discussion, other scholars, such as David Damrosch, have also developed this conjectural theoretical construction both in theory and practice, thereby enabling it to move closer and closer to literary production and circulation in the whole world.[3] Although they have more or less touched upon literatures outside of the Western world, their critical experiences are largely based on their knowledge and understanding of Western literature. In my previous elaboration of world literature, I classified it into two categories: "world literature in general and world literatures in particular, the former referring to a universal criterion by which to evaluate literature of the greatest world significance, the latter to the different representations, including translations, of literatures from all countries" (Wang, "World Literature" 4). I have, referring very much to the practice of world literature in China, simply developed this conjectural concept coined by my Western colleagues, pushing it into a broader context of East-West literary relations.

According to Douwe Fokkema, who had a remarkable knowledge of both Western literature and Chinese literature, world literature means different things to different scholars. In elaborating the duality of world literature, he emphasized both its uni-

versality and relativity: without the former, literary works of any countries could be regarded as world literature, and without the latter, world literature will become all the more Eurocentric or Western-centric (Fokkema 1290-91). Fokkema, in describing the unfair division of different national literatures in the name of world literature, tells us:

> Raymond Queneau's *Histoire des littératures* (3 vols., 1955-58) devotes one volume to literatures in French, one to Western literatures, and one to ancient, oriental, and oral literatures. Chinese literature is allotted 130 pages and the literatures of India 140 pages, but the literatures in French are given 12 times more space. In his *Weltliteratur* (1989) Hans Mayer ignored the non-European world completely. (1291)

As the above quotation indicates, Eurocentrism, like a spectre, always haunts the memory of literary historians even in describing world literature. Thus Fokkema's dual categorization is certainly right. But here I would rather use the other two terms to describe the dual characteristics of world literature, in order to avoid ideological bias: canonicity and readability. The former appeals to the aesthetic quality of world literature, and the latter refers to the wide popularity and influence of an individual literary work. That is, in judging whether a literary work should be regarded as a work of world literature, we must put forward a set of criteria that should be as objective as possible. I certainly agree with Damrosch that literary texts are fictional, valuable, and even beautiful, for they are first of all artistic and aesthetic products. On the other hand, literature is also diversified in artistic form and in aesthetic spirit, so it is hard to judge texts in an equally objective way. Still, a relatively objective criterion could be agreed upon among literary scholars. In this sense, we should first recognize that there is no such thing as a singular world literature, as it has been constructed and reconstructed by different theorists and practiced in different times and regions. Starting from this point, I will deal with how world literature is constructed and reconstructed in the Chinese context so as to deconstruct the singular form of world literature.

World Literature and China

Although for a long period of time, China was isolated from the outside world, and Chinese literature before the nineteenth century was seldom influenced by literatures of other countries, China still has had close relations with the world. As we know, ancient China developed very fast, so that in the Tang Dynasty, China became one of the most powerful and prosperous countries in the world, not only politically and economically but also culturally and literarily. Chinese people at the time thus viewed their country as the "Middle Kingdom," and China was also called a kingdom of poetry, for in the Tang Dynasty, poetry flourished the most in the history of Chinese literature, while Europe was still in the "dark" Middle Ages. But unfortunately, due to later rulers' corruption and inability to govern the country well, it was

not long afterward that China became a second-class feudal and totalitarian country. Even so, Chinese literature still inspired Goethe, and the concept of "*Weltliteratur*" was first put forward by this great European writer and thinker with the help of his reading and dynamic understanding of Chinese literature. Goethe, after reading some Chinese literary works of minor importance, proposed 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. (Damrosch 1)

We should say that Goethe himself benefitted much from translation, which helped him enlarge his European and international reputation, moving from Germany to all of Europe and then to the whole world. When he was advanced in age, he was almost "marginalized" and ignored in German critical circles. He was regarded by those young critics as "conservative" and "old-fashioned." But due to the translations of his works into the major European languages, he became one of the best-known European writers. In the age of Eurocentric dominance, to be a famous European writer means to be a world-renowned writer. As well, thanks to his interest in Oriental literature and to the translation and reception of his works in the Oriental countries, Goethe has indeed become one of the most famous writers in the world.

Despite these facts, Chinese literature has largely been marginalized on the map of world literature since the late Qing Dynasty. In order to change this situation and bring China closer to the world, Chinese intellectuals launched large-scale translations of Western cultural and literary works into Chinese, viewing it as the only way of identifying China with the world. Due to this overall Westernization, literary translation in China is indeed rather unbalanced even today, with numerous Western literary works available in Chinese, while very few excellent Chinese works have been translated into other languages, partly due to the absence of skillful translations and partly due to the bias of Orientalism prevailing in Western literary scholarship as well as in the mass media. In the age of globalization, Chinese literature, like literatures elsewhere, is severely challenged by the rise of global popular culture and consumer culture. Literature and literary studies are severely challenged by popular culture and consumer culture, and have often been reported to be "dead." On the other hand, we should realize that globalization has, in homogenizing national cultures, also offered China a precious opportunity to bring its culture and literature to the world. In order for Chinese literature to be part of world literature in the shortest possible time, some Chinese scholars and translators, including myself, once thought it merely a matter of translation. That is, we have seldom translated our own literature into the major world languages, especially English. This is only one of the reasons for the current marginal position of Chinese literature in the world.

Frankly speaking, the current situation of book marketing is far from satis-

factory. If we go to any British or American bookstore, we can hardly find many books written by Chinese writers, even in English translation, let alone those written directly in the Chinese language. In sharp contrast, if you go to any bookstore in China, you may easily find as many foreign literary works as possible translated into Chinese. There are quite a few publishing houses, such as Shanghai yiwen chubanshe (Shanghai Translation Press), Yilin chubanshe (Yilin Press), and Waiguo wenxue chubanshe (Foreign Literature Press), which devote almost all their efforts to the publishing of translated foreign literary and humanities works, among which Western literary works occupy the most part of their entire titles. Such leading publishers in Beijing as Shangwu yinshuguan (Commercial Press) and Sanlian shudian (Sanlian Press) make the most profits by publishing translated books, of which contemporary Western literary works and those of the humanities have sold extremely well. In contrast, similar books written by Chinese scholars are hardly circulated as widely as those translated books. Today's young people do admire Western thinkers and writers much more than their Chinese counterparts. We cannot but be puzzled: Why does such a phenomenon appear in today's China? Does it mean that China has not produced great literary works, or that China does not have its own literary masters? The answer is obviously positive if we have some knowledge of modern Chinese literature and culture. Since the above questions cannot convince us, we should make some investigations and find the reasons behind this. From my preliminary observations, I think there are three reasons.

First of all, due to the prevalence and ideological intervention of Orientalism, Western audiences have 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 seen as both poor and backward, even now. Chinese people are regarded as uncivilized, far from the elegance of Western people; thus, they can hardly produce excellent literary works. It is true that even from my own observation, there is a sharp contrast between the image of the West in the eyes of Chinese people and that of China in the eyes of Western people. It is a shame for a Chinese high school student not to know about such Western intellectual giants as Plato, Aristotle, Einstein, Shakespeare, Goethe, Mark Twain, Joyce, Eliot, Faulkner, and Hemingway. Their books have sold extremely well in China. But in contrast, it is quite natural for a Western literary scholar, let alone an ordinary reader, not to know about Qu Yuan, Tao Yuanming, Li Bai, Du Fu, Su Shi, Wang Yangming, Lu Xun and Qian Zhongshu. I suppose that even the above authors' works have hardly sold well in the English-language book market, let alone in other languages. Due to such an unbalanced situation of translation, Chinese literature is still at some distance from world literature, although it has been trying to move toward the mainstream of world literature.

The second reason for this is the absence of excellent translation. As is known, foreign language teaching in China has been a big educational enterprise, out of which great profits have been made by quite a few publishing houses. In recent years, along with the booming of Chinese language studies worldwide, this enterprise has gradu-

ally been on the decline. Even so, it has always had great importance attached to it in China's high schools, colleges, and universities, especially English-language teaching, which is almost compulsory for the majority of university students in China. But the fact is that most Chinese college students and teachers, including English majors, can only read English books or newspapers and have simple daily communications with native English speakers. Although many Chinese scholars are able to translate literary or theoretic works from foreign languages into Chinese, very few of them can translate Chinese works into foreign languages. 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 because of their foreignizing elements, or are unable to be circulated in the target book market. Therefore, many translated Chinese literary works published by China's Foreign Language Press are chiefly circulated domestically rather than internationally.

Here I consider 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.) as examples. Judging by linguistic faithfulness, the former is much better, but judging by readability and elegance, the latter is far more elegant. But the former is, so far, mostly consulted and studied by some scholars of Chinese and translation studies, while the latter is extremely popular among the broad reading public. Therefore, as Chinese literary scholars and translators, we should solve the problem of how to effectively translate great Chinese literary works into elegant and idiomatic English so that these works can reach the broad reading public in English-speaking countries (Wang, "Zhongguo wenxue"). In speaking of the principles of literary translation, foreignization and domestication should be taken into consideration in a dialectical way. Chinese readers are very tolerant of the foreignizing elements in reading translated foreign literary works, but in the English-speaking world, the domesticating tendency is obviously more dominant. Otherwise, how could Yang's version of *A Dream of Red Mansions* fail to reach the broad reading public, as Yang Xianyi himself was a near-native English speaker and his wife Gladys Yang was a typical native English speaker? The English-language publisher or book market does not even tolerate the foreignizing elements indicated in such an eminent scholar and translator as Lawrence Venuti. According to Venuti, even his own translation of selected poems of the Italian writer De Angelis "has received many rejections from American and British publishers, including two university presses with noted translation series" (Venuti 300-01), let alone the "foreignizing" translations of Chinese translators.

The third reason might be a paradox. Nowadays, we 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. If faithfully translated into English or other major foreign languages, they can hardly be appreciated by the reading public, let alone

become commercially successful, as many Western literary or theoretical works are in China. As far as modern Chinese literature is concerned, since it has largely been developed under Western influences, it can hardly be compared to its Western counterpart even when translated into English or other major foreign languages. We Chinese literary critics and scholars often complain that we do not have our own literary masters such as T.S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, V.S. Naipaul, Garcia Marquez, and Milan Kundera. So ours is an age lacking literary and theoretical masters. To many people, therefore, what we should do is only to translate as many literary and theoretical masters and their masterpieces from the Western languages into Chinese. Thus, the current unbalanced situation of translation appears in China's literary and critical circles. If we do not solve the problem, we cannot expect the real age of world literature to come.

The Coming of a Real Age of World Literature

Since we cannot deny that we have already entered an age of globalization, and literary production and studies have gone far beyond national and linguistic boundaries, then another question might be raised before us: How skilled are contemporary Chinese writers in foreign languages? This is a very tough question that might well offend most Chinese writers in the contemporary era, but it is very important for Chinese literature to become an important part of world literature. Several years ago, there was a serious debate on whether it is necessary for Chinese writers to understand a foreign language. According to a news report published in *Qingnian bao* (*Youth Gazette*), German sinologist Wolfgang Kubin, who has been more and more controversial among contemporary Chinese writers, held that contemporary Chinese writers are too unskilled in foreign languages to read great world literary works. Since most of them do not understand any foreign languages, they cannot learn from the language of foreign literature. What they can do is only to explore the way of writing by themselves. According to Kubin, as compared to their precursors, these writers' ability with foreign languages is too low to enable them to read foreign literary works in the original. However, many Chinese writers before 1949 were very good at foreign languages, which certainly enabled them to produce excellent literary works, such as Lu Xun and Guo Moruo, whose Japanese was very good, and Lin Yutang, whose English was so idiomatic that he even wrote his own creative works in excellent English (Li, "Deguo hanxuejia").What Kubin said is absolutely true, but his above remarks still aroused severe debates among contemporary Chinese writers. Those who are against Kubin's attitude tried to refute it thus: although the writers mentioned by Kubin could read foreign literary works in the original, it was Lin Yutang only who could write skillfully in English and publish his works in English-speaking countries. All the others mentioned only grasped the language on the level of reading rather than writing, or translating foreign literary works into Chinese

rather than vice versa. Even so, it did not prevent them from being recognized as world-renowned authors. In this sense, Kubin's ideas are too radical to convince ordinary people, although he might mean well.

Perhaps people are not aware that the starting point from which Kubin criticizes contemporary Chinese writers is not Chinese literature proper, but rather, world literature. That is, he observes these Chinese writers in a broad context of world literature and evaluates their achievements based on such a high standard. Thus, he largely offends the writers whose educational background cannot be compared with those of the May 4th period, chiefly due to the Chinese educational system during the Cultural Revolution, when many of them were not even able to study well in high school. Despite that, these Chinese writers have tried their best to pursue as much knowledge as possible by extensively reading foreign literary works in translation as well as canonical Chinese works. Some of them, such as Yu Hua, Mo Yan, Han Shaogong, Wang Anyi, and Jia Pingwa, following suit of their Western counterparts, deal with some fundamental issues of broad human concern and have already attracted wide critical and academic attention from Western sinologists. With the help of translation, their works have joined the ranks of world literature, which can hardly be denied by Kubin. Kubin himself does respect these skilled contemporary writers and has made friends with some of them, according to him. In one of my previous articles, I mentioned the case of two modern Chinese writers, Ba Jin and Ye Junjian, who both studied Esperanto. The former could only read the artificial language, and the latter even wrote literary works in it. Obviously, Ye's Esperanto is much better than Ba Jin's. But Ba Jin's works have become works of world literature with the help of skilled translators, while Ye Junjian is remembered by contemporary readers merely as a talented translator of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales (Wang, "World Literature" 12). This undoubtedly proves that any valuable work of art, whether written in Chinese or any other foreign languages, could become part of world literature through translation. The same is true of two other Chinese writers, Lu Xun and Lin Yutang; the former, as noted above, could only read and translate foreign literary works into Chinese, while the latter could write in excellent English and publish in the English-speaking world. Lu Xun's international reputation and influence are much wider than Lin Yutang's, although Lin's English level is close to that of a native speaker. For Lu Xun, Guo Moruo and Ba Jin understood that their foreign-language knowledge and writing skills were still far from enough to produce literary works, so they would rather write in their native Chinese. They were fortunate enough to have skillful sinologists who have translated their works into various major foreign languages, and they thus became important writers of world literature. Therefore, judging by this, I think that Kubin does not want these Chinese writers to write in foreign languages, but instead, he sincerely hopes that they can read world literary works in the original so that they can benefit directly from these canonical works both in literary content and in language style. In this sense, I think that Kubin means well. He himself has translated several Chinese literary works into German

and published extensively on classical and modern Chinese literature. We all know that literature is an art of language. Skilled writers must be masters of their native language. If they want to become world-renowned authors, they should read as many great foreign literary works as possible so that they can gain as much as possible from these works, for translation, after all, can never very faithfully represent the subtle cultural nuances between the lines and behind the lines of the original, even if the translator tries his best to do so.

Obviously, it is not very difficult for contemporary Chinese writers to grasp a foreign language, especially English, on the level of reading, but it will certainly influence the quantity of their literary production. From a long-term point of view, it will help them produce outstanding literary works that will be considered part of world literature. Here I would like to quote another German theorist and thinker whose ideas on translation and world literature are undoubtedly very insightful and influential, even in the Chinese context:

> 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. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life. The idea of life and afterlife in works of art should be regarded with an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity. (Benjamin 72-73)

It is true that Benjamin's literary life was not long, but he has had a much longer "continued life" or "afterlife," largely thanks to the English translation of his major works. Such an afterlife will continue through translation and re-translation by new generations of translators in different languages. It is also true and necessary for a great writer who is very strict with himself to know as much as possible what his domestic and international peers have achieved and are doing now. For in the past, as Benjamin says, "the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin" (73), he himself was not able to read the translated versions of his own works. Although as a skilled translator himself, Benjamin co-translated the French literary master of stream of consciousness, Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, into German, he probably did not expect that the German version, on which he spent much time and effort, would be surpassed by several new versions. However, the preface he wrote as an introduction to the translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*, after being translated into English as "The Task of the Translator," was greatly appreciated by such deconstructionist theorists as Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, and was extensively interpreted by them, enabling him to become one of the pioneering figures of deconstructive translation theory. In this sense, if a writer could read outstanding world literary works in the original and gain aesthetic nourishment and creative inspiration, he will certainly make his own work equally if not more outstanding. On this point, I largely agree with Kubin. What I would like to emphasize first of all is: are Kubin's comments on contemporary

Chinese literature really facts? If the answer is, more or less, yes, what shall we do? Secondly, as writers, especially as serious writers of wide international horizon, these Chinese writers should also question themselves: do they write for all the readers of the world or merely for their native fellow readers? If they merely want to restrict their writings to the domestic reading public, as some of these writers expressed, we will not be able to go on with our discussion. If a writer writes not only for his own contemporary readers, but rather for all the readers of the world, he will at least think over whether the subject matter he deals with is his own initiative, and whether it is of certain universal significance. If not, it will not be thought of as original, even though he might not deliberately repeat or even plagiarize others. In this aspect, I would like to remind my readers of what Henrik Ibsen has experienced in his writing career.

As is well known, Ibsen is now recognized as the "father of modern drama" of world significance, and many of his plays have already been recorded in literary and theatrical history. But in his lifetime, he was incompatible with his contemporary critical circles, largely due to his striking individualism and his avant-garde experimental consciousness. Some of his plays, such as *Ghosts* and *An Enemy of the People*, were not well received by his contemporary readers and audience. When he published *Ghosts*, he was severely criticized even by his contemporary critics. Confronted with these malicious attacks, he never gave up, but proudly declared that his writing was pointed to the future (Haugen 3). His affirmation that he was writing for the future has been proved true by literary history. That is, Ibsen's art is by no means short-lived. It is open to future interpretations and reinterpretations. Therefore, it is of eternal artistic value. Although Ibsen died over a hundred years ago, his plays are still performed in different countries, attracting not only dramatic critics and scholars but also ordinary readers and audiences. We should say that Ibsen's works are certainly part of world literature, while many of his contemporaries, including some Nobel laureates, have been forgotten. The same is true of Goethe, who put forward the utopian conjecture of world literature and later benefitted from the wide reception of his works throughout the world. Thus, Goethe has had a "continued life" and "afterlife" not only in his own country, but also in the whole world. Today, both Goethe and Ibsen are among the most famous and canonical European writers in China, who constantly inspire one generation after another of Chinese writers in their creative writing.

Some Chinese writers might well raise another question: Goethe did not understand Chinese, but he could also read Chinese literary works through translation, inspired by which he could even put forward his conjecture of world literature. But Goethe read almost all the Oriental literary works he could access in English and French translations. Since most of the literary works of world significance are available in English translation, if today's Chinese writers can read in English, they can at least gain aesthetic and creative inspiration directly, rather than wait for the Chinese translation. In this sense, I still think that writers should at least master the English language, the lingua franca in the present era. And more and more great Chinese lit-

erary works should be translated into the major world languages, especially English. Through the joint efforts to be made by us in collaboration with our Western sinologists and publishers, we will most effectively translate excellent Chinese literary works into English and promote them throughout the world. Since the Chinese economy has been developing by leaps and bounds in the past decades, China has made great contributions to the world economy. As a literary scholar, I have always thought that Chinese literature and literary studies should also contribute a great deal to the remapping of world literature. Any history of world literature, if not including the great achievements made by Chinese writers, would be regarded as incomplete and imperfect. Thus, we may well expect a real age of world literature to come along with the process of globalization in culture. It is, perhaps, the very significance for us to discuss once again the issue of world literature in both Chinese as well as international contexts.

Notes

1. However, I should point out that they both express their interest in Chinese literature, especially D'haen's *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature*, which discusses the debate and studies of world literature in modern and contemporary Chinese literary scholarship (166-73).

2. As far as the modernity of different forms, especially the so-called alternative modernity of Chinese characteristics is concerned, see my *Translated Modernities: Literary and Cultural Perspectives on Globalization and China* (13-20).

3. I am particularly indebted to Damrosch's threefold definition of world literature focused on the world, the text, and the reader (Damrosch 281).

Works Cited

Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator." *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, edited by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet, U of Chicago P, 1992, pp. 71-82.

D'haen, Theo. *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature*. Routledge, 2012.

Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton UP, 2003.

Fokkema, Douwe. "World Literature." *Encyclopedia of Globalization*, edited by Roland Robertson and Jan Aart Scholte, Routledge, 2007, pp. 1290-91.

Haugen, Einar. *Ibsen's Drama: Author to Audience*. U of Minnesota P, 1979.

Hawkes, David, and John Minford, translators. *The Story of the Stone*. 5 vols, Indiana UP, 1973-80.

Li, Liang. "Deguo hanxuejia gubin tui xinshu: buti 'laji lun,' 'Zhongguo dangdai wenxue zuida wenti shi yuyan' [German sinologist Kubin published a new book:

not mentioning the idea of "garbage," "the biggest problem in contemporary Chinese literature is language"]." *Qingnian bao* [*Youth Gazette*], September 17, 2008.

Moretti, Franco. "Conjectures on World Literature." *New Left Review,* vol. 1, 2000, pp. 54-68.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Routledge, 1995.

Wang Ning. *Translated Modernities: Literary and Cultural Perspectives on Globalization and China*. Legas, 2010.

---. "World Literature and the Dynamic Function of Translation." *Modern Language Quarterly,* vol. 71, no. 1, 2010, pp. 1-14.

---. "Zhongguo wenxue ruhe youxiaodi zouxiang shijie [How Does Chinese Literature Effectively Move toward the World]?" *Zhongguo yishu bao* [*China Art Gazette*], March 19, 2010.

Yang, Xianyi, and Gladys Yang, translators. *A Dream of Red Mansions*. Foreign Languages P, 2001, first published in three volumes in 1978-80.