

The Making of Chinese-Sinophone Literatures as World Literature

Edited by Kuei-fen Chiu and Yingjin Zhang

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Introduction

Chinese-Sinophone Literatures as World Literature

Kuei-fen Chiu*
Yingjin Zhang

World Literature from the Vantage Point of Chinese and Sinophone Literatures

In 2016 we sent out the call for papers (CFP) for a special issue entitled “Chinese literature as world literature” for the journal *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* and received more than fifty submissions. The warm response to the CFP indicated the keen interest of the scholars of Chinese and Sinophone literatures in taking part in the critical discussion on world literature. We noted in the selection process, however, that many submissions made no distinction between “Chinese literature as world literature” and “Sinophone literature” or “Chinese literature.” These three terms were often conflated and taken as interchangeable. It seemed that the methodologies and theoretical propositions in the academic discipline of world literature were still new to many scholars of Chinese and Sinophone literatures. At the same time, we noted that many issues taken up by the potential contributors to that special issue promised fruitful polemical interventions in the studies of world literature. For example, the role of popular genres and the increasing practice of repackaging Chinese literary texts or writers through different media and technologies, as discussed by Angie Chau (2018), point to important and yet much neglected issues in the realm of world literature studies. Apparently, the studies of world literature would benefit by the contribution of literary scholars from the vantage point of Chinese and Sinophone literatures, and vice versa. This edited volume is intended to bridge the distance between the scholarship of world literature and that of Chinese and Sinophone literary studies. It tries to open up a space for scholars of these disciplines to engage in fruitful exchange.

None of the key words in our book title—Chinese, Sinophone, world, and literature—is taken for granted, as this introduction and many of the chapters in this edited volume will make clear to the readers. This introductory chapter begins with a

* Kuei-fen Chiu's contribution to this co-authored chapter is part of the research output of a project supported by Taiwan's Ministry of Science and Technology.

critical mapping of the domains of world literature, Sinophone literature, and world literature in Chinese to delineate the nuanced differences of these three disciplines and to highlight the central issues under debate. As Kuei-fen Chiu (2019) argues elsewhere, though all three disciplines are informed by the notion of transnationality that goes beyond the circumscribed space of national literature, the “world” in “Chinese-Sinophone literature as world literature” should not be conflated with the “world” in “world literature in Chinese” and the world of “Sinophone literature.” The implications of the polemical intervention of the authors in this edited volume cannot be fully appreciated without a critical awareness of the difference in these three terms.

While we subject the term “world” to critical examination in our discussion of the three aforementioned terms, we also take the concept of “literature” in “world literature” to task by including chapters that focus on genres often neglected in the studies of world literature. While Wendy Larson raises an issue with the Western novel form by studying the works of two Nobel Prize winners, Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan, Andrea Wu and Mingwei Song draw attention to the role of children’s literature and science fiction in the conceptualization of world literature. Given the increasingly influential power and globality of children’s literature (Wu’s chapter) and science fiction (Song’s chapter), how should we deal with the traditional hierarchy of world literature in which these genres are considered “lesser genres” and understudied? The well-known war on “literary fiction vs. genre fiction” between the world-renowned science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin and the Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro revived the age-long debate on the place of popular genres in what is deemed “great literature” (Barnet 2015). If we agree that children’s literature and science fiction are legitimate subjects for studies of world literature, how does the redefinition of the meaning of “literature” impact on the studies of world literature?

Another issue implicitly raised in the way we invite contributions and organize this edited volume is the impact of media and technology on our understanding of “literature” and “literary prestige.” Both Andrea Wu’s discussion of picturebooks for children and Tong King Lee’s analysis of transmedia as translation call attention to the increasing importance of transmedia as an important mode of textual composition and a technology-enhanced mode of circulation and reception of literary texts. If world literature refers to literary works that travel across geopolitical and cultural borders, it seems impossible to ignore the increasingly important role of transmedia and technology in the reconstitution of world literature. These transmedia and multimodal practices of textual composition and spatial movement beyond linguistic translation demand a new approach to the term “literature” in “world literature.” While Wu’s and Lee’s chapters problematize the concept of “literature” and “literariness” for the studies of world literature, Michel Hockx’s and Kuei-fen Chiu’s chapters tackle the literary activities on the internet and the alternative mechanism of international literary recognition bestowed by netizens instead of authoritative literary critics. This research orientation is particularly important for

small literature writers whose entry into the realm of world literature used to hinge on the recognition mechanism implemented by the literary centers in the West. How do the internet and its netizens impact on the concepts of “literariness” and “literary prestige” which are essential to the making of world literature? This edited volume is designed specifically to explore issues like these.

The Resurgence of World Literature as a Discipline

Although the significance of the concept of *Weltliteratur* (world literature) is usually traced back to a conversation Johann Wolfgang von Goethe had with his disciple Johann Peter Eckermann in 1827, world literature began to play a prominent role in literary studies at the turn of the twenty-first century when globalization engendered increasingly transnational flows and reshaped disciplinary paradigms. Despite its unsettled tension with globalization studies, world literature should not be conceived “without globalization,” as Eric Hayot reminds us (2012, 224). Hayot contends that both world literature and globalization are “part of a larger cultural awareness of the processes of transculturation, inspiration, exchange, and engagement that govern our cultural, political, and economic lives” (2012, 224).

The exponential growth of publications on world literature in recent years testifies to the vibrancy of world literature studies. Pascale Casanova’s *La république mondiale des lettres* was first published in Paris in 1999, and its English version followed in 2004. Franco Moretti’s “Conjectures on World Literature” appeared in 2000, followed by his “More Conjectures” in 2003. David Damrosch’s *What Is World Literature?* came out in 2003. Together, these works set the stage for the resurgence of world literature as a response of literary studies to the changing cultural sphere of an increasingly globalized world. Edited collections of critical studies (e.g., D’haen, Damrosch, and Kadir 2012; D’haen, Dominquez, and Thomsen 2012; Damrosch 2014) cover a wide range of topics and reveal the growing critical interest and impressive research output that world literature has generated in the new century. The launching of the *Journal of World Literature* by Leiden-based Brill in 2016 and the book series on “Literatures as World Literature” by London-based Bloomsbury Publishing in 2016 further indicate how this new trend has gained significant momentum.

As an academic discipline, world literature began to appear in the United States in the mid-twentieth century (Bermann 2012; Damrosch 2013). Unlike comparative literature, which demands close readings of texts in their original languages, world literature relies largely on translated texts. In fact, as Zhang Longxi remarks in this volume, “in Goethe’s concept of *Weltliteratur*, Chinese literature in translation occupied an important place,” for it was Goethe’s encounter with a Chinese work in translation that prompted him in 1827 to make the famous announcement that “national literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World-literature is at hand” (Goethe 2012, 19). As noted, this emphasis on the role of translation

in world literature used to keep world literature as a marginal discipline vis-à-vis comparative literature. In Damrosch's view, the different orientations of comparative literature and world literature reveal a divide "along lines of class and of geography" (2013, 152): while East Coast private universities were known for their leading comparative literature programs with multilingual faculty members, world literature was introduced in undergraduate lower-division courses in Midwestern public universities such as Ohio State University and Indiana University, Bloomington.¹

The shift of emphasis from comparative literature to world literature as a productive approach to literary studies in the new era of globalization is understandable. Comparative literature stresses the engagement with literary works in their original languages. However, as it expands the scope of training beyond the preoccupation with dominant West European literatures to those from non-Western countries, the insistence on reading untranslated texts no longer appears viable. As Zhang Longxi sums up succinctly in his chapter, translation plays a crucial role in opening our eyes to literary worlds in a global context beyond the West. He poses a practical question: "How many languages do you really know with a high proficiency across the European and non-European linguistic groups?" Reading literary texts in translation becomes unavoidable as more and more literatures originated from the margins and written in small or non-dominant languages have come into scholars' purview of world literature.

Studies of world literature are concerned foremost with the ways literary texts move across borders through mediation and negotiation to open up a new, "worldly" vision. In Hayot's words, "Worlding is gestural; it is an attitude, by which one adjusts oneself, symmetrically, to one's inclusion in a whole that does not belong to one" (2012, 228). World literature, in this conception, expands one's view of the world outside one's own. For Pheng Cheah, however, the key issue of worlding in world literature is "what kind of world does world literature open and make" (2016, 193). Cheah defines world literature first and foremost as a normative force and aims to reclaim temporality to counterbalance what he sees as an overemphasis on spatiality in world literature studies. Nonetheless, we recognize that Damrosch's definition of world literature as "a mode of circulation and of reading" actually attends to both spatial and temporal dimensions of world literature. Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* is groundbreaking because it advances the by now commonly accepted definition of world literature: "A work only has an effective life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture" (2003, 4). While the emphasis on the travel of works of world literature underscores the importance of the spatial dimension of world literature, the mode of reading as discussed by Damrosch in his proposed notion of "double refraction" (2003, 283)—that is, the negotiation with the host culture and the source culture—inevitably addresses the temporal dimension, including the normative function of works of world literature in the process of circulation and reading.

Shifting the focus from texts to structures, both Casanova and Moretti grapple with the concept of world literature in terms of literary systems. In *The World Republic of Letters*, Casanova formulates her theory of world literature by drawing from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field of literary production, and she delineates positions and rivalries among literatures in what she calls "world literary space." It is important to note that, although her notion of world literary space is informed by a spatial metaphor, Casanova's studies of dominated writers' constant struggle for recognition in this world literary space provides concrete studies of world literature as a normative force. Her discussion of Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz's relationship to world literature is an excellent example (Casanova 2004, 87–95). Similarly, Moretti sees world literature as "one and unequal" system (2013, 46). For him, to study world literature is not to study an endless parade of texts, for "reading more" does not solve the problem of the unequal structure of world literature. Allying himself with scholars of digital humanities, Moretti proposes the innovative method of "distant reading" to tackle the problem of the "great unread" (2013, 87). Moretti seeks to comprehend how literary systems work and explain the inequality between centers and peripheries in world literature.

The resurgence of world literature studies at the turn of the century has opened the door for scholars to examine various peripheral configurations of world literature in Africa, Asia, East and Central Europe, Scandinavia, and Latin America, as evident in several special issues of the *Journal of World Literature*. From the perspective of the Chinese scriptworld, China actually has occupied the center for over a thousand years in East and Southeast Asia. This center position has seen two noticeable developments in relation to world literature: (1) an apparently mandated centripetal move to consolidate Chineseness as a rallying point to counterbalance Eurocentrism or, more recently, Anglophone triumphalism or Americanization on the global stage; and (2), in the opposite direction, a centrifugal move to diffuse Chineseness or Sinocentrism as geopolitically defined by mainland China and to reinvestigate variations and ramifications of incompatible Chineseness over time in different geographic locations in Sinophone studies. As discussed in Yingjin Zhang's chapter, some mainland Chinese scholars of world literature (e.g., H. Liu 2018) would rather believe that Chinese literature has already constituted a center in the worlds of world literature, with visible ripple effects manifested in Chinese literature translated in dominant languages and in global Chinese literature written by ethnic Chinese writers, as well as in certain types of national or transnational literature influenced by Chinese literature. Other Chinese scholars (e.g., Fang 2018, 1–63), on the contrary, are cautious with the China-centered position in world literature and encourage dialogue and further research on the making of Chinese literature as world literature. The spirit of academic nationalism behind the claim of a China-centered position runs counter to another recent development in Chinese literary studies vis-à-vis world literature, namely, Sinophone studies, a topic we address in the following sections.

The Challenge of Chinese and Sinophone Literatures as “Small Literatures”

In her influential book on world literature, Casanova identifies Chinese literature as a “small literature” despite its “great internal literary tradition” (2004, 256–57). She contends that all literary authors in small languages are “translated men” in that they need to write in the dominant languages or have their works translated into dominant languages in order to acquire recognition and reach readers beyond their culture of origin in the world literary space. Following the renowned Czech writer Milan Kundera, Casanova defines “smallness” as a situation marked by backwardness, destitution, remoteness, and invisibility (2004, 183). Writers of small literatures so perceived by the literary authorities in the center are relegated to dominated and peripheral positions in relation to writers of large or dominant literatures. It is within, rather than against, this hierarchical structure that writers of small literatures try to maneuver their way up to acquire recognition and literary legitimacy in the world literary space (Casanova 2004, 176). In other words, world literary space is a hierarchically structured domain constituted by incessant literary rivalries at all levels (Casanova 2004, 12).

The conceptualization of Chinese literature—and we would add Sinophone literature—as “small literature” may appear contradictory given the large size and geospatial spread of Chinese-speaking communities around the world, as well as the rich, meticulously preserved literary tradition accumulated over thousands of years. Nonetheless, for many scholars of world literature studies, Chinese literature is “small” in the sense that “the Chinese language is not a widely used language for international communication, neither are the canonical Chinese literary works known to most readers beyond the geographical and linguistic borders of China,” as Zhang Longxi observes in Chapter 1.

Not surprisingly, a series of daunting challenges of small literatures to the West-dominated centers of world literature in the early twenty-first century have come from Chinese and Sinophone literatures. Examples include the controversy surrounding the honoring of the naturalized French citizen Gao Xingjian with the Nobel Prize award in 2000 (Casanova 2004, 147–48), the debate on Mo Yan as an appropriate Nobel Prize winner in 2012 (Klein 2016)—both Nobel laureates Gao and Mo are to be discussed in Wendy Larson’s chapter—and the nomination of the Taiwanese writer Wu Mingyi as a candidate for the Man Booker International Prize in 2018 (Chiu 2018). Writers of Chinese and Sinophone literatures are obviously gaining more visibility in the world republic of letters. Their prominent entry into the world literary space in the new century exemplifies the increasing power of Chinese and Sinophone literatures in reconfiguring world literature in academia as well as in global book markets.

As a new development in global popular literature, the high profile of science fiction writers from mainland China, such as Liu Cixin, who won the renowned

Hugo Award for his *The Three-Body Problem* in 2015, and Hao Jingfang, who claimed the same prestigious award for her short story “Folding Beijing” in 2016, reveals the significant role of Chinese writers in the reformation of time-honored literary consecration mechanisms in the West. As Chau persuasively argues in her study of Chinese science fiction on the international stage, the boundaries of genre fiction and literary fiction are being blurred, so much so that the science fiction works by Liu Cixin are now “elevated to the level of Shakespeare and other masterpieces of world literature” and featured on the reading list of President Barack Obama (Chau 2018, 113). Writing amidst the global pandemic of COVID-19 in 2020, we are compelled to cite epidemic fiction from China as another genre of popular literature that explores the interconnectedness of humankind in the grips of invisible but omnipresent viruses. Like science fiction, Chinese epidemic fiction in translation promises to play a significant role in revisiting the shared human condition of “we are in this together” and reshaping the genre landscape of world literature to come (Kong 2018). Similar to science fiction and epidemic fiction, new developments are visible in what used to be regarded as “lesser genres” of literature and therefore excluded from studies of world literature. A good case in point is the genre of picturebooks for children, as discussed by Andrea Wu’s chapter. Finally, as literary studies readjust their value system vis-à-vis pressing issues of globalization, their mechanisms of literary consecration will surely face new challenges and modifications. This issue is addressed by Michel Hockx and Kuei-fen Chiu respectively in their chapters that focus on the virtual space of the internet.

“Chinese-Sinophone Literatures” and the Problematics of Chinese

Theo D’haen acknowledges that the rise of China as a new player will offer “an alternative vantage point from which to regard both the present and also the past of world literature, anchoring it elsewhere than in the hitherto dominant center” (2012, 420). However, it is not simply modern Chinese literature from mainland China that may offer such an alternative vantage point. Equally important are works from the diverse Sinophone sphere around the world. We use “Chinese-Sinophone literatures” instead of “Chinese literature” in this introduction to foreground the problematics of Chinese in current discussions of works from mainland China and those produced in different parts of the world. The hyphen is meant to underscore the tension between the conceptualization of Chinese literature and Sinophone literatures as theoretical, critical practices. As Andrea Bachner points out, works written in what is commonly identified as Chinese in its variations do not constitute a homogenous corpus; in fact, “as the recently established field of Sinophone studies has highlighted, there exists a multiplicity of different Chinese languages, and the field of literatures in these Sinophones is hybrid and multifaceted” (2017, 142). For readers unfamiliar with recent debates in Chinese literary studies on the theory of the Sinophone (Shih 2007; Bernards 2016), the term “Chinese literature” is usually

The reference to Li Bai, a renowned poet from China's Tang dynasty, draws our attention to another aspect of "Chinese-Sinophone literatures as world literature," namely, the long tradition of pre-modern Chinese literature. Several authors of pre-modern Chinese literature have made it to the world of world literature, although many more "masters" and "masterpieces" of pre-modern Chinese literature have yet to gain new life outside Chinese-speaking communities, as discussed in Yingjin Zhang's chapter. The plural form of "Chinese-Sinophone literatures as world literature," therefore, is designed to preserve the space of pre-modern Chinese literature as world literature on the one hand and, on the other, the tension between modern Chinese literature and Sinophone literature since the late nineteenth century. It is worth noting that, for the sake of simplicity, few contributors in this volume use the combinational term "Chinese-Sinophone literatures as world literature," and except for this introduction, which seeks to distinguish our object of study from other related terms enumerated above, most chapters that follow will simply refer to Chinese literature and sometimes Sinophone literature.

Chapter Summary

After this introduction, the volume is divided into four parts. First, Part I, "Conceptualization and Methods," revisits the history of disciplines of comparative literature, world literature, and world cinema in comparative perspective and further imagines new ways of conducting relational comparison in world literature. In Chapter 1, "Chinese Literature, Translation, and World Literature," Zhang Longxi provides a historical framework for us to approach Chinese-Sinophone literatures as world literature. He reminds us of the expected knowledge of multiple European languages as a precondition for scholars of comparative literature in the past and observes the impacts of a changing lingua franca from Latin to French to English in the making of world literature. Given the importance of a lingua franca, he concentrates on the problems of translation or translatability in the context of classical Chinese poetry and elaborates how canonical Chinese works of literature can become part of world literature through effective translation and critical scholarship.

In Chapter 2, "Locations of China in World Literature and World Cinema," Yingjin Zhang advocates a located approach to Chinese literature as world literature and tracks parallel debates on world literature and world cinema by revisiting recurring issues of invisibility, circulation, mapping, worlding, cosmopolitanism, humanism, and globalization. Locations of world literature and Chinese literature have their crisscrossing trajectories, histories, and stories. The chapter first investigates how China is caught up in the visioning of the world and world literature and how Chinese literature has been randomly referenced and relegated to relative invisibility in Western scholarship. The chapter then argues that the recent critique of world literature is propelled by anxieties of globalization, but that much of it is still informed by parochial Eurocentric and US-centered views. After tracking a

parallel development in world cinema and its proactive engagement with circulation and globalization, as well as its self-awareness of its own evolving and contending locations over the twentieth century, the chapter returns to the question of locations of China by evaluating competing positions on world literature in China and in the West, as well as interrogating what the periodic refashioning of literary studies in the West would mean to Chinese literature as world literature.

In Chapter 3, “Comparison as Relation: From World History to World Literature,” Shu-mei Shih proposes a new method of doing comparative literature and world literature called “relational comparison.” Relational comparison sets into motion relationalities among seemingly disparate texts by deploying world historical perspectives to reveal the global interconnectedness of the world in literature, where the agents who partake of such interconnection are not only major but also minor and marginalized literatures. The method of relational comparison thus helps level the playing field of uneven and unequal power dynamics in the constitution of world literature and works in some way towards a more egalitarian and inclusive conception of world literature. Shih’s chapter moves from the Caribbean to the Pacific and narrates fascinating stories of cultural flows and ideological transactions across oceans and islands as well as continents, which are otherwise obscured or dismissed by traditional methods of comparative literature.

Part II, “Translation Circuits: Intra-Asia, Transpacific, and the Global,” takes us through three fascinating routes by which the making of Chinese literature as world literature takes place. It should be noted that Satoru Hashimoto’s and Andrea Bachner’s critical examination of the translation and reception of Chinese literature mark a shift away from the focus on the textual performance of original literary works or their translated versions to the significant role of translators as literary agents in the host culture. In Chapter 4, “Intra-Asian Reading; or, How Lu Xun Enters into a World Literature,” Satoru Hashimoto examines Takeuchi Yoshimi, a Japanese translator and scholar of modern Chinese literature, who translated and commented extensively on Lu Xun’s works during the wartime and postwar periods. By analyzing Takeuchi’s wartime monograph on Lu Xun and its gesture of copious citations, as well as his postwar reengagement with Chinese modernity through repeated translations of Lu Xun’s writings, Hashimoto delineates a mode of reading that engages the worldliness of literary texts and is informed by critical self-reflection on the condition of textual circulation. This mode of reading calls for a transformation of the reader/critic’s self, which represents an act of tuning to voices that other routes of literary exchanges may have failed to convey. Through Takeuchi’s longtime engagement, Lu Xun’s works find themselves on an intra-Asian horizon of reading that points to the possibility of becoming a world literature through regional routes.

In Chapter 5, “World-Literary Hospitality: China, Latin America, Translation,” Andrea Bachner juxtaposes two examples of world-literary circulation from the early 1920s between Latin America and China. The first is Mexican writer José Juan

Tablada's 1920 poetry collection *Li-Po y otros poemas* (Li-Po and other poems)—an experiment in visual poetry inspired by Chinese and Japanese cultures. The second is one of the earliest translations of a Latin American literary text into Chinese—Mao Dun's 1921 Chinese rendition of Nicaraguan writer Rubén Darío's story "El velo de la reina Mab" ("The veil of Queen Mab"), published originally in 1888. Rather than showing how Chinese literary texts can be read through the lens of world-literary approaches, Bachner reads these texts as scenes of world-literary hospitality, as early experiments in exploring alternative world-literary patterns. She observes that, despite various approaches, most debates about what constitutes world literature put emphasis on movement and creation, on world-literary originality or activity, thus drawing a skewed map of world-literary intensity. She asks: What if we paid attention to an equally important part of literary worlding, namely, the capacity for receiving literary impulses from other cultures, the ability to translate, integrate, rewrite, and (re-)create? What if we contested world literature's fixation on successful exportation over literary importation and rethought world-literary patterns in terms of host and guest literatures instead? Bachner challenges such commonplace notions as textual agency, especially the trope of the "life" of a text and espouses a method attentive to world-literary hospitality from the receiving end.

In Chapter 6, "The Worlding of Chinese Science Fiction: A Global Genre and Its Negotiations as World Literature," Mingwei Song examines the constituents of world literature as defined by circulation beyond national borders. Approaching science fiction's origin and category as a global genre, Song demonstrates Chinese science fiction's "global" impact as a new wave and analyzes *The Three-Body Problem* and *Waste Tide* as two primary examples. Then, switching to an opposite perspective, Song asks what remains "Chinese" of these translated texts in terms of poetic vision, ethical commitment, and political subversion or conformity, which may not have easily crossed the borders via translation. Song focuses on the works by Liu Cixin and extends discussions to Han Song, Chen Qiufan, and Bao Shu, and he moves beyond their translated works and explores what their untranslated or even unpublished works mean to global science fiction as an eye-catching genre in world literature.

Part III, "Genre Matters: The Novel, Poetry, and Children's Literature," illustrates the importance of genre in the making of world literature. Wendy Larson's chapter tackles the issue of the modern novel form. Tong King Lee revisits the notion of translatability with a focus on poetry—a genre traditionally held to be most untranslatable. Andre Wu calls attention to children's picturebooks as an important genre for remapping the landscape of world literature. In Chapter 7, "Space, Place, and Distance: Gao Xingjian, Mo Yan, and the Novel in World Literature," Wendy Larson tackles the issues raised by the entry of the Chinese novel into world literature. She begins with an assertion that, despite criticism, controversy, and scandal, the Nobel Prize for Literature remains the preeminent recognition of literary talent on a global scale. The prize seems to favor writers of fiction. The first native-born Chinese writer

to receive the prize was Gao Xingjian, although in the eyes of some critics, his self-exile and claiming of French citizenship in 1998 tainted his Chineseness. Mo Yan, who received the prize in 2012, was immediately hailed as an alternative, a writer whose fiction is written in a contemporary, vernacular language that expresses an authentic Chinese sensibility. However, both writers have made use of modern global trends in fiction. In *Soul Mountain*, Gao Xingjian downplays place in favor of narrative distance and philosophical reflection, whereas in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, Mo Yan demands that readers engage with specific locales and the physicality of the material world. The contrasting styles chosen by the two Nobel Prize winners suggest different underlying concepts of what world literature should mean to non-Western writers. In conclusion, Larson speculates on the reasons why Chinese literature is not embraced as fully in the West as Western literature is in China. She argues that the modern novel form, which embodies hidden ideological and cultural demands, may be a limiting factor for non-Western writers' aspiration for global literary equality.

In Chapter 8, "Memesis and Contemporary Chinese Poetry: A Distributed View on World Literature," Tong King Lee focuses on what is often considered the most untranslatable genre—poetry. Advancing the idea of memes, he rescales the notion of translation into a more inclusive rubric for imagining the multimodal trajectories of works as their semiotic potentialities are unraveled in the assemblage of myriad texts. Using examples from concrete poetry in translation and remediations of contemporary Chinese-Sinophone poetry on new media, Lee argues that an extended notion of translation is needed with respect to world literature. The crosslingual, intersemiotic, and transmedial instantiations of contemporary Chinese writing demonstrate that world literature must consider the potentialities of translation beyond language as such, where a work may distribute itself across linguistic as well as modal and medial repertoires to herald a new global literary imaginary.

In Chapter 9, "Taiwanese Picturebooks and Children's Literature as World Literature," Andrea Wu brings the genre of children's picturebooks into the purview of world literature. She studies the award-winning picturebook *Guji Guji* (2003) by Chih-Yuan Chen (Chen Zhiyuan) and considers it an appropriate source to explore the ways in which a local text from Taiwan is made and remade anew in the global space to become a world literature text. Wu examines the modes of circulation of this particular picturebook from printed texts to theatrical performances, as well as its movement from the local (birthplace) to the global (host places) and vice versa. After tracing *Guji Guji*'s incorporation into linguistic and cultural spaces through diverse working systems—one associated with independent publishers and the other involving the national library associations' mechanisms of book recommendations—Wu discusses the theatrical adaptations of *Guji Guji* in various forms. She argues that hybridity and transculturality are evident in the process of reception and circulation, and they constitute a distinctive mark in conceiving a local text as world literature, particularly when such a text is endowed with multifold "new lives," as

in transcultural adaptations and transnational reproductions. *Guji Guji* illustrates such double tracks or refractions of circulation and reading into the broader world and alternatively even back to its homeplace.

Finally, Part IV, “Literary Lives on Transmedia and the Internet,” confronts new challenges posed by new media technologies to world literature studies. Both Michel Hockx and Kuei-fen Chiu discuss how the internet provides a different channel of dissemination and alters the conceptions and practices of world literature. In Chapter 10, “From Writing to Roaming: World Literature and the Literary World of *Black and Blue*,” Michel Hockx brings us to a little-known Chinese journal, *Black and Blue*, which is the collective name of a unique group of writers that has been promoting experimental fiction in China for over two decades. Led by Chen Wei, the group started with a failed print publication in 1996 before establishing itself online in 2003. Between 2003 and 2015, the group published a total of 149 issues of its monthly literary magazine (also called *Black and Blue*), with singular devotion to “serious,” independent creation. Its aesthetics are clearly inspired by the kind of literary values typically associated with world literature, while its presence on the World Wide Web allows in theory for global circulation of its work, even though the group remained very marginal in China. In 2018, the group embarked on a new venture, using the WeChat software to collect writings around the theme of “roaming,” which eventually culminated in the publication of a new print magazine. Hockx assesses the group’s contributions to global avant-garde aesthetics through its innovative practices. Close readings of work published in the group’s magazine provide insight into what Damrosch calls the negotiation between two different cultures, specifically in this case of engagement between Chinese fiction and Dutch poetry. Hockx also looks at the way in which the group’s latest initiative literally combines writing with global mobility, producing writing on roaming cell phones. Hockx’s chapter is framed by an argument concerning the importance of the World Wide Web as a significant production site for world literature, although world literature continues to be dominated largely by print culture practices and values.

In Chapter 11, “World Literature in an Age of Digital Technologies: Digital Archive, Wikipedia, and Goodreads.com,” Kuei-fen Chiu examines the role of digital platforms as new agents of international recognition in the age of the internet. She addresses the impact of digital technologies on the shaping of world literature via a study of three digital platforms associated with the internationally recognized Taiwanese writer Li Ang—respectively, the blog *The Li Ang Archive*, the English Wikipedia article on Li Ang, and Goodreads.com with its recording of readers’ online response to *The Butcher’s Wife* by Li Ang. *The Li Ang Archive* adopts the “broadcast” model and works in a way similar to traditional mechanisms of literary consecration. In contrast, the non-profit Wikipedia writing and the commercial-oriented Goodreads.com exhibit the character of participatory culture in the age of the internet as they call for contributions from global mass participants. Despite their differences, all three digital platforms keep minute records of the e-footprints

of their users and compile statistics that shed light on the literary life of a writer or a work on the international stage. Chiu raises the following questions: How do digital platforms help measure the international recognition of a writer in the age of the internet? How do they redefine the mode of circulation of world literature? What significant computer-generated research material is available and what research methods of world literature studies are in demand? She investigates how digital technologies impact on world literature in terms of literary production, dissemination, and literary scholarship.

Overall, this volume emphasizes the crucial importance of circulation and reading as distinctive markers of Chinese-Sinophone literatures as world literature. As Part IV demonstrates, we have entered a new age in which circulation, translation, and transmediation have brought us to new territories beyond geopolitical and purely linguistic borders, to new spaces of performance and reinvention, to an expanded cyberspace where literary works enjoy the potentiality of being both global (in their ever-increased spatial reach) and local (in their located engagement with readers), being both an effective means of word-making and a reliable source of human history, memory, and values. Herein lies the promise of Chinese-Sinophone literatures as world literature, as the following chapters will amply illustrate.

Notes

1. However, one must remember that during the 1960s, public universities (e.g., Indiana University, Bloomington, the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) competed effectively with private universities in gaining the prestige and impact of comparative literature programs in the United States. Even now, two of the most recognizable journals in the field are published by the University of Oregon, Eugene (*Comparative Literature*) and Pennsylvania State University (*Comparative Literature Studies*).
2. This concept of Chinese-language film has continued from Sheldon Lu's earlier collaborative work (Lu and Yeh 2005) and predated the debate on Sinophone studies. Although we have used the title *New Chinese-Language Documentaries*, the concept in that book of documentaries from mainland China and Taiwan is close to what we envision here as "Chinese-Sinophone," regardless of whether one is referencing literature or film (Chiu and Zhang 2015).

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Comparison as Relation: From World History to World Literature*

Shu-mei Shih

Comparison, as the act of comparing similarities and differences, has led to two ethical conundrums. First, it leads to anxieties toward the grounds of comparison, because when we put two texts or entities side by side, we tend to privilege one over the other. The grounds are never level. A presumed or latent standard operates in any such act of comparison, and it is the more powerful entity that implicitly serves as the standard. Second, the most likely conclusion to these comparisons is further pronouncement of differences and incommensurabilities between the entities, precisely due to an ethical concern over the latent operation of the presumed, usually Eurocentric, standard. Comparing two entities at their intimate juxtaposition therefore paradoxically produces further distances between them.

This chapter is a modest proposal for a new theory of comparison that I call relational comparison. It argues for comparison as relation, or doing comparative literature as relational studies. Comparison as relation means setting into motion historical relationalities between entities brought together for comparison, and bringing into relation terms that have traditionally been pushed apart from each other due to certain interests, such as the European exceptionalism that undergirds Eurocentrism. The excavation of these relationalities is what I consider to be the ethical practice of comparison, where the workings of power are not concealed but necessarily revealed. Power, after all, is a form of relation.

To set up the relational framework, I first draw insights from the integrative world history detailed by such scholars as Janet L. Abu-Lughod (1991), John M. Hobson (2004), and André Gunder Frank (1998) to consider the potentiality of a world historical study of literature as they do global economy, and to offer a new, and I think more viable, conception of world literature. I synthesize these findings with the theory of Relation developed by Martinican thinker Édouard Glissant as a way to link geocultural and socioeconomic history—the history of worldwide

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interconnectedness—not only to literature but also to poetics. Literature is part and parcel of the world, and poetics is as much about understanding the text as understanding the world. Glissant's notion of poetics as a certain logic of the world and a theory of literature offers us a creative way to think about the relation between the text and the world in several ways. As a being in the world, the text is not only organic to the world but also enters into relations; its worldliness is its thrownness. Usefully, we can consider the question of scale in literary studies from the world to the text, the grand geographical scale of the world to the admittedly small physical scale of an individual text. The relational method informed by world history, I contend, allows for the scaling back and forth between the world and the text as well as along the intermediary scales, moving toward a more integrated conception of comparative literature and world literature, where the issue is not inclusiveness or qualification (which text deserves to be studied or designated as “world literature” and which does not) but excavating and activating the historically specific set of relationalities across time and space. These relationalities can be as much about form as content; hence the importance of poetics.

Relational studies of literature in integrated world historical contexts can occur along various axes and pivots, from different perspectives, around different thematics, and in different scales. For example, we can consider the specific decolonial pivot of world history in the global 1960s to analyze literary texts that cross-fertilized each other, or we can consider the axis of women's movements around the world to analyze women's literature in these different places not as discreet entities but in relation. The potential topics are as numerous as the infinite web of world relations within which the text is caught.

In this chapter, the specific pivot traces what I call the “plantation arc,” stretching from the Caribbean to the American South and to Southeast Asia. From the Caribbean, we follow Glissant's theory of Relation, a theory that is consonant with the widespread tendency to think on a global scale in the late twentieth century (as in chaos theory, which he appropriates, and theories of globalization) and organic to the location from which he theorizes, the Caribbean archipelago or the West Indies. From there, we follow Glissant's reading of the plantation novels of William Faulkner, set in the American South and populated by white and mixed-blood planters harboring dark secrets, a reading which enacts the scaling of the theory of Relation from the worldwide to the textual. From this American South, we move to the British East Indies—the Borneo rain forest of British and Japanese colonizers, Chinese settlers and coolies, Sarawak communists and indigenous Dayaks—in the work of Taiwan-based Sinophone Malaysian author Chang Kuei-hsing (Zhang Guixing). We then loop back to the Caribbean of Patricia Powell, the Jamaica of post-abolition blacks, white coolie traders, Chinese coolies, and shopkeepers. The purpose here is twofold: first, to illustrate how doing relational studies with a keen world historical sense demands that world literature take its worldliness more seriously than thought possible; and second, to show how relational comparison opens up a new arena, perhaps even a new life, for comparative literature.

Integrative World History and World Literature

The two main theses for integrative world historians, simply put, are that the world as we know it has been integrated economically and otherwise for much longer than the modern world system theory proposes, and that the so-called “rise of the West” owed much to the more advanced East. To consider the macrohistory of the world is to learn the interconnectedness of the world since at least around the sixth century, and what this means is that the ideology of “East is East and West is West” is as fictive as it is false.

Historical sociologist J. L. Abu-Lughod identifies in her important book *Before European Hegemony* (1991) the existence of a polycentric world system in the thirteenth century, much before the European-led world system of the sixteenth century, as has been proposed in Immanuel Wallerstein’s popular world systems theory. By the eleventh, twelfth, and especially the thirteenth century, the world had become more integrated than ever before. The “increased economic integration and cultural efflorescence” of the thirteenth century can be witnessed in such accomplishments as Sung celadon ware, Persian turquoise-glazed bowls, Egyptian furniture with complex inlays of silver and gold, grand cathedrals in Europe, great Hindu temples in south India, as well as developments in technology and social innovations such as navigation and statecraft, all of which happened alongside an international trade system that stretched from northwestern Europe to China (Abu-Lughod 1991, 4). This international trade system was in turn organized around three major circuits of the Far East, the Middle East, and Western Europe, covering most of the world, with the exception of the continental Americas and Australia.

Disputing Abu-Lughod’s claim that the thirteenth-century world system then declined when the European-led world system arose, André Gunder Frank’s explicitly anti-Eurocentric *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (1998) pays special attention to the structural relations, interconnectedness, and simultaneity in world events and processes during what he calls “the Asian Age,” which he dates from 1400 to 1800 (1998, 5). Even though he actually locates in his other works the existence of something similar to Wallerstein’s world system back by five thousand years, not five hundred years, his main point in this book is to show how Europe “climbed up on the back of Asia, then stood on Asian shoulders,” which also asserts the view, contrary to Abu-Lughod’s, that Asia did not decline but maintained its economic dominance until 1800. Frank analyzes trade routes, the capillary operation of money, and the interconnectedness of a global economy, making an argument after Joseph Fletcher for a “horizontally integrative history.” This is how Fletcher defined integrative history as a method (quoted in Frank 1998, 226): “Integrative history is the search for and description and explanation of such interrelated historical phenomenon. Its methodology is conceptually simple, if not easy to put into practice: first one searches for historical parallelisms (roughly contemporaneous similar developments in the world’s various societies) and then one determines whether they are causally interrelated.”

Here what we have is a proposal to study macrohistory in a horizontal fashion across different geographical regions in terms of structures, simultaneities, and interrelations, as opposed to predominant studies of vertical continuities of national histories. The integrative method is deceptively simple, but it is also the method that historians (not to mention literary scholars) have more than successfully avoided throughout the modern period. This avoidance is telling. To analogize alongside Frank's critique of Eurocentric history, separating the West from the East in literary studies was probably as foundational to the construction of European literary exceptionalism as it was for Eurocentric historical studies. We can now perhaps begin to see the conceit of not only the displacement of horizontal studies (the East is too hard to know), but also the conversion of horizontal to vertical studies (the East is the past of the West) prevalent in literary studies. Fletcher's method begins with finding parallel patterns, and this is but one of the methods one can use to do relational studies, but it can be highly productive for literary studies. When we do modernist studies, for instance, we can no longer turn a blind eye to all those modernisms that occurred in non-Western countries, nor can we see each of these modernisms as autonomous or discreet. Apparent parallelisms are not historical accidents.

Synthesizing many of the views of Abu-Lughod, Frank, and other like-minded world historians, J. M. Hobson's *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (2004) offers specific analyses of the "resource portfolios" (technologies, institutions, and ideas) that the East had to offer to the West to make possible the rise of the "Oriental West," because globalization was first of all Eastern (Far Eastern and Islamic Middle Eastern) or Oriental. What this means is that the world since the sixth century has been a "single global cobweb" (2004, 22), where advancements in the production of iron and steel (not to mention the production of crops, crafts, and arts), breakthroughs in astronomy and mathematics, and the creation of a whole series of capitalist institutions in the Islamic Middle East—as well as technological advancements such as printing, gunpowder, navigational sciences (compasses and the building of ships), enlightened ideas of rationality, and agricultural and other technological know-how from the Far East (especially China)—made the world a much more interconnected place. It was with the construction of the white racist self-identity, the burgeoning of European social sciences, and the rise of imperial ambitions that the ideas of European exceptionalism and the autonomous "rise of the West" were invented. Methodologically, Hobson does not necessarily offer anything more than Frank does, but substantiates Frank's more theoretical and general claims in greater detail.

Integrative world history, as far as I can see, began as both a reaction against nationalist historiography (where the object of study is one nation and its vertical history of continuity) as well as traditional comparative history (where the two objects of study—two nations—largely run parallel while differences and similarities are calibrated). The new focus is instead, as one historian notes, on "the complex,

global network of power-inflected relations that enmesh our world” (Seigel 2005, 78). To be sure, not all parts of the network are equally affecting or evenly affected by the global system, but all parts of the network are constitutive of the system itself, and there is no hiding from an interconnectedness that is thoroughly infiltrated by the operations of power. This means that histories of empire, conquest, slavery, and colonialism cannot in any way be disavowed when one does integrative world history; after all, as noted earlier, power is a form of relation.

Herein lies perhaps the greatest distinction between integrative world history and the theories of world literature offered by literary comparatists in recent years. Franco Moretti’s map of world literature, though inclusive of much of the world, is Eurocentric to the extent that he holds up what is essentially an exceptionalist argument about the life story of the novel as rising in the West and traveling to the East (2000).¹ Pascale Casanova’s model considers colonial history only to reaffirm Paris as the center of the world republic of letters. David Damrosch’s model would grant world literature status only to those texts that have “circulated beyond their culture of origin” through such modes of circulation as translation, publication, and reading (2003, 4). What this implies is that the study of world literature is partly about identifying which texts were translated into and read in which languages. Considering that the United States has the lowest percentage of translated books compared to almost all of the other countries in the world, American scholars should be accordingly least qualified to theorize the system of world literature. More importantly, texts travel over terrain that is by no means even, and the circulation model effectively cuts off from consideration the literatures of many small nations and minor languages that are nonetheless also touched by world historical processes. Wouldn’t it make better sense to consider a model of world literature similar to that of integrative world history that sees, instead of discreet national literatures, all literatures as participating in a network of power-inflected relations, with the task of the world literature scholar to excavate and analyze these relations through deep attention to the texts in question in the context of world history? These relations can manifest themselves on formal, generic, and other levels, so the new model will require close readings of the texts (as opposed to Moretti’s “distant reading”) and will require sensitivity to world history, scaling both the textual and the global without losing sight of either of the scales. To put it differently, form and formation are intimately connected, as are content and history, even in texts that most assiduously flaunt artistic autonomy. The argument for the autonomy of the text is itself a historical formation.

From the West Indies, Relation

While the integrative world historians have given us concrete historical and economic evidence as to the interconnectedness of the world since the sixth century, Martinican thinker Édouard Glissant has theorized Relation as both a way of

Memesis and Contemporary Chinese Poetry

*A Distributed View on World Literature**

Tong King Lee

It may be difficult to conceive of a world literature entirely without translation; but is there a world literature *beyond* translation? My question is premised on an understanding of translation in the interlingual sense, where a literary work is seen to traverse the space between discrete languages. But let us pause for a moment and consider Maria Tymoczko (2014) rescaling translation into a cluster concept, that is, as a network of mediating practices within which translating between languages is a prototype, or nucleus, but not its sole *modus operandi*. This enlarged view of translation enables us to consider interlingual translation in conjunction with affiliated semiotic practices that rearticulate a work: a text may thus be “translated” in the sense of being rendered into a different language, but also (even simultaneously) in the sense of being resemiotized into a different mode or onto a different media platform.

The implication of this rescaling of translation is that a literary “work” can no longer be seen as contiguous with a singular, discursive “text”: a work is a virtual, relational entity, whereas a text is a semiotic, discrete one. A literary work is thus capable of distributing itself into a plenitude of networked semiotic entities (texts), including but exceeding verbal translations. Distribution, then, becomes a more inclusive heuristic for imagining the multimodal trajectories of works as their semiotic potentialities unravel into assemblages of myriad texts. The story of how a singular work becomes a member of world literature, then, has to change.

Distributed Literature and Semiotic Assemblages

In this chapter, I propose a conception of world literature based around the idea of distribution, drawing on contemporary Chinese poetry as an illustrative case. My notion of distributed literature is informed by that of distributed language (Cowley

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2017; Love 2017; Steffensen 2014; Thibault 2017), an approach that conceives of language not primarily as an autonomous, rule-based system locked in as part of an individual's cognitive capacity. Rather, it treats language as a second-order construct constituted through the first-order process of languaging—that is, language as embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended across repertoires. A repertoire, as opposed to a linguistic code, comprises diverse modalities of communication (languages, dialects, registers, gesture, mime, dress, posture, bodily orientation, movement, touch), but also the spaces, artifacts, and bodies that bear on a communicative event (Pennycook 2018, 52).

In a distributed view, communication does not occur within the abstract mind of an individual but through the concrete unraveling of semiotic assemblages that encompass linguistic and nonlinguistic resources. The idea of assemblage originates in the work of Deleuze and Guattari as *agencement*, referring to “the action of matching or fitting together a set of components (*agencer*), as well as to the result of such an action: an ensemble of parts that mesh together well” (Delanda 2016, 1). According to Martin Müller's account (2015, 28–29), assemblages are *relational* (they are formed through a contingent arrangement of autonomous entities); *productive* (they produce new organizations, behaviors, expressions, actors, and realities); *heterogeneous* (they can be formed by relating things of very different orders); *de- and re-territorializing* (they form concretions as various components come together, but constantly undergo mutation, transformation, and disintegration); and *desired* (they are motivated by the desire for fragmentary entities to come together in continuous flows).

Applying assemblage thinking to language as used alongside people, places, and things in urban settings, Alastair Pennycook proposes that we see language use in terms of “vibrant, changeable exchanges of everyday life” whereby a diverse range of “linguistic, artefactual, historical and spatial resources [are] brought together in particular assemblages in particular moments of time and space” (2018, 54). Thinking of language use in terms of distributed language and semiotic assemblages moves us away from individualistic and systemic accounts of language to a more inclusive perspective that foregrounds “a greater totality of interacting objects, places and alternative forms of semiosis” (Pennycook 2018, 55).

What if we adopted a distributed/assemblage lens on literature? One consequence would be a shift in our understanding of literary writing from one based on individualistic (language-, culture-, author-centered) accounts of creativity to one based on the idea of semiotic repertoires, whereby texts are reimaged as “concrete collections of heterogeneous materials that display tendencies towards both stability and change” (Adkins 2015, 14). Elsewhere (Lee 2015), I attempted this line of thinking in respect of Hong Kong literature, proposing to balance the fetishization of the local by dispersing the notion of the text. A literary text is, in this view, an assemblage of semiotic features that contingently accrue into particular forms under

the hands of individual authors but are also eminently distributable to recombine with other resources to create different repertoires.

A distributed view thus compels a revision of our ontology of literature, prompting us “to view literature not as encapsulated in self-contained entities called texts . . . but rather as a gamut of semiotic resources that are distributive and mobile, and which, in each specific instance, converge on a text via a creative nexus—typically an author” (Lee 2019). Taking this argument further, I argued for an understanding of world literature as “a vibrant assemblage of semiotic resources . . . a repertoire of repertoires drawn upon by a plenitude of situated, place-based literatures, including the plethora of Sinophone literatures in the world. Each literature is, in this sense, an instantiation of the global with local inflections; or, alternatively, an articulation of the local with global extrapolations, thus enacting a kind of recursive loop between different scalarities” (Lee 2019).

Memes and Memesis

In the following, I build on this argument by recourse to the concept of memes. In so doing, I seek to put an intersemiotic and transmedia spin on Damrosch’s conception of world literature as “a mode of circulation and of reading” (2003, 5); an “elliptical refraction” of place-based literatures (2003, 282);¹ and “writing that gains in translation,” where translation becomes an exercise in productive critical engagement (2003, 291).

Memes are the nonbiological counterpart of genes. As originally defined by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*, a meme refers to a “unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation” that propagates itself “by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation” (2006, 192). A meme must be “sufficiently distinctive and memorable” (Dawkins 2006, 195) to be abstractable from the whole in which it subsists, such as a phrase from Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9, as singled out and used by broadcasting stations as a call-sign. Besides tunes, Dawkins’s own examples of memes include ideas, catchphrases, sartorial fashions, architectural styles, and ways of making artifacts.

Analogizing this to literature, I define memes as the motifs, concepts, structures, and themes abstracted from their material signs in a given text, with the potential to be disseminated from one text-body to another. A word or expression is not a meme; it is a meme “vehicle” (Dawkins 2006, 192), the concrete instantiation of a meme. A literary meme is thus a prelexicalized semiotic resource, tentatively locked into specific textual formations, yet susceptible to propagation across languages, modes, and media. This is where the notion of memes connects with a distributed and assemblage view on creative writing: like language, literature is an infinite series of momentary constellations of memes (semiotic resources) put together in particular moments of time and space; and as assemblages, literature is deterritorializable (memes can scatter) and reterritorializable (memes can combine with other memes

to partake of different repertoires). What we call literary quality or literariness is therefore not a discrete property located exclusively within the material confines of a particular text or within the mind of an author—although a particular text or author can legitimately claim originality with respect to a specific configuration of memes. It is instead a *distributed effect* that emerges through interaction among the affordances of the medium of writing, the materialities of the platform on which the text is produced and consumed, and memes.

A memetic (not mimetic) perspective allows us to dislodge the motif, concept, structure, or theme of a piece of writing from its linguistic-semiotic substance; in virtue of this, literary memes are capable of “leaping” out of its text-body to take shape in different formations. Rather than imitation, or *mimesis*, the process involved here is more aptly characterized as a form of semiotic rearticulation, or *memesis*. Memesis includes a range of translational procedures, be they intralingual (within the same language), interlingual (across languages), or intersemiotic (across visual, verbal, oral-aural, kinetic, and other modes). It is akin to what Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O’Flynn call adaptation—a “transcoding process that encompasses recreations, remakes, remediations, revisions, parodies, reinventions, reinterpretations, expansions, and extensions” (2013, 181)—and affiliates with Tymoczko’s (2014) cluster concept of translation.

Illustrations from Chinese Concrete Poetry

To illustrate the workings of memesis, I now turn to my own engagement with the concrete poetry of the Taiwanese poet Chen Li. Although my notion of memes is meant to have a general applicability to all forms of literary composition, concrete poetry is exemplary with its cognitive-perceptual focus on linguistic materiality, more specifically the iconographies (visuality-verbality) and sonographies (orality-aurality) of scripts, to use Andrea Bachner’s (2014) terms. Here the question of interpretation, though not irrelevant, takes a back seat. This allows us to downplay for the moment the perennial problem of meaning in its classical, hermeneutic sense—although its spectre will continue to haunt us. If the reader (and translators are exemplary readers) seems to be occasionally suppressed in this analysis, it is for the purpose of highlighting the mobility of memes and the materiality of the media in which they subsist. Memes, as mentioned above, are an abstraction from lexical meaning and hence from readerly interpretation, which makes concrete poetry, with its strong focus on schematic form, a good test case in this regard. This is also in line with the sociolinguistic notion of distribution, which represents a radical departure from both logocentricism (privileging verbal language) and anthropocentricism (privileging human agency). Yet we must recognize that human agency is never altogether missing from the picture, for it is always through social and historical bodies (of readers, writers, translators) that memes are invented, mobilized, and transposed. The point here is to foreground the dynamic of literary assemblages by

bringing our attention to the artifact and the media, without necessarily obliterating the human and the social.

Figure 8.1 shows Chen Li's "Nation" (Guojia). The poem hinges on the sino-graph 家 (home) in the title, deconstructing it into 宀 (*mi*), appearing in the first line as a linear series, and 豕 (*shi*), immaculately arranged into a block constellation underneath. Both of these radical-components are pictographs on their own, the former meaning "to cover" and the latter, "pig" (its cognate character being the more familiar 豚 [*tun*]). Configuring them in a top-down structure creates a non-character that closely resembles 家 but is ultimately unrecognizable. Yet by virtue of its constitution, this non-character is capable of giving rise to an ideographic reading: "pig under (a) roof," hence invoking the etymology of 家, notwithstanding that the latter figures the 宀 (*mian*) radical instead of the 豕 radical.²

And this is where reading, as such, ends; the poem really is meant more to be seen than to be read. As when viewing a painting, one takes a step back to gain a holistic perspective on the poem as a gestalt: we can see, literally, that Chen Li's "nation" is one populated by pigs, in lieu of humans, lined up under its overarching structure—the "roof" extending over the "pig" characters. I am aware that interpretation is already sneaking in here, apparently contradicting my earlier point about interpretation taking "a back seat." Still, such interpretation is semiotically rather than hermeneutically driven; any "meaning" espoused in the process remains "thin," insofar as it serves only to be abstracted toward a global concept, or meme. In the present case, the meme may be formulated as: the *irony* of giving form to the lofty idea of "nation" while *deconstructing* that form to *subvert the humanness* of its people.

Here, a detail from Chen Li's own account of his creative process is revealing. Upon completing this piece, the poet was reminded of the opening scene of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*, which depicts a flock of trotting goats fading into a herd of men walking up from a subway station, onto the streets, and into a factory to take up their respective positions. The superimposition of animals over factory workers constructs an analogical relationship pointing to the objectification of ordinary people in an age of industrial modernity. This imagery has somehow stuck with Chen Li, who might have subconsciously transposed its visual schema into the textual shape in his poem (Chen Li, personal communication). Using the terms developed in this chapter, what we have here is a meme emanating from the film and passing through Chen Li's mind into his poem, in which the configuration of "pig" characters gains an intertextual-intersemiotic significance against the image of goats-turned-workers in the Charlie Chaplin scene.

Germane to the point of this chapter is how we can take the meme beyond the Chinese script to the threshold of world literature. Enter translation. Let us take a look at my own translation (with Tao Huang) of Chen's poem, titled "Nation." As seen in Figure 8.2, I start the poem with a series of the neologism *demoncracy*. This is my coinage, inspired by a term from New Chinglish (English as appropriated

World Literature in an Age of Digital Technologies*

Digital Archive, Wikipedia, and Goodreads.com

Kuei-fen Chiu

Digital Platforms as Agents of International Recognition

This chapter examines the role of digital platforms as agents of international recognition in the age of the internet and discusses the impact of digital technologies on the shaping of world literature. Following David Damrosch, we understand “world literature” as “a mode of circulation and of reading” rather than “an infinite, ungraspable canon of works” or literary masterpieces (2003, 4). The issue of “mode of circulation” is essential to any discussion on world literature if “world literature” is defined as “all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language” (Damrosch 2003, 4). Understood in this light, spatial movement is a prerequisite of any work considered as world literature. World literature is literature that travels. It is not to be equated with the “sum total of the world’s literatures,” which can simply be placed under the blanket term “literature” (Damrosch 2003, 4). Neither is it made up of the so-called “canonical works” or “masterpieces,” if we see the notion of “world literature” as deriving from Goethe’s vision of world literature as “less a set of works than a network” that promotes the intellectual exchange between nations (Damrosch 2003, 3).¹

This chapter explores the significance of digital platforms as a rich site for understanding the mode of reading in world literature studies. I argue that the changing environment of literary production and dissemination in the internet age has a direct bearing on the international recognition of a writer and the circulation of her works. I conduct a study of three digital platforms featuring an internationally recognized Taiwanese writer—Li Ang. These three digital platforms are, namely, the Li Ang Archive constructed by the National Chung Hsing University in Taiwan,

* This chapter is part of the output of a research project funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology in Taiwan. The images in this chapter are from two sources: (1) the *Li Ang Archive* I constructed under the aegis of The Research Center for the Humanities and Social Sciences, National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan, and (2) English Wikipedia. I want to thank Professor Minxu Zhan for calling attention to the English Wikipedia’s rejection of an attempt at an independent article for the Chinese-Malaysian writer Li Yongping.

the English Wikipedia article of Li Ang with its minute preservation of the editing activities of global contributors, and the Goodreads.com with its special design for readers' feedback. Compared with Wikipedia and Goodreads.com that feature a global scope of public participation, interactivity, open access, or collaborative writing, the Li Ang Archive resembles more conventional mechanisms of literary recognition in that it adopts basically a "broadcast" format which does not leave room for readers' contribution. It relies on experts' knowledge in the production of the website. In comparison, the Li Ang Wikipedia article and readers' comments on Li Ang's work on Goodreads.com encourage participation and contribution from their users. They help consolidate the status of Li Ang as a world literature writer in ways different from those exercised by traditional mechanisms of literary consecration.

Before I examine these three digital platforms in more detail, it is necessary to give a brief introduction to the writer Li Ang. Li Ang is a Taiwanese woman writer whose works are characterized by their bold treatment of sex and violence. Arguably, she is one of the few Taiwanese writers who can be identified as a world literature writer. Li Ang was introduced to readers outside Taiwan with the English translation of *The Butcher's Wife* (Shafu) in 1986. This novella featuring domestic violence and sexual abuse made its appearance in the US literary market at a time when feminist literary criticism was carving a niche in the US academic world (Chiu 2018, 21–22). Translated by Goldblatt, who later became one of the most influential translators of modern Chinese literature, and promoted with a blurb written by Alice Walker, a renowned Afro-American womanist writer, *The Butcher's Wife* embarked Li Ang on the journey to the world republic of letters.²

However, as I pointed out, translation does not automatically make a work part of world literature (Chiu 2018, 21). Neither do the recommendations by individual readers or experts guarantee that a work would claim the status of world literature by gaining an effective life beyond the culture of its origin. Instead of relying on the subjective interpretations by individual readers, I proposed a relatively objective scheme of "international recognition indicators" (IRI) to measure the effective life of a literary work in its travel (Chiu 2018, 16). The list includes translation, international awards, presence in international anthologies or websites, book reviews in foreign languages, special issues or reports in foreign publications, adaptations by communities other than those from the writer's country, research publications in foreign languages, and invitations to literary activities organized by foreign institutions (Chiu 2018, 16). I argued that "the more indicators a literary work is marked with, the more effective life it enjoys in the world literary space" (Chiu 2018, 17–18).

When I proposed this IRI list as what I believed to be a relatively objective measurement for the international recognition of a writer or her works, I did not consider the role of media technologies in the shaping of world literature in the age of the internet. To amend this negligence, this chapter explores the new possibilities opened up by three kinds of digital platform in assessing the literary life of Li

Ang on the international stage. As Thomas O. Beebee remarks, the internet impacts world literature in three main areas: literary production, literary readership and reception, and literary scholarship (2012, 298). The three digital platforms under examination in this chapter impact on literary production in the sense that they contribute to the production of the international image of the writer and promote her visibility. In addition, the minute preservation of the readers' activities on these three sites sheds new light on the global readership and reception of the works of the writer. As a result, new research questions are generated and they call for new research methods. The following discussion will study the significance of the three digital platforms in the three areas identified by Beebee. I shall tackle the following questions: How do digital platforms help measure the international recognition of a writer in the age of the internet? How do digital platforms redefine the mode of circulation of world literature? What significant computer-generated research material is available, and what research methods of world literature studies are in demand as scholars try to make use of the material?

The *Li Ang Archive*

The *Li Ang Archive* was launched by the National Chung Hsing University in 2014. This digital platform collects, preserves, and displays archival materials related to the writer Li Ang and her works by employing a variety of digital tools such as Blogger, Timeline JS, Tour Builder, and TimeMapper. It attempts to present a picture of Li Ang's career and life as an internationally recognized Taiwanese writer. Conceived as an archive to celebrate and exhibit the writer's achievements, this digital platform belongs to what Richard Rinehart calls "formal social memory" that is "canonical" in nature (2014, 15).³ Like museums and libraries, archives belong to the cultural heritage sector. They are usually stewarded by institutions (Rinehart 2014, 15). Jacques Derrida traces the word "archive" to the Latin *archivum* or *archium*, which comes from the Greek *arkheion*—"a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded" (Derrida and Prenowitz 1995, 9). Archons, the documents' guardians, are privileged to exercise the power of consignation, which is to "coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration" (Derrida and Prenowitz 1995, 10). An archive houses documents believed to be important social memory. Guarded by appointed archons, it also works as a hermeneutic apparatus. This is basically the aim and function of the *Li Ang Archive*. The fact that the archive is constructed by an academic institution already indicates the significance of the writer. The archive consolidates the status of the writer and can therefore be regarded as an agent of literary consecration.

The *Li Ang Archive* resembles a traditional archive in the sense that it collects documents and historical material associated with the writer Li Ang. What makes this writer's archive relevant for the study of world literature is that it is designed

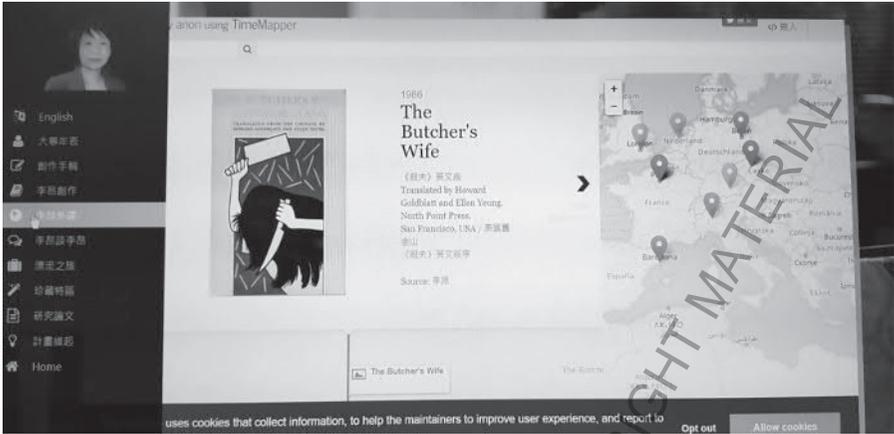


Figure 11.1: Li Ang's works in translation on TimeMapper

in a way to present the writer as a world literature writer. This implicit rationale finds expression particularly in the spatial representation of the publication of the writer's works in translation as well as the entries selected for the construction of the chronology of the writer's career. As a digital platform, it is different from traditional archives in the sense that the digitized documents are mixed with digital recreation.⁴ The presentation of Li Ang's works in translation highlights the spatial movement of these works by mapping them on the Google map. We have on the screen a time map of the publication dates and places of translations of Li Ang's works. This interactive exhibition gives the readers a quick view of the global travel of Li Ang's works.

If, as aforementioned, world literature is literature that travels and translation plays a significant role in the circuit, this time map presents Li Ang as a writer whose works have been translated into more than ten languages and published across regions. In other words, the employment of TimeMapper as part of the web design implicitly defines the status of Li Ang as a world literature writer. In addition, the entries selected for the construction of Timeline JS, another interactive digital tool, reinforces the image of Li Ang as an internationally recognized Taiwanese writer. For example, the year 2004 shows the writer awarded "Chevalier de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres" by France's minister of French culture and communication. In the same year, Fujii Shozo's Japanese translation of Li Ang's *Autobiography: A Novel in Japan* (Jiden no shōsetsu) was published in Japan and the French translation of *The Butcher's Wife* (translated by Alain Peyraube and Hua-Fang Vizcarra) was republished. Thus, the *Li Ang Archive* not only houses historical traces of Li Ang but also interprets these traces by configuring them in a specific way. In other words, the archive is not a transparent window to the writer Li Ang. Rather, it stages an interpretation of the writer.

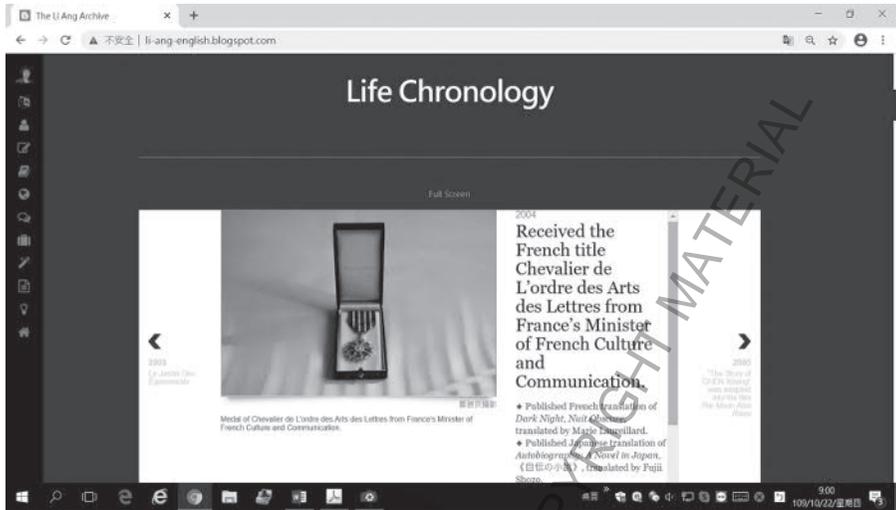


Figure 11.2: A chronology of the writer by Timeline JS

Web-based designs embody value, as Johanna Drucker reminds us (2014, 144). Even the seemingly ideology-neutral chronology of the writer's life and career in Timeline JS involves the selection, omission, and editing, as well as the organization of selected materials. As has been noted (Sample 2016, 189–98; Drucker 2014, 75), there are many alternative versions of temporality. The construction of a writer's timeline actually involves interpretative knowledge. More than a virtual house that collects and preserves documents associated with the writer in a neutral way, the *Li Ang Archive* acts as an “archon,” attempting to shape the reader/user's perception of the writer and her works. Its overall web design presents the writer, among other things, as a world literature writer.⁵

However, the most interesting aspect of the *Li Ang Archive*, as a digital platform operating with algorithms and distinguishing itself from the traditional model of archive, is its capability to preserve the so-called “e-footprints” of its users and to generate meaningful statistic figures based on the automatically collected data. This creates a potentially fruitful area for world literature studies. In addition to the exhibition of the works and life events of the writer, the digital platform has trackers that measure the blog traffic. They trace blog visitors' activities and present them in statistic figures. We find here statistic figures of the exact number of visits during a specific period of time (e.g., a day, a month, or from the launch of the website to the present). If we follow the ups and downs of the statistic figures over a long period of time, say, ten years or a decade, we should be able to trace the wax and wane of attention to the writer.

Another chart that is also relevant for world literature studies is the statistic chart showing the visits of users from different countries. For example, as of July

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