

The Variation of Chinese Literature and the Formation of World Literature

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Abstract: In "The Variation of Chinese Literature and the Formation of World Literature" Shunqing Cao and Lu Zhai discuss how Chinese works of literature entered other countries' literary circles through variation, and became an essential part of world literature. Both ancient Chinese literature and contemporary Chinese literature have undergone textual circulation, language translation and cultural filtering before becoming part of world literature, all of which are the reasons why literary variation occurs. According to Cao and Zhai, the occurrence of variation is a key factor for Chinese literature to become world literature, and an important foundation for the formation of world literature. A country's literature absorbs the characteristics of other countries' literature through variation, thus adapting to the cultural background and reading habits of other countries' readers in terms of language and style, in order to enter the world literature market. Variation may lead to a certain loss of nationality in literary works, and result in significant differences from the original texts. However, the formation of world literature does not come at the cost of eliminating nationality; variation facilitates the formation of world literature.

Keywords: World Literature; Ancient Chinese Literature; Modern and Contemporary Literature; Variation.

Since Goethe's concept of world literature was introduced to China in the early 20th century, academics have applied it to the study of the global development of Chinese literature. At that time, China was undergoing a transformation from a dynastic state to a modern nation-state, and national and global consciousness was increasingly coming to the fore. Zhenduo Zheng was the first Chinese scholar to systematically discuss world literature. In his article "The Unity of Literature" published in 1922,

he argued that, although there were differences in human literature in terms of region, nationality, era, and sect, literature spoke to universal humanity, which was the basis for world literature (Zheng, 1998). Zheng's view about universal humanity and world literature was shared by many intellectuals in the context of the outward-looking May Fourth Movement, because it reflected the desire of the new Chinese literature to consider the direction of national literary development from the perspective of human nature and to establish extensive ties with foreign literature. In recent years, scholars such as David Damrosch have reinterpreted the meaning of the term "world literature" (Damrosch, 2003). On the one hand, they reflect on, examine and criticize the traditional view of world literature put forward by Goethe; on the other hand, they try to break open the stricture of Western centrism and reconstruct a globalized, differentiated, and diversified world literature system. In this background, Chinese scholar Professor Shunqing Cao's theory of "comparative literary variation" has emerged.

Cao first proposed the variation theory of comparative literature in 2005. Then, in 2014, Springer published his monograph *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature* in English. According to Cao, "Variation is a common fact in the process of communication between different literatures and cultures. What's more, it is also the basic law for the interaction, integration, and development of culture and civilization" (Cao, 2014). More specifically, Variation is created by recipients in the process of filtration, assimilation, and transformation after communicators and recipients interact with each other, resulting in changes in literature as it crosses different cultures. At the 22nd International Congress of Comparative Literature in Macau in 2019, variation theory became an important topic in the conference with a keynote speech by Professor Theo D'haen of Leuven University entitled "The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature from a World Literature Perspective," followed by a variation sub-forum in which a scholar used the example of Shakespeare's plays to elaborate on the variation theory of comparative literature (Wang, 2020). Based on this background, this paper argues that variation has played an important role in the communication of Chinese literature with the world and the formation of world literature.

I. THE VARIATION OF ANCIENT CHINESE LITERATURE

According to historical records, the earliest texts that were translated abroad in ancient China were Buddhist classics. During the Northern Wei Dynasty of China (508-534 A.D.), the Northern Tianzhu monk Bodhidhiruji translated the Chinese monk Tuan Wu's "Mahayana Chapter of Meaning" into Sanskrit, brought it back to his home region and circulated it in the Western region, now modern-day parts of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan (Ma & Ren, 1997:2). With the colonial expansion of Western countries to the East, missionaries from various countries came to China one after another. While preaching, they cooperated with Chinese scholars to translate Western scientific and technical works into Chinese. At the same time, the Chinese Confucian classics represented by the Four Books (*The Great Learning*, *The Mean*, *The Analects of Confucius*, and *Mencius*), as well as Chinese poetry, were translated into European languages and began to spread outside China. Influenced by Confucianism, which is the dominant ideology in ancient China, poetry has always been the most important form of literature in ancient time, occupying a central position in ancient Chinese literature.

The most representative classic of ancient Chinese poetry, *Shi Jing* (*The Book of Poetry*), has undergone layers of variations while entering the world. Although it is classified as poetry, in the hands of Chinese scribes from the Han Dynasty until the late Qing Dynasty, it was a tool used by Confucian rulers to educate the people. Thus, *Shi Jing* contains two parts: the "Shi" is the poem, and the "Jing" is the annotation of the content of the poem. At first, governments since the Han Dynasty provided "Jing" as official commentaries on the content of the poems initially to prescribe the right thoughts which they considered that people should follow. While later "Jing" evolved into a part of the classics with the commentaries of several great writers like Xuan Zheng, Yingda Kong. In other words, the annotation and the poems are equally important in terms of classical Chinese. The task for an ideal translator is to not only translate the text of each poem, but also explain the "Jing" part fairly. However, from the existing translations of *The Book of Poetry*, all translations after James Legge's version shared a same tendency that is to emphasize "Shi" over "Jing." A representative phenomenon is that the *Shi Jing* changed as it was

translated into the West: It became part of English literature but differed from the traditional one because it had an exotic flavor of the far East.

Take James Legge's translation as an example. James Legge was the first translator who had fully translated the *Shi Jing* into English. During his lifetime, he completed three translation works: The first one was an unrhymed translation published in 1872, the second one was a rhymed translation published in 1876, and the third one was a so-called religious translation of selections from *The Book of Poetry (Shi Jing)* published in 1879. Despite its fair translation of the poem, he often disobeyed the scriptural tradition and identified the theme of the poem as love. For example, in "Cheng Feng - Tsze K'in," the "Preface to the Poem" says that "Tsze K'en" is "a poem about the abolition of schools. The scholars have left in the troubled times." The translation of the poem is followed by an explanation of the title: "A Lady Mourns the Indifference and Absence of Her Lover. I cannot adopt any other interpretation of this piece than the above, which is given by Choo"(Legge, 1960: 144). The poem's political satire and admonition to the emperor were also often overlooked, for example, "Chi Feng - Loo Ling." The people bemoaned the fact that Lord Xiang was so fond of fields and hunting that he neglected civil affairs, so they spoke of the past to satirize him. While the inscription added to the body of the translation by James Lee reads: "The Admiration in Ts'e of Hounds and Hunters" (Legge, 1960: 158), which inevitably changed the theme and tone of this poem from a historical "satirical poem" to a happy and romantic hunting atmosphere without political significance. The translation is:

Lin - lin go the hounds;
Their master is admirable and kind.
There go the hounds with their double rings;
Their master is admirable and good.
There go the hounds with their triple rings;
Their master is admirable and able. (Legge, 1960:158)

The three-stanza translated poem praises beauty, goodness and the talent of the host. The whole poem is full of the poet's admiration without the slightest irony. This is an obvious variation in theme from the original poem.

Similarly, Arthur Waley's translation of the *Shi Jing* was affected by Western anthropological methodology from the late 19th century onward. He refers only to a small number of Jing's annotations, and produces a translation using purposefully excavated folkloric elements in the original poems in order to restore the "original" social and cultural life of the ancient Chinese people. Waley's translation is basically the translator's own cultural interpretation of the specific poems, and it has no causal relationship with the traditional scripture view. One can say that the variation in Waley's translation is obvious, because the Chinese glorification and satirical themes are completely re-interpreted as themes of daily life. By some counts, regardless of the system of scripture and doctrine, Waley discovered 17 themes, such as courtship, marriage, agriculture, architecture, benediction, song and dance. He included 47 poems of courtship, 25 poems of marriage, 17 poems of warriors and warfare, 1 poem of architecture, 5 poems of welcome, 6 poems of benediction, 2 poems of agriculture, 4 poems of feasting, 2 poems of song and dance, 3 poems of field hunting, 2 poems of clan feasting, 2 poems of friendship, and 2 poems of sacrifice. The only poems still considered to contain praise and irony are 12 poems, which are considered as lamentations. Only 6 of the satirical poems are officially recognized as moral pieces, accounting for less than 12 percent of the total number of praise and satire poems. None of the "praise" poems are considered to be related to moral edification (Li Yuliang & Zhang Yue, 2018). Thus, the reconstruction and reassociation of the poetic themes make this work appear in the English-speaking world as a relaxed work of folklore that opposes didacticism and keeps away from those pedantic moralistic interpretations.

In another version of the translation of *Shi Jing*, the book of poems has been abridged in accordance with the characteristics of English poetry. Clement F. R. Allen believed that the chapters in the book of poems were unnecessary "repetitions" and should be deleted in the translation. For example, in the translation of "Zheng Feng - Yang Zhi Shui," he eliminated one stanza and combined two stanzas into one:

Of our friends are left but few;
Scarcely more than I and you.
Do not trust what others say,
They'll deceive you if they may.
I alone continue true. (Allen, 1891: 116)

As we can see, only a total of five lines remain in the translated poem. The reason for Allen to translate "Yang Zhi Shui" in this way is that he considers that the two stanzas of the original text are repetitive with each other. The original poem has two stanzas, each with six lines. In Allen's opinion, there is only one important point, that is, the only two people who are friends are "you" and "me" in the poem while other voices are simply not trustworthy. Then he decides that five verses are enough to express this meaning in English poetry. As for the meaning of "Shui" (water), "Chu" (thorns) and "Xin" (firewood), and what aesthetic effect they have, it seems that it is a matter in Chinese cultural backgrounds, but not very important for English readers. So Allen simply deleted them. In this way, what finally appeared before readers in the English-speaking world was a variant version of *Shi Jing*.

The greatest contributor to ancient Chinese poetry's true contribution to the formation of world literature through variation was Ezra Pound. His slim English translation of the collected poems *Cathay* was able to attract widespread attention immediately after its publication. The book quickly won universal praise in the Anglo-American literary world and subsequently was hailed by critics as the most lasting contribution to English poetry. The famous poem "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter" in *Cathay* (i.e. Rihaku's "Chang Gan Xing") includes some important classical readings of English poetry, as exemplified by the first two stanzas of the poem:

The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter

WHILE my hair was still cut straight across my
forehead
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.
And we went on living in the village of Chokan:
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful.
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
Called to a thousand times, I never looked back.

.....

(Pound, 1915: 11)

In terms of the poetic form, Pound translated this ancient Chinese metrical poem into a modern English free-verse poem. One of the lines, "You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums," contains an allusion to a childhood sweetheart. Pound here chose to translate the literal meaning directly, but for Western readers it is heterogeneous, requiring special commentaries to understand. Although Pound was against the use of Victorian poetic diction, the language of his translation was not entirely "modern" for the sake of conveying the characteristics of foreign culture. For example, in order to express the cultural characteristics of ancient Chinese women who often addressed their husbands as "guests" to show respect, Pound translated the wife's address to her husband in the story as "My Lord you." Furthermore, these two words are capitalized to indicate a deliberate imitation of the classical flavor. The use of this phrase not only highlights the historical and cultural atmosphere of the poem, but also achieves a transformative effect in the language of the translation. On top of that, Pound's use of words indicating scenes and place names creates a distinctly exotic atmosphere, making English readers identify emotionally with the cultural traditions expressed in the Chinese poems. English-speaking readers, though, in a variant version, thus enjoy Chinese classical poetry, as a part of world literature through Pound.

II. THE VARIATION OF CHINESE MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

David Damrosch defines world literature as the "elliptical refraction" of national literature (Damrosch, 2003). The definition is of significant meaning because it proposes a public space for Goethe's "world literature." National literature does not naturally become world literature, but must pass through the medium of language, culture, time and space like light refraction; it reflects a second focus in the oval space to form a mixed and symbiotic work. The theory of "elliptical refraction" presupposes the inevitable distortion and transformation of texts through variation, but this is the price that national literature must pay in order to be presented to the world's readers. In the end, the original text benefits. Mo Yan's award for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012 is a good example that supports Damrosch's theory. Researchers have confirmed

the existence of a large number of rewrites and variations in the English translations of Mo Yan's novels.

Howard Goldblatt, a renowned American sinologist, has translated over 60 works by about 30 contemporary Chinese writers. He is largely credited with helping Mo Yan win the Nobel Prize. Goldblatt regards translation as a process of re-writing, for he has a thorough understanding of the differences between the two languages. He uses fluent and authentic language to express the cultural concepts and values of Chinese, as well as the metaphors and images constructed in the Chinese language. The translation of Mo Yan's *Sandalwood Death* is a good example. It is one of Mo Yan's longer novels that describe the helplessness of people from all walks of life. Mo Yan's extensive use of dialects and colloquialisms reflects his deep roots in Chinese culture. When dealing with these characteristic Chinese words in English, variation is inevitable.

First, there are linguistic changes. In Chinese, words do not have plural forms, tense is embodied in morphological changes, and sentences are formed with the help of inflectional order and imaginary words. English words, on the other hand, have variations in countable nouns, verbal tenses, gendered pronouns, complex morphology, etc., which will find no easy equivalents in Chinese. The linguistic variation in Goldblatt's translation is first found in the switching of order and the use of auxiliary words.

For example, "他在刑部当差四十年，砍下的人头，用他自己的话说……"
(He served as an officer in the Ministry of Justice for forty years, chopping off people's heads, in his own words)

Goldblatt's translation: During his four decades in the Board of Punishments, he had—to hear him say it... (Goldblatt, 2011: 107).

In the example, not only was the order of the words changed, but also the all-positive "his," the subject "he" and the object "him" appear alternatively, even though the Chinese original has only "he." This happens for the obvious reason of grammar requirements of English. Translation would be impossible in this situation without breaking or converting Chinese grammar, while this shift does make a more fluent and smooth sentence in English.

The second point that causes the variation is that English is a morphological language, which focuses on explicit connection and needs to use connecting words to reflect the dependency or subordination between clauses. If we consider that English values formality and structural integrity, Chinese would rely more on syntax to suggest the relationship between clauses, which often generate meaning from grouped words.

For example, "狗哼哼还是狗, 猪汪汪还是猪, 爹不亲还是爹."

(A dog is still a dog if it hums, a pig is still a pig if it woofs, my father is still my father if he is not intimate for me.)

Goldblatt's translation: If a dog grunts, it is still a dog, and when a pig barks, it remains a pig. And a dieh is still a dieh, even if he does not act like one (Goldblatt, 2011: 107).

The translation added relational words and connectives such as "when," "even if," and "and" to indicate the subordination and juxtaposition of the sentences. Since there is a difference between the English and Chinese languages in terms of form, the translation of the Chinese into English needs to add the necessary correlatives to make the form and structure of the translation more complete and the logical meaning clearer. One more word, it is interesting that the "dieh" is an onomatopoeia of the Chinese dialect to make it closer to the folklore of the original sentence.

The third kind of linguistic variation occurs where English narratives tend to describe how objective things act on human perception, using inanimate abstract nouns as subjects (non-spiritual subjects), while predicate verbs often use actions that can only be performed by things with living characteristics (spiritual verbs), achieving anthropomorphic effects. The Chinese narrative commonly describes things from the point of view of the self-person, adapting a combination of spiritual subjects and spiritual verbs.

For example, "那天夜里, 俺心里有事, 睡不着."

(At that night, I had something on my mind. I couldn't sleep.)

Goldblatt's translation: My thoughts kept me awake that night (Goldblatt, 2011: 107).

The original used "I" as the subject, but the translation changed the subject by choosing the inanimate "thought" as the subject, which was matched with the spiritual verb "kept," adding a dimension of "feeling" that the heart was haunted by something. This kind of sentence is very common in English, but not in Chinese.

It is hard to say that the above details of translation have any great impact on the novel as a whole, especially in terms of plot, structure, and content; however, they shall definitely affect the reading experience. A general idea that the language of a literary work would greatly affect the reader's acceptance of it, thus it has a significant effect on whether it could be a work of "world literature." Or, furthermore, as the famous fable of the Ship of Theseus implied, can a work be considered the same work if the details of its language have been changed, even if it still tells the same story?

The author (Shunqing Cao) has been an admirer of Professor Goldblatt for many years, but it was not until May 2013, when the author was invited to attend the Sixth China-US Symposium on Comparative Literature at Purdue University, that the author had the opportunity to meet him and his wife, Professor Lijun Lin. During the tea break at the conference, the author asked him a question: "Why are some of the more faithful translations of Chinese literature less popular in the West, while some of the less faithful translations are very popular in the West?" In a small cafe near Purdue University, the author and Goldblatt had a more in-depth conversation on the topic. As the most important English translator of Mo Yan's novels, Goldblatt says, "Some people say I am Mo Yan. At first I didn't agree with it, but then I slowly felt that it was quite right. I think Mo Yan is the flower, and I am the one who helps Mo Yan to blossom" (Cao & Wang, 2015).

Goldblatt's literary translations break with tradition and no longer stick to the strict correspondence between words, words and sentences, but move from the linguistic level to the transformation in a cross-cultural perspective. While fidelity to the original text is his guideline, his translation is also a creative rebellion. In the process of translation, he would freely use different translation methods according to different cultural backgrounds, so that the translation could better convey the form and spirit of the original text. He often even adds luster to the original, while making it more acceptable and understandable to the target language

readers. Since there are certain differences between languages and cultures, the translator must navigate these differences in the original text while translating it into the target language. When the original text conflicts with the values of the target language culture, the translator's creative adaptation and intentional "misreading and misinterpretation" are needed.

At the end of the conversation, Goldblatt gave his own criteria for judging whether a work is a good or bad translation. He pointed out: "One hundred percent is my standard, my aesthetic. I know very well what I am doing. I translate according to my own understanding of the original, and my goal is to make the translation better accepted by the target language readers and the market." He gave another example: "When I look at a translation of a Czech text, even though I don't know the Czech language, if I can think it's a work that's fluent enough for a foreign reader to understand, but still retains a humanistic, local taste, then maybe it's good. If one of the two is missing, then it's not very good; if both are missing, then it's even worse" (Cao & Wang, 2015).

Xiangyi Yang and his wife Naidian Dai, who are renowned translators of Chinese literature, were the first to translate classical Chinese literary masterpieces into English in the second half of the 20th century. They strictly abided by the translation principles of "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" advocated by the great early 20th-century Chinese translator Yan Fu. Their productive translations include *Li Sao*, *Dream of the Red Mansions*, *The Scholars* and other titles, which are done almost word by word to bring traditional Chinese literature to the world in its faithful and original form. However, the acceptance of their translated works by foreign readers is not satisfactory. The reason for this lies mainly in the cross-cultural differences in literary translation.

For example, in the 27th episode of *Dream of the Red Mansions*, there is this sentence:

"(宝钗) 如今便赶着躲了, 料也躲不及, 少也得要使个'金蝉脱壳'的法子."

([Baochai] is now rushing to hide, but it is too late to hide, so I have to make a 'golden cicada' method.")

Xiangyi Yang's translation: "Well, it's too late to hide now. I must try to avoid suspicion by throwing them off the scent" (Cao & Gao, 1986: 127).

The translation did not do a good job in conveying the character traits of the original text, which suggests that Baochai was a sophisticated and old-fashioned person; it also left out the Chinese idiom "escaping from the golden cicada," which indicates a clever trick to escape without being discovered. The original text, however, did not express the intention of not wanting to be found out by using a scheme to escape. It is more difficult for the target language readers to resonate with the original author and to appreciate the infinite charm of Chinese literature. The translation is to some extent bound by the time and cultural background of the target language. Therefore, linguistic variation in the translation process is not only necessary but also inevitable, plus, it doesn't always emerge in success. As we can see, when variation is bound to happen, how to better reconcile this variation with the original work and the target language is the key to making a successful translation of a national literature into a world literature, which is also the most important concern of a competent translator. When it comes to modern and contemporary Chinese literature, the translation of vernacular texts into the languages of the world is a necessary way to enter world literature, and in this process, variation is beneficial. The purpose of translation is to provide readers of the target language with a translation that is accurate to the essence of the original. It should be readable and marketable at the same time. The readers of the translation, however, do not know either the source language or the culture of the source language. Under such circumstances, the translation must try to adapt to the mainstream culture of the target language, which may be somewhat different from the source language culture. Therefore, the translator can fully demonstrate his or her unique creativity in the selection of the translation object and the process of the translation. This situation shall be an explanation of how variation works in the formation of world literature.

III. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHINESE LITERATURE TO BECOME WORLD LITERATURE

The cases of Chinese literature from ancient times to the present show that translation is the primary option for national literature to become world literature. However, we must also acknowledge that access to the world literary space through translation is limited in the role it can play.

Translation is constrained by translators, markets, and other factors, and ultimately depends on complex relationships of international politics, economics, and culture. Just like the situation described in 1827 when Goethe told Eckermann he was reading a Chinese novel:

Like European engagement with China during the early modern period in general, his interest came in fits and starts as the opportunity for learning Chinese presented itself, when texts or Orientalists offered themselves up. As Goethe's model of WL circulation suggests, the movement of texts between cultures could be stymied, as well as escalated, by political events. Certainly the limited availability of Chinese manuscripts and books governed any Central European's ability to learn the language. Only with the increased circulation of Chinese texts was it possible for a Central European writer to engage with China. (Purdy, 2014: 56).

Goethe's understanding about the Chinese novel had a deep connection with the preface of Abel Rémusat's French translation of *Les Deux Cousines*. This translation was an international sensation, and it may have inspired Goethe's thoughts on world literature. We notice Rémusat also mentioned the difficulties of translation:

Rémusat seeks to offer a smooth translation, one that integrates the Chinese novel into the European readership, without the stumbling blocks of scholarly footnotes laden with learned discourses on languages. A translation ought to convey the defining features of the foreign language; in this case Rémusat mentions the compact simplicity of style coupled with the dense allusions. The translator is faced with many tropes that have no correspondence in Europe. In the end, differences in literary language block the all too easy incorporation of world culture into a single abstract concept of humanity. (Purdy, 2014: 59)

Emily Apter argues for a rethinking of comparative literature in her book *Against World Literature*, in which she focuses on the problems that emerge when large-scale paradigms of literary studies ignore the politics of the "Untranslatable" (Apter, 2013). Many national literatures are untranslatable because they resist substitution, yet they are continually retranslated, mistranslated, transferred from language to language. The "Untranslatable" is an important factor that prevents excellent national literature from going into the global market. China is a major recipient of foreign literary works in translation; a huge number of foreign works are

translated into China every year. In contrast, how many Chinese works are translated abroad? How many excellent translations have been produced? We are not optimistic about this. If we are content with the one-way bridge of translation and yet believe in Damrosch's words that translation is the only way for a national work to become a work of world literature, it is a sign of narrow-mindedness.

There are at least three other paths to becoming integrated into world literature that may help us rethink about translation: Firstly, expand the scope of Chinese literature in world literature, and bring the previously neglected Chinese world literature into our research focus. The concept of "Chinese world literature" is similar to that of "English world literature," "French world literature," "Spanish world literature," etc. It refers to a phenomenon of cross-border and cross-regional circulation of language and literature, including both the globalization of Chinese literature and the Chinese-ness in world literature. In addition to mainland China, there is also Chinese Taiwan and Hong Kong literature, as well as overseas Chinese literature, which have taken Chinese language and its culture as its roots and have blossomed into a unique landscape around the world. Chinese world literature refers to a group of writers from China or of Chinese origin who write in the language of their country, such as Chinese-English literature and Chinese-French literature. At present, North American writers of Chinese descent are particularly influential, represented by Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, Frank Chin and others. For the countries where these writers are based, they are an integral part of their own literature, but from an ethnic perspective, they are an important part of a cosmopolitanized Chinese literature, a sort of dual citizenship in literature. Historically, the English-language works of Yutang Lin and Eileen Chang have also been treated as part of American literature as well as world literature. In today's era of ethnic diversity, increasingly common mixed origins, and frequent transnational migration, these works are an important part of Chinese world literature.

Secondly, break away from Western centrism and turn more attention to Eastern literature and literary theory. According to the common discourse of world literature, the formation of world literature starts from Europe and then gradually expands to other regions. Because of the disadvantage of remote geography and totally different language, Chinese literature seems to be in the periphery. At present, the author (Shunqing

Cao) is leading a team to conduct research on "Research on The Important Categories and Discourse Systems of Ancient Oriental Literary Theory and Data Collation," a Major Program of National Fund of Philosophy and Social Science of China. The research of this project includes the literary theories and discourse systems of East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia, and it seeks to conduct a multi-method intersection of ancient and modern and East-West, as well as inter-lingual, inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary research. The turn from the West to the East is an original contribution that bears significance to the law and value of the development of literature from Chinese literature to world literature in terms of generation, interaction, dissemination, and variation.

Thirdly, more attention should be paid to the world literature influenced by Chinese literature and culture, especially the new texts formed by the variation of Chinese literature. This refers to the fragmented presence of Chinese literature and culture in world literature in a heterocultural space. The influence of Chinese literature and culture on the literature of the world is widespread, as in the countries of East Asia, and also in Europe and America. The Chinese elements in the works of such American poets and writers as Fenollosa, Pound, Stevens, Moore, Snyder, and many others can be seen as the global presence of Chinese literature. The variation theory of comparative literature shall play an important role in the studies of this phenomenon. Unlike traditional influence studies, variation theory would break away from the narrow mindset of focusing only on textual influence and cultural restoration; it conducts an in-depth and systematic study of the characteristics of dialogue, imagination, unity and difference between regions, with the aim of exploring how Chinese culture is infused into the cultures of other countries to contribute to the formation of world literature.

In fact, lots of works have been undertaken in recent years. Several Chinese universities, represented by Sichuan University and Beijing Normal University, have carried out the project of overseas dissemination of Chinese literature. Sichuan University organized Chinese doctoral students in comparative literature to write a series of books on the translation and study of Chinese literature in the English-speaking world, which was published by China Social Science Press. Such efforts have resulted in the initial building of an academic history of the translation and study of Chinese literature in the English-speaking world (Cao, 2013).

Beijing Normal University founded the English journal *Chinese Literature Today* in the United States, published the series of English translations of Chinese literature today, and held the International Symposium on the Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Literature (Liu & Xie, 2015). These activities respond to the national strategy of "Chinese culture going abroad" and have received widespread attention from scholars at home and abroad. Whether it is "Chinese literature spreading abroad" or "Chinese culture becoming World Literature," such a proposition was unimaginable twenty years ago, or even ten years ago. We are confident that we are at a time to re-mark the relationship between Chinese literature and world literature over the past century and to re-evaluate the contributions of the Chinese writers to the world in the twenty-first century.

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