

Minority Writing across Cultures: From 彝 (Yi) Literature to World Literature (s)

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Abstract: Through an analysis of the work of the Yi (彝) poets, Aku Wuwu, Jidi Majia, and Jimu Langge, this paper discusses the significance of Yi literature in translation, circulation, and production, with an additional focus on the development of minority literature in the context of world literature. A variety of factors enable the translation of ethnic minority literature, including the content and characteristics of the literature itself, the cultural ideologies and literary values of societies, and the personal motivations of authors and translators. In turn, the translation and distribution process introduce the unique experiences of the minority subject into the realm of world literature. Presenting ethnic minority literature in various forms, including recitation performance and multimedia, these Yi poets enhance the range of sensory experiences for readers while drawing attention to poetic traditions and enriching the ways in which world literature circulates. Moreover, the travels of ethnic minority writers introduce new cross-cultural writing and advances world literature's ideals of prosperity, equality, and freedom. In sum, Yi literature represents a global development of ethnic minority literature as "anthropological literature" that enriches the content of world literature.

Key words: Yi literature; world literature(s); ethnic minority literature; Aku Wuwu; Jidi Majia; Jimu Langge

In October 2016, the first International Symposium on World Ethnic Minority Literature was held in Chengdu, China. The forum was jointly sponsored by the Southwest Minzu University and Chinese Ethnic Literature Society. More than 60 minority literature researchers from the United States, Japan, Vietnam, South Korea, China and other countries participated in the forum. The manifesto for the symposium states the following:

Literature is both ethnic and beyond ethnicity. That we appeal and speak out in the name of ethnic minorities is not merely because we are ethnic minorities. "Minority" and "majority," "margin" and "center,"

“tributary” and “mainstream,” coexist side by side and their relationships keep shifting. The existence of ethnic minority literature not only means the existence of a specific nationality, or specific ethnic literature, but also the existence of mutual relevance and reliance among literatures in the world (The first International Symposium on World Ethnic Minority Literature, 2017: 215).

The manifesto quoted above proposed the concept of “world ethnic minority literature” that combines the concepts of “ethnic minority literature” and “world literature.” This new term highlights the significance of minority literature to world literature (Xu, 2019: 2). Reviewing the conceptual history of “world literature” in the more than 200 years after Goethe proposed “world literature,” Haun Saussy shows that it had always been a positive dream that had not been materialized (Saussy, 2006: 12). A “world” picture was created from national literature composed mainly of literary masterpieces from European countries. After the mid-20th century, with the growing criticism of Western cultural hegemony, the concept of “world literature” was increasingly opposed to Eurocentrism, classicism, and national boundaries (Wang, 2019: 68). The composition of world literature in global circulation was re-examined, and the non-classical literature of different countries, regions, and nationalities were embraced (Damrosch, 2003). Simultaneously, cross-cultural exchanges were frequently occurring around the world. The ethnic minority literatures of some multi-ethnic countries, which have become part of world literature, transcended national boundaries and were appreciated by readers in other countries. Since the 1990s, there has been a growing advocacy among comparative literature scholars of thinking outside national literature to delve into the waves of global multi-ethnic literature (Miller, 2010; Ye, 2010; Durnin, 2011). It is against these backgrounds of promoting the concept of world literature and the global circulation of ethnic minority literature that I wish to discuss the translation, the circulation, and the production of contemporary Yi literature, namely, its practical impact on and theoretical significance to the global development of ethnic minority literature in the formation of world literature.

China’s population of the Yi nationality (yizu, 彝族) numbers over eight million, with most residing in parts of southwest China that include between the highlands and coastal hills of Yunnan Province, Guizhou

Province, Sichuan Province, and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The Yi people primarily subsist through traditional agriculture and pastoralism, which entail limited contact with the outside world. In their traditional culture, examples of folk literature such as epics, legends, and stories are passed down orally or through handwritten script in Yi (Loloish) languages. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the government created a "set of literary institutions and systems" (Chen, 2009) to accommodate the multiethnic community of China. In this context, "ethnic minority literature" (i.e., the literature of 55 ethnic groups, including the Yi nationality) was juxtaposed with literature produced by members of the Han nationality. Since then, Yi national literature has been considered part of general Chinese literature. In the 1950s, the central government promoted the translation of *Ashma* (阿诗玛), a folkloric narrative poem of the Sani people, who are part of the Yi nationality, from Chinese into English, Russian, and French. The intention of this translation was to advance the image of China as a multiethnic society to other countries (Huang, 2020: 21). However, the translation of named Yi writers' works into foreign languages did not start until 30 years later. Politically, geographically, and culturally prominent ethnic groups, such as the Mongolians, Manchus, Uygur, and Tibetans, had accumulated a relatively substantial tradition of literary creation and were able to introduce their writers' works to the world after 1949. In contrast, like many other less visible ethnic minorities, Yi national literature was not brought to the public attention at the same time. Most of the first-generation Yi writers, such as Li Qiao (李乔) and Li Na (李纳), and the second-generation writers, such as Zhang Kunhua (张昆华) and Su Xiaoxing (苏晓星), were born in the Yi regions in Yunnan and Guizhou provinces that were deeply influenced by Han culture during the Republican period (1912-1949), and wrote in Chinese (Ma, 1999). They only became famous after the founding of the PRC, and had limited influence. The third-generation writers, born in the PRC, received modern education at school and developed outstanding Chinese or Yi writing skills. Of them, Jidi Majia (吉狄马加), Aku Wuwu (阿库乌雾, also known by his Han name 罗庆春) and Jimu Langge (吉木狼格) who are from the Nuosu nationality, a subgroup of the Yi, in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, are the most translated authors.

CONSENSUS AND DEVELOPMENT: THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION

The main genre of Yi literature entering the world literature is poetry. One reason is that poetry is usually short, epigrammatic, and easy to translate and publish, but the more important reason is that poetry is the most common form of expression in the classic and oral literature of the Yi nationality. The Yi people are good at poetry. They often recite “Ke Zhi” (克智, a poetic way of dialogue) in assembly activities. On ceremonial occasions, such as weddings and funerals, “De Gu” (德古, wise people) often talk about the past and the present in poetry. Jidi Majia is undoubtedly the most translated Yi poet. He was born into a family of officials in Liangshan Prefecture in 1961, and received a good Chinese education. In 1978, he was admitted to the Southwest College for Nationalities (renamed Southwest Minzu University in 2003) in Chengdu majoring in Chinese Language and Literature and began to write poetry. His poems are written in Chinese, with most of the content focused mainly on the themes of praising and longing that reflect on the history the Yi nationality and their destiny in modern times. His outstanding literary talent has won him a place in the government’s cultural system. He served as vice president of the Chinese Writers’ Association and vice governor of the Qinghai provincial government. He is currently a member of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress. Jidi’s high political status also guaranteed his access to the richest cultural resources. From 2005 to the present, with the assistance of the national strategy of “publicizing Chinese culture abroad” that has funded translation and dissemination of Chinese cultural products overseas, Jidi has published nearly 100 translated poetry anthologies in dozens of countries around the world, such as *Words of Fire* (火焰与词语), and *Song of Yi People* (彝人之歌).

Aku Wuwu, born in 1964, a poet in his native Nuosu language (a Tibeto-Burman language), is known as the “creator of modern poetry written in Yi” (Zuo, 2006:1147). He also earned a place in poetry with his Chinese language works (Zhu, 2020:191). Aku was born in a mountainous village in Liangshan Prefecture and did not understand Chinese until elementary school. He studied Chinese and other subjects very diligently and in 1982 gained admission to Southwest College for Nationalities to major in

Chinese Ethnic Language and Literature. While at college, he learned the standardized Yi script and began writing poems, first in Yi, then in Chinese. Despite its long history, the Yi script is written in many ways, and is only used by a very small number of Bimos (毕摩, ritual experts). In 1980, literary creation in Yi languages began to emerge after the State Council of the PRC approved a standardization plan for the Yi script, in which the syllabic writing of Nuosu was established as the standard. Most of Aku's poems are related to the Yi people, mainly focusing on themes such as the preservation of the mother tongue, reflections on ethnic culture, and questions of modernity. Aku has always held an open-minded view in matters of literature. During the 1990s, he expanded the notion of "hybridity in literature" (Luo and Xu, 1998), in which he discussed the absorption of elements across cultures in his literary creations. In 2000, he met the American scholar Mark Bender, who started working on translating Aku into English. Soon after, Aku's bilingual poems were published first in American journals and then as books of collection (Aku, 2006).

Jimu Langge grew up in Ganluo County, Liangshan Prefecture, where the Yi and Han cultures coinhabit. He started writing poetry in Chinese at the age of 18. As a representative poet of the Not-Not (非非) group, an influential school of poetic art in China, he mainly records the intuitive feelings and perceptions of modern people's daily lives using colloquial language, which has earned him a place in the Chinese poetry world (Cheng, 2003:294). Although his poems rarely touch on the Yi nationality and their local culture, they have been translated into English (Dayton, 2006).

In addition to understanding the creative experience and stylistic characteristics of the Yi poets, we must also examine the cultural ideology and aesthetic concepts of the society where these authors and translators live, as well as the influence of personal factors on translation. With strong official support, Jidi's target languages of translation include major languages and some minor languages. Jidi highly praises African poets Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire's advocacy of the value of "Nigritude," their writing of national history and rapid changes, and their bold reference to the skills of modern western literature. At the same time, he believes that China and Africa have increasingly close political relations, but cultural exchanges are not as strong as they should be (Jidi, 2021). Jidi

is glad to see his poetry collection, *Words of Fire*, being translated into Swahili by the famous Kenyan female writer and human rights fighter, Philo Ikonya. Ikonya stated that when she first read the English translation of the poetry collection, she “deeply fell in love with it, ...decided to translate it into Swahili, ...because it reminded me of our familiar life in rural Africa” (Adunis, 2017: 296). In the context of maintaining ethnic culture during rapid modernization, the commonality of being a minority subject and the desire to revitalize their own ethnic culture have connected the poet and his translator.

Denis Mair, Jidi's main English translator, is an American sinologist and poet. He sees that Jidi in his Chinese poetry attempts “to revive a people's identity, from the roots up, in a modern setting of cultural dislocation and anomie.” As a translator, he experiences “the perspective of an indigenous belief system with its windows thrown wide-open to the modern world” (Mair, 2013:16, 20). Attaching importance to indigenous culture and its beliefs is the embodiment of contemporary humanistic value. For nearly half a century, with the rapid development of economies, the survival and development of diverse cultural expressions created by all nationalities in the world have become important issues for the international community. This is the result of people reflecting on economic globalization and Western cultural power from the level of basic human ethical values. The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions adopted in 2005 by UNESCO is the embodiment of this contemporary humanistic value (Liu, 2014). Jidi's poems show the long history and rich culture of an indigenous minority under threat by modernization, which is a shared motivation for his European and American translators (Adunis, 2017).

Unlike Jidi, Aku's translation relies on personal academic relationship. His use of the Chinese language is favored by the English translator Mark Bender. Bender, who holds similar cultural values to Mair, has translated many poems written by other Chinese poets including many Yi poets, like Bamo Qubumo (巴莫曲布嫫), Lu Juan (鲁娟), Eni Mushasijia (俄尼·牧莎斯加), Jiluo Daze (吉洛打则), Lama Yizuo (拉玛伊佐), and Ma Deqing (马德清) (Bender, 2017). However, as a folklorist and researcher of oral literature, Bender especially values Aku's writings in Nuosu. Bender is well-versed in Ethnopoetics, one of the important theories developed among American folklore scholarship since the late 1960s and early 1970s,

and appreciates the research and practice of poets, translators, and folklorists. The researchers in Ethnopoetics have brought traditional oral poetry and the poetry of local poets with the traditional themes of the Third World and Fourth World into the mainstream of social consciousness and cultivated the public's attention to the decline and extinction of aboriginal culture (Bender, 2007). Aku's native language poetry not only has the theme of protecting Yi culture but also takes the Nuosu language as the medium. Therefore, Bender attaches great importance to these poems and attempts to translate and introduce them to American readers. Moreover, Aku recognizes that ethnic minority literature is privileged to flourish in the world due to its rarity, despite its invisible position (Aku, 2008). Under this consensus, Aku, Bender, and their assistants spent more than a decade translating a Yi epic known as *The Nuosu Book of Origins* (勒俄特依), transcribed by Jjivot Zopqu (Aku, Bender and Jjivot, 2019). Subsequently, they developed a model of "cosmographic translation" (Ma and Bender, 2019).

Few of Jimu's poems involve the Yi nationality, and few Chinese scholars have studied him as a minority writer. However, inspired by the study of postcolonial poetry, the American literary scholar D. Dayton found in Jimu's poetry to be "a hybrid struggle that exists within the collision of ethnic minority cultures and the Han cultural center" (Dayton, 2006:2). Jimu did not quite agree with Dayton's interpretation of his poetry, and believed that the poetry was fundamentally untranslatable; however, after examining Dayton's language skills and literary comprehension, he agreed that Dayton could translate Jimu's poetry in his master's thesis and upload it to the poetry website "Poetry International" (Jimu, 2021). Dayton was motivated by the possibility of Jimu's poetry as an example of postcolonial criticism with regard to the relationship between Chinese language literature and minority literature in China.

In general, through different foreign translation channels and cooperation methods, Yi poetry has successfully entered the field of world literature. Where the politics of translation are concerned, various factors jointly drive the integration of ethnic minority literature into world literature. The multilingual translation of ethnic minority literature should evidently be based on sound policies for modern education, ethnic equality, and openness in communication. The contents and characteristics of the work, the cultural ideolog(ies) and literary concepts

of the society, and the personal motivations of the authors and translators are also important factors. Ethnic minority literature's unique historical experience, aesthetic taste, and beliefs are closely related to the popularization of contemporary humanistic values of pluralism and equality. As individuals, the ethnic minority writers like Jidi, Aku, and Jimu, are clearly aware of the unique value of their works for other cultures and their significance for all humankind, so they hope that their works can enter the world literary system. As for translators, they are not only familiar with the ideology and literary aesthetics of their own culture, but also have their own literary judgments. As I have mentioned in the above, Mair is a multiculturalist, Bender is a folklorist who attaches importance to the language of mother tongue in ethnic literature, and Dayton is a scholar of postcolonial poetry. They regard Yi poets as their ideological comrades and seek the rationalization of their own cultural and literary concepts through translation.

RETURNING TO POETIC TRADITIONS: DISSEMINATION THROUGH RECITATION PERFORMANCE AND MULTIMEDIA

According to David Damrosch, world literature is “not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading, a detached engagement with a world beyond our own” (Damrosch, 2003:297). This understanding departs from the conventional view of world literature with its root in classic texts. This paper attempts to expand Damrosch's notion of “mode of reading” to the inclusion of “mode of perception.”

For thousands of years, the Yi people have passed on their culture and history through chanting. Indeed, the Yi language is strongly rhythmic. Aku learned chanting from local Bimos and folk artists before developing his own unique style of recitation (He, 2020). He recited his masterpiece “Calling Back the Soul of Zhyge Alu” (为支格阿鲁招魂) and other poems in the Yi language at university lecture halls, cultural salons, and community gatherings in the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Australia, where he received fervent responses from audiences almost every time (Aku, 2021). This masterpiece derived from the traditional soul-calling rituals of the Yi nation to call back the soul of their hero, Zhyge Alu, thus uplifting and restoring the cultural spirit of ethnic minority groups that have been suppressed through modernization and massive

social change. When Aku recited, he seemed spellbound with his jumping voice, rhythmic variations, and changing expressions and postures, as if he were a sorcerer (Aku, 2020). Some audience members shed tears, while some shouted “O la” (“come back”) from the poem with Aku. In one excited exchange, someone said “I don’t understand what you are saying, but I feel like I can see my grandfather’s grave” (Ajia, 2019). Following Aku’s lead, Yi poets such as Jiluo, Lama, and Mahai Wuda (马海五达) also recited their poems in Yi languages at international events, where they received positive reviews (Yichengzhi, 2016).

Even Jidi’s Chinese poetry is very musical. Mair stated that “when Jidi’s poetic voice is related to personal and subtle emotions, he often chooses a natural rhythm of speech, which gives people the feeling of talking with a friend; and when expressing a certain sense of decency, he would use a discourse style similar to that of Bimos in religious rituals, giving people the feeling [he was] speaking on behalf of his tribe” (Mair and Zhang, 2014: 76). Thus, Jidi’s poems are also very suitable for recitation and performance. Although Jidi’s recitation is not as contagious as Aku’s, he also recites his poems on various occasions at home and abroad. Jidi also strongly supports his poetry being composed in music and performed. He believes that “Poetry and songs are inseparable.... From the perspective of receiving literature, any kind of art will bring many wonderful things to the audience in its original vocal form” (The Paper, 2021). Many of his poems were indeed composed and chanted. For example, *A Girl in Butuo* (布拖女郎) was first composed and sung by the famous Yi singer Waqi Yihe (瓦其依合), who later performed in the Liangshan area and became widely popular. The Yi Team (彝人制造), an influential pop band in China, released its first experimental music album, *The Poems of Jidi Majia*, in 2021, in which nine of Jidi’s poems were performed in combination with Yi folk songs, chanting, Bimo music, and other traditional tunes.

Poetry recitation performances by Aku and other Yi poets and artistic performances of Jidi’s poetry are generally welcomed. One of the reasons is that their poems reflect on the Yi culture and evoke the ethnic spirit. Another reason is that they return to the long-standing tradition of oral poetry. In traditional societies across the world, the arts of poetry, music, and performance are one and the same. As Marcel Granet and Albert Bates Lord show us, the poems in ancient China’s *The Book of Songs* (诗经) and in ancient Greek’s *Homer’s Epic* (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*) were both

sung in performative rituals (Granet, 1929; Lord, 1960). It was not until distinct artistic categories were created that literature including poetry gradually took a strictly textual form. Poetry gradually lost its musicality and audibility, and the function and expression ability of language had been brought into full play (Gong, 1980:43). Even in this context, some indigenous minorities such as the Yi still retain the tradition of oral poetry, in which poetry, music, and performance are integrated. Ethnopoetics focuses on indigenous poetic performances, with sounds, visuals, words, and discourses as the core elements (DuBois, 2000), which display the charm of the verbal art. While audiences may not understand examples of such poetry line-by-line, general thematic understandings can stir up deep and hidden feelings, which produce superb poetic enjoyment through the combined senses of hearing, seeing, and atmospheric immersion.

Due to emphases on orality and performance, Yi poetry can easily be presented in multimedia forms such as audio, imagery, and video, which facilitate dissemination. In fact, Aku's poetry collection, known as *Tiger Traces*, was published along with a compact-disc recording of readings in Chinese, Nuosu, and English (Aku and Bender, 2006). When the collection of poems titled *Coyote Traces: Aku Wunu's Poetic Sojourn in America* was published, readings in Chinese and English (including audio recordings and a video) were also offered on the website of the Department of East Asian Languages and Literature at The Ohio State University (*Aku Wunu's Coyote Traces*, 2015). Furthermore, videos of Jidi's poetry performances and videos of poetry readings by native Yi poets were also widely viewed on the Internet.

Through multimedia sources, poetry written in the native languages of ethnic minorities and in Chinese extends the physical performance of poetry, thus breaking through the communicative limitations of time and space. These conditions allow audiences to accept literature through multisensory experiences without language barriers while simultaneously diversifying the forms in which world literature circulates. With the help of multimedia, literature has expanded the reach of world literature with almost unrestricted global circulation.

PROSPERITY, EQUALITY AND FREEDOM: WRITING ACROSS CULTURES

The oversea travels of Yi poets have brought new literary productions, realized cross-border, cross-language, and cross-cultural dialogues, and advanced the world literary ideals of common prosperity, pluralism, equality, and free development.

Of all poets in contemporary China Jidi may be the poet with the richest experience in overseas travels. Foreign poets--their hometowns or cemeteries—are of special interest to him. In Santiago de Chuco, Peru, Jidi stood in the cemetery where César Vallejo is buried. Imagining Vallejo's death in Paris in 1938, Jidi felt a connection to Vallejo: "Veritably, there is no doubt, I could unmistakably feel the wailing in your soul / Although there were no remains of your body there" ("At the Graveyard of César Vallejo", Jidi, 2017:308). In writing cross-culturally, Jidi often has a strong sense of minority consciousness, observing the "self" while examining the "other." *Earthen Wall* was written about the Wailing Wall in Israel: "Deep in my consciousness/ The image that often appears/ Is this earthen wall of the Nuosu / ... / Because when I see that wall / Sadness wells up in my heart" (Jidi, 2013:170). Historically, Yi people have also experienced wars with external or internal enemies, which often resulted in people been forced to flee their hometowns (Ma, 1987). The difficult histories of the Jewish people and the Yi people establish a common bond for people living in places away from home. In subsequent translations, these cross-cultural poems return to the cultures that have been written about by others. In reading them, readers may enjoy the experience of "I look at what people look at me" (Fei, 1983). Jidi engages in dialogue with the world through his travel poems and comprehends the importance of physical travel to the world's ethnic minority literature as well as to world literature. Therefore, he established the Qinghai Lake International Poetry Festival, Xichang Qionghai Lake Silk Road International Poetry Week, and other large-scale international poetry events, and invited Chinese and foreign poets to these Chinese multi-ethnic regions to conduct poetry recitations, seminars, fieldwork, and writing. These events have attracted many poets from different countries.

Aku has written a large number of poems about indigenous people when he travels aboard, including works about Native Americans in

America, the Ainu in Japan, and Aboriginal Australians in Australia. In the United States, he visited Native American reservations and museums, where he interacted with chiefs, poets, scholars, and other people in Indigenous nations. In his bilingual (Chinese and English) collection of poems based on his trips to the United States, entitled as *Coyote Traces*, Aku works on an rich array of cross-cultural themes. To facilitate translation and understanding, Aku chose to write *Coyote Traces* in Chinese, rather than Nuosu, and with a colloquial style. Before the poems were published, he sent the English translation to his Native American friends in the United States for feedback. Later, his work was endorsed by John N. Low, a Potawatomi Indian man and cultural scholar at the Ohio State University. Low's endorsement was also printed on the back cover of the book: "Aku Wuwu's *Coyote Traces* is an important work; reminiscent of *Ogimawkwe Mitigwaki* in its ability to span time and space through the power of the written word" (Aku, 2015). *Ogimawkwe Mitigwaki* (Queen of the Woods) is a novel written by Simon Pokagon, a member of the Pokagon band of Potawatomi who died in 1899. Aku was not concerned with the criticisms he received from his own readers in China, but valued the responses of "others" (Aku, 2021). He was active in planning a co-publication of poetry between China and the United States and regretted that some poems criticizing Native American culture were withdrawn by the publisher because of "political correctness" (Aku, 2021).

Scholars have criticized some Chinese writers for pursuing "translatability" in writing in order to facilitate the translation of their works into foreign languages in the future, so that the writers lose their "local subjectivity" (Liu, 2018). However, in his poems, Aku uses many cultural images common to Yi and Native Americans to describe respective customs and reveal their spiritual worlds. For example, the Yi concept of "sy jjy bbyx" (死给, avenging) has been used to describe a deer killed on a North American highway (Aku, 2015: 30–35). In Yi culture, "sy jjy bbyx" is a concept demonstrated by committing suicide, when a person thinks that their dignity is harmed by an enemy. Here, the "avenging deer" is attracted by modern civilization, but what the deer sees is only the appearance of "houses," "churches," and "meadows." The deer cannot be integrated into the real modern civilization and deliberately hits the car to die in order to maintain dignity. This appears to be a symbol of indigenous Americans and Yi people viewing the road to modern civilization with

both difficulty and dignity. On one occasion, Aku writes about visiting the historic remains of the ancient Bannock and receiving gifts from the Bannock people. The family deity legends of the Bannock tribe and of Nuosu are embedded in a horrific nightmare. “In the legends of the Bannock people, / when children violate the will of a family deity, / he has the right to kill them” (Aku, 2015: 59). In the poem, he writes that in his dream, his family deity asked him to build a stone house to take refuge in a snowstorm in Oregon and he found that one gift from his Bannock friend was missing when he woke up in the morning. The legends of family deity of the two ethnic groups are so similar that the Bannock could call for his own family deity. These examples show that Aku did not give up his own ethnic subjectivity, but continually uses Yi culture to connect with Native American culture. In this regard, he passionately embraces a poetic resonance and reflection of common destiny with Indigenous peoples everywhere in the world.

If both Jidi and Aku have specific foreign dialogue partners, then it is not clear for whom Jimu writes in his cross-cultural writing. As a poet of the Not-Not group which advocates colloquialism, the purpose of Jimu’s creation is to oppose ideas, and to reject the sublime and collectivity (Yu, 2018:131). In 2016, he made a month-long trip to the United States as part of a funded writing-in-residency program, during which he wrote dozens of poems. His ethnic consciousness helped him turn the experiences into interesting poetry occasionally. For example, *Laugh* describes his nonverbal communication with an American woman: “She certainly cannot speak Chinese / let alone Yi language / I said, you are really cute / She laughed, even though she did not understand” (Jimu, 2017:53). Jimu has no attachment to the Yi language in the way that Jidi does, nor any concern about it like Aku. Instead, he simply tries to humorously express the embarrassment of the language barrier between people of different cultures and the feeling that kindness can be conveyed without language. The romantic character and simple thinking of the Yi people also underlie his simple way of expression in Chinese. As the famous Chinese poet, Han Dong, commented: “Jimu Langge brings a certain kind of alien quality to Chinese cultural thinking. His simplicity, plainness, and whimsical logic are extraordinary” (Han, 2020: 77).

The cross-cultural writings of Yi poets based on their physical travels have their own characteristics and meanings. Jidi always attempts to

engage in equal dialogue with the whole world through poetry, showing great self-confidence and ambition. Aku uses the common languages of China and the United States to cross the cultural barriers between people and places, thus encouraging free exchanges in ethnic minority literature and connecting the weak with the weak. Jimu's cross-cultural writing merely regards overseas travels as a new experience of his life, fostering the understanding of foreign cultures from the perspective of ordinary people. If Jidi and Aku introduce Yi culture to the outsiders, then Jimu sketches Yi people's feelings and thinking for readers everywhere. All of them have made world literature richer and more diverse with their poetry.

CONCLUSION: "THE WORLD REPUBLIC OF LETTERS"— MORE THAN JUST A DREAM

Yi literature, as represented by the poetry of Jidi, Aku, and Jimu, has been disseminated into the world through translation, circulation, and production. It is of great relevance and symbolic significance that this is an embodiment of the contemporary development of world ethnic minority literature. Upon examining the resistance of German romanticism to French hegemony, Casanova states that "radical challenges to the existing literary order have appeared in the most impoverished territories of the international republic of letters, shaping and lastingly modifying its structure, which is to say the very forms of literature" (Casanova, 2004:44). In this light, it can be argued the three Yi poets proves that world ethnic minority literature is repositioning itself away from a marginal location in world literature.

First, the world ethnic minority literature is rich and unique in its historical experiences, aesthetic sensibilities, literary techniques, ways of thinking and expression, which provide universal and shared resources to world literature. Second, the persistence of oral transmission liberates world minority literature from the conceptual constraints of written texts. Compared to simply writing and reading, oral literature is presented in physical performance and offers multisensory experiences to audiences. This approach represents literature's return to its longstanding and great poetic traditions. Third, ethnic minority literature expands "world literature" beyond the limiting frame of national borders; it is a move toward "anthropological literature" that crosses national barriers and

connects ethnic groups in the world (Ye, 2011). With a few exceptions, the literature of most nations is actually composed of diverse ethnic literature. Ethnic minority literature in translation corrects the erroneous perception that only literature of the majority counts as national literature, and as such, the nation-based concepts of world literature is no longer valid. Ethnic minority literature has entered the world, which makes “The World Republic of Letters” more than just a dream. It is already a reality through the efforts of the people who are creating it.

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