

Localization, Globalization, and Traveling Chinese Culture

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Abstract: In their article "Localization, Globalization, and Traveling Chinese Culture" Chengjun Wang and Junhong Ma discuss three channels of the "traveling" of Chinese culture to the outside world. Focusing on the situation of bilingualism (i.e., Chinese and English) and the need of spreading Chinese literature and culture especially in the English-speaking world, Wang and Ma argue for the practice of "localization and globalization." Further, Wang and Ma argue that in order to narrow the gap of the cultural divide between China and the West, bilingualism is essential in the case of translation and they posit that especially the writing of the literary history of Chinese is needed in both English and Chinese.

Chengjun WANG and Junhong MA

Localization, Globalization, and Traveling Chinese Culture

Edward W. Said's work is discussed frequently in current Chinese critical and theoretical circles in particular his theory of knowledge transfer (i.e., the "travel" of theoretical thought) (see, e.g., Wang, Xiaolu; Zhao). According to Said's traveling theory, communication about culture might be considered as a movement of ideas or theories and this remains the case especially with globalization. This implies that cultural globalization at best is a phenomenon where knowledge spreads from the West to the East and vice versa hopefully with the result that the cultural distance between cultures is narrowed. Over the past decades, Chinese culture and literature began to move beyond its national borders and to be acknowledged although in a limited range. Chinese culture can be regarded as one of the four classical civilizations of ancient times and influenced not only Europe (see, e.g., Menzies), but other Asian countries. In several instances—for example in the late Qing Dynasty (618-907 AD)—Chinese governments adopted a closed-door policy, which resulted in gaps in communication between the East and the West and this remained mostly the case until the early nineteenth century. Thus it is not surprising that communication between China and the rest of the world and in this case in particular with the West become unbalanced not only in politics and economics, but also in the study of literature and culture. However, as said, especially in the last two decades the situation appears to be changing (see, e.g., Wang, Miaomiao <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2370>>; see also Duran and Huang).

In the study at hand we describe briefly the current situation of comparative literature with particular reference to the rewriting of literary history in Mainland Chinese scholarship. During the past ten years, scholars in China have been discussing the situation of the discipline of comparative literature because of its apparent decline in the West and especially in the United States (see, e.g., Spivak). Chinese scholars argue that unlike in the West comparative literature is thriving especially when Chinese-Western cultural and academic exchange is concerned (see, e.g., Wang, Ning "Death"; Yue). Since the 1980s, comparative literature has been developing in China and Chinese scholars have soon become regular contributors, among others, to the conferences and publications of the International Comparative Literature Association / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée. On the one hand, this means Chinese scholars have recognized the need to spread the Chinese culture beyond national borders. On the other hand, they try to foster a balanced cultural and scholarly communication between China and the West. Fortunately these efforts have borne fruit. Comparative literature in China has played an indispensable role in the context of cultural globalization and Chinese comparatists have focused on enabling a Chinese-Western cultural exchange with the strategy of "crossing borders" between countries, theories, and disciplines.

Although Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's controversial view about the demise of comparative literature in its conservative form may be relevant, Chinese scholars demonstrate that comparative literature is thriving in Mainland China (on the situation of comparative literature world wide see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári). For example, Ning Wang lists four achievements which illustrate that the discipline has been thriving and gradually maturing over the past two decades: "First, there have been numerous publications of comparative literature studies both in book form and as individual journal articles, plus the translated works ... Secondly, since 1994, there have already been seven independent Ph.D. programs of comparative literature and world literature ... Thirdly, the institutionalization of comparative literature on the national level was completed with the founding of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association in 1985, which has been a member of the International Comparative Literature Association ... Fourthly, the enthusiastic participation in various international conferences" ("Death" 154-55). We believe that comparative literature in China will flourish in the future under the influence of literary and cultural globalization. Although some may worry about negative impacts of globalization, there is no doubt that Chinese comparative literature studies will benefit from globalization. It is true that in some intellectual circles, humanities scholars and literary critics worry about the impact of globalization and worry even more about the prevalence of popular culture in recent years and advocate against what they see as "the crisis of the humanistic spirit" (Wang, Ning, "Death" 158). The same situation also happened in the West. Peter Hajdu makes a somewhat related

observation when he points out that "some representatives of a "modernist" movement in Hungarian literature regard the anecdotal character of Hungarian literature as its decisive shortcoming" (Hajdu 121). Like Péter Hajdu's modernists have a phobia against high-brow literature, Chinese scholars and literary critics have what could be called a phobia against globalism. True, cultural globalization has an impact on local cultures and may eventually swallow them including their literary market. Fortunately, Chinese intellectuals have realized this problem and try to find strategies to cope with it. They pay attention to "Chinese-Western comparative studies as a metamorphosed version of area studies from literary perspectives" (Wang, Ning, "Death" 158). They travel across the borders of disciplines and traditions and make their own voices heard in international academic discourse. As mentioned earlier, Chinese scholars suggest we should face the opportunities and challenges of globalization through study and teaching of Chinese cinema, popular culture, and in particular the rewriting Chinese literary history (see Wang, Ning "Global"). Ning Wang posits that "globalization has already affected research in literature and culture, especially in the field of such a process in the latter part of the nineteenth century, but which is now suffering from the strong forces of cultural and linguistic globalization ... How shall we seek a national and cultural identity in such an age of globalization when national cultures are becoming more and more homogenized" (Wang, Ning, "Comparative" 586)?

Just as the West faces the consequences which industrial revolutions and economic crises may hold for global security, the influence of globalization has gradually become a reality in China, too. Under these circumstances and in conjunction with the trend towards digitization, the distance between China and others elsewhere is smaller than before. At the same time, the differences between developed and developing countries in terms of cultural and ecological balance is actually bigger than before. Cultural globalization is a kind of cultural simplification to a certain degree, because Western cultures assimilate other cultures into their way of thinking, which has also influenced the way China identifies itself nationally and culturally. Today, young people in China like to celebrate Halloween, Easter, and almost forget traditional Chinese festivals, such as Tomb-sweeping Day or the Dragon Boat Festival. In the worst case, we may lose our tradition with its history of 5000 years, but we can make full use of the challenge to develop our national culture in a global context nevertheless. Therefore, we should highlight our national cultural tradition and make Chinese culture and literature known to the world. To be a culturally rich world, one needs to allow local national cultural identity to be recognized globally. As Ning Wang notes, the revival of Confucianism might be such a kind of exchange of cultural identity from East to West: "in current China as well as in some other Asian countries, the revival of Confucianism might well serve as an oppositional force against the challenge of globalization. In this context, some Asian intellectuals have been trying to search for an Asian national and cultural identity, which is undoubtedly an Asian version of postcolonialism" (Wang, Ning, "Globalization" 112).

To some extent, the "simplification" of culture can be regarded as a direct consequence of economic globalization. The Chinese cultural market, for example with regard to the publishing of books from the West including scholarship is facing challenges in the context of cultural and economic globalization (see, e.g., Lin <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2668>>. Wang describes these challenges as follows: "Faced with the impact of Western postmodernism, contemporary Chinese consumer culture marked with various types of 'postmodern' or 'quasi-postmodern' manifests itself in different forms: the weekly supplements of various newspapers have become a sort of 'cultural snack'; TV programs which have attracted more audience strongly challenge the film industry which needs greater investment and more advanced technology, making Chinese cinema be confronted with a double challenge: from Hollywood (Western culture) and local (mass media and consumer culture)" (Wang, Ning "Globalization" 112-13). In order to establish a platform for cultural exchange and communication to reduce the cultural divide Ning Wang advocates a model of dialogue: "We could globalize Oriental and Chinese culture in the world in such an age of globalization. And in this sense, we ought to have more communications and dialogues with the international community rather than maintain an oppositional attitude toward the West" ("Globalization" 116). Another important change comes in the form of digitization: "Importantly, the processing, production, and marketing of cultural products such as music, film, radio, television programmes, books, journals and newspapers, digital media, etc., determine that today almost all aspects of production and distribution are digitized" (Tötösy de Zepetnek and

López-Varela Azcaráte 38). We live in an era of multi-modal media and we can move with these trends.

It is obvious that Chinese cinema has been disconnected from the international market prior to 1986. In 1987 Mo Yan published his novel *红高粱家族* (*Red Sorghum: A Novel of China*) and the film *Red Sorghum* directed by Zhang Yimou followed in 1988 making the film widely known abroad. Of course, Chinese films suffer greater challenges and shocks owing to the popularity of US-American films (just like any other country's film industry). However, the number of US-American films allowed by the Chinese government increased from 20 to 34 in 2012 and on average three films per month are introduced into the market and this has made a great impact on domestic movies (see, e.g., Yang). At the same time, some critics complain that there are no excellent works of modern literature which can be adapted by film directors. This implies that localized and national literature would help innovation in Chinese cinema. The decline of Chinese cinema may be imminent if we lose our spot in the film market of the world and one way to avoid this is to create a new trans-cultural style as Yongpin Shen (沈勇平) is doing: "While in the 1930s Chinese cinema had an ambivalent and paradoxical attitude toward US-American and Soviet films, Chinese filmmaker Shen developed his own narrative and formal style in the process of a trans-cultural practice of visual reinterpretation" (Zhang <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2226>>). While for practitioners of phobia against globalization local culture will have no place in the globalization of Chinese cinema, scholars like Ning Wang point out that we should not avoid globalization and instead should face the challenge of external influence and analyze the phenomenon of globalization: "I hold that we particularly need stable external surroundings for China's modernizations, especially in the present age of globalization. Culturally and theoretically speaking, to observe and analyze the phenomenon of globalization will help us objectively evaluate the 'forces of globalization' from the perspective of 'traveling theory'" ("Globalization" 116). In addition, Chinese cinema should take efforts to penetrate overseas markets in order to cooperate and exchange ideas with overseas film companies, as well as in order to enhance the international visibility of Chinese films. And this is happening indeed. For example, in 2012 the Chinese corporation Dalian Wanda invested \$ 2.6 billion to acquire the rights of a United States cinema chain (see Reeves <<http://www.ibtimes.com/dalian-wanda-buys-amc-entertainment-cinema-company-26b-699284>>). Further, the "fusion" of Western and Asian cultures is another way to reduce the cultural divide: "Besides the adaptation of Western cultures, more and more Asian cultural elements are found in the Western world. Some Western composers and directors tend to infuse Asian cultures in their musical compositions and dramatic and film productions" (Wang and Guo, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2231>>) and to some extent this can be thought of as a result of economic and cultural globalization.

Although English is the *lingua franca* of communication today, we argue that it is not the only option. Recently, people prefer bilingual dialogue and both Chinese and Westerners have been affected with the "Chinese fever" and some Westerners like to demonstrate their knowledge of Chinese when they have a meeting in China. While globalization promoted and promotes the popularization and use of English, it also popularizes Chinese language and culture. Nowadays many Westerners not only learn Chinese, but also try to pass the Chinese proficiency test and many foreigners, for example at Tsinghua University, prefer to read Chinese classical works in the original. We submit that the Chinese language will play an important role in the processes of reading and learning about China and this will reduce the cultural divide. Obviously, the vitality of Chinese is partly due to the fact that the world economies and cultures are tightly linked because of globalization with each other and because economic and cultural exchanges drive its development, as well as the economic power of China. Because of the availability of funding, the interest of the Chinese government and the Chinese population in general, many branches of The Confucius Institute have been established throughout the world and among other interests of the Institute many foreigners learn Chinese and take part in all kinds of cultural and commercial activities, such as appearing on TV programs in China. And foreigners not only learn Mandarin, but also other dialects such as Cantonese.

As we mention previously, digitization and all aspects of the digital has a significant impact in China and of course in the West. Although English is still the most popular language on the internet, it is now challenged by the rising importance of Chinese. When we have international conferences on cultural and academic exchanges taking place, the use of Chinese is increasing (on English versus Chi-

nese see, e.g., Eoyang <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2349>>. We believe that through the use of English and Chinese, bilingual speakers also learn to accept cultural differences and communicate across cultural divides. As scientists unlock more of the neurological secrets of the bilingual brain, they are learning that speaking more than one language may have cognitive benefits which extend from childhood to old age (see, e.g., Price) and this insight may encourage people to learn more than one language. For instance, when speakers learn English and Chinese (or any other language), they may develop some cognitive and neural advantages over their monolingual peers. It is common knowledge by now that if native English speakers begin the study of a second language, particularly at a young age, such an exercise may impact positively the speakers' acquisition of knowledge and skills in their first language (see, e.g., Perani, Paulesu, Galles, Dupoux, Dehaene, Bettinardi, Cappa, Fazio, Mehler). And many researchers have demonstrated empirically that skills in the first language have been enhanced after learning a second language (see, e.g., Bialystok, Peets, Moreno; Philp, Mackey, Oliver; Weatherford). Generally, students who begin learning a second language in kindergarten or grade one perform better than those learning at grade four and much better than those who begin at grade seven.

Although as suggested above, in the process of English becoming the global means of international communication, Chinese can and at times plays an important role, but clearly not par with English or any other language (a similar situation exists with regard to Indian languages with its many separate languages). The linguistic diversity of Chinese does contribute to the formation of such "English-Chinese globalization" and how the diversity of Chinese contributes to it. Chinese has long been diversifying from one standard into many varieties of Chinese with distinct grammatical rules and large-scale immigration has brought Chinese language and culture abroad together with regional Chinese dialects. This makes it more difficult to learn "standard" Chinese. However, one can still learn a specific Chinese dialect and benefit from the cognitive advantages which come with a bilingual brain. When we learn more languages we will also know more about foreign countries' culture. However, what exactly does "bilingual" mean? We adopt Elisabeth Ahlsén's definition: "a bilingual person is someone who knows two languages and is able to keep them apart" (121). Ahlsén also lists different subtypes of bilingualism based on factors such as: a) age of acquisition of the second language (L2): early L2, late L2, and adult L2 and b) the fluency or mastery of the two languages: balanced or dominant for one language: "The first language (L1) and L2 are learned concurrently before the age of six; often, each language is spoken by one of the person's parents (i.e., Compound bilingualism); L2 is learned before puberty in the home or some other environment (i.e., Coordinated bilingualism); One language, L1, is dominant and L2 is used for mediation; that is, the bilingual person thinks in L1 and then translates into L2 (i.e., Subordinated bilingualism)" (122).

It is probably true that the two languages in the bilingual brain are not exactly "balanced"; in other words, bilinguals do not know exactly the same things in the two languages and they do not use them for exactly the same purpose. It is more common for the two languages to complement each other for a bilingual person. For example, one language may be used at home and another at school or at work; or the two languages may be used selectively in a certain context (e.g., in bilingual classroom). Obviously, most often, our L1 is dominant and L2 or foreign language (FL) is used for mediation. If we disregard people who majored in second languages and further develop their proficiency by spending time in countries where this second language is spoken, "bilingualism" usually refers to subordinated bilingualism. Although our excursion to the matter of bilingualism appears to be related only distantly to our argumentation for the need of communication between Chinese and English, what ties the two matters together is the suggestion that in addition to what has been done in China with regard to translation must be furthered. What we mean is this: scientific and technological development is based on creative thinking which comes from and grows with the heritage which human civilization has left to us. Thus the reading and study of classical literature bilingually is one way to absorb the essence of human civilization that may inspire our imagination. And hence we subscribe to the rewriting of Chinese literary history and this is to be performed by scholars who at the very least have command in Chinese and English (although of course further languages in the East and the West would be optimal). Further with regard to the bilingualism, Western readers have fewer English versions of Chinese literary works to read and thus Chinese literature is little known to them. High-quality translation of literary works is difficult, but necessary if we want to make Chinese literature known

globally (i.e., at the very less in English). As Ning Wang notes, "Western literary works [are] available in Chinese, while very few excellent Chinese works [are] translated into other languages ... We should make joint efforts with our Western colleagues to translate the best Chinese literary works into the major world languages, especially into English, which is actually playing the role of lingua franca in such an age of globalization" ("Weltliteratur" 8-9).

Chinese comparatists have published scholarship on globalization and the global spread of literature and most of this work is about Chinese literature and culture and world literatures from the perspective of English and this is not enough to introduce the Chinese culture to the outside world. Said argued that ideas and theories travel from one context to another and thereby gain or lose in strength (226). In comparison with English-language translators, Chinese-language translators have fewer experience in translation and, hence, they sometimes cooperate with English-speaking translators to finish translation work and thus we posit that there is a need of bilingual translators. Exploring the possibility of rewriting Chinese literary history in Chinese and English, is a vast undertaking and so we offer only a tentative summary here. We argue that Chinese scholars of comparative literature and literary studies in general are well advised to find a new model of rewriting Chinese literary history in both Chinese and English. Following Spivak's argumentation we posit that a "new comparative literature" ought to be combined with area studies. In this line of argumentation we believe that a local culture such as the Chinese should have a strong voice in the process of globalization and so combined with the development of local economy. Fostering the mutual exchange of literary heritage will make all of us more globally oriented, but also appreciative of other cultures. After all, "Comparative Literature means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature" (Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári 5).

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