

Introduction to A Critical Response to Neocolonialism

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Introduction to A Critical Response to Neocolonialism

Colonialism as a system of imperialist countries to reign over other countries has crumbled as a system in the middle of the twentieth century. Currently the world does not allow the imperial countries to send military troops to garrison the territories of other countries and bring the governments of other countries under their control. However, that is not to say that colonialism has totally passed away. It continues its life in a disguise of neocolonialism that inherits the historical legacy of colonialism and presents itself in various subtle forms. In this sense, neocolonialism can be defined as the continuity of colonialism, which, on the one hand, "is exercised through economic or monetary means" (Nkrumah ix); on the other hand, through culture, politics, ideology, literature and education, etc., which have "all the outward trappings" (Nkrumah ix) so as to subjugate the "Rest" to the "West" (cf. Rizvi 157-171).

In particular areas of culture, politics, ideology, literature, and education neocolonialism also finds expression in its propaganda of the so-called cultural adaptation to the neocolonialists and demands that neocolonized people to accept the neocolonialists' value system including social norms, moral rules, ideological, critical discourses, mindset and mannerism. This cultural adaption by nature is to bring into and maximize the effect of the neocolonized people's cultural submission and therefore, to make the neocolonized people become controlled subjects and to be willingly and sometimes actively self-colonized.

The neocolonialist would very much like to employ strategies of self-mystification through inventing of mumbo jumbo and therefore, to mislead the (neo)colonized people to misrecognize them as messiahs. As early as in January twenty-seven, 1956, Jean-Paul Sartre attacked the notion of "neocolonialist

mystification" (Sartre 36) in his speech delivered at a rally "For Peace in Algeria". He asserted that there was no differentiation between "good colonists" and "very wicked ones" (36). The only difference between neocolonialism and colonialism is that the former takes a subtler form of dominance than the latter (cf. Nkrumah 1965; Tikly 2004). Neocolonialist as its predecessor colonialist is "fabricated like the native," yet in essence he is "made by his function and his interests" (Sartre 51). In other words, motivated by his function and interests, neocolonialist seeks to exercise control and manipulation of the colonized people as subhuman and therefore to secure maximum benefits out of them.

Contributors to this special issue titled "A Critical Response to Neocolonialism" contributed by nine Chinese scholars at home and abroad, discuss the phenomena of neocolonialism from different aspects. The authors work towards uncovering the basis of neocolonialism, trying not actually to enter the theoretical contentions but to understand it phenomenologically both at the individual level and as an ideology. The questions addressed throughout this cluster of articles detect various neocolonialist manifestations, including the issues of cultural and literary translation, the functions of Nobel Prize in literature, the resistance to neocolonialism in contemporary Chinese literary theory, the relationship between neocolonialism and "seventeen-year-literature" in China, the postcolonial discourse in Mo Yan's reception in China and the conflicting neo-colonialist narratives in the varied representations of Africa in Ngugi and Naipaul's novels.

Specifically, in "Cultural Translation in the Age of Neocolonialism/Neoliberalism," Shaobo Xie makes an enquiry into the rationale and methodology of cultural translation as a counter-colonialist practice, which he holds plays a significant role in the neoliberal/neocolonial global present. Xie begins his establishment of the theoretical legitimacy of cultural translation by tracing the conceptualization of "universality" from Etienne Balibar's "ambiguous universality" to the consensus among Butler, Laclau and Žižek on the perpetual gap "between the concept of universality and its actual content." For Xie, they all insist that "the universality claimed or acclaimed is always contaminated or dominated by particularity. As such the universal is a place for contestatory negotiations among social classes or groups over hegemony." Yet different from others' emphasis on social struggle for power, Butler picks up the thread of Hegelian logic of the universal and shifts to antagonism of cross-cultural articulations of universality. Xie deems that Butler's view on universality explains the culture-specific nature of articulations of universality and the significance of cultural translation to any true universal claim. Responding to a series of questions concerning the necessity and methodology of cultural translation in the day of neocolonialism/neoliberalism, Xie attributes the urgency of applying cultural translation to the crisis-laden neoliberal global present, which is caused by the neoliberal transformation of humanity and social life into market actors and economic conduct. He also expands the concept of modernity and development beyond the hegemony of capitalist globalization by presenting a range of scholars' academic and social researches and proposes cultural translation as a capable strategy to "deconstruct what are called white mythologies" and to resist "the homogenizing processes of globalization by way of foregrounding and celebrating cultural and lingual diversity." Xie's conception of cultural translation comes chiefly from Spivak and Benjamin's discussion on it, which Xie believes, could break the West's dominance of "the concepts such as modernity, democracy, rationality, agency, and development" by

way of rehabilitating or re-including the racial and social excluded Others. The most noteworthy is perhaps in the last part of the article. Besides the examples taken from Iran and India, Xie accentuates examples of forms of insurgent agency coming from China to illustrate that there are diverse forms of agency and democracy which may be illegible or unrecognizable to many Eurocentric Westerners. He concludes that the concept of universality is different and thus it has different manifestations in different cultures likewise, for which he advances an audacious and ambitious solution of cultural translation.

Indeed, cultural translation as a counter-colonialist practice plays a significant role and is an additional support to the construction of world literature. For a particular nation, translation can also help integrate its national literature into the family of world literature. Nevertheless, there are always some annoying gaps between the ideality and the reality. In "Neocolonialism in Translating China," Guoqiang Qiao detects these gaps that find expression in translating China. He discerns that neocolonialism is exercised through means of literary translation in the disguise of globalization and with an excuse of reception. Based on his observation of literary globalization, Qiao maintains that such a "predisposed globalization" is essentially a new means of colonialization, namely, neocolonialism, which imposes an American-centric or Eurocentric set of standards on the undeveloped and developing countries. Goldblatt's translation of Chinese literary works and the ideas he advances for the "walking-out" of Chinese literature prove to be of American-centric neocolonialism. Qiao contends that Goldblatt has a particular preference for those works that render the evilness of China's society and the chaotic relationship among the Chinese old family members. For Qiao, Goldblatt's as well as the American readers' craving for the "bad side" of the Chinese society and the people implies their deep-rooted white supremacy. In the same vein, Goldblatt's choice of word expressions and the political savvy of image structure boil down to his neocolonial translation strategy that denies Chinese writer's literary characteristics and cultural tradition. Goldblatt's another speculative partiality, that is, his newly-developed preference of Chinese popular literature to Chinese serious literature, turns the subject of Chinese literature into object of commodity. Qiao also exposes Goldblatt's neocolonialist stance through the examples of Goldblatt's essays, interviews, speeches. For example, Qiao analyzes the three questions Goldblatt raises at the outset of his essay on Chinese literature's "walking-out" that shows Goldblatt's marked proclivity for neocolonialist supremacy.

Furthermore, Qiao critically highlights Chinese writers' and critics' and scholars' self-colonization in the process of Chinese literature's integration into the world literature. Chinese writers, critics and scholars have a thwarted passion to integrate into the family of world literature. In recent years, particularly after Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize, quite a few well-known Chinese writers nurture a feverish affection to gratify the foreign reading public. In order to stake a claim to being international, they accommodate themselves to the Western requirements and write in a queer and strange sensibility, complicating their effort at combining the Chinese cultural and literary tradition with the Western. What is more, some of the Chinese scholars rush to make up a kind of theory of translation based on Goldblatt's concept of translation, which lacks theoretical stringency and cultural sustenance but strikes a confused note to the theory of translation.

The intricacies of neocolonialist extension through translation indicate in a sense the complex spatialization of power. As an American translator of Chinese literature, Goldblatt ascribes special importance to the utility of space by setting up a hierarchical spatial structure of Chinese writers and their works so as to devote to official and political and commercial relevance to literature. In other words, the hierarchical spatial structure of his translation is constituted with not only literary works, but also official politics and commercial benefits. He sits in the center of it, making indiscreet remarks as an official and politically and commercially minded neocolonialist.

There is never lack of neocolonialists in the circle of world literature. The policy for Nobel Prize in Literature is also predicted on the belief of spatialization of power. But this spatialization of power is nuanced by political efficacy, featuring an increasing emphasis on politics that has characterized the modern age. In their article titled "The End of the Nobel Era and the Reconstruction of the World Republic of Letters," Guohua Zhu and Yonghua Tang advance another version of spatialization of power for world literature. Based on the basic concept of neocolonialism, they examine the mechanisms of cultural hegemony associated with the Nobel Prize in Literature and analyze the operating logic of the Nobel Prize through conceptual binary constructs. They employ the basic idea of "World Republic of Letters" proposed by Casanova and further discussed by Jonathan Culler to argue about the dualism of the Noble Prize. Casanova proposes that literature not only belongs to an intellectual world but also observes the rules of the secular world. Thus, in this sense, the emphasis that the committee of Noble Prize in Literature lays on the universal value and pure aesthetic transcendence of literature is a kind of essentialism and fundamentalism. However, for Zhu and Tang, the Nobel Prize's legitimacy is a trap of neocolonialism, manifesting cultural hegemony in Nobel Prize committee's "just" and "impartiality". Taking Bob Dylan, Mo Yan and Xingjian Gao for examples, Zhu and Tang contend that the so-called impartiality that the Nobel Prize committee claims is "no more than a compromise." Unhappy with the evaluation system operated by the Nobel Prize committee, Zhu and Tang propose a new system of the World Republic of Letters—a world of multi-center, multi-polar and multi-dimensional coordination. Although such an ideal third space-like world literature is in a sense much like a utopia, this world predicts possibilities of a world that is different from the present monocentric one.

Similar to Guohua Zhu and Yonghua Tang's ideal of the World Republic of Letters—a world of multi-center, multi-polar and multi-dimensional coordination, but different from their point of departure, Binghui Song also employs Casanova's basic concept of "world republic of letters" but to challenge the negative viewpoints on Mo Yan. In his "Mo Yan's Reception in China and a Reflection on the Postcolonial Discourse," Song develops an alternative reading of Mo Yan, regarding Mo Yan's choice, either of aesthetic consideration or thematic representation, as a practical and effective utilitarianism in incorporating into the world literature. Song refutes those critics who approach Mo Yan from perspective of post-colonialism. It might be problematic for the multi-polarity that Song expects of the world literature in Casanova's ideal, particularly in the case of Mo Yan, as the noted heightening of human emotional velocity has never happened to Mo Yan's characters except in his passionate depiction of sexual acts and promiscuity.

Indeed, to achieve anything like a critical consensus with complicated literary renderings of modern social life in China would be impossible particularly in terms of Mo Yan's literary works, just as the old saying goes "wise see wisdom." As one of the most controversial writers in China, Mo Yan's winning of Nobel Prize in Literature creates quite a critical stir in China. Incisive criticism and submerged dissent come along with his persistence in depiction of the downtrodden people and absurd events. Critics have been split into several opposite groups. Some discern the ambiguity he creates in his novels is at once irritating and arresting; some others daringly express that the irony in his novels is strained and the humor is not sustained. Some take trendy political stance to appreciate the temper of the times he shows in his novels; still others are angered at the densely layered account of sexual acts and promiscuity.

Yet, the hard fact of China's situation today seems contradictory to the ideal that Zhu and Tang and Song have proposed. The spatialization of Western power in the area of literary theory that has started from the last two decades of the twentieth century continues to grow on campuses of university and the literary critical circle. Jun Zen is conscious of the Western power's invasion, which has gained tremendous momentum in recent years with the growth of publication of textbooks of Western literary theories. In his article "Resistance to Neocolonialism in Contemporary Chinese Literary Theory," Zeng reconsiders the recent invasion of Western literary theories into Chinese academia. He examines the "Western imagination" in the discourse of contemporary literary theory, which refers to the understandings of Western literary theory from the viewpoint of contemporary Chinese literary theory, and believes that it has formed itself in the process of introduction and reception of western literary theories in China. Based on a detailed investigation into the revision of Chinese textbooks on Western literary theory, he points out that the roles of teachers and students that the Western literary theories and Chinese academia used to play now have been reversed. He evidences the interaction between the introduced western literary theory and the China's reception, and believes that this reversal of roles as a kind of resistance can not only rebuild the subjectivity of discourse of Chinese literary theory, but also exert a great influence on the academic circle in the West.

In retrospect, Chinese people have long been on the way to confront and oppose against the invasion of colonialism and neocolonialism. In "Neocolonialism and 'Seventeen-Year-Literature' in China," Tian Zhang looks back at the special period of Chinese literature from 1949 to 1966, for support of her argument of Chinese people's early resistance against the neocolonialism. By demonstrating the vicissitudes of the hard time, such as the anxieties that the Chinese people had when experiencing the initial stage of the new government, the Sino-American confrontation of the 1950s and 60s and Sino-Soviet polemics since 1958, Zhang highlights the role of Chinese literature in this period, which arouses Chinese people's awareness and confidence in fighting against the control of western countries. In order to explore the textual manifestation of Chineseness, that is, "the quality of being Chinese or the characteristics regarded as typically Chinese," Zhang categorizes the confrontational relationship between seventeen-year-literature and neocolonialism into three narrative patterns: historical narrative, ideological narrative and public affairs narrative, each of which serves respectively for safeguarding sovereignty, renouncing semi-colonialism and semi-feudalism, ensuring communist leadership and a

sound way to popularize fictions alike. Zhang points out the tremendous influences of seventeen-year-literature, with many amazing and fascinating works produced, within its era and in the era to come as a way to resist neocolonial invasion.

An in depth understanding of literary neocolonialism in the present world entail a wide range of reading of literary works. Weiping Li and Xiuli Zhang's article on "Conflicting Neocolonialist Narratives in the Representation of Africa in Ngugi and Naipaul's Novels" is an effort to understand it from a foreign context with a focus on the effects that neocolonialism has imposed on post-independent Africa. They analyze the conflicting neocolonialist narratives by comparing the different representations of Africa and her people between Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* and Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*. They argue that although both Ngugi and Naipaul render the theme of chaos of post-independent African society in their novels, Ngugi, as an intellectual with strong national consciousness, criticizes the whole system of imperialism, capitalism and colonialism that has brought about the current situation; whereas due to his adaptation to European culture, Naipaul attributes the chaotic Africa to the deep-rooted wickedness of the African people. Their attitudes towards revolution are also different: revolution for Ngugi is the only path towards real freedom from the foreign exploitation; while for Naipaul it is an irrational and barbarous act. Li and Zhang elaborate these two writers' differences through the narrators, the conflicting representations of African women and opposing visions of the African future in their novels. Li and Zhang's article spells out Chinese scholars' extensive concern on similar experience of other nations under the influence of neocolonialism.

In brief, this cluster of articles has explored how neocolonialism continues its "stranglehold on the neo-colonial sectors of the world" whose intention is to "ensure the continuation of the system" (Nkrumah xx) of the great international monopolies. In the meantime, it has also voiced some speculative concerns that can break through to an insightful understanding of the actualities of the increasing presence of neocolonialism.

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