

■ Introductory Remarks

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The essays included in this special issue were mostly delivered at the International Conference on Translating Global Cultures: Toward Interdisciplinary (Re-) Constructions held on 12-14 August 2006 in Beijing. Since quite a few papers delivered at the conference dealt with cultural translation from literary perspectives, or more specifically, from cross-cultural perspectives of Chinese and Western comparative literature and culture studies, we decide that the current special issue focuses on Chinese-Western comparative literature studies through translation. The reader might well find that this sort of “cultural translation” is represented in different ways: either through literary creation in a translational manner or directly translating one’s personal or collective experiences in a dynamic or constructive manner by means of language. In any event, we have no difficulty finding that the definition of translation in a traditional sense has largely altered: from translating from one language into another into translating from one culture into another by means of language, in the process of which something of significance has been constructed or reconstructed, and cross-cultural dialogue between the East and West has been carried on in an equal manner.

As we all know, teaching China as well as Chinese literature and culture is now more and more attractive to students of the new generation in the United States. In this aspect, Robert Hegel, as a well-experienced American sinologist who has been teaching Chinese literature and literary translation for years, simply offers us a changing image of China in the eye of Americans by illustrating the

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increase of Chinese-learning students' number in the US as well as in Washington University. To him, this fact "demonstrates just how China's stature in the world has changed over the last fifty years: from quaint, mired in the past, different, and thus labeled 'feminine' in gender terms, hence implicitly considered 'submissive' to more dominant world leaders, China is now seen as a vibrant and powerful member of the world community, worthy of the most serious study for solutions to common problems and for understanding the common human condition." Since the changing of the image of China is more and more familiar to ordinary young Americans, China has become the "focus of career plans" for many of the American students. Through some statistic analyses, he finally concludes, "The implications of this trend are fairly clear: students know how important China is for their individual futures" On the other hand, he also hopes, "our colleagues in China must also be able to translate the United States and its complex—but different—historical experience into forms and models that make sense and can further productive dialogues between our two countries and our two cultures." Actually, we have already found that in recent years, through frequent cultural communications and dialogues, this sort of cultural translation of both China and the United States has certainly strengthened mutual understandings between the two peoples.

The following two essays deal respectively with the issue of translation in its broad sense: translation of national and cultural memory, translation of cultural tradition, and translation of one's individual psychological perception. Letty Chen's essay deals with a newly rising literary genre popular among the English speaking audiences: two common mnemonic practices among Chinese diasporic writers. They are "self-victimization" and "self-exoticization," which together form a "new discourse of self-Orientalization." To Chen, the "commercial success" of these works also reveals a "complex process of literary production that exposes a number of issues": how the Chinese diasporic writers' narratives of pain and recovery can be treated as political and commercial actions; how self-victimization can be used to forge a kind of moral authority, cultural capital, and a new identity for the diasporic Cultural Revolution generation; and how the West's continuous fascination for China encourages the Chinese diasporic writers' unbalanced and uncritical examination of their personal and their nation's traumatic past. Since many of these writings are narrated in a "third-person, omniscient narrators" similar to that in a realist novel, whether "the stories are true or not are rather suspicious." She devotes her analysis to the extremely popular book written by Jung Chang, *Wild Swans*, pointing out that it is "conditioned by the narrator's large dosage of historical anecdotes that reads more like a historical novel than a personal memoir." Judging by this, Chen then goes on, "It is hard to believe the Jung

Chang portrayed in this memoir and the one who wrote this book are the same person.” After some detailed textual analysis, Chen concludes, “In sum, *Wild Swans* is not an individualist self-reflection narrative as expected of a memoir; but rather it fashions after the former collective, socially-oriented realism produced since the 1930s.” It is true that as a diasporic Chinese writer in Britain, every book of Chang’s arouses controversies for its lacking in truthful description of historical events. On the other hand, if it were really more literary than historical, it would at least convince readers for its verisimilitude of the story.

In discussing issues of translation, we should not forget the other meaning of translation which is seldom practiced by traditional literary translators. According to Roman Jakobson’s notorious three senses of translation, that is, interlingual translation, intralingual translation and intersemiotic translation, translating films has in recent years become a conspicuous theoretic topic for Chinese-Western comparative literature and culture studies. Lu Tonglin’s essay tries to analyze some of the most recent films, which she calls “melodrama,” from the perspective of globalization. To her, melodrama is an open form, as its “flexibility allows it to mix with different genres, and to adapt to various historical and social contexts.” The melodrama exposes “numerous contradictions existing in contemporary China” because of its emphasis on “the experience (especially the suffering) of ordinary people.” She then devotes her analysis to two filmic texts: *Parking Attendant in July* and *Life Show* as “test-cases for the broken home melodrama.” To Lu, “Broken home genre represented by these two movies shows to what extent melodrama as a form is malleable in view of changing local and historical conditions. This genre stays away from the conventional happy ending prevailing in most commercially oriented melodramas, while remaining faithful to certain core conventions: duality, excessiveness, contradiction, dramatization, and focus on private spaces.” Usually, at the end of these films, “irreversibly broken home space replaces the relatively cosy bourgeois family as a fantasized solution of irreconcilable social conflicts in American family melodrama.” Although the sense of broken home could move the audience, ironically speaking, “neither fantasy space nor traditional ethics will help contemporary melodrama patch up its broken home even in the brief moment of an artificial conclusion. Ironically, this radical failure to escape from the gloomy reality of everyday life also prevents the genre from reaching its goal: competing in the domestic film market with Hollywood blockbusters, which exemplify escapism par excellence for Chinese audiences thanks to their geographical distances.” In this sense, intersemiotic translation is by no means an easy job, for it should take into consideration the dynamic roles played by both the information sender and recipient in a cross-cultural context, and the implied meaning in the image and the manifest

appearance in the verbal text. In this sense, a translator also plays a role of “interpreter” in a cross-cultural context, who should not only exploit the manifest textual meaning but also delve deep into its subtextual connotation implied in the various images.

In the past few years, discussing the issue of modernity in the Chinese context has become a hot topic although different scholars try to periodize modernity from different perspectives. Obviously, modernity in the current global context is no longer “singular” or “totalitarian,” but rather plural with different versions. Modernity in the Chinese context is a sort of “alternative” modernity of Chinese characteristics mixed up with both modern and postmodern elements plus a few premodern elements. Hao Tianhu’s essay, inspired by both Brian McHale’s theoretic doctrine and David Wang’s practical research, deals with this controversial issue by putting premodern, modern and postmodern together, especially in the Chinese context and viewing the three as a mixed one. While examining the intricate interplays between the modern and the pre-modern in Liang Qichao’s *The Future of New China* to reveal the difficulties and contradictions, he tries to point out the fact that all the “imported” Western theoretical concepts were subject to various metamorphosis, for in the Chinese context, the pre-modern is reformed, transformed, or deformed by the nascent, emergent modern and the latent, potential postmodern in the process of the cultural contact between China and the West. Since “China had not undergone the stage of capitalism and industrial revolution yet, so in the Chinese context ‘modernization’ and ‘modernism’ existed on paper rather than in reality, and had different implications from their counterparts in the West.” To Hao, In Liang’s modern project, on the other hand, the relationship between modernization and modernism is more complex than one of objective and vehicle, or the political and the aesthetic. “Liang’s promotion of the status of fiction . . . is an aesthetic *and* political act.” Therefore, at such moments “modernization and modernism not merely inhabit the same space; they are joined into one inseparable entity.” In the final analysis, “The modern struggles hard to be free, only to find itself still in the grips of the pre-modern. Liang’s strategy to promote ‘modernization’ even at the expense of ‘modernism’ sometimes damages both.” Since the interference of the “political with the aesthetic” proves to be “destructive of the old literary conventions, but fails to be constructive of the new aesthetics,” his modern project is “destined to become a sacrifice on the altar of history,” but this is just the “value of Liang Qichao and the value of studying *The Future of New China*.” Here, translating modernity in China has produced some new significance in the Chinese context, which may well contribute to the international debate on the issues of modernity and postmodernity from a Chinese perspective.

The last two essays describe the critical receptions and metamorphoses of two of the American writers in the Chinese context. Henry Schvey, an American scholar of drama studies, deals in his essay with a historical event in 1983: the performance of the American playwright Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and its significance today. After describing the traveling of Miller's *Death of a Salesman* from the United States to China, he points out, "The journey of Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, undertaken in 1983, seems even more remarkable today, more than twenty years later, since the American and Chinese societies now seem far closer economically and culturally than they were when Miller directed his production." However, the lessons that Miller's production at the Beijing People's Art Theatre "provide about the process of 'translation' between cultures may (paradoxically) be even more valuable today." He finally concludes, "In assessing Miller's reflections on his production of *Death of a Salesman* in Beijing today, I find that his insights and reflections are not only illuminating about cultural differences between China and America, or about the differences in theatrical practice between the East and West. In his search for a 'nonnational' event, he reminds us that every truly great work of art, however much it seems tied to a particular nation or culture of time period, ultimately has the power to connect rather than divide us as human beings." This insightful idea seems close to the concept constructed by Goethe as "Weltliteratur" many years ago. It is true that in the current age of globalization, the significance of world literature has become more and more conspicuous as comparative literature studies should be done in such a broad cross-cultural context of world literature.

Du Lanlan's essay describes the critical reception of American novelist Tony Morrison and her works in China in an attempt to offer a critical survey of the evolution of Morrison criticism in China, focusing on how the Chinese scholars respond to Morrison's view of identity politics as reflected in her novels and in what sense the Morrison criticism in China is similar to and different from that of the American counterpart. To Du, "The Morrison studies worldwide are significant in the sense that they help people understand how Morrison's stories depict the lives of the marginalized minority people in terms of race, gender and class and how her novels address to the readers the issue of viewing the cultural identity in the age of globalization." After discussing Morrison's dynamic view on identity politics represented in her five major novels (all of which have Chinese translations), Du analyzes some Chinese scholars' response and pertinently points out that in dealing with Morrison's identity issues, most of the Chinese scholars "give a partial understanding of Morrison's dynamic view due to the tendency of evaluating Morrison's works in an isolated way." Actually, to Du, "Morrison's later novels compel the recognition of multiple identities and divergent interests

within the category of blackness.” Judging by this, she finally concludes, identities are not “fixed; they depend on the specific contexts. This view makes it possible for Morrison to address cultural identity not as an essence, but as a process of becoming. Thus Morrison is able to view identity politics in a dynamic way and avoid the trap of essentialism. From Morrison’s dynamic view on identity politics, we can see that Morrison is apparently very much influenced by the postmodern thought which sees identity as a process rather than an essential deterministic force.” It is true that at the present, Morrison studies in China is more introductory and superficial than scholarly and profound, but along with the deepening and plurality of Morrison studies in China, Chinese scholars will certainly put forward their insightful ideas from a cross-cultural perspective. The same will be true of studies of many more foreign writers in the Chinese context.

Since I always call for a sort of cultural translation and try to regard it as another “turn” in comparative literature and cultural studies, I proposed to edit this special issue immediately after the conference. I believe that readers will find, while reading these essays, the change of meaning of traditional translation, hence a new “turn” in Chinese-Western comparative literature and cultural studies in the age of globalization.