

Wang Ning: Sinicizing World Literature

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Abstract: Wang Ning has been one of the most productive Chinese comparative and world literature studies scholars of the past four decades with numerous publications in both Chinese and English. In his scholarly trajectory in English we can discern an evolution from translating, interpreting, and adapting Western models for use with reference to Chinese literature and literary studies to advancing the claims of native-grown Chinese works, traditions, methods, and approaches to be treated on a par with Western ones. As such, he has been instrumental in securing for Chinese literature and literary studies a more prominent place on the maps of comparative and world literature studies.

Keywords: Wang Ning; world literature; china; comparative literature; translation studies

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标题: 王宁：世界文学的中国化

内容摘要: 王宁在中西方发表了数量庞大的学术成果，是过去四十年来中国最为高产的比较文学和世界文学学者之一。在他的英文发表轨迹中，我们可以分辨出王宁从根据中国文学和文学研究实际翻译、阐释、改造西方模型到提出与西方相媲美的中国本土文学研究传统、研究方法和研究成果的演变历程。因此，可以说王宁是建立中国文学和文学研究在世界学术界显著地位的关键学者。

关键词: 王宁；世界文学；中国；比较文学；翻译研究

作者简介：西奥多·德汉，比利时鲁文大学和荷兰莱顿大学的荣休教授、欧洲科学院院士、前《欧洲评论》主编和《世界文学研究杂志》联合主编。他曾担任四川大学长江学者讲座教授以及上海交通大学、哈佛大学和奥地利维也纳大学等多所大学的访问教授或研究员。他出版了60余部学术专著或编著，发表了200余篇论文。近期代表作包括《地缘政治时代的世界文学》（2021）和《劳特里奇世界文学简史》（2012）等。

My argument in what follows will be that Wang Ning's scholarly trajectory narrowly parallels that of his country.

Born in 1955, Wang came to intellectual maturity when Deng Xiaoping opened China to the international community. This was also the moment when the study of comparative literature in China was revived. As Xiaoyi Zhou and Q. S. Tong argue in their 2000 article "Comparative Literature in China," comparative literature had under Western influence taken root in China in the first half of the twentieth century, first and foremost at Tsinghua University, where the English literary theoretician I.A. Richards taught as a visiting professor from 1929 to 1931, but from about 1950 on it had lain dormant. Although Western texts and handbooks on comparative literature such as Hutcheson Macauley Possnett's 1886 *Comparative Literature*, Frédéric Loliée's 1903/1906 *Histoire des littératures comparées des origines au XXe siècle / A Short History of Comparative Literature from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, and Paul van Tieghem's 1931 *La Littérature comparée* played an important role in the grounding of the discipline in China, actual interest of the early Chinese comparatists mainly concerned the relations between Chinese and Indian, Russian, and to a lesser extent European literature, the latter often through Japanese intermediaries, as extensively documented by Karen Thornber (2009). The interest in Russian and particularly Soviet literature was fuelled by the interventions of Lu Xun, without question the most important Chinese author of the first half of the twentieth century, and his brother Zhou Zhuoren. Zhou and Tong note that with respect to Indian, especially Buddhist, and Russian literature, pre-1950 Chinese comparatists focused on how these literatures had been received in Chinese literature, while with respect to European literature they paid most attention to the reception of Chinese literary works in Early Modernity. At its revival in the 1980s, Chinese comparatists rather focused on American developments in literary theory, mostly New Criticism as filtered through Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1948), or in comparative literature via the writings of H.H. Remak.

The 1980s and 1990s is also when Chinese comparatists started looking for

international contacts and actively began to participate in the workings of the Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée/ International Comparative Literature Association. The latter was mainly the work of Yue Daiyun and Meng Hua, both then at Peking University's Department of Comparative Literature, where Wang also received his training as a comparatist. In 1990-1991, he did postdoctoral research at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, under the guidance of Douwe Fokkema, a noted Dutch comparative literature scholar of postmodernism, but also of Chinese literature. Wang first prominently appeared in person on the international scene at the 1997 ICLA triannual Conference in Leiden, in the Netherlands. In the meantime, however, he had already broken into the English-language publication market. Not surprisingly given his links to Fokkema, he did so with "Constructing Postmodernism: The Chinese Case and Its Different Versions" (1993). As is evident from this article's title, even at this early stage of his career he already reflected on Chinese literature in an international context. This shows even more strongly from his next English-language publication, in the very prestigious journal *New Literary History*, "Confronting Western Influence: Rethinking Chinese Literature of the New Period" (1993). But he also already paid attention to issues of translation, as witnessed by "Toward a Translation Study in the Context of Chinese-Western Comparative Culture Studies" (1996), and of postcolonialism, for instance in "Orientalism versus Occidentalism?" (1997) Nor did he neglect the theoretical dimension, as testified to by articles such as "Toward a New Framework of Comparative Literature" (1996), or "'Decolonizing' Chinese Culture in a Post-Colonial Era?" (1997). Over the next thirty years he would go on developing his interests in all these fields via a true deluge of publications, in Chinese and in English, the latter in almost all prestigious comparative literature, translation, and theory journals: *New Literary History*, *boundary 2*, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, *Social Semiotics*, *Neohelicon*, *Comparative Literature Studies*, *Critical Inquiry*, *Modern Language Quarterly*, *Semiotica*, *Minnesota Review*, *Narrative*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Third World Quarterly*. But he did not neglect paying tribute to whom he considered important predecessors and mentors, such as Douwe Fokkema, but also Ralph Cohen and Northrop Frye, and to his colleague Shunqing Cao. In more recent times Wang also branched out into ecology, with "Global in the Local: Ecocriticism in China" (2014), and, as the title of the article just mentioned already betrays, world literature studies, with again a number of articles, in Chinese and in English, too numerous to mention.

Such a swerve to world literature studies in fact fully chimes with the history of comparative literature in China itself as well as with more recent developments

in comparative literature in the West. Zhou and Tong note that comparative literature in China, as actually in most Western countries, has often, if not to say most often, and this in apparent contradiction with the ostensibly and avowedly idealistic international push of the discipline, been used to promote, sometimes slyly sometimes openly, one's national literature via "comparison" with the literatures of other countries. The same thing holds for world literature studies, from one of the earliest works in the genre, Richard Moulton's 1911 *World Literature and Its Place in General Culture*, which only studies the world's literatures to the extent in which they had been of influence on the formation and growth of the "literature of the English-speaking peoples," to the way the subject was taught in US undergraduate curricula in the 1950s, with the difference that in the latter case it was not one national literature but the "major" European literatures that of old had formed the core subject also of comparative literature studies that implicitly were foregrounded as making up "world literature." Werner Friederich (1960), a Swiss comparatist working in the US, at the end of the 1950s scathingly remarked that world literature courses in the United States were undeserving of the name as they only taught the literatures of one fourth of Europe's NATO members. Even earlier, Albert Guérard, a French scholar likewise teaching in the US, had suggested that it would be more accurate to speak of "Western World Literature: a literature for Westerners, wherever they may be, and for Westernized Orientals" (Guérard 34). And René Etiemble, another Frenchman, in the mid-1960s lambasted world literature's Euro- or Western-centrism and called for the inclusion of Arabic, Indian, Japanese and Chinese literature(s) (Etiemble 1975). A. Owen Aldridge in the mid-1980s warned that for non-European critics the way world literature was taught smacked of a "colonialist mentality" as "even when Eastern masterpieces have been recognized as such, they have often been treated as precursors of later European works, not as models or cultural achievements in their own right [...] it is now time for the classics of the East to be viewed as the foundations of independent traditions and made available to Western students" (Aldridge 10). Etiemble had even provocatively suggested that the future of comparative literature and world literature might well lie with Chinese comparativism. In this context it is useful to mention, as indeed Wang himself reminds us in a 2006 article (163), that the Chinese Ministry of Education in 1998 integrated comparative literature and world literature into one discipline for graduate study in China, and that since 2016 Beijing Normal University Press has been publishing a journal called *Comparative Literature and World Literature*. Although the editors-in-chief of *Comparative Literature and World Literature* issue from Beijing Normal University, and the associate editors, while being Chinese,

are stationed at Arizona State University, the Advisory and Editorial Board are internationally constituted, comprising luminaries such as Susan Bassnett, Hans Bertens, Thomas O. Beebee, David Damrosch, and Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta, next to Yue Daiyun, Luo Liyang and Chen Guangching. Against this background it is no surprise that when Wang turns to world literature studies he not only subscribes to the de-European- and de-Westernizing agenda of Guérard, Etiemble and Aldridge, but does so from a Sinicizing perspective.

As of the final decade of the twentieth century we see an increasing tendency in the broad field of what is commonly called the Social Sciences and Humanities to, borrowing Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) words, "provincialize Europe," and to upgrade the study of other continents, which in our particular case means other literatures. In first instance this tendency manifests in the more recent editions of the Longman and Norton anthologies of world literature, under the general editorships of, respectively, David Damrosch and Martin Puchner, where European literature is no longer favoured over Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Indian or African literature. It also transpires from the critical discourse on world literature shifting from an exclusive focus on European literature(s) to postcolonial literatures, as in the works of Pheng Cheah (2016), Aamir R. Mufti (2016), and Baidik Bhattacharya (2018). But said discourse increasingly also broadens to include literatures in non-European languages, not necessarily postcolonial, as in recent discussions by May Hawas (2019) and Robert Young (2021). In the numerous publications he has devoted especially since the turn of the twenty-first century to the relationship between Chinese literature and world literature, Wang inscribes himself in the latter trend. In his early work he is intent on discussing Chinese literary works with a methodology and terminology imported from Western discourse, though not without "Chinese characteristics." And notwithstanding the title of his very early article, "Confronting Western Influence: Rethinking Chinese Literature of the New Period" (1993), and his claim therein that "Chinese literature is no longer a small tributary of the mainstream of world literature. At the present time, no scholar, either from the West or from the East, could undertake to write a book with *The Mainstream of Literature in the Twentieth Century* [a reference to Georg Brandes's extremely influential late nineteenth-century *Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century Literature*] as its title without including the development of contemporary Chinese literature" (905-906), the article essentially chronicles the influence of Western philosophers and theorists such as Freud, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre, and currents such as modernism, postmodernism, and the avant-gardes, on Chinese literature. At the end of his essay Wang asks: "Since Chinese literature has its own grand tradition and its great writers

and writings, how has it influenced other literatures, for instance, the literatures of the Western countries?” Citing difficulties of language, Euro- and Western-centrism, and various other reasons, Wang arrives at the conclusion that “the results in the study of Chinese influence on Western literatures are not satisfactory at all” (922), but he expresses his hope that through increasing East-West collaboration this gap might soon be filled.

Even in the early 2000s, in his 2005 *New Literary History* article “Translating Journals into Chinese: Toward a Theoretical (Re)Construction of Chinese Critical Discourse,” Wang still emphasizes how Chinese critical discourse then remains largely tributary to Western and particularly American influences. In fact, he starts off his article by drawing a parallel with what happened in the early twentieth century when, he says, “During the May 4 period, almost all the Western cultural trends and critical theories flooded into China through translation, mostly from English and occasionally from Japanese and Russian, exercising a strong influence on Chinese literary creation and critical interpretation. Many Chinese writers, such as Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, and Cao Yu, and literary theorists would rather recognize being inspired by Western literature and theories than by their Chinese precursors” (2005 649). Likewise, he finds, after a period in which Western influence was largely dormant, from the Communist take-over of 1949 to the end of the Cultural Revolution, since 1978 “more and more foreign, especially Western, cultural trends and literary theories have been coming into China through translation, directly influencing the critical and creative construction of contemporary Chinese literary and theoretical discourse. [...] Almost all the cutting-edge Western critical theories have been echoed in the Chinese context, for there are quite a few translators, including myself [i.e. Wang Ning], who follow the most recent advances in Western literary and cultural theories and who take the initiative of translating them into Chinese as well as interpreting them to Chinese scholars and critics” (650). In line with this ambition, Wang, as he explains in the article in question, took it upon himself, along with some colleagues, to translate into Chinese such major American journals as *New Literary History*, *Critical Inquiry*, and *boundary 2*; for the first two of these Wang served as editor of the Chinese versions. From then on, though, Wang, at least in his English-language publications, which are the only ones I, being illiterate in Chinese, can access, starts to adopt a much more critical position vis-à-vis Western theory, as for instance in the issue of *MLQ* he guest-edited, along with Marshall Brown, in 2018.

Indeed, as of the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Wang assumes an increasingly more self-confident Chinese stance and calls for an

authentically Chinese approach in literary studies, including comparative and world literature studies. As such he picks up on the long-standing claim that there is, or there be, a distinctive Chinese School of Comparative Literature, a claim forcefully put forward also by Wang's colleague Shunqing Cao, a.o. in the latter's 2013 *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature*. Cao is one of the editors-in-chief of the journal *Comparative Literature and World Literature* mentioned earlier. In the very year Cao's volume appeared, Wang published a perceptive review in *CLCWeb*, in which he also gave an outline of Cao's entire career up to date. Throughout, Wang emphasizes how "at the time when few scholars of classical Chinese literature realized the importance of comparative literature, Cao took the initiative to apply a comparative approach to study Chinese classics. While Cao was inspired by the work of such as James Liu and Earl Miner, in his later work he transcended what he presented in his 1988 *Chinese and Western Comparative Poetics* where he interpreted Western critical concepts from a Chinese perspective. Cao's objective to develop a home-grown Chinese comparative literature culminated in his 2012 four-volume edited collection *A History of Chinese and Foreign Literary Theory*" (Wang "Variation Theory and Comparative Literature: A Book Review Article about Cao's Work" 3). Wang does not hesitate to rate this work on a par with the ICLA's *Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages*. "The strength of the work," Wang argues, "lies in that it for the first time put Chinese literary theory in a broad context of world literary theory highlighting its different characteristics and unique position. It also demonstrates that to write a comprehensive history of world literary theory should not overlook the literary theory and criticism in those non-Western countries, especially China, where there is its own autonomous body of literary theory with *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (by Xie Liu) as its landmark" (3). Regrettably, however, Wang remarks, "Since the collection is available in Chinese only, it has not made an impact outside the Chinese context" (3). Obviously, Wang himself has no intention of falling into the same trap—while in China his standing is comparable to that of Cao, he is much better known abroad precisely because from the very beginning of his career he has taken care to publish extensively in English. At the same time, he leaves no doubt that he underwrites and shares Cao's ambition for a "home-grown Chinese comparative literature."

Wang's growing assertion as a Chinese comparative and world literature scholar clearly shows from a 2010 article, "Global English(es) and Global Chinese(s): toward rewriting a new literary history in Chinese," in which he reflects on China's enormous population, its numerous diaspora, and its rising economic might, which make it inevitable that the Chinese language will gain ever greater

purchase on the world. Comparing the fate of the Chinese language to that of English, and the possible consequences of its spreading beyond China proper, he recognizes that this might bring with it a certain measure of hybridization. Instead of worrying about this, as he says some of his colleagues are doing, he welcomes it, because “if it really achieved the effect of being inclusive and hybridized like English, Chinese would become the second major world language next to English, for it could play the unique role that English cannot play, and in more aspects, it could function as a major world language in an interactive and complementary way to English” (167). With the “rise of ‘Chinese fever’ in the world,” he asks, “what shall [Chinese] literary scholars [...] do to remap world literature?” (Wang “Global English(es) and Global Chinese(s): toward rewriting a new literary history in Chinese” 170). Like English literature, so too “Chinese literature: also from a national literature to a sort of transnational and postnational literature” (172). Invoking “Tu Wei-ming’s concept of ‘Cultural China’,” Wang defines “Chinese literature in two senses: one is the literature produced in greater China: mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan in Chinese which is the people’s national language or mother tongue; and the other is the literature produced overseas in Chinese which is the writers’ mother tongue although not necessarily their national language” (173). Such international Chinese literature studies will become, “like its counterpart of international English literature, a sub-discipline in the broader context of comparative literature and world literature [...] since to Spivak [2003], a new Comparative Literature must be encountered within area studies, international Chinese literature studies will have both characteristics and, therefore, will undoubtedly have a bright prospect along with the popularization of Chinese worldwide” (173-174). Literature in Chinese, then, as a world literature, similar to literatures in English, French, Spanish, or Portuguese; only bigger. Wang holds up especially English and literature(s) in English as examples only, but it is clear that he means for Chinese world literature eventually coming to rival these examples.

Picking up on Zhou and Tong’s claim at the beginning of their 2000 article that in the West comparative literature is “dead”—they based themselves mostly on Susan Basnett’s 1993 *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, in which she posited that comparative literature was to be subsumed by translation studies, and on their perception of what since then has been labelled “the age of theory,”—Wang in another 2010 article, “World Literature and the Dynamic Function of Translation,” posits “that the globalization of material, cultural, and intellectual production, accompanied by the dissolution of Eurocentrism and ‘West-centrism’ and by the rise of Eastern culture and literature, has assisted at world literature’s birth from the

ashes of comparative literature” (2). World literature, he argues, implies translation, and while translation in Chinese literary history has frequently served foreign literatures to colonize Chinese literature and culture, “the recent trend of cultural globalization in the Chinese context [...] will help promote Chinese culture and literature worldwide” (13). This almost sounds like a far echo from Goethe’s belief, in an earlier wave of globalization following the Napoleonic wars, that German literature, because of what he saw as the German genius for translation, was to play an important mediating role in the coming into being of world literature. At the same time this would promote German literature’s standing in the world concert of literatures. Ultimately, it would serve to foster the ideal of a German *Kulturnation* at a time when what we now know as Germany was still divided into sundry smaller entities. Wang seems to have something comparable in mind with respect to the Chinese situation in a global context.

Constant awareness of modern Chinese literature’s involvement with and indebtedness to, but also resistance against, emancipation from, and ultimately transcending Western influences keeps running also through Wang’s more recent scholarly production. In “Chinese Literature as World Literature” (2016) he argues that contemporary Chinese authors should read as much foreign fiction as possible, preferably in English translation as this makes the world’s literatures available to them, but that they should also recognize their indebtedness to their own native tradition. At the same time, he posits that more, and better translations from Chinese into other languages, and again primarily English, are needed to make Chinese literature part of “mainstream” world literature. Wang’s argumentation here chimes with ongoing discussions in world literature studies regarding the importance, the advantages, but also the dangers, of translation in the practice of world literature. Whereas comparative world literature scholars from the very beginning have emphasized the inevitability of translation for “doing” world literature, their more “orthodox” comparative literature counterparts, often schooled in German-inspired philological practices, have consistently insisted on sticking to literary works in the original. The debate was fanned over the last twenty years—practically speaking since the re-emergence of world literature as a scholarly paradigm first triggered by Sarah Lawall’s *Reading World Literature: Theory, History, Practice* (1994), and then fuelled by the appearance, in rapid succession, of Pascale Casanova’s *La République mondiale des lettres* (1999), Franco Moretti’s “Conjectures on World Literature” (2000) and David Damrosch’s *What is World Literature?* (2003)—and pitted in particular Damrosch, as main editor of the *Longman Anthology of World Literature*, but also as theoretician of world literature in the book of his just listed,

versus Gayatri Spivak, with *Death of a Discipline* (2003), and at a later stage also Emily Apter with her *Against World Literature* (2013). Perhaps most famous in this respect is a debate on the issue between Damrosch and Spivak at the 2011 American Comparative Literature Association meeting in Vancouver (Damrosch 2011). Spivak denounced how world literature studies as promoted by Damrosch led to what Jonathan Arac in 2002 has labelled “Anglo-Globalism,” i.e. a regime whereby the literatures of the world are all turned into “literatures in English”, and therefore in effect become extensions of an Anglo-Global culture suppressing their specificities and singularities. Against this, Damrosch, as had done other world literature scholars such as Moulton (1911) and Guérard (1940) before him, objected that even if something might be lost in translation something undoubtedly was also gained, first and foremost the very basic fact that without translation many works would be lost to a wider audience, practically speaking most of the world unable to read the work in the original. This is an argument Wang also recognizes, and it is precisely why he advocates wider translation of Chinese works into English, although he at the same time also insists on better translations.

In “Chinese Literature as World Literature” Wang also goes into what should constitute a “good” translation, arguing that this depends on the target audience. He distinguishes between two kinds or forms of translation via the example of two English-language translations of *Honglou meng* as, respectively, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, and *The Story of the Stone*, by David Hawkes et al. While he recognizes that the former is the better from a philological or translation equivalence theory perspective, yielding what Lawrence Venuti would call a “foreignizing” translation, he also admits that the Hawkes translation “reads” better and is therefore more likely to reach a wider public. Obviously, both kinds of translation, or remediation, to use a term coined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1998) and elaborated by Jan Baetens (2022), or rewriting, using the term popularized by André Lefevere (1992), are useful, and indeed necessary, the one because it allows for a scholarly approach elucidating as many aspects of the original as possible also for a readership unable to access the original, and the other because it allows a wider audience to enjoy what otherwise would remain hidden from them, and to do so in a reader-friendly version unhampered by foreignization and uncluttered by a heavy scholarly apparatus. Ironically, of course, nothing gainsays the argument against untranslatability and Anglo-Globalism more effectively than the fact that Casanova’s book only really gained traction outside France than when it was translated into English as *The World Republic of Letters* in 2004, or that Spivak only enjoys the fame she does because of her writings in

English and her position at Columbia University in New York. For better or worse, and whether one likes it or not, publication in English is the necessary condition for gaining world renown—or at least it is so for the time being. In a not too distant past, as Casanova argues, it was French. And as I mentioned before, Wang in various articles has hinted or claimed that in some not too far away future Chinese might well assume this role.

Wang's growing assertiveness on behalf of Chinese literature and literary studies likewise transpires from his 2015 article "On the Construction of World Poetics," which starts off with the programmatic statement that "Goethe's dream of world literature was largely inspired by his reading of some non-Western literary works, including Chinese ones. By the same token, Western scholars' construction of comparative poetics has also been influenced by Chinese literary theory, though in the great majority of mainstream scholarship this debt is unconscious or even rejected. Now that world literature is becoming an aesthetic reality, the 'post-theoretic era' has arrived in literary theory. Its advent enables the previously marginalized theoretical discourses to come to the forefront in a break from a unified West-centric orthodoxy, and enables scholars from small ethnic communities or non-Western groups to engage in dialogues with their Western and international counterparts on a level playing field" (187). Consequently, he argues, "now is the time to develop a Chinese theoretical discourse" (187) with respect to a world poetics. Wang invokes the work of Zhang Jiang as an example of how this might be done when he says that "formulating the concept of world poetics can further improve the theories of world literature and enable a remapping of existing world literature and literary theory. We can gain some idea of the former through the experiments with 'reconstructing Chinese critical discourse' that have recently emerged in contemporary Chinese theory. In this regard, Zhang Jiang has boldly articulated the concept of 'ontological interpretation' in questioning Western literary theory. We can take a step further and say that simply to use existing theories to interpret literature is not the ultimate goal; the key is to construct our own theories so that we can make our unique voice heard in the clamour of different theoretical discourses in today's globalized context. Of course, our voice may be low and weak at the beginning and may even go unheard by international academia. But as Chinese literature occupies a growing place in the domain of world literature and the country's world importance continues to increase, there will be a corresponding rise in the international position of Chinese literary theory." And he concludes that "we must renew our dedication to this goal" (195).

I started off this essay by saying that I see Wang Ning's scholarly trajectory

as paralleling that of his country over the last forty years or so. This is also the era in which the world has gone through the most intense globalization process ever seen. The dates at which globalization was kickstarted by Ronald Reagan's coming to power in the United States and China's Opening Up policy initiated by Deng Xiaoping narrowly concur: 1980 and 1979 respectively. Reagan's economic reforms—deregulation, doing away with tariff barriers, etc.—hastening globalization were meant to consolidate and even extend American hegemony. In retrospect, we can see that this policy backfired, leading to the outsourcing of American industrial production south of the border and to what were then still called “third world” countries, leading to or at the very least hastening the rapid decline of traditionally manufacturing regions in the US itself, accelerating demographic shifts, and ultimately causing the political destabilization that made possible Donald Trump and the 6 January 2021 debacle. At the same time, it facilitated the rise of China from a mostly agricultural nation to workshop of the world, undercutting wage and production costs in much of the rest, and certainly the more developed part, of the world, and in the second half of the 2010s emerging as the main challenger to the US for global hegemony. Wang's call for greater attention to Chinese literature in a world literature context, then, reflects his country's growing self-confidence on all fronts, including the cultural-intellectual. He himself addresses this issue in some of his most recent publications, such as “The Impact of Globalization on Chinese Culture and ‘Glocalised Practices’ in China” (2020) and “(Re)Constructing Confucianism in a ‘Glocalised’ Context” (2020). While in the first of these texts Wang primarily concentrates on the more economic aspects of the impact of globalization on China's position in the world, in the second text he specifically focuses on Chinese culture under globalisation. He sees particularly Neo-Confucianism and what he calls “Sinicized” Marxism as constitutive of modern Chinese culture. The latter he considers a ‘glocalised’ form of Marxism. Together, for Wang these lead to a particularly Chinese idea of cosmopolitanism. To this end he compares two famous talks on art and literature delivered, respectively, by Mao Zedong in the 1940s in Yan'an, and Xi Jinping in the late 2010s at the 19th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in Beijing. In Mao's talk, Wang says, “the national sense is more emphasized, while in Xi, the international and cosmopolitan significance of Chinese literature and art is particularly emphasized.” In Xi's talk, he continues, “numerous world literary masterpieces are mentioned which indicate that China's literary and artistic works are not only produced for Chinese people, but also for people of the entire world” (1011). And he seamlessly makes the transition to Xi Jinping's “Belt and Road” initiative which he sees as serving all of

mankind, and not just the Chinese people. It is also in this same spirit that one of his most recent articles in English to date, “Transvaluing the New Cultural Movement: Toward the Construction of a Cosmo-Humanism” (2021), offers a re-interpretation of the New Cultural Movement partly underlying, partly issuing from the May Fourth Movement (1919), arguing that “apart from its revolutionary spirit and pioneering role, NCM has contributed to the grand narrative of global humanism” (6). And he adds that it has done so “with unique Chinese elements” (7). The start of the NCM according to Wang is to be located already in 1915, with the founding of the journal *New Youth*. The ideas vented in the latter he sees as influenced by a form of humanism introduced already earlier in Chinese literature and culture by Lu Xun and Zhou Zhuoren, who labelled it “literature of human beings” (*ren de wenxue*) (7). In doing so, Wang argues, they by-passed “the fact that China had its own tradition of humanism in its ancient philosophy and the thought of Confucius, who can be taken as one of China’s first humanist teachers and thinkers” (7-8). By now interpreting the NCM as having contributed to “global humanism” Wang brings things full circle: from Chinese culture and literature importing foreign, and particularly Western elements, spurning its own cultural, philosophical and literary traditions, to that same culture, moreover in the guise of the very same literary works, making an important contribution to a global culture encompassing both Chinese and Western art, philosophy and literature—once again a cosmopolitanism, this time a “cosmo-humanism.”

Clearly, Wang’s ideas with respect to Chinese literature and literary studies, comparative literature and world literature, and the relations between all of these, keep evolving. What is already certain, though, is that with his numerous publications, in Chinese but perhaps even more so in English, he has already secured not only himself, but also his country’s literature and literary-critical thought, a more prominent place in world literary studies than they occupied at the outset of his career. In this sense again, Wang’s career closely parallels that of China itself on the global scene.

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