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Preface to Translation and Sino-Foreign Exchange

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Harvard professor David Damrosch offers three ways to define "world literature," one of which is that "World literature is writing that gains in translation."[1] He emphasizes translation's crucial role as a medium of circulation in world literature.

The concept of world literature dates to 1827, when Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) introduced the idea of *Weltliteratur* in his conversations with contemporary scholars. Nearly 200 years later, world literature studies face significant problems. They focus too heavily on major European literatures and simply accumulate national literatures. This approach contradicts Goethe's original vision. We must break free from these conceptual limitations and embrace global literature.[2] In today's era of accelerating globalization, translation has become essential for shaping global literature and promoting exchange across languages and cultures in politics, economics, literature, and thought.

Throughout human history, translation has played a crucial role in civilization. For Chinese civilization, this is especially true since the modern era's "eastward spread of Western learning." The massive influx of translated Western academic works has deeply influenced the development of Chinese

1 David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003),281.

2 See Ye Yangxi 葉楊曦, "Zouxiang quanqiu wenxue de Dongya Hanwenxue: jiyu Mumo Mingzhi Hanwen Zhongguo xingji de kaocha" 走向全球文學的東亞漢文學—基於幕末明治漢文中國行紀的考察, *Shehui kexue* 社會科學, no. 1 (2024): 90.

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culture. Since the new millennium, "Chinese culture going global" has become an unstoppable trend.[3]

This pattern spans centuries. During the medieval period (220–907), Chinese scholars translated Buddhist sutras on a large scale from Sanskrit to Chinese. In the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1616–1911) dynasties, Jesuits like Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and Giulio Aleni (1582–1649) first translated Western religious classics and works on natural and mathematical sciences into Chinese. During the late Qing and early Republic of China periods (1840–1919), Western literary and artistic works entered the Chinese-speaking world through two main paths. First, figures like Liang Qichao 梁啓超 (1873–1929) brought works into China indirectly through Japanese translations of Western books. Second, scholars like Lin Shu 林紓 (1852–1924) translated directly from Western languages while making deletions and revisions. In both these cases, translation's role was fundamental for cultural transmission.

Translation has also been crucial for a foreign understanding of Chinese culture. During the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, *chinoiserie* swept across Europe. Missionaries in China such as those mentioned above translated the Four Books, which contain the essence of Confucian thought, into Latin. Missionaries quickly rendered these works into French, English, and other languages, satisfying Western intellectuals' taste for the exotic and utopian imagination. In the first half of the 19th century, popular Chinese works like drama and novels appeared in translation. The English translation of the Chinese Courtship "Huajian ji" 花箋記 (The Flowery Scroll) and the French translation of "Yu Jiao Li" 玉嬌梨 (Iu-Kiao-Li, Two Fair Cousins) influenced Goethe's use of *Weltliteratur* and his emphasis on universal humanistic significance. In the second half of the 19th century, James Legge (1815–1897), with help from his Chinese friend Wang Tao 王韜 (1828–1897), translated all the major Confucian classics including the Four Books and Five Classics into English. He published them as the 28-volume *Chinese Classics*. Through bidirectional exchange – translating Chinese into foreign languages and foreign languages into Chinese – translation serves as "an important medium for exchange and mutual learning between Chinese and foreign civilizations."[4]

3 See Editor's Note in Zhang Xiping 張西平, Li Xuetao 李雪濤, Shen Fuying 申富英, Ji Jianxun 紀建勳, and Wang Song 王頌, "Fanyi yu Zhonghua wenhua zouxiang shijie bitan" 翻譯與中華文化走向世界（筆談）, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲, no. 5 (2024): 5.

4 Ye Yangxi 葉楊曦, "Xueshu fanyi yu Zhongwai wenming jiaoliu hujian: *Wen shi zhe* zazhi renwen gaoduan luntan zhi shier ceji" 學術翻譯與中外文明交流互鑒—《文史哲》雜誌人文高端論壇之十二側記, *Zhonghua dushu bao* 中華讀書報, May 29, 2024, 6.

This collection focuses on "Translation and Sino-Foreign Exchange." It includes five representative research articles by Chinese scholars in this field. Li Xuetao 李雪濤 reconstructs translation's cultural function from a global historical perspective. His central argument is that translation is essentially a generative process of transculturation between different cultures. Li's article develops several key arguments. It emphasizes translation's philosophical element. Using the German translation of Feng Zhi's 馮至 (1905–1993) "Venice" as an example, Li argues that this poem clearly points to Karl Jaspers's philosophy of "communication" within the German context. This reveals how texts engage with foreign thought through translation and transcend single cultural limitations. Similarly, the Chinese translation of Buddhist sutras shows how translated texts must undergo adaptive transformation to survive in different cultural contexts. Translation generates a "third space" that belongs neither to source nor target culture, promoting civilizational renewal.

The remaining four articles examine specific literary genres through case studies. They move from textual analysis to historical interpretation, exploring cross-cultural concepts and exchanges.

Hong Yue 洪越 analyzes seven English translations of Wang Wei's 王維 (ca. 701–761) poetry in America and their scholarly reception. Hong reveals two distinct approaches to image construction. First is the reception by American poetry movements. The early 20th century Imagist movement and the 1950s–60s Beat Generation both simplified Wang Wei's landscape poetry into a model of "natural Zen spirit." This served their rebellion against industrial civilization and their pursuit of unity between self and nature. The 1970s translations continued this trend, emphasizing connections between poetry and painting. However, sinologists criticized these versions as "distorted" because the translator's voice overshadowed the poet's original meaning.

Second is scholarly restoration of complexity. The 1970s brought an academic shift as American sinology. New scholars criticized earlier translations as one-sided. They advocated historical contextualization to reveal Wang Wei's conflict between officialdom and reclusion. They also showed his social engagement rather than pure hermit status. These scholars opposed essentialist comparisons between Chinese and Western poetics, instead seeking commonalities like the convergence between symbolism and metaphysical poetics. Hong argues that Wang Wei's dual image reflects two modes of cross-cultural transmission. Instrumental transplantation involves local creators selectively appropriating foreign literature for their own needs. Scholarly restoration emphasizes historical context and complexity, resisting essentialist readings.

Ren Zengqiang 任增強 examines the most translated ancient Chinese novel – *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異 (Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio). He

focuses on how interpretations of "strange" (*yi* 異) have evolved across cultures. Nearly two centuries of European and American reception show three major shifts in the understanding of this concept.

Early sinologists avoided "strange" and focused on linguistic artistry. However, after Herbert Giles (1845–1935) established "Strange Stories" as the standard English title, "strange" became central. The translation tradition emphasized supernatural elements in cultural interpretation.

During the 19th century, sinologists used *Strange Tales* to map Chinese customs and social practices. From the 20th century onward, interpretations turned toward deeper cultural structures. This included ontological perspectives, gender politics, and narrative theory. Recent research has elevated "strange" to civilizational dialogue.

Ren argues that interpreting "strange" reveals how Western sinology examines itself through the other. The concept demonstrates cross-cultural interpretation's theoretical power. It has evolved from surface customs to cultural foundations, from binary opposition to boundary-crossing integration. "Strange" now transcends national literary experience, becoming global discourse for exploring Chinese-Western differences and universal human themes.

Zhang Zhi 張治 examines Spanish Golden Age literary translation through three frameworks. First, is temporal scope and periodization. The translation history covers the Spanish Renaissance to Baroque periods (14th–17th centuries).

Second is translation context and canon formation. Yang Jiang's 楊絳 (1911–2016) translation of Cervantes's (1547–1616) *Don Quixote* exemplifies literary quality over linguistic precision. The 1996 eight-volume *Saiwantisi quanji* 塞萬提斯全集 marked the peak of Cervantes translation.

Third is translation strategies and scholarly standards. Source text selection significantly affects quality. For example, Liu Jiahai's 劉家海 Xiao laizi 小癩子 (*Lazarillo de Tormes*) ignored Spanish textual traditions. Genre conversion poses challenges, as seen in lost wordplay in Quevedo's (1580–1645) *Historia de la vida del Buscón*.

Zhang identifies two imbalances in Spanish Golden Age translation. First is thematic imbalance – weak coverage of pastoral novels and religious drama, with only 5% of Calderón's (1600–1681) works translated. Second is an academic gap. Yang Jiang's acclaimed *Don Quixote* translation contrasts sharply with the neglect of lesser works like Delgado's (ca. 1475–ca. 1535) *Retrato de la Loçana andaluza* (Portrait of the Lusty Andalusian Woman). This disparity reflects how market forces influence academic translation. Ultimately, Spanish

Golden Age translation history represents a gradual expansion from canonical works toward broader literary coverage.

Gao Bo 高博 analyzes how 16th-century Spanish writer Juan González de Mendoza (1545–1618) translated the Chinese imperial symbol *long* 龍 (the Chinese dragon) as "golden serpent" in *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran reyno de la China* (The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China and the Situation Thereof). This created the misaligned pairing "golden serpent – King of China." Gao deconstructs this symbolic collocation through three arguments.

First is the religious-political logic behind translation choices. In 16th-century Spanish dictionaries, a dragon symbolized an anti-Christian foreign tyrant, while a serpent symbolized the devil's servant. Both carried strong negative meanings in the Western, Christian world.

Second is dual image construction under ideological influence. Mendoza's hidden purpose was to encourage religious conversion in Ming dynasty China through a subtle narrative that wrapped ideology in a utopian vision. This served Spain's colonial shift from military conquest (as in the Americas) toward peaceful proselytism.

Third is an upgraded civilizational framework. Unlike the Americas' "civilization-barbarism" binary, Mendoza created a "civilization-semi-civilization" model. This acknowledged China's material and institutional achievements while maintaining Christian spiritual superiority. It responded to Ming China's dominance in international trade while strengthening European identity.

Gao argues that "golden serpent kingship" reflects the intersection of Christian universalism and Chinese-Western political-economic realities. Its development reveals how early sinological writing served colonial expansion strategies.