



中外文化与文论

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中外文化与文论 Cultural Studies and Literary Theory

第 38 辑

中国中外文艺理论学会
四川大学中文系
汉语言文学研究所
主办

比較文學變異學



四川大学出版社

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前 言

所谓“穷则变，变则通，通则久”，文学变异的现象古已有之。从佛教的格义，王国维、钱钟书等的中西阐发、严绍璦对日本文学变异现象的研究到赛义德的“东方学”中关于形象学的变异学研究，对“变异”作为方法论及现象的研究就从未停止过，但比较文学变异学首次从学科理论建设的高度将其系统化、科学化、方法化。比较文学变异学最初由曹顺庆教授在2005年《比较文学学》一书中的第三章“文学变异学”中提出，将其分成译介学、形象学、接受学、主题学、文类学、文化过滤及文学误读。“变异学”自提出之日起就得到了广泛的关注及探讨，目前国内已发表相关论文近百篇。曹顺庆教授关于变异学的英文版著作 *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature* 的问世更是打破了世界比较文学学科理论以西方为中心的局面，体现了中国学者在比较文学学科理论建构上的独特见解。

The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature 由世界知名的斯普林格出版社 (Springer-Verlag Berlin and Heidelberg GmbH & Co. K) 于2014年3月在纽约出版。该书是作者关于比较文学变异学学科的理论在英语世界的首次亮相和集中体现。全书主要包括：绪论、影响研究的历史功绩及重大缺憾、平行研究的历史功绩与学科困惑、跨语际、跨文化变异学及跨文明变异学。世界比较文学学会前会长、荷兰乌特勒支大学教授佛克玛 (D. W. Fokkema) 为此书作序，提出“比较文学变异学是对已有研究范式——‘影响研究’和‘平行研究’不足的回答”。此书一经出版，就得到了国际学界的积极回应与赞赏。美国普渡大学 A&HCI 刊物 *Comparative Literature and Culture* 发表长文书评，认为该著作推进了比较文学学科的发展。在最新的 *Introducing Comparative Literature: New Trends and Applications* 一书中，多明戈、苏源熙等编者认为此著为“比较文学一种必然的研究方向作出了重要贡献”。欧洲科学院院士、国际知名比较文学学者斯文·埃里克·拉森 (Svend Erik Larsen) 在《世界文学》(*Orbis Litterarum*) 2015年第5期上发表书评，高度评价了曹顺庆教授的变异学理论及其对世界比较文学发展的影响。大卫·达姆罗什教授指出，此理论对变异的强调提供了很好的一个视角，

一则超越了亨廷顿式简单的文化冲突模式，再者也跨越了普遍的同质化趋向。欧洲科学院院士德汉教授认为，此著将成为比较文学发展的重要阶段，将其从西方中心主义方法的泥潭中解脱出来，拉向一种更为普遍的范畴。此著还受到牛津比较批评与翻译论坛重点关注（OCCT，<http://www.occt.ox.ac.uk/about>）。隶属于牛津比较批评与翻译论坛的杂志《牛津比较批评与翻译评论》（*Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation Review*），对曹顺庆教授的研究成果高度关注，特向全球征集曹著的书评。

本辑分为五个栏目：变异学在海外、变异学与翻译研究、变异学与形象研究、跨学科视野下的变异学及其他变异学相关研究，既是回顾，亦是展望，集中体现了目前国内外变异学研究的最新进展，以期推动相关后续研究。

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变异学在海外

World Literature and Translation/Reading as an Exchange of Alterity

Dian Li

Abstract: The story of Goethe's invention of "world literature" while reading a Chinese novel is an interesting one, for it prefigures the presence of alterity in the very formation of the concept. Whether we consider world literature as a theoretical recognition of writing to be literature or as a body of actual texts, we often frame our discussion in a language of duality: self/other, culture/cosmopolitanism, nation/world, etc. While the force of world literature has always been its alluring ideal of "one-world-ness", it is time for us to better account for its embedded alterity, which is what energizes world literature as a discipline of study in the 21st century. The place to start, this essay will argue, is translation/reading. Translation as reading is not only the material condition for world literature, where texts of different language congregate to form a "republic of letters", but also creates the site of an "afterlife" in which the textuality of world literature becomes visible and realized. Like writing itself, however, translation is not a transparent text for meaning. It is an exchange of alterity, but not its equivalent. The varying strategies in translation deal with alterity, thus invigorate the discourse of sameness and difference in the concept of world literature.

Keywords: world literature, translation as reading, alterity, textuality, worlding

Zhao Lihong (b. 1952) is a prolific Chinese writer of *sanwen*, or literary essay, a genre that does not find a perfect equivalent in the West. He is loved by his readers, frequently anthologized, and has works selected in school textbooks, always a high honor of recognition for contemporary Chinese men or women of letters. One common stylistic feature of *sanwen* is the author's allegorical elevation of a small life event that is either experienced or witnessed. Zhao Lihong follows this convention faithfully in his essay entitled "Xue Fa" (cutting hair), which, in Zhao's widely admired elegant and expressive language, describes his one-time visit to the United States in the 1980s. On the streets of Los Angeles, Zhao was struck by the variegated display of people's hairstyles: men with long hair, women with short hair, tightly braided hair, and disorderly hairstyles like a bird's nest. Of particular attention was the blond hair of a young girl, who was 16 or 17 years old; half of her head featured her naturally curly golden hair, which flew beautifully in the wind, but the other half of her head was shaved nearly clean to the scalp. The girl was talking and laughing, totally unaware of how she was being watched by a tourist from China. Incidentally, this kind of hairstyle is prosaically called a "half-shaved" or "one-side shaved" hairstyle in American English. Evidently Zhao was unaware of the "proper" name for this hairstyle in English, which hardly matters for the rumination and the crosscultural imagination that followed.

Standing nearby the sight of pure joy, our writer, the Chinese tourist, was not in the laughing mood; in fact he was besieged by the feeling of sadness, because he recognized (and translated) this hairstyle as "*yinyang tou*" (literarily, the head of yin and yang). *Yinyang tou* was a hairstyle forced upon certain people during the "Cultural Revolution" when Red Guards would shave half of the head of a targeted person (usually a member of the "black class" such as intellectuals or former landowners) as a mark of humiliation. Zhao Lihong immediately recalled the memories of his high school Chinese teacher and her teenage daughter being shaved to the style of *yinyang tou* in a public "criticize and struggle" session many years ago. Zhao writes: "For my associated imagination about *yinyang tou* from a young American girl to a Chinese young girl, my heart is heavy and my mind is confused; I cannot, for the life of me, make sense of my thoughts about this strange and

extraordinary experience” (Zhao, 16).

“Associate imagination” jumps out from the above text to pinpoint the excitement of intercultural reading, which is what happened with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe on that fateful day of January 31, 1827 when the concept of World Literature was born. The Chinese novel provides the text of “I heard the lovely girls laughing, and when I got a sight of them, they were sitting on cane chairs”, upon which Goethe ruminated: “There you have, at once, the prettiest situation; for cane chairs are necessarily associated with the greatest lightness and elegance [...] a girl, who was so light and graceful in the feet, that she could balance herself on a flower without breaking it” (Eckermann, 132). Even though Goethe’s intention is to highlight the universal values of national literatures, which questionably puts an obscure Chinese fiction on par with the renowned French writer Victor Hugo, it is evident that World Literature as a concept and a practice operates on the creation of new textuality by translation and translation as reading that negotiate the meanings of the self and the other.

In this connection, Zhao Lihong is not much different from Goethe when confronted with the presence of the foreign, whether through a live semiotic sign or a translated verbal structure. Even if he is unaware, Zhao Lihong is creating a text that calls for attention to itself as World Literature. In this text, he performs an act of translation, a translation not strictly linguistic in the conventional sense, but textual and cultural in its function. To be exact, he translates a cultural signifier and gives a new meaning for himself and for his readers. The new meaning recalls the word *yinyang tou* in the Chinese context with its cultural specificity but also refers to a cross-cultural context which expands the sign’s signifying powers among its various referents: fashion, humiliation, beauty, scorn, freedom, repression, self-expression, collectivity, conformity, and etc. That translation liberates the signifier, so to speak, rather than suppress it, and such liberation by translation, first and foremost, relies on the recognition of the presence of alterity in oneself and one’s reading positions in the intercultural space.

The theory of alterity has given a needed energy to the current revival of World Literature as a disciplinary force in literary studies. The word has its root in the Latin word “alter”, which means “the other of the two”. It

expresses an idea about ourselves and our conception of the world that has echoed through theories of humanities in recent times. For example, in philosophy, alterity is embedded in the phenomenological tradition that sets up a contrast to which an identity is constructed; it bestows on us the ability to distinguish between self and non-self, thus assuming the existence of an alternative viewpoint. For the French scholar Jean Baudrillard, alterity is a precious and transcendent element fundamental to the very existence of humanity, and he warns that its loss would seriously impoverish a world culture of increasing sameness and "arrogant, insular cultural narcissism" (8). The Indian American scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has opened a whole new discourse of postcolonial criticism based on a theory of alterity, which is actively employed to counter what she calls "Master-metaphors" in the orthodoxy of history writing. In the mode of poststructuralist thinking, alterity encompasses Ferdinand de Saussure's scheme of sign, signifier, and signified as they are related to each other but yet oppose each other to produce signification. Jacques Derrida conceives alterity as the cornerstone of his world of *différance*, in which the very iterability of signs makes possible the loop of human epistemology, however uncertain and problematic it is; it is also at the very heart of Lacanian psychoanalysis in that the self becomes one only through "mirrors" of other people around him. It is perhaps Gilles Deleuze who has given the strongest articulation to the role of alterity in the discourse of identity formation. In his critique of representation, Deleuze focuses on the concepts of difference and repetition in themselves, which are logically and metaphysically prior to any concept of identity. In discussing the primary effects of the Other's presence and absence, he argues that "the Other is neither an object in the field of my perception nor a subject who perceives me; the Other is initially a structure of the perceptual field, without which the entire field could not function as it does. That this structure may be actualized by real characters, by variable subjects—me for you and you for me—does not prevent its preexistence, as the condition of organization in general, to the terms which actualize it in each organized perceptual field—yours and mine" (59). Alterity, in this connection, can be expressed, most succinctly, as the otherness in the self; it is that unfamiliar familiarity when one views one's own culture nearby and the familiar unfamiliarity one views somebody else's

culture from a distance. In another word, it is an aggregate of semiotic signs that distinguish one culture from another.

The place for alterity to thrive is translation because translation at the most fundamental level is a willful act to seeking otherness. By definition, translation is the turning of one sign into another, traversing two linguistic and cultural contexts. Thus it serves as the intermediary of the two discourses—that of sameness and that of difference. Alterity shows itself through translation, but translation will not always present it in equal light. The translator, as the reader of one text and the writer of another, consciously or unconsciously, will be responsible for the showing of alterity. On the technical level, this is the concern of the long running debate of domestication and foreignization. On the philosophical level, this is about the very construction of alterity as a semiotic sign, which is to say, if it is a signifier itself, then it will need a signified to call it “home”. But does this “home” for alterity even exist? If it does, will translation ever find it?

There are two answers to these questions, one provided by Jacques Derrida and the other by Walter Benjamin. For Derrida translation is an unwieldy process and he is highly skeptical of the claim of a clean transference of meaning. In his influential essay “The Tower of Babel”, he writes, after a thorough analysis of the multiple meanings of the term “babel”: “Telling at least of the inadequation of one language to itself and to meaning, and so forth, it also tells of the need for figuration, for myth, for tropes, for twists and turns, for translation inadequate to compensate for which multiplicity denies” (218).

On the surface Derrida seems to suggest that translation is impossible, because translation is not fully equipped to deal with multiplicity, and multiplicity is the very nature of language. But “multiplicity denied” is not the same as “meaning denied”, for it is doubtful that Derrida would think translation is an ever shrinking process. If the translated work loses some meanings in relation to the source language, it may gain new ones in the target language. In both languages, meaning follows the Derridian law of difference and deferment, in which the signifier is always in search of the next signifier. The distance between signifiers, which Derrida describes as “citational”, meaning they cite each other to energize the “hermeneutic circle”, is where

alterity inhabits, because it is the very “otherness” of the signifier to itself that motivates the next signifier. In this sense, translation works just like writing, but as far as meaning generation is concerned, translation has the added benefit of “double writing” on both languages, in which alterity shows its traces not only intra-linguistically but also inter-linguistically and, one might add, cross-culturally as well.

In contrast to Derrida, Benjamin shows much more confidence in translation. He opposes the conventional equivalence theory of translation, and considers translation as a continuation of the original, but not its mere copy. The metaphor of “life” embodies his thoughts on the function of translation. He writes: “The concept of life is given its due only if everything that has a history of its own, and is not merely the setting for history is credited with life. In the final analysis, the range of life must be determined by the standpoint of history rather than that of nature, least of all by such tenuous factors as sensation and soul.” (71)

We may say Benjamin here is proposing a prototype of cultural theory of translation. A text worth translating must be considered from its place in the host culture where it is produced, and that consideration is the task of the translator. But Benjamin does not want to bother with the cultural specificity of either the host language or the guest language, and concerns himself only with the functionality of a translation, which is live in the sense that it continues the spirit of the original, or in Benjamin’s words, it is “an afterlife of the original”. In this connection, he offers what is probably the most famous pronouncement on translation in the 20th century: “A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium to shine upon the original all the more fully. This may be achieved, above all, by a literal rendering of the syntax which proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator. For if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade.” (77) This passage has been read and re-read by many scholars of translation, each coming up with his own interpretations. The poetic metaphor of light in the passage, no doubt, enhances its expressive power but also keeps it away from an analytical accuracy. Perhaps a Derridian close reading will help us untangle the web of

metaphors and images that Benjamin uses, or perhaps this reading will ultimately prove that to theorize translation is such a challenge that any attempt will fail at its own recursive referentiality. Suffice it to say that Benjamin relies on the concept of “pure language”, a “master signifier” that points to a basket of universal signifieds such as the aesthetic sublime, the spirit of language, or the literariness of the text itself, to organize his thoughts on translation. Of particular attention is his use of the phrase “all the more fully”, which affirms the distance between the original and its translation, a distance that must be measured by foreignness and by otherness. Thus, poetically at least, Benjamin makes alterity not only manageable but also preferable in the act of translation.

Of note is Benjamin's concluding thoughts on “real translation” in the half-sentence “the literalness is the arcade”, which seems to have received little attention by his readers. “Arcade” is a gallery of arches, decorations and games for the purpose of amusement and entertainment; “literalness” is the meaning of a word itself, stripped of its possible figurative or metaphorical association. It is odd, to say the least, for a passage full of metaphors to end on a word against the metaphor, but again the juxtaposition of “literalness” with “arcade” is itself a metaphorical construction and the analogy between them forces us to reconsider the range of signifieds in the context of Benjamin's whole essay in which the central argument is that translation is a form of art and exists for its own sake. It follows that “literalness” serves as one perceptible link between the original and its translation; it is the “echo” that reminds us the very foreignness of the foreign language. This is also to say in the “arcade of literalness” an exchange of alterity happens, profitably and unimpeded.

However, “literalness” is commonly associated with the semantic transference in translation in whose context “literal translation” often fares poorly with people who emphasize translation as a practicing craft and its goal is to communicate a predetermined and unequivocal message. In modern China, an aversion to “literalness” of translational textual transference was firmly established in Yan Fu's (1854–1921) famous three-word principle of “*xin* (faithfulness), *da* (fluency), *ya* (elegance)”, a precursor to a Chinese theory of translation and in Lin Shu's (1854–1921) mercurial rewriting of 18th-century English

novels. Both men have cast a long shadow over later translation theorists who valorize the sinicization of the foreign text as the ultimate aesthetic judgement of a translation, the best examples of which are Qian Zhongshu's concept of *huajing* (realm of transformation) and Fu Lei's notion of *shenyun* (divine spirit). Such a tendency to place the foreignness of the foreign language under "erasure" is what the American translation scholar Lawrence Venuti succinctly calls "the translator's invisibility", which he finds to be prevalent in the English translations of other languages. The translator becomes "invisible", Venuti argues, when he makes an conscious effort to create "the illusion of transparency" of his translation in which "the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or essential meaning of the foreign text—the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the 'original'" (1). The driving force for the pursuit of "the translator's invisibility" in translation, Venuti further illuminates, is the market tyranny of fluency demanded of the translator to be "adhering to current usages, maintaining continuous syntax, fixing a precise meaning" (ibid.). In this connection, what is "invisible" in fact is less of the translator as the author of his work but more of the very foreignness of the foreign, or the presence of alterity itself that a translation is supposed to make evident.

Venuti's insight marks the beginning of a shift of concern in translation studies that has been trending in the field since the late 1990s, a shift away from the techniques of language manipulation in the craft of translation, especially with respect to those used for concealment and suppression of the presence of the foreign to the making of translation as a cultural product, i. e., the condition of its genesis, the market of its circulation, and the assemblage of its reception and reading. It is this paradigmatic shift that has given rise to the call of "cultural turn" in translation studies by some Western scholars such as Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere. In this light, translation studies should not only concern linguistic transference but should instead focus on the analysis of translation in its social, historical, and political context to better account for the values-driven nature of translation as a cultural text. A similar reconsideration of translation has been gathering momentum in China

behind the efforts of scholars like Yue Daiyun, Cao Shunqing and Xie Tianzhen, whose prolific work on Comparative Literature and World Literature reflects the views that the value and significance of a translation are better measured in the difference between the source text and the target. These views are embodied by Chinese comparatists' sustained interest in analytical terms such as "creative treason", in a newly developed sub-discipline named "Medio-Translatology", and in critical positions associated with "Variation Theory", a theory of cross-cultural literary relations that has started to have an impact with the scholarly community in the West.

It goes without saying that translation is at the heart of World Literature as a discipline of humanities study, for it prefigures the presence of alterity in the very formation of the concept in theory and in practice. If literature in general and in essence, according to J. Hillis Miller, is a response to or a record of the world of the other and reading is a comparative behavior by nature (77), then translation is also the nexus between World Literature and Comparative Literature. In this regard, translation deserves all the scholarly attention it has received in the discourse of World Literature of our times. But for World Literature to sustain its critical vigor, we need to unbound translation from the traditional trappings of equivalence, which as Susan Bassnett has warned us, should not be equated with "a search for sameness", always an illusory linguistic effect, but instead should be perceived as "a dialectic between the signs and the structures" of signifying mechanisms (29). Equivalence as a dialectic means its split from a fixed signified in the transference of signifiers, so it is necessary for the doubling performance of translation in World Literature, i. e., first as text, which is the material condition for World Literature to exist and then as textuality, which is the effect of reading. In his influential formation of World Literature, David Damrosch has given a full account of this function of translation as reading and re-reading, which he calls "double refraction" (514), in which a new sense of "worlding" could emerge from negotiations between seemingly opposing and different conceptions of self and other, culture and cosmopolitanism, systematicity and infinite textual multiplicity, and global patterns and local manifestations.

Even though translation as an exchange of alterity establishes the text and