

Marginalization Inside-Out: Thoughts on Contemporary Chinese and Sinophone Literature¹

Carles Prado-Fonts (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya & University of California, Los Angeles)

Abstract / Resum / Resumen

This article argues that contemporary Chinese and Sinophone literature are in a position of double marginalization: exogenous and endogenous. On the one hand, they remain marginalized vis-à-vis the global literary system. On the other hand, specific works of Chinese and Sinophone literature are also repressed by the internal dynamics of the field. After having briefly explored these two conditions, the article presents a few (Utopian) tactics of intervention in order to modify this situation—especially in the Catalan and Spanish context. By analyzing this problematic, the article wants to suggest that, in the academic and literary sphere of the Humanities, the complex relation between China and the West needs an informed, ethical and critical interdisciplinarity.

L'article sosté que les literatures xinesa i sinòfona es troben en una posició de doble marginació: exògena i endògena. D'una banda, es veuen marginades pel sistema literari global. De l'altra, hi ha obres específiques de literatura xinesa i sinòfona que també romanen reprimides dins de la dinàmica interna del mateix camp. Havent explorat breument ambdues condicions de marginació, l'article presenta algunes tàctiques (utòpiques) d'intervenció per tal de modificar aquesta situació—especialment en el context català i espanyol. Tot analitzant aquesta problemàtica, l'article vol suggerir que, en el vessant acadèmic i literari de les Humanitats, la relació entre la Xina i Occident ha de menester una interdisciplinarietat crítica, ètica i informada.

El artículo sostiene que las literaturas china y sinófona se encuentran en una posición de doble marginación. Por una parte, se ven marginadas por el sistema literario global. Por otra parte, existen obras específicas de literatura china y sinófona que también están reprimidas dentro de la dinámica interna del propio campo. Habiendo explorado brevemente ambas condiciones de marginación, el artículo presenta algunas tácticas (utópicas) de intervención para modificar dicha situación—especialmente en el contexto catalán y español. Con el análisis de esta problemática, el artículo pretende sugerir que, en el vertiente académico y literario de las Humanidades, la relación entre China y Occidente requiere una interdisciplinarietà crítica, ética e informada.

Key Words / Paraules clau / Palabras clave

Chinese literature, Sinophone literature, marginalization, minority literature, technologies of recognition.

Literatura xinesa, literatura sinòfona, marginació, literatura minoritària, tecnologies del reconeixement.

literatura china, literatura sinófona, marginación, literatura minoritaria, tecnologías del reconocimiento.

Without the support of the humanities, Area Studies can still only transgress frontiers, in the name of crossing borders; and, without a transformed Area Studies, Comparative Literature remains imprisoned within the borders it will not cross.²

Now that it seems that the different disciplines of the Humanities have been invited—more or less kindly—to meet at a general crossroad and find new ways of enriching each other, there are certain problems and reflections that might be common for all these fields at this new

-
1. Partial research for this paper was made possible by a grant from the Spanish Ministry of Education (HUM2005-08151 *Interculturalidad de Asia Oriental en la era de la globalización*). I thank Seán Golden and David Martínez Robles for their insightful comments on earlier drafts
 2. Spivak, Gayatri, *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, 7.

conjuncture. Discussions about issues like perspective, cross-cultural transfer, politics and universalism—just to name a few—are nowadays as relevant in Comparative Literature as they are in History, for instance.

Standing at this interdisciplinary crossroad and watching how contemporary Chinese literature passes by, in the following pages I want to explore several features and dynamics of these literary works that, I think, may also be relevant for other academic disciplines, such as History, Anthropology or Translation Studies. By giving visibility and using Chinese literature as a synecdoche for the whole set of Chinese and even other non-Western cultures, it is my intention to spur the discussion about how China and Chinese culture should be taken into account in the Humanities in the West, especially in the Catalan and Spanish academic context. Considering the global and transnational society that inescapably surrounds their work, Western scholars are urged to consider new ways of approaching and dealing with their object of study, whatever it might be. But this new scenario is particularly critical when confronting (or when deciding not to confront) broad and vague categories such as “China,” “East Asia” or even “Asia.” The concerns I will develop next, then, want to help these scholars reconsidering their own position and framing their inquiries by being aware of the discriminations such a position may entail.

I will present two discourses of oppression that capture contemporary Chinese literature from a double flank. On the one hand, not being part of “Western” literature, Chinese literature remains unknown and marginalized *outside* China and the Chinese speaking communities. On the other hand, due to internal mechanisms of oppression—political, geographical and, as we will discuss, also chronological—there are parts of Chinese literature that remain equally marginalized from the *inside* of the field. More specifically, in the next sections I will examine some of the challenges that contemporary Chinese literature must face in order to move (at least in a Utopian way) beyond the “minority” label from which it is usually conceived—either implicitly or explicitly—from our Western perspective. Without leaving Utopia, these reflections would like to be translated, in more practical terms, into a non-restrictive inclusion of Chinese literature and culture within academic curricula in disciplines like Comparative Literature, History or Translation Studies, among other sorts of academic, social and institutional recognitions—especially, again, in the Catalan and Spanish context. But above all, these reflections would like to invite comparative scholars who do not specifically deal with “China” or the “East” to reflect on the possibilities they have and their ethical role in confronting or ignoring them.

At this point, three previous clarifications are probably required. First of all, “any attempt to define Chinese literature in terms of the old geopolitics will risk instant anachronism.”³ According to the theoretical approaches started in the 1980s, an exclusive conception of Chinese literature as only the writings from the People’s Republic of China (hereafter, PRC) would certainly be misleading. Here I will set the discussion upon the limits of the sometimes vague, controversial but, at the same time, useful concept of “Cultural” or “Greater” China, particularly in vogue since the last decade or so.⁴ I will consider, then, the literary texts *written*

3. Wang, David Der-wei, “Afterword: Chinese Fiction for the Nineties,” in Wang, David Der-wei, ed., *Running Wild: New Chinese Writers*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 238.

4. For a complete analysis of this concept, see Tu, Wei-ming, “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center,” in *The Living Tree. The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994, 1-34. A similar concept, but tripartite into the political, economic and cultural spheres, is examined in detail in Harding, Harry, “The Concept of Greater China: Themes, Variations and Reservations,” in *The China Quarterly*, no. 136 (1993): 660-686.

in Chinese language from the PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Chinese diaspora. This wide conception of Chinese literature not only affects its geographical boundaries but also, as we will see in the third section, its internal dynamics, as it calls for a terminological distinction between *Chinese* and *Sinophone* literature.

Secondly, the chronological notion of “contemporary” Chinese literature can also be quite misleading, especially from a Western perspective. Here I will focus on what Chinese literary historians have considered “contemporary literature” (*dangdai wenxue*), as the literature starting around 1979, at the beginning of the Open Door and Reform Policy promulgated by Deng Xiaoping three years after the death of Mao Zedong and the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).⁵ The chronological boundaries of the following analysis, then, must be set from the late-1970s to the early 1990s—a period that may have a certain continuity through the mid- and late-1990s, obviously taking into account the progressive changes shaping the Chinese cultural spheres during that decade, such as market economy, commercialism or political ambiguity.⁶

Finally, I will focus on the minority status of contemporary Chinese literature in terms of international cultural distribution and ethical consideration. From our Western perspective we should not forget that, in absolute numbers of readers and texts produced, Chinese literature is certainly not a minority phenomenon.⁷

Minority discourse, minority literature

In relation to the minority status of contemporary Chinese literature, Rey Chow has quoted Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd, who, after Deleuze and Guattari, wrote one of the first works dealing with minority literatures as such and who could also be our departing point. According to them, “minority discourse is, in the first instance, the product of damage, of damage more or less systematically inflicted on cultures produced as minorities by the dominant culture.”⁸

Based on a binary relationship between dominant (damaging) and minority (damaged) cultures, this definition is without doubt embedded in the postcolonial approaches that grew as a repercussion of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*.⁹ The hierarchical relations displayed by these

5. Scholars like Chen Sihe would also include in the “contemporary” period the literature from the Maoist years (1949-1976). See: Chen, Sihe, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue shi jiaocheng*. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1999.

6. Among the many works that have analyzed this new context, especially from a cultural perspective, see for instance: Barmé, Geremie, *In the Red. On Contemporary Chinese Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999; Wang, Jing, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng’s China*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996; and Zhang, Xudong, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms. Cultural Fever, Avant-garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1997.

7. In *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argued that minority was related to marginalized interests within a social order and not to being in a minority. Chinese and Sinophone literature, then, can be a majority in terms of readers, but a minority in relation to the dominant power structures and Eurocentric or Westercentric canon. See: Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix, *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure*. Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1975.

8. JanMohamed, Abdul and Lloyd, David, “Introduction: Minority Discourse – What Is to Be Done,” in *Cultural Critique*, no. 7 (1987): 7, as quoted in Chow, Rey, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, 100-101.

new theories are grounded in an economic paradigm, the derivations of which have reached the cultural and, consequently, the literary discourses. Fredric Jameson tried to analyze the consequences that this hierarchical world economic division had for the minority literatures in his famous “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.”¹⁰

Engaging his argument in a Marxist socio-economic framework, Jameson, in short, tried to re-conceptualize the whole notion of world literature, dealing with the relationship between “first” and “third” world texts. According to Jameson, the first world would include the capitalist countries, the socialist bloc would form the second world, and the third world would represent the range of countries that have suffered colonialism and imperialism.¹¹ Trying to explain why the third world texts remain outside the literary canon, he argued that third world texts “necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory,”¹² and it is because of this essence that they fail in transferring into a first world cultural and literary context. The examples he selected to prove his argument—all from Lu Xun (1881-1936), in the Chinese case—are, certainly, very suitable for his purpose. However, in spite of a logical reasoning and a good intention, his extrapolations remain rather simplistic especially when applied to the contemporary context.¹³

In “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory,’”¹⁴ Aijaz Ahmad projects an efficient critique of Jameson’s argument. Considering the impossibility to homogenize in time and space the three worlds, his argument spreads logically: if the economic-based tripartite division established by Jameson is false, the literary theory constructed upon it should, consequently, be false as well. Ahmad is concerned with the rejection of the determinism relying on Jameson’s argument, denying the fact that third world literature has no other escape but to be allegorical and, consequently, to remain out of the canon. Ahmad’s relativistic claim targets Jameson’s universalism that takes for granted the centered position of the Western canon.¹⁵

44

This specific debate illustrates how the problem of minority literature—and therefore of Chinese culture in many disciplines—is, in short, a question of *position*. Searching for the origins of the literary paradigm that nowadays is considered as the dominant canon, Andrew F. Jones goes back to the romantic concept of world literature or *Weltliteratur*,¹⁶ foreseen by

-
9. Said, Edward, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995 (1978).
 10. Jameson, Fredric, “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” in *Social Text*, no. 15 (1986): 65-88.
 11. The fact that, both the first and the second worlds would be determined by the economic mode of production, whereas the third world by the historical experience, is precisely one of the inconsistencies that have been pointed out by his critics. Moreover, with the advantage of a historical perspective, we could argue as well that the disappearance of the socialist bloc and the dynamics of contemporary transnationalism (including population, economy, politics, culture, etc.) have considerably blurred the tripartite boundaries between Jameson’s homogeneous worlds.
 12. Jameson, “Third World Literature,” 69 (*italics mine*).
 13. David Der-wei Wang, for example, points out the anachronism relying in Jameson’s argument vis-à-vis contemporary Chinese literature: “The best contemporary Chinese fiction cannot be classified as realistic in a traditional sense. For those used to seeing modern Chinese fiction as a supplement to social history or as a predictable Jamesonian ‘national allegory’ of sociopolitics, the fiction produced since the late eighties may tell a different story. It shows that literature in the post-Tiananmen period [post-1989] has not harked back to the old formulas of reflectionism.” In: Wang, “Afterword,” 242.
 14. Ahmad, Aijaz, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory,’” in *Social Text*, no. 17 (1987): 3-25.

Schlegel in 1815 and defined by Goethe in 1827.¹⁷ Jones develops the consequences that the dominance of such a concept—also based in economic terms—has had for the repercussion of contemporary Chinese literature.¹⁸ Jones's conclusion is that the walls that imprison Chinese literature and, by extension, any other marginalized literature as a cultural ghetto “were set (and continue to be held) in place by the very entity —‘world literature’— that was *supposed* to tear them down.”¹⁹ In other words, the Western canon based on the assumption of the concept of *Weltliteratur* functions in a Machiavellian way: while openly recognizing all sorts of literatures, at the same time—and by the same process of recognition—it establishes distinctions and hierarchical levels, taking into account its own centered position. For Rey Chow, the roots of this degradation are in “the rhetoric of universals, [which] in other words, is what ensures the ghettoized existence of the other, be it in the form of a different culture, religion, race or sex.”²⁰

External marginalization

Analyzing the situation of contemporary Chinese and Sinophone literature from the exogenous perspective of the global circulation of literatures, it is relevant to refer to what has been called “technologies of recognition” and their relation to world literary membership. Considering technology “in the transnational terrain of cross-cultural politics of power and in the national terrain of interethnic and intercultural politics of power” as a denotation of “the constellation of discourses, institutional practices, academic productions, popular media, and other forms of representation that create and sanction concepts,” Shu-mei Shih has referred to the “technologies of recognition” as “the mechanisms in the discursive (un)conscious—with bearings on social and cultural (mis)understandings—that produce ‘the West’ as the agent of recognition and ‘the rest’ as the object of recognition, in representation.”²¹ Drawing on Sara Ahmed's definition of recognition, Shih shows how “the logic of ‘re-cognition,’ the cognition of that which is already known and predetermined by political economy in mostly predictable ways” influences the marginalized consideration of Chinese and Sinophone literature in the global context.²² The *agency* of recognition is crucial here: *who* makes this act of recognition possible and, from that powerful and centered position, acts as a mediator and allows for the incorporation and circulation of a specific work into the global literary system.

Contemporary Chinese literature holds a de-centered position vis-à-vis the literatures that form the Western canon and act as a reference. “[E]ven when studies of a comparative nature are undertaken, the terms of reference are often provided by the West (...),”²³ and therefore the

15. Shu-mei Shih has also recently referred to Jameson's argument by pointing it as an example of “sweeping generalizations” made by scholars who, “good intentions aside,” show a “tendency toward generalization and ‘omnipotent definitions,’” even as they admit their “limited knowledge about literatures outside Western Europe.” In Shih, Shu-mei, “Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition,” in *PMLA* 119, 1 (2004): 19. Shih correctly observes that allegory is not a specific condition of a text, but rather a hermeneutical code used to read that text. See: *Ibid.*, 21. Besides Jameson's, another representative example of these Eurocentric generalizations in the context of World Literature also mentioned by Shih and relevant for our purposes is: Moretti, Franco, “Conjectures on World Literature,” in *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54-68.

16. Jones, Andrew F., “Chinese Literature in the ‘World’ Literary Economy,” in *Modern Chinese Literature*, vol. 8 (1994): 171-190.

17. See McInturff, Kate, “The Uses and Abuses of World Literature,” in *The Journal of American Culture*, 26, 2 (June 2003): 224-236.

18. For this purpose, see Jones, “Chinese Literature in the ‘World’ Literary Economy,” especially pages 178-183.

19. *Ibid.*, 171.

20. Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, 101.

canonization discourse is effectively produced by Western critics and academics who establish hierarchies according to imperialist principles, which try to justify the de-centered position of Chinese literature by presumptuously considering it to be inferior, underdeveloped or unsophisticated.²⁴ This process is usually unconscious, as we have seen in the Jameson's example, and this is what makes it more dangerous and difficult to confront.

Chinese literature, then, gets trapped by its own consideration as a minority, third world literature: "While the 'world' significance of modern Chinese literature derives from its status as minority discourse, it is precisely this minority status that makes it so difficult for modern Chinese literature to be legitimized as 'world' literature (...)." ²⁵ In other words, we could argue that the representation of contemporary Chinese literature in the West is a victim of restricted cross-cultural transference politics. Only the texts with particular appeal to the Western canon will be valorized, whereas the rest will remain unnoticed. This situation can easily lead to what Chen Xiaomei defines as cross-cultural "misunderstandings": "a view of a text or a cultural event by a 'receiver' community that differs in important ways from the view of that same phenomenon in the community of its origins."²⁶ These misunderstandings, I would argue, always reinforce the minority status of Chinese literature. Taking, for instance, the ways in which many Chinese literary works choose to move towards modernity (in terms of style and thematic, for instance), we find that they match perfectly with what the Western canon considers to be a thematic sign of minority discourse: "In its investment in suffering, in social oppression, and in the victimization and silencing of the unprivileged, modern Chinese literature partakes of the many issues of 'minority discourse' that surface with urgency in the field of cultural studies/cultural criticism in North America [and in the West in general] today."²⁷

Echoing Gadamer, Howard Goldblatt has also analyzed the differences between the Chinese authors' and readers' horizons on the one hand, and the international readers' horizons on the other hand. Goldblatt points out how Western expectations have been fulfilled by the contents of certain contemporary Chinese novels that were produced in other terms, creating then cross-cultural misunderstandings:

46

-
21. Shih, "Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition," 17. Her reference to the West and the rest echoes Stuart Hall's remark in Hall, Stuart, "The Rest and the West: Discourse and Power," in Hall, Stuart and Gieben, Bram, eds., *Formations of Modernity*. London: Polity Press, 1992, 275–332. Among many possible technologies of recognition that affect Chinese literature, Shih selects the academic discourse and the literary market as representative in terms of consistency and complexity. In the next sections we will basically remain on the same focus.
22. Shih, "Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition," 27. Her reference to Ahmed is from: Ahmed, Sara, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Postcoloniality*. London: Routledge, 2000.
23. Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, 123.
24. The Nobel Prize, for instance, would be one of these technologies that, instead of raising the status of minority literatures—by "letting them speak"—uses a tokenistic process, by which the Western canon tries to justify its false plurality. For an analysis of the relation of the Nobel Prize and contemporary Chinese literature prior to the concession to Gao Xingjian in 2000, see Larson, Wendy and Kraus, Richard, "China's Writers, the Nobel Prize, and the International Politics of Literature," in *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 21 (January 1989): 143 – 160. See also: Lovell, Julia, "Gao Xingjian, the Nobel Prize and Chinese Intellectuals: Notes on the Aftermath of the Nobel Prize 2000," in *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2002): 1-50.
25. Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, 101.
26. Chen, Xiaomei, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, 96.

(...) throughout the twentieth century, the socio-political intentions and applications of Chinese literature have frequently overshadowed the belletrist for a “foreign” audience; read more as a window onto contemporary events and society than for its aesthetic or entertainment values, modern and contemporary fiction and verse have tended to follow, and sometimes subvert, the political and ideological twists and turns of the nation. Whether because of the nature of the writing or because China, like so many countries, appears so culturally remote to Western readers, those few novels, stories, and poems that migrate beyond China’s geographical and linguistic borders attract an audience made up primarily of those who wish to “learn about China” in a more reader-friendly format than a textbook.²⁸

These hermeneutic difficulties have inevitably raised the question of Chinese writers trying to facilitate the understanding of their work in the West.²⁹ This would require them to write in the small room—in terms of style, thematic, etc—already allowed by the Western canon to adequate on purpose to Western tastes. Writers like Gabriel García Márquez, also from third world countries but who have acquired a prominent role in the international arena—precisely by the canon’s tokenistic nature—are usually taken as reference, not only because of their strictly literary influence but also as models for the international image that Chinese writers wish to have.

Internal self-marginalization

Analyzing the situation of contemporary Chinese and Sinophone literature from an endogenous perspective, there are also issues of marginalization that should be addressed in order to have a deep knowledge of the field. Whereas the previous reflections on the exogenous marginalization of Chinese literature in the global context are probably assumed (more or less intuitively) by scholars in the Humanities in general, these internal coercions may surprise those who do not usually deal with the contemporary Chinese cultural context.

At the academic level, contemporary Chinese literature has a “double marginalized nature” since it is “not merely unknown to nonspecialists” but it is “dismissed by the specialists of Asian cultures as well.”³⁰ Classical sinology disregards contemporary literature and places itself in a higher literary status. Scholars such as Rey Chow have suggested that this attitude reveals a generational problem at its origins. The new perspectives opened by the postcolonial and postmodern approaches inevitably engendered a melancholic disorder in the minds of the classical sinologist, who anxiously feels that “the Chinese past which he has undertaken to penetrate is evaporating and that the sinologist himself is the abandoned subject.”³¹

27. Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, 103. More specific examples of this cultural misunderstanding phenomenon would be the rurality in Mo Yan’s works, the violence in Yu Hua’s and Su Tong’s early works, or the irony and humor in Wang Shuo’s. For a brief analysis of Mo Yan’s case, see: Goldblatt, Howard, “Border Crossings: Chinese Writing, in Their World and Ours,” in Weston, Timothy B. and Jensen, Lionel M., eds., *China beyond the Headlines*. Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000, 327-328, and also: Jones, Andrew F., “Chinese Literature in the ‘World’ Literary Economy”: 187-188.

28. Goldblatt, “Border Crossings”, 327.

29. For a detailed analysis of the controversial argument in this sense made by Stephen Owen, and the responses by Rey Chow and Michelle Yeh, see: Jones, “Chinese Literature in the ‘World’ Literary Economy”: 173-178.

30. Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, 126.

31. *Ibid.*, 4.



Contemporary literature, in this sense, is the hypothetic oppressor that classical sinologists—scholars who nowadays still have an important weight in designing curricula and directing research interests—need to get controlled, oppressed and marginalized.

Also, and focusing at this point especially on the literature from the PRC, it must be noticed that women writers, authors from national minorities or writers from repressed collectives such as the homosexual don't have a voice in the (official) literary sphere.³² Since the Communist Chinese Party has appropriated the agency speaking for minorities in its official and national discourse—"a continual investment in minority, in suffering, and in victimization"³³—the real minorities and subaltern collectives, then, remain silenced. As Chow puts it in the case of women: "Chinese women are, in terms of the structure of discourse, a kind of minor of the minor, the other to the woman that is Chinese man [vis-à-vis the West]."³⁴ The same analogy could probably be made with the other members of the marginalized collectives or national minorities. In these cases, the parallelism with Gayatri Spivak's notion of the subaltern, unable to speak because her voice has already been represented by someone else, is probably quite precise.³⁵

This situation in the PRC literary scene collides with the transnational dynamic in which Chinese literature has apparently enrolled. Yet, although the Chinese works published in the West are by authors from different origins and characteristics (diaspora, exiled, woman writers), they generally display a specific type of literature—such as autobiographies, for example—that the Western market welcomes to consider and incorporate, in part precisely because it is oppressed (or even censored) in China. This is what Shih calls the "exceptional particular," a logic exercised by the Eurocentric canon by which "particular works cannot be universal unless they are exceptional." Therefore, "granting universality to the exceptional particular—the singular—thus in no way compromises standards of the universal, nor does it threaten the guardians of the universal."³⁶ In this sense, the internal marginalization within the PRC paradoxically favors the external promotion of these works, even if it is by acting as an obstacle for a fluid integration of PRC literature in the global domain of Chinese literature, and forbidding a literary richness that should be a way to oppose the exclusivity of the Western canon and its own minority status.

Another aspect that should also be taken into account is the usual tendency to consider as Chinese literature only the works coming from the PRC. Facing this source of oppression, it seems imperative to divide the literary writings in Chinese language into, on the one hand, Chinese literature or the works that certainly come from the PRC and, on the other hand, what Shu-mei Shih has called Sinophone literature, "literature written in Chinese by Chinese-speaking writers in various parts of the world outside China."³⁷ This distinction wants to "contest the neglect and marginalization of literatures in Chinese published outside China and

32. For two of the first attempts to challenge this situation in English translation, see: Sieber, Patricia, *Red Is Not the Only Color: Contemporary Chinese Fiction on Love and Sex between Women, Collected Stories*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001; and Martin, Fran, *Angelwings: Contemporary Queer Fiction from Taiwan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003.

33. Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, 107.

34. *Ibid.*, 112.

35. Spivak, Gayatri, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in Williams, Patrick and Chrisman, Laura, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 66-111.

36. Shih, "Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition," 26.

37. *Ibid.*, 29.

the selective, ideological, and arbitrary co-optation of these literatures in Chinese literary history. *Sinophone*, in a sense, is similar to *anglophone* and *francophone* in that Chinese is seen by some as a colonial language (in Taiwan).³⁸

Finally, there is another flank of oppression that could also be perceived as internal and that should be addressed here. It is not unusual to find many literary works that are commercialized in the West (or, at least, in Catalonia and Spain) as Chinese literature, but which are written in languages other than Chinese—mainly English or French.³⁹ It is generally in the Western areas where hyphenated categories or typologies such as Asian-American or Sino-British have not yet developed that these works hold the space of writings in Chinese language, a space which is both discursive and physical—they pack the usually meager and remote shelves of “Asian Literature” at university libraries and serious bookshops. There is an urgent need to popularize categories such as the Sino-Western and use them more commonly in order to allow Chinese and Sinophone works to circulate and gain consideration.

It is interesting to note the relation between many of these works written in English or French and some of the issues discussed above. Caught inside the “prison-house of recognition,”⁴⁰ these novels often use self-orientalizing techniques, stereotypes and exoticisms in order to win the complicity of the Western popular market. This would be the case of biographical memoirs of traumatic experiences in difficult historical times such as the Cultural Revolution or post-Mao China as popular in the American as in the Catalan and Spanish literary markets.

Tactics of Intervention⁴¹

Transnationalism is changing the traditional relationship of China vis-à-vis the West and, even more interestingly, the traditional centre-periphery relationship within Cultural China itself:

How does one classify a work produced on the mainland and published in Hong Kong with a Taiwan sponsorship, which receives its first acclaim from readers in the United States? In answering these questions, one comes to realize that literature from mainland China—the “center” of traditional geopolitics—is becoming decentralized.⁴²

38. *Ibid.* The island of Taiwan (called Formosa by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century) started receiving gradual waves of immigration from the mainland, especially from the region of Fujian, after being incorporated to the administration of the Qing empire in the seventeenth century. It remained under Japanese rule from 1895 to 1945. In 1949, following the end of the Chinese Civil War, the Nationalist army fled to Taiwan and reestablished the Republic of China in the island. Nowadays Taiwanese population, culture and identity combine different origins and profiles: aboriginal, Fujianese (from the first waves of immigration), mainland Chinese (from recent immigrations). This is the reason why Chinese language may be seen as a colonial language by some people.

39. Some examples would be novels by Ha Jin, Timothy Mo or Amy Tan (in English) or Dai Sijie, Shan Sa or Ya Ding (in French).

40. *Ibid.*, 25.

41. I accept the differentiation between tactics and strategies of intervention made by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everydaylife*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, as quoted in Chow, Rey, *Writing Diaspora*, 16. In simple terms, according to de Certeau, a strategy would be a more concrete, personal and “spatial” interventionist practice (a text, for instance), whereas a tactic would involve a more elaborate, essentialist and “chronological” challenge (something maybe closer to an ideological policy).

42. Wang, “Afterword”, 241.

However, although the transnational flux of economic capital may be re-shaping the boundaries between China and the West, and within China itself, and although this new context is changing the economic production of the literary works (as it is exemplified in the last quotation) the cross-cultural exchange, the flux of symbolic and cultural capital seems to remain unidirectional. As Andrew F. Jones already claimed more than a decade ago: “it is essential that we break that vicious circuit, (...) that we begin to envision ways in which we might promote dialogue and even ‘communal action’ directed against the perpetuation of a system mired in unidirectionality.”⁴³ This one-way road leads to a cul-de-sac when we try to find out specific answers, especially in the tangible and materialistic domain of the cultural industry: “I can only suggest just how intractable these problems remain, especially in the context of the publishing industry.”⁴⁴

The suitable tactics of intervention should reserve a crucial role for the translator and the critic—both Chinese and Western—specialized in the contemporary Chinese field. His or her mission, not only as cultural mediator, but also, in Jones’s terms, as “*entrepreneur*, a “go between” who must successfully market a product to the target audience” should be absolutely essential,⁴⁵ even more so given the restrictive and commercially biased politics of the publishing industry. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the current context. It would be highly beneficial if the professional and ethical commitment of the translator as mediator could directly influence the divulgation and promotion of Chinese writers whose works can fracture the canon by using literary weapons such as sophisticated techniques, experimental structures or unattended themes.⁴⁶ It is probably a question of finding a balance between the adaptation or adequateness to the Western canon and, at the same time, a strong degree of what in translation theory has been known as foreignization—already suggested by Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century as one of the two ways of translation (the other one being domestication) and, more recently reworked by Lawrence Venuti, among others.⁴⁷

50

In this attempt of balancing domestication and foreignization and being aware of the insidious ways in which the literary market works, Sinophone literature could perhaps be tactically interesting in order to win the appetite of the international readership. On the one hand, on a conceptual basis: as a way to break the stereotypical, monolithic vision of Chinese literature from the West. On the other hand, on a more pragmatic basis: given the historical and socio-economic background embedded in the Taiwanese works, for example—especially vis-à-vis the works from the PRC—they could present a context more accessible for the Western reader, in which he would probably find more complicities and identifications—assuming the

43. Jones, “Chinese Literature in the ‘World’ Literary Economy”: 189.

44. *Ibid.*, 188.

45. See: Jones, “Chinese Literature in the ‘World’ Literary Economy”: 183.

46. Writers like, for instance, Ge Fei (b. 1964), Can Xue (b. 1953), Chu Tien-wen (b. 1956) or Wang Chen-ho (1940-1990), would certainly fall apart the expectations that the Catalan and Spanish audience has for Chinese literature. The possibility of cultural misunderstandings in these works would always be present, but, in my opinion, is still more remarkable in the works of Su Tong (b. 1963), Yu Hua (b. 1960), Mo Yan (b. 1956) and Wang Shuo (b. 1958), which would nevertheless be suitable for promotion as well.

47. See: Schleiermacher, Friedrich, “On the Different Methods of Translating,” in Robinson, Douglas, ed., *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997 (1813), 225-238; and Venuti, Lawrence, *The Translator’s Invisibility. A History of Translation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

risk of over-domestication.⁴⁸ At the same time, however, from this pivotal position, Sinophone literature could forge a bridge between Chinese literature (from the PRC) and the Western market.

The world wide acclaimed Chinese cinema, in spite of its own restrictions vis-à-vis the international audience,⁴⁹ could nevertheless play an important role in helping the projection of Chinese literature, even if both fields are still somehow disconnected: “While these writers have taken heart in the rather amazing reception of Chinese films around the world (do, in fact, participate in the scriptwriting), they are puzzled that their books do not generate the same enthusiasm.”⁵⁰

The marginalization of subaltern literature within Chinese literature itself certainly is another important challenge to face. Even if the oppression exerted by classical sinology will, in principle, be reduced in the future by a logical generational evolution, and even if the classical dynamics of centre predominance vis-à-vis a periphery subalternity have already been challenged, once Chinese literature has been put into the transnational capital flow and writers from Taiwan, Hong Kong, or the diaspora have started acquiring a remarkable role, a new step is required. These measures can be seen as primary stages in a more ambitious project, which should arise interest in minority, women or homosexual writers, nowadays the more marginalized collectivities within Chinese literature itself. In this sense, fields like Cultural Studies are essential in denouncing and uncovering these situations, and claiming for a *prise de conscience* that should be the first stage towards a change. Similarly, another essential step in that direction would probably be the role of language:

(...) to make the traditional linguistic sophistication of Comparative Literature supplement Area Studies (and history, anthropology, political theory, and sociology) by approaching the language of the other not only as a “field” language. (...) We must take the languages (...) as *active cultural media* rather than as objects of cultural study by the sanctioned ignorance of the metropolitan migrant. (...) Indeed, I am inviting the kind of language training that would disclose the irreducible hybridity of all languages.⁵¹

Language (Chinese language in our case) should not only be conceived as a tool for understanding the discipline and its object of study, but also as a way to implement its institutional and social recognition in the middle of globalization, far beyond from orientalist and exotic approaches. As Gayatri Spivak has recently mentioned, the first step towards cultural diversity is, precisely, linguistic diversity.⁵²

48. In the case of Japanese literature, for example, the translation of Haruki Murakami’s *Noruuue no mori* (*Norwegian Wood*) into Catalan and Spanish languages (as *Tòquio blues* and *Tokyo blues*, respectively) certainly deserves a critical study exploring the impact of its degree of domestication over its amazing commercial success. The novel has often been praised precisely because of such a degree of domestication: “It is set in Tokyo, but it could actually happen in any big Western city” (slogan from “De llibres,” a Catalan literary TV show).

49. I think that we could talk about an example of minority discourse in this case as well, the main difference from the literary case being perhaps a more popular and commercial presence and consideration, a symbolic capital (take, for instance, the names of Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige or, more recently, Wong Kar-wai) that, interestingly, can lead Chinese cinema towards a new position—probably not as marginalized in quantitative terms, but, at the same time, with similar dangerous processes of self-orientalization and exoticism as in the literary cases.

50. Goldblatt, “Border Crossings,” 344 n11.

51. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 9 (italics mine).

52. Spivak, Gayatri. Public talk. Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, January 27, 2006.



Finally, Homi Bhabha has stressed the strategic role of the diaspora, which can influence the regulation of these “abnormalities,” both internal and external to Chinese literature: “the demographic and phenomenological impact of minorities and migrants *within* the West may be crucial in conceiving of the transnational character of contemporary culture.”⁵³ Rey Chow has also aimed at diaspora intellectuals as important actors in the struggle against marginalization, taking into account their strategic and privileged position.⁵⁴ She nevertheless alerts of the dangers that these privileges may have, what she calls the “lures” of diaspora: a desire “to play the role of the Other,”⁵⁵ easily falling into an orientalist paradigm, into a Western tokenistic spiral, which forces them to present themselves as minority figures in order to acquire attention and recognition. The Chinese diaspora intellectual, then, is placed under the same sword of Damocles that hangs over contemporary Chinese literature as well.

In sum, now that, due to the impact of globalization and transnationalism, it is time to reconsider a new paradigm for the study of literature and the humanities, we should activate a discussion on new ways of incorporating Chinese literature and culture into our Western discourses—not as an exception or a dutiful quota, but as a demonstration of a Popperian spirit of perpetual interrogation and critique:

A global literature should not be the old world literature spiced up with exotic or exceptional representatives from the “rest of the West” but a literature that critically examines its own construction by suspiciously interrogating all claims to universalisms, while acknowledging that any criteria emerging from these interrogations will be open to new questioning.⁵⁶

If, as Gayatri Spivak said, “[c]omparative Literature must always cross borders. And crossing borders, as Derrida never ceases reminding us via Kant, is a problematic affair,”⁵⁷ nowadays such a challenging imperative equally applies to any discipline of the Humanities—including, of course, literature. Let’s take that complexity seriously. And let’s celebrate it by confronting it with an ethical and rigorous work.

52

Works cited

Ahmad, Aijaz, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory,’” in *Social Text*, no. 17 (1987): 3-25.

Ahmed, Sara, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Postcoloniality*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Barmé, Geremie, *In the Red. On Contemporary Chinese Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

53. Bhabha, Homi K., “How Newness Enters the World. Postmodern Space, postcolonial times and the trials of cultural translation,” in *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994, 214.

54. Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, 73-98 and 99-119.

55. *Ibid.*, 110.

56. Shih, “Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition,” 29.

57. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 16. The reference to Derrida is from: Derrida, Jacques, *The Monolingualism of the Other*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, 57-58.

Bhabha, Homi K., "How Newness Enters the World. Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation," in *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994, 212-235.

Chen, Sihe, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue shi jiaocheng*. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1999.

Chen, Xiaomei, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Chow, Rey, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993.

de Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix, *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure*. Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1975.

Derrida, Jacques, *The Monolingualism of the Other*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, 57-58.

Goldblatt, Howard, "Border Crossings: Chinese Writing, in Their World and Ours," in Weston, Timothy and Jensen, Lionel M., eds., *China beyond the Headlines*. Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000, 327-346.

Hall, Stuart, "The Rest and the West: Discourse and Power," in Hall, Stuart and Gieben, Bram, eds., *Formations of Modernity*. London: Polity Press, 1992, 275-332.

Harding, Harry, "The Concept of Greater China: Themes, Variations and Reservations," in *The China Quarterly*, no. 136 (1993): 660-686.

Jameson, Fredric, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," in *Social Text*, no. 15 (1986): 65-88.

JanMohamed, Abdul and Lloyd, David, "Introduction: Minority Discourse – What Is to Be Done," in *Cultural Critique*, no. 7 (1987): 5-17.

Jones, Andrew F., "Chinese Literature in the 'World' Literary Economy," in *Modern Chinese Literature*, vol. 8 (1994): 171-190.

Larson, Wendy and Kraus, Richard, "China's Writers, the Nobel Prize, and the International Politics of Literature," in *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 21 (January 1989): 143 – 160.

Lovell, Julia, "Gao Xingjian, the Nobel Prize and Chinese Intellectuals: Notes on the Aftermath of the Nobel Prize 2000," in *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2002): 1-50



Martin, Fran, *Angelwings: Contemporary Queer Fiction from Taiwan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003.

McInturff, Kate, "The Uses and Abuses of World Literature," in *The Journal of American Culture*, 26, 2 (June 2003): 224-236.

Moretti, Franco, "Conjectures on World Literature," in *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54-68.

Said, Edward, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995 (1978).

Schleiermacher, Friedrich, "On the Different Methods of Translating," in Douglas Robinson, ed., *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997 (1813), 225-238.

Shih, Shu-mei, "Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition," in *PMLA* 119, 1 (2004): 1-29.

Sieber, Patricia, ed., *Red Is Not the Only Color: Contemporary Chinese Fiction on Love and Sex between Women, Collected Stories*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

Spivak, Gayatri, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in Williams, Patrick and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 66-111.

Spivak, Gayatri, *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

Tu, Wei-ming, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center," in *The Living Tree. The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994, 1-34.

Venuti, Lawrence, *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Wang, David Der-wei, "Afterword: Chinese Fiction for the Nineties," in Wang, David Der-wei, ed., *Running Wild: New Chinese Writers*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 238-258.

Wang, Jing, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996.

Zhang, Xudong, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms. Cultural Fever, Avant-garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997.