

GETTING IDEAS ABOUT WORLD LITERATURE IN CHINA

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Jing Tsu

A number of seminal figures come to mind when one considers the formative moments of world literature: Goethe, Hugo Meltzl de Lomnitz, Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, and sometimes Engels and Marx, if only to give global capitalism its due. On a more contemporary scale, Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, and David Damrosch offer models for a new world literary history and system, steadily moving beyond their predecessors. Given this constellation of dialogues, it is hard to imagine that the names John Albert Macy, John Drinkwater, Richard Green Moulton, William Lee Richardson, Jesse M. Owen, and Caleb Thomas Winchester would carry much discursive weight. Even less expected would be the important textbook value they served for the likes of Zheng Zhenduo, Zhou Zuoren, Yu Dafu, and other intellectuals and writers in China in the 1920s and 1930s who were trying to invent a modern national literary history, on the one hand, and to gain authority over a literature of the world, on the other.

These mostly unfamiliar literary scholars would not be strung together if not for their convergence on one issue: how and where does one get the idea of “world literature” outside of its presumed discursive lineage? To provide an answer via East Asia, one trajectory might be to polarize Western and non-Western conceptions of world literature by filling a “China” gap in an intended global literary history. Another approach would be to show the inevitable defeat of world literature in competition with national literatures by exposing world literature’s still provincial interests, despite the fact that it has cast its net wide. Yet neither would say very much about how world literature is less about literary texts than about how the *idea* of a globalized literature caught on, a speculative process of worlding that is equally powerful in its ideational as well as material contents.



After all, we're not just tracking the movements of translations, texts, and anthologies. To plot out a history of world literature seems to require more than just connecting the dots from text to text, readership to readership. One surely shows a lack of methodological imagination in thinking of world literature as the sum of all literatures since the dawn of time, hosted in some nebulous zone of contact. Yet the very idea does exploit a particular assured sense of being in the world in an ageless and supranational way. How was creating this confidence especially important during a period of national uncertainty in early twentieth-century China? An examination of this contrast highlights the force of asymmetry, rather than commonality, behind the projection of a global literary humanity. Why is it better to participate in world literature? How does this awareness of the superiority of the idea of "world," as opposed to nations or cultures, open up a space of emulation and dissimulation? Is it not enough to be just in the world? To approach these questions, Chinese intellectuals and writers pursued what I describe as a "narcissistic" notion of world literature. By this I mean less the familiar indictment of Euro-American self-preoccupation than the process by which world literature was made into its own audience as an intellectual project, emerging field, and a threshold of national reflexivity in the formative decades of modern Chinese literature.

Bickering about the World

To date, there is no consensus as to what world literature should be or what it should do for the world. Most recent discussions focus more on its shortcomings than its virtue. That the very idea of a more inclusive literary humanity should provoke such disharmony would not have surprised Oliver Goldsmith, having already foreseen it in the early 1760s. In a series of letters written in the fictional voice of a traveling Chinese philosopher Lien Chi, who was reporting back on the strange European social customs he encountered, *The Citizen of the World* was an instrument of social satire in the vein of Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu. Issuing a call for world literature closer to Goethe's than to our own, Goldsmith observed the real difficulty in establishing any literary community:

The republic of letters is a very common expression among the Europeans; and yet when applied to the learned of Europe, is the most absurd that can be imagined, since nothing is more unlike a republic



than the society which goes by that name. From this expression one would be apt to imagine, that the learned were united into a single body, joining their interests, and concurring in the same design. From this one might be apt to compare them to our literary societies of China, where each acknowledges a just subordination; and all contribute to build the temple of science, without attempting from ignorance or envy to obstruct each other.

But very different is the state of learning here; every member of this fancied republic is desirous of governing, and none willing to obey; each looks upon his fellow as a rival, not an assistant in the same pursuit. They calumniate, they injure, they despise, they ridicule each other: if one man writes a book that pleases, others shall write books to shew that he might have given still greater pleasure, or should not have pleased. If one happens to hit upon something new, there are numbers ready to assure the public that all this was no novelty to them or the learned; that Cardanus or Brunus, or some other authority too dull to be generally read, had anticipated the discovery. Thus, instead of uniting like the members of a commonwealth, they are divided into almost as many factions as there are men; and their jarring constitution, instead of being styled a republic of letters, should be entitled an anarchy of literature.¹

For sure, anarchy is not behind the current revival of world literature. Goldsmith's insight into the self-defeating practices of the literary world nonetheless has instructive relevance. One can well imagine his literary republic being populated by national specialists, all accustomed to fortifying a wall of expertise around their domains. The fact that there are well-entrenched disciplines that sometimes step on the toes of other disciplines, however, is not the cause of conflict. For Goldsmith, the problem lies with the people rather than the literature. The ever-effective debunking phrase "It's been done before" brings to mind the familiar battles between the ancients and the moderns, and it's a weapon that has not lost its luster in the ongoing attempts to reinvent comparative as well as national literary studies. A proprietary tone continues to animate as well the debates on the belatedness of modernities and nationalisms in non-Western parts of the world. Goldsmith's point is that rivalry and self-interest inevitably direct the world republic of letters. The literary space, however scaled up, remains divisive owing to the self-oriented inclinations that also tend to be its most prized attributes. Any new mandate for world literature risks being undercut



by the fact that a world republic of letters is possible, to begin with, only as a space of agonism.

This is where Goldsmith might seem dated. The dynamics of the global literary field, though still unevenly developed, have come to refunnel power and authority in different ways. Made wiser by the chastening decades of poststructuralism and postcolonialism, visions of literary humanity are moving toward caution and nonaggressive expansion. The current moment of world literature is not about open rivalries or monopoly of power but extended hospitality. Indeed, never has it been more important to go out on a limb to show accommodation rather than exclusivity. As would befit an impeccable host, it provides a forum rather than forcibly occupies a territory.

In this new scenario, the crucial work is being done behind the scenes. It is undoubtedly better, for instance, to be hosting the conversation on world literature than to be invited into it. The power of accommodation demonstrates one facet of a complex global capacity that I discuss elsewhere as “literary governance,” whereby influence is not limited to intertextual parallels but also extends to the manner in which one recognizes their importance and the very linguistic medium (i.e., English) in which one receives these common texts of “the world.”² Without a concomitant inquiry into these social and linguistic conditions, invocations of world literature risk an apolitical pretense of the political, a possible failing that some critics have seized on as the guilty guise of renewed cultural imperialism.

The reflex to cry out at any whiff of universalism, while a useful critical instinct, may not serve us as well as it used to. In part, that is because we are not dealing with traditional forms of domination coupled with hypocrisy. The current state of literary affairs is a more complex beast. The realm of world literature is ruled by civility and diplomacy rather than unilateral power, and access to it is facilitated via a sophisticated network of linguistic and cultural hospitality. In this scheme of things, universalism fronts a larger, complicitous cooperation that redistributes long-standing rivalries and equalizes cultural incommunicabilities. Even if this expansive effort does not really resolve old antagonisms and creates new ones in the process, it holds out the prospect of a leveled playing field. Every invited participant, in this way, gets something but not everything out of world literature.

To the question, then, of just who would willingly sit as a guest at this table, the answer is almost everyone. This was made plain by not Goethe, or any of the usual suspects in the ongoing discussions, but the first known Chinese francophone bilingual writer who, in 1898, first invoked the idea of



世界的文学 [world literature] in Chinese.³ A military attaché who occasionally spied for the Qing dynasty government and was instrumental during the 1883–85 Sino-French War, Chen Jitong was privy to the unadorned reality of international intercourse. Operating mainly out of Paris and becoming one of the most celebrated mandarin figures in Europe at the time, he was publicly recognized as the authority on all matters concerning the Far East.

On this particular occasion, in a conversation with the late nineteenth-century master writer Zeng Pu, Chen expressed discontent with the misrepresentation of Chinese literature in France. He lamented that the European sinologists viewed Chinese literature with more mockery than respect, with more contempt than genuine appreciation. Still, China's participation in French literary discourse, though admittedly on asymmetrical grounds, was better than not entering the latter's purview at all. Chen was willing to compromise. In order to enlarge its presence in the world, China had to participate in world literature. This meant foregoing her narrow pride in the riches of a long indigenous literary tradition in favor of learning from the masterworks of her Western others. In return, she would export her literary gems, through the important conduit of translation, into their cultures:

既要参加世界的文学，入手方法，先要去隔膜，免误会。要去隔膜，非提倡大规模的翻译不可，不但他们的名作要多译进来，我们的重要作品，也须全译出去。⁴

[Since we want to participate in world literature, our first step must be to do away with the barriers so as to preempt misunderstandings. To do this, we must advocate for translation on a grand scale. Not only should we bring others' masterworks into our language but our own works of merit must also be translated en masse into theirs.]

Chen no doubt observed the importance of reciprocity in world literature as a fail-safe measure against the accumulation of any single language's prestige in the literary market. Participation, on this view, is no simple response to an invitation. It exploits, instead, an opportunity for possible inversions in mutual governance, whereby the idea of world can be finessed into doing the bidding of nations. The medium of translation compels an implicit agreement among the different languages, as various national communities enter into a shared network of comparisons, trade, and extended self-interest. Of course, hopefully something more altruistic will be accomplished along the way as well. On this point, however, Chen leaves the future open.



The Examples of Others

Given how drastically the world was changing for China in the late nineteenth century, Chen's remarks were prescient. The idea of carrying out literary rivalry through a sustained warfare of open exchange underscored the strategic importance of civility. Hospitality was the new mode of conduct after the era of imperial warfare and aggressions. This new mode might have held its own, had it not been for the competing rising force of nationalism in East Asia. The fear of China's extinction in the world of nations injected anxiety into the professedly lofty goal of actualizing greater humanity.

Instead of helping to transcend the civilizational differences between East and West, translation came to weigh heavily on the side of China's nationalism-driven modern literature project beginning in the 1910s. The volume of translated Western fiction had already approached an unprecedented level in the popular press around the turn of the century. Lin Shu's pioneering efforts, to name the most influential example, portended the medium's new status; he produced more than 180 collaborative translations of Western fiction. Translation steadily took on a self-preserving nationalist flavor. This preference led translators to prioritize particular messages in the received novels. As Chinese writers and intellectuals became more aware of others' similar plight in the world, they drew certain distinctions in sympathy. In his preface to the 1901 Chinese translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for instance, Lin makes plain that the lesson the Chinese should draw from a tale of black slavery in America is to avoid a similar fate in racial demise.⁵ Rather than sharing in a globally circulated sympathy for the oppressed, in other words, his tone prioritizes the rejuvenation of the yellow race as the most important task.

While the works of Western writers like Zola, Maupassant, Defoe, Hugo, and Dickens continued to trickle in, translation began to take off in a distinctly ideological direction as part of the intellectual socialist agenda. Lu Xun and his brother Zhou Zuoren led the way in propagating a new perspective of literature in the world in 《域外小说集》 (*Yuwai xiaoshuo ji*) [*A Collection of Fiction from Abroad*] in 1909.⁶ It featured writers from Eastern Europe and Scandinavia such as Fyodor Sologub, Milena Mrazović, and Juhani Aho. Despite good intentions, the collection barely sold any copies. The lack of commercial success often frustrated the intellectual elite, whose sense of ideological mission was strong. The planned third volume never appeared owing to the low sales from the first two volumes, totaling forty-one copies in Shanghai and Tokyo combined. The manuscript was subsequently lost in a fire. Apart from the publication mishap, Zhou was



especially disheartened by the fact that one story by Polish author Henryk Sienkiewicz full of social earnestness appeared under the genre of 滑稽小说 [humorous fiction] in a translation different from the one he had supplied.⁷ Such a caricature of serious literature, he lamented, hindered the prospect of addressing worldwide oppression. “这事使我到现在,” Zhou wrote in 1920, “还感到一种空虚的苦痛。但不相信人间的心理,在世界上,真会差异到这地步” [“To this day this incident still gives me an empty pain. I can scarcely believe that people’s mentalities can be so vastly different in this world”].⁸

Zhou’s own social awakening led him to develop a perspective on 人的文学 [humane literature] in 1918 that promoted a basic share in humanity at large as a literary goal.⁹ His complaint about the Sienkiewicz story, however, points at a structural problem in producing and translating literature for the world. Entering into world literature can be a hit-or-miss venture. That one translator’s social message ends up as a comedic punch line in the hands of another bespeaks the greater peril that awaits any text, should it fall into the circuit of translation. Zhou’s dismay at the misreception of Sienkiewicz’s story highlights the difficulty in not only dealing with the foreign language of the text but also in translating the more complex coding of its genre or place in its own historical context. Entering the world requires that a text gives up a certain local context in order to be universally legible.

That the trees are sacrificed for the forest in this manner has, in fact, shaped the most pivotal moments in world literature. Commenting on Goethe’s well-known allusion to a Chinese novel during his conversation on world literature with Johann Peter Eckermann, aesthetician Zong Baihua of the 1920s and 1930s expressed shock and disappointment at the fact that Goethe should have taken such an interest in this novel, since in Zong’s view, the famed Chinese text was a second- and possibly even third-rate novel.¹⁰ Goethe’s Chinese novel, indeed, did not turn out to be the masterwork it was reputed to be. Based on a 1681 edition of a typical traditional romance novel, 《好逮传》 (*Haoqiu zhuan*) [*A Fortunate Union*], the original English translation began as a translation exercise assigned to a British merchant who was taking language lessons from a Jesuit priest in Canton.¹¹ In the same way that Sienkiewicz, had he known of the two competing Chinese versions, might have been appalled, Goethe’s choice would have offended many modern Chinese writers and intellectuals at the time who were, incidentally, on a crusade against precisely such traditional romance novels. At the same time, they were also the German literary master’s passionate advocates. Thus, this awkward episode in translation went more or less



unmentioned in all the accolades and tributes paid to Goethe in Chinese intellectual circles.

One might see this crossing of purposes as part of the disjuncture between the **desire for world literature** and the **imperative for a national literature**. From the perspective of Chinese writers, the outside literary world was divided between the works of the **European masters** and the **literatures of the oppressed**. Both categories deserved to be translated, but they **represented opposite ends of the national goal**. Nationalism's identification with the weak, though by no means simple, saw a world literary alliance not in terms of prestige but oppression and survival. In contrast, to lead world literature, in the way that Chen had intended, would be to match one nation's cultural arrogance against another's. In the latter case, greatness is assumed as a prior endowment. The choice was between positing an ideal China and coming to terms with her actual state of decline in the early twentieth century.

Both standards of comparison served a purpose, but it was the concern with the oppressed that increasingly preoccupied the intellectuals' global focus. In 1921, for example, when Mao Dun, an influential realist writer and critic, took over the editorship of 《小说月报》 (*Xiaoshuo yuebao*) [*Fiction Monthly*], previously run by the then ostracized Mandarin Duck and Butterfly school, also known as the champion of traditional romance fiction, its aesthetic tone changed dramatically. In that single year, translations comprised around 65 percent of the total fiction printed in the journal, more than half of which were devoted to the so-called 弱小民族 [weak and small races/nations].¹² A special issue titled “被损害民族的文学” (“Bei sunhai minzu de wenxue”) [“The Literatures of the Injured Nations”] appeared in December of that same year. Other journals followed suit, with a barrage of reports and more special issues variously titled “弱小民族文学” (“Ruoxiao minzu wenxue”) [“The Literatures of the Weak and Small Races/Nations”], “英文的弱小民族文学史之类” (“Yingwen de ruoxiao minzu wenxueshi zhilei”) [“A Literary History of the Weak and Small Races/Nations in the Anglophone World”], “现世界弱小民族及其概况” (“Xian shijie ruoxiao minzu jiqi gaikuang”) [“The Present State of the Weak and Small Races/Nations in the World”], culminating in the 1930s with the publication of anthologies of translated fiction, such as the 1936 《弱小民族小说选》 (*Ruoxiao minzu xiaoshuo xuan*) [*A Selection of the Fiction of the Weak and Small Races/Nations*], Shi Luoying's 1937 《弱国小说名著》 (*Ruoguo xiaoshuo mingzhu*) [*Famous Works from the Fiction of Weak Races/Nations*], and Hu Feng's 1936 《山灵：朝鲜台湾短篇小



说集》 (*Shanling: Chaoxian Taiwan duanpian xiaoshuo ji*) [*Mountain Spirits: Selected Short Stories from Korea and Taiwan*].

The sympathetic eye Chinese intellectuals turned toward oppressed peoples such as Jews, Africans, Poles, Persians, Czechs, Native Americans, Hungarians, Turks, Bulgarians, Koreans, and Taiwanese was not disinterested.¹³ Examples of the weak imparted a new and political mandate. It rallied global social distress to the cause of Chinese nationalism. In this light, it is unsurprising that Chen's 1898 call for world literature should have remained largely forgotten until only the past few years, even though the topic of world literature had already resurfaced in the 1980s.¹⁴ In a predominantly nationalist framework, Chen's views would have been seen as quaint and nostalgic. His aspiration to a transnational civility based on well-mannered cultural exchanges would have lacked urgency in comparison to the pressing concern with national extinction. To embrace an open-border world literary intercourse during the nation-building decades seemed fanciful. Against the serious, if ideologically narrow, consciousness of a nationalist and socialist literary orientation, Chen's world literature, seen as a strictly literary enterprise, was more of a leisurely and gentlemanly sport. This is an important historical reference for the current propagation of world literature, especially in light of the discontent it has already aroused in the contexts of minor literatures where the idea of a national identity might be an ongoing struggle, not to be dismissed as a *passé* fetish.

The idea of global mutual influences and shared literary humanity was acceptable in China only up to a point. When May 4th writer Yu Dafu acknowledged the influence of Western literary trends by saying that modern Chinese literature in reality belonged to the lineage of the Western novel, he thus more than just raised eyebrows.¹⁵ The sentiment was perceived by the majority of his fellow writers as bourgeois and did not sit well with them. A more balanced view of world literature and national literature, some observers thought, would have to integrate China into world literary history without compromising her. This mandate implied proceeding on an equal footing that was yet to be established. In this regard, the voice of Zheng Zhenduo, a prominent figure in the reCanonization of Chinese literature in the modern period, was heard with greater approbation. He finessed a one-sided dialogue with the construction of a world literary history that justified its importance through the national frame, and vice versa. When world literature was discussed in the 1920s and 1930s—but without reference to Chen's earlier call—it was accompanied by a methodology that reflected a concomitant interest in world literary history as a self-conscious discipline.



How to Write World Literary History

Between 1924 and 1927, Zheng Zhenduo compiled and wrote 《文学大纲》 (*Wenxue dagang*) [*The Outline of Literature*], the first important, systematic attempt at a world literary history in China. Zheng is, however, not usually remembered for this endeavor, as he spent his life doing what seems to have been the opposite: building a new Chinese literary history. His notable contribution to the study of popular literature remains a standard reference work for scholars. A seminal figure in modern literary criticism, Zheng produced canonical accounts of Chinese literary history from its beginnings. His broad syntheses are, of course, not without prejudices and omissions. He was influenced by new currents of thought from Europe and elsewhere, and his choices have been met with criticism. Stephen Owen, for instance, singles him and Hu Shi out as the two May 4th intellectuals responsible for burying the past in favor of a developmental narrative that culminates in the modern historical moment.¹⁶ For more than a decade, revisionist accounts have raised similar questions regarding the May 4th legacy. Most would agree that its “literary-historical judgment [was] a pure act of ideological will” and that its proponents “rewrote the history of premodern Chinese literature to serve their purposes.”¹⁷

The complaint that Zheng and his ilk made premodern literary history more homogeneous and therefore old and boring is a legitimate one. No anthology or sweeping account of literary history has ever won over fans and critics equally. Like others before him, Zheng set out to make his mark. Nonetheless, there is a self-defeating logic in the periodic reproduction of the quibble between the ancients and the moderns, or the premoderns vs. the moderns. Just as the moderns can always make the grand claim of having a more comprehensive historical vantage point by virtue of being alive later, the premoderns can always rein them back in with the irrefutable charge that the moderns had a past. It seems reasonable to let such obvious arguments cancel each other out, especially given the imaginable absurdity of, for example, the case where the modernists might accuse, in turn, the premodernists of misappropriating the modern epoch—which had not yet happened—for their own agenda. The limitations of this kind of debate, a debate no doubt familiar in every literary tradition, are particularly hampering when it comes to understanding the intersection between national and world literatures. It gives us only half a perspective in its focusing on an exclusively internal dialogue with one’s literary past. The missing other half, in Zheng’s case, I suggest, may be illuminated with reference to his attempt to write China into a global literary history.



Several steps led up to the compilation of *Wenxue dagang*. The idea first came to Zheng in 1920, when he was translating an essay by Maxim Gorky. He made the project explicit a year later in the preface to the inaugural issue of 《文学旬刊》 (*Wenxue xunkan*) [*Literature Trimonthly*], where he proposed that world literature and national literature were two sides of the same task:

惟有我们说中国话的人们，与世界的文学界相隔得最鸟远；不惟无所与，而且也无所取。因此，不惟我们的最高精神不能使世界上说别种语言的人的了解，而我们也完全不能了解他们。与世界的文学界断绝关系，就是与人们的最高精神断绝关系了。这实在是我们的非常大的羞辱与损失——我们全体的非常大的羞辱与损失！以前在世界文学界中黯然而色的诸种民族，现在都渐渐的有复兴之望了。爱尔兰，日本，波兰，吐光芒于前；印度，犹太，匈牙利，露刃颖于后。惟有我们中国的人们还是长此酣睡，毫无贡献。我们实是不胜惭愧！... 在此寂寞的文学废墟中，我们愿意加入当代作者译者之林，为中国文学的再生而奋斗，一面努力介绍世界文学到中国，一面努力创造中国的文学，以贡献于世界的文学界中。¹⁸

[Only we who speak Chinese are the farthest in distance from the literature of the world. Not only do we have none to contribute, we have obtained none in return. Thus, not only are we unable to communicate our highest spiritual form to others in the world who speak other tongues. We are also not able to understand them at all. To sever relations with the world's literature is to sever contact with humanity's highest spiritual content. This is truly our tremendous shame and loss—indeed for us as a collective! . . . Those nations who once dimly subsisted in the realm of world literature are now beginning to show signs of revival. Ireland, Japan, and Poland first acquired their luster, and now the Indians, the Semites, and the Portuguese are showing their blades. Only we the Chinese are still in the midst of slumber, making no contribution whatsoever. It is indeed our great shame! . . . From these lonely literary ruins, we gladly join the ranks of contemporary writers and translators and fight for the rebirth of Chinese literature, apply ourselves to introducing world literature to China, on the one hand, and to creating the literature of China, on the other, in order to contribute to the world's literary domain.]



The tone of dejection suggested China occupied a position of recognized disadvantage. Few starting points can be more humble than “lonely literary ruins.” Zheng’s invocation, however, was less self-deprecating than it sounded. The spirit of scientific thinking was then sweeping through China, prompting intellectuals to look for a new epistemic authority in all modes of inquiry. Literature was no exception. Along with Luo Jialun, Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu, and Lu Xun, Zheng wished to radically depart from how traditional Chinese literature had been transmitted, interpreted, and anthologized. Existing accounts, he noted, had either followed old periodization schemes or were insufficient in their coverage.¹⁹ Zheng began to consult a wide array of recent Western historiographical and conceptual models that might allow him to envision a new literary history. During those years, he steadily built up confidence in his views, and they came from unobvious sources.

A few examples demonstrate the unusual selection. In 1921, Zheng wrote a review essay of Caleb Thomas Winchester’s 1899 *Some Principles of Literary Criticism*. Relying on a 1923 Chinese translation, Zheng took note of Winchester’s emphasis on literature’s eternal reflection of individual emotions.²⁰ He was particularly struck by the following passage: “While any single emotion is transient, the general character of human emotion does not greatly alter. Each successive wave of feeling rises for its little instant, breaks and passes; but the ocean of waves rolls steadily on though the ages.”²¹ “文学可以有永久的价值与兴趣,” Zheng marvels, “就是因为人们情绪的固定不变之故呀” [“The reason literature can possess lasting value and hold our interest is that human emotions don’t change!”].²² Through the imagination, literature enables a broad communion that spans different generations and nations of readers. ‘Zheng deduces from that a working definition: “文学是人们的情绪与最高思想联合的‘想象’的‘表现,’而它的本身又是具有永久的艺术的价值与兴趣的” [“Literature is the ‘expression’ of the ‘imagination’ that is the union of human emotions and the highest intellect. Moreover, literature itself possesses an enduring artistic value and interest”].²³ This capacity, importantly, will come to have a global relevance for Zheng.

As was so often the case in early modern China, inspirations for new paradigms were the accidental production of their sources. In contrast to the impression he made on Zheng, Winchester was not a particularly outstanding critic in his own context. A professor of English at Wesleyan, he was a favored teacher and colleague. His accomplishments, though remembered with fondness, enjoyed more of a local following than



professional peer esteem. *Some Principles of Literary Criticism* was said to be “a sound discussion of formal literary principles,” though the colleague who expressed the accolade at his memorial service preferred his more entertaining *A Group of English Essayists of the Early Nineteenth Century*.²⁴ Endowed with “Yankee shrewdness,” Winchester was a man for whom “religion and morality were an enveloping atmosphere, which rendered dogma superfluous.”²⁵ His parson background was said to shed light on his moderate opinions and general open-mindedness. These details, however, blended into the background from afar. For Zheng, even a mild representative was a valuable window into an alternative paradigm for interpreting literature. He especially noted Winchester’s defense of the study of literature against the indiscriminate application of scientific rationality. Winchester’s explication of the centrality of the imagination helped Zheng affirm the primacy of individual taste over a received cultural canon. At the same time, Winchester’s emphasis on the complementarity between the intellect and emotions, history and the present, spoke to Zheng’s generally judicious approach as a critic.

Indeed, scholars often overlook the unprecedented significance of Chinese writers’ attempt to approach literature according to an objective method that would befit the general spirit of modern science. Studies of Chinese intellectuals’ encounters with foreign knowledge largely subsume the experience under the explanatory framework of translation as cultural appropriation, leaving no room for discussion as to what forms of cultures are assumed the process or why translations singularly guarantee the occurrence of appropriation. In fact, the development of May 4th literary criticism resonated with a larger disciplinary reorganization that was impacting many traditional branches of knowledge at the same time. In the process, some hoped that literary studies would usher in a new era of methodological rigor that would help redefine other areas of knowledge. This prospect had tremendous implications for the spiritual and cultural transformation of modern China as a whole.

Throughout the 1920s, Zheng continued to comment on the works of various, mostly American, literary critics, extracting different positive lessons and negative examples from their syntheses. Many of these works reflected the then trend of giving a totalizing account of all subject matters, or, as one American observer at the time put it, of “round[ing] up knowledge, throw[ing] it and hog-tie[ing] it.”²⁶ Bonnie McDougall has noted a similar desire operative in China at the time, a wish to acquire concise, textbook knowledge on all subjects in the humanities from every part of the world.²⁷ Chinese writers, in other words, were looking to the weak and small as well



as the strong and powerful. They were negotiating simultaneous visions of possible future and demise.

Expectedly, they grumbled at the underrepresentation of China in the world picture. In 1923, Zheng briefly introduced William L. Richardson and Jesse M. Owen's *Literature of the World: An Introductory Study* (1922).²⁸ Of its 526 pages, Zheng notes, only two were devoted to China and Japan.²⁹ Yet he was not concerned with just his own areas of interest. Zheng also took note of the study's other methodological flaws. He pointed out Richardson and Owen's apparent prejudice against modern writers, because they mentioned Gabriele D'Annunzio only in brief in the treatment of Italian literature. Yet, Zheng was pleased to note, they paid special attention to Spanish writer Jacinto Benavente y Martinez. Comparing *Literature of the World* to other works, Zheng at least approves of the former's attempt at a new framework and its more even representation.³⁰

Chinese readers like Zheng Zhenduo were among the distant interlocutors who initiated parallel conversations about the intrinsic value of literature, extending the idea outward into the world. This circulation, however, did not quite equate to either a coherent, globally recognized form of literary exchange or a facile fulfillment of cosmopolitanism. Ideas and inspirations came in and out of focus, disarticulate rather than forming a continuous circuit. One might understand this uneven process as how worlding happens, as offshoots of unformed ideas get caught up in the momentum of a global valence. The interest in world literature in China was, in this way, no less than a general attempt to transform humanistic studies in relation to the world as well as in relation to China's past. Intellectuals tried to institute literature as an independent field of knowledge and to transform it into a different framework for understanding. This concern is reflected in Zheng's preoccupation with two works in particular: Richard Green Moulton's *World Literature and Its Place in General Culture* (1911) and *The Modern Study of Literature* (1915).

Zheng's general interest in Western literary criticism stemmed from how it argued and upheld a notion of pure literature. Moulton's works, in particular, offered him specific cues. *The Modern Study of Literature* was written during a time of methodological change in literary studies in the United States. Moulton was, for most of his career, a professor of literary theory and interpretation at the University of Chicago. An attempt at giving literary criticism an objective vocation, the study was a response to a perceived "defect." Moulton thought that literary studies, unlike other areas of inquiry at the time, lacked "any instinct for inductive observation, such as must be the basis for criticism of any other kind."³¹



All his previous works, Moulton claims, served as a preamble to this proposed paradigm shift. His earlier *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (1901) had already hinted at the new reevaluation with the subtitle “A Popular Illustration of the Principles of Scientific Criticism.” Both Sarah Lawall and Eugene Williamson have pointed out the striking prescience in his championing of “inductive criticism.”³² According to Moulton, “inductive interpretation makes its appeal neither to the reader nor to the critic, but always to the literature itself,” transcending the subjective variabilities that characterize the “judicial” process, colored by tastes and individual preferences.³³ Building an “alphabet of science” for the study of literature, Moulton proposes the following axiom: “Interpretation is of the nature of hypothesis, tested by the degree in which it explains the content of the literary work.”³⁴ The desire to approach **literature as a science** is expressed without ambiguity. At the same time, literature offers something more:

Where is there to be found the special science or the art of human life? Many sciences touch life, but they deal only with particular aspects of it: biology treats the physical basis of life, sociology treats human life in aggregations, psychology and ethics are concerned with only single elements of life. The question is of LIFE as a concrete whole, of what we mean when we speak of “seeing life.” It is literature—in the most miscellaneous sense of the word, alike poetry and prose—that stands as the only organ for the science and practical art of LIFE.³⁵

The defense of literature as the living science of life reverberates in our current interest in renewing the ties between the biological human and the humanities, as literary studies gravitate toward a dialogue with the sciences. Moulton’s work also has an important relevance as a precursor to other subsequent developments in literary criticism. Williamson points to the echo of Moulton’s scientific literary criticism in Northrop Frye’s critique of “the debauchery of judiciousness” and concomitant promotion of “the total acceptance of the data of literature.”³⁶ Moulton’s emphasis on the intrinsic focus of literary criticism is revisited in Wellek and Warren’s *Theory of Literature*.³⁷ His point-by-point attack on “fallacies” further anticipated the theoretical cornerstone of New Criticism, as was captured in William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley’s “The Intentional Fallacy.”³⁸ The prescience of his ideas in retrospect is not as important as the fact that they demonstrate the general mood of American literary criticism in the first half of the twentieth century. From afar, Zheng Zhenduo perked up his ears,



heeding the call for a “pure study of literature” and the unifying approach toward literary studies it aspired to.³⁹

In an important 1922 essay, “文学统一观” (“Wenxue de tongyi guan”) [“A View on the Unification of Literature”], Zheng Zhenduo first explains that by 统一 [unification] he means, first and foremost, a disciplinary cohesiveness that is accompanied by depth of inquiry. How strange is it, he remarks, that universities often have a French or German literature department, but not a literature department. Other disciplines like philosophy enjoy a general unifying rubric as well as subfields like ancient Greek philosophy. The courtesy extended to philosophy of allowing it to stand alone as a proper object of inquiry, independent of cultural provenance or time period, is rarely extended to literature, which inevitably has to be attached to an author, historical frame, language, politics, and so on. In answer to those who suggest that “comparative literature” already fills this lacuna, Zheng points out that comparative analyses often take cross-sections and selected aspects as their basis of reference rather than complete literary traditions, thus still falling short of a truly unified methodology toward literary studies. And, how odd, he comments as an afterthought, that a field should name itself comparative literature, when one can scarcely imagine “comparative philosophy” or “comparative economics.” The need for comparison, on his view, somehow betrays the insufficient purpose of the field itself.

Zheng makes it plain that the shortcomings of the literary criticism of his time is that its practitioners often see the trees or the forest but not both: “知道一个人的文学,却不知道他的在文学史上的地位;知道一个时代的文学,却不知道他的前面的来源与后来的结果;知道一个地方的文学,却不知道他与别的地方的关系” [“We would know one author’s writings but not its place in literary history; we would know the literature of a period but not know what became before or after; we might know the literature of a specific locality but not its relation to other places”].⁴⁰ That the field of literary studies lacks a more complete view strikes him as a weakness in the conceptualization of literature itself.

If the reader thinks she or he hears the voice of Moulton behind this, that suspicion would be well founded. At the very beginning of *World Literature and Its Place in General Culture*, in a chapter entitled “The Unity of Literature and the Conception of World Literature,” Moulton makes the exact same remarks about the disciplinary problems of literature as an object of study, using the examples that Zheng then reproduced. Moulton singles out “the failure to recognize the unity of all literature” as the reason why “the study of literature, in any adequate sense, has yet to begin.”⁴¹ Zheng was



essentially paraphrasing Moulton but doesn't refer him by name yet. By the time he does, about halfway through the essay, he has already built his case with Moulton's terms. Finally crediting Moulton with having come up with a "similar" idea, Zheng introduces him in the following way:

在这个地方，有一个问题似乎也应该连带的提起，就是：莫尔顿也是极力主张文学的统一观的——他大概是世界中主张这个学说的最初的人，——他的文学统一观如何？与上面所讲的是同呢还是不同呢？莫尔顿之文学统一观的要求的呼声，同我是一样的，并且我的这种观念也是最初的由他唤起的，我殊觉感谢他‘但是他的统一观，却是不彻底的，与我的颇为不同；我却是不能赞成他的。⁴²

[At this juncture, there is a problem that we should probably also discuss; that is, Moulton also expressly supports a unitary view of literature—he is probably the first person in the world to propose this scholarly view. What, then, is his view of unification like? Is it *similar* or *different* from what I discussed above? Moulton's call for a unitary conception of literature is the *same as mine*. And *my idea, moreover, was first inspired by him. I am indebted to him. At the same time, he doesn't take his view of unification far enough. It is quite different from mine, and I cannot endorse it.*] (emphasis added)

In attempting to distance himself from Moulton despite his clear borrowing, in expressing his thanks to withdrawing his endorsement, Zheng is ambivalent at best. More interesting still is the acknowledgment as a form of address. Counting himself among the scholars of world literature, Zheng brings the imagined dialogue to life. Having a long-distance conversation with world literature, in his case, is like signing an agreement, the terms of which are too general to be contested. This makes it easier for Zheng to assume a common discourse, especially when the selected interlocutor is absent and cannot object. Disagreement, moreover, is hardly the issue here. Though Zheng claims not to fully support Moulton's ideas, his view is not "quite different" or new. How, then, does Zheng invert the terms of engagement to make Moulton's view of world literature look less exciting and worldly than his view, which is in fact informed by Moulton's?

Zheng exploits, as it turns out, an embedded local advantage. He quotes Moulton at length, then offers a better account. The passage in question is



from the same beginning chapter of *World Literature*, where Moulton makes an instructive distinction between “world literature” and “universal literature”:

It must be admitted that the term “world literature” may legitimately be used in more than one sense; I am throughout attaching to it a fixed and special significance. I take a distinction between Universal Literature and World Literature. Universal Literature can only mean the sum total of all literatures. World Literature, as I use the term, is this Universal Literature seen in perspective from a given point of view, presumably the national standpoint of the observer. The difference between the two may be illustrated by the different ways in which the science of Geography and the art of Landscape might deal with the same physical particulars. We have to do with a mountain ten thousand feet high, a tree-fringed pond not a quarter of an acre in extent, a sloping meadow rising perhaps to a hundred feet, a lake some four hundred miles in length. So far as Geography would take cognizance of these physical features, they must be taken all in their exact dimensions. But Landscape would begin by fixing a point of view: from that point the elements of the landscape would be seen to modify their relative proportions. The distant mountain would diminish to a point of snow; the pond would become the prominent centre, every tree distinct; the meadow would have some softening of remoteness; on the other side the huge lake would appear a silver streak upon the horizon. By a similar kind of perspective, World Literature will be a different thing to the Englishman and to the Japanese: the Shakespeare who bulks so large to the Englishman will be a small detail to the Japanese, while the Chinese literature which makes the foreground in the one literary landscape may be hardly discernible in the other. World Literature will be a different thing even to the Englishman and the Frenchman; only in this case the similar history of the two peoples will make the constituent elements of the two landscapes much the same, and the difference will be mainly in distribution of the parts. More than this, World Literature may be different for different individuals of the same nation: obviously, one man will have a wider look, taking in more of universal literature; or it may be that the individuality of the student, or of some teacher who has influenced him, has served as a lens focusing the multiplex particulars of the whole in its own individual arrangement. In each



case the World Literature is a real unity: and it is a unity which is a reflection of the unity of all literature.⁴³

After quoting this extended passage from Moulton, Zheng makes the following critique:

莫尔顿的这种见解实是极不彻底的;他既然承认文学有统一研究的必要,为什么仍然不把人类当做观察的出发点而以一国为观察的出发点呢?以一国为观察的出发点,那末,必如画风景图一样,要把一个极大的山峰,只画成一点,把一个极大的湖水,只画成一线,把一个不及四分之一亩的小池当作研究的中心了。如此,仍然是部分的研究,不是全体的统一的研究了。如此怎么能讲得到以文学为一个整体,为一个独立的研究的对象呢?莫尔顿的文学统一观,所以,我以为,虽是较别的只研究一国的文学,一个时代的文学,一个种类的文学或一个人的文学的稍为进步些,然而仍然是十分不彻底的。研究文学,就应该以“文学”——全体的文学——为立场。什么阻隔文学的统一研究的国界及其他一切的阻碍物都应该一律打破!⁴⁴

[Moulton's not thorough enough in his understanding. Since he acknowledges the necessity of studying literature in a unitary way, then why not take the human, rather than a nation, as the departing point of the perspective? If proceeding from the viewpoint of a nation, then, like Landscape, an extremely high mountain peak would be represented by a dot and a very large lake would become a line, while a small pond that is not even a quarter of an acre would be the perspectival center. In this way, it is still a partial and not a unitary study of the entire body. How can we then speak of taking literature as a whole, as the object of an independent inquiry? Moulton's view, I believe, is still not fully complete, though his approach is a slight improvement over approaches that study the literature of a mere nation, epoch, genre, or author. To study literature, one ought to take "literature"—the entire body of literature—as the premise. One should smash the national borders that obstruct the unitary study of literature and all other such impediments!]

Zheng seizes on Moulton's reliance on the "national standpoint" as the weak link. As is made clear throughout his books, however, Moulton neither hides nor disguises the fact that he is promoting world literature from an English point of view.⁴⁵ By taking issue with this strawman, Zheng



effortlessly distinguishes himself from Moulton. He accomplishes this, more importantly, by exploiting a logic of insufficiency that is inherent to world literature itself. The idea of world literature both thrives and falters on the promise of making good on the world. Setting up Moulton's exposition to fail in just this way, Zheng swoops in to show that Moulton's notion of the world, after all, is not really "world" enough. Zheng thus does away with one idea of world literature in order to propagate the concept anew, making room for a new universality to host the notion of a unified literature.

As Zheng understood well, world literature can always be more encompassing and thus never exhaustive in scope. It legitimates an expansionist project undertaken in the name of accommodation that facilitates the sprawling embrace of literary governance as new open access. This idea of world literature allows for national interests to overlap and cross bounds but keeps the fundamental concern with power intact. It would be misguided, indeed, to think of world literature as a postdisciplinary breed. It is neither an exception to nor innocent of the modality of power that is created in any context of prestige. To claim a literature on behalf or under the aegis of "the world" comes with liabilities that make questions of transparency and accountability all the more crucial.

It is thus convenient for Zheng to make a passionate case for relinquishing national interests, especially when he knows that it is easier said than done. At the same time, it was precisely his preoccupation with such a nation-bound identity that motivated him to turn to the world as the desired forum for China's literary participation. After poring over countless literary anthologies from China and elsewhere up to this point, he arrived at the inevitable conclusion that the subject had not been said or done adequately. There was only one remaining option. Zheng himself had to step in and write a world literary history.

The Outline of Literature *and* The Outline of Literature:
Zheng Zhenduo and John Drinkwater

By the time Zheng started publishing preliminary installments of his *Wenxue dagang* in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* in 1924, he had in mind a specific goal. To call it his, though, would be somewhat misleading. *Wenxue dagang* is a rewriting of a critical compendium with the same title in English by John Drinkwater, *The Outline of Literature*, published in 1923. Zheng revised and expanded the thirty-nine chapters into forty-six as well as reproduced many of the



five hundred or so illustrations in his *Wenxue dagang*. An intended bilingual Chinese-English index to the four volumes—published in April 1927—never appeared owing to a shortage of time. The sections on Japanese literature were assigned to two colleagues who were more familiar with the subject matter. Zheng wrote the various chapters on Chinese literature himself, and the rest Zheng cut and pasted from his Western sources. Apart from a general chapter on the sacred books of the east that covers the Koran, Buddhist scriptures, and the Confucian classics, Drinkwater deals little with literary traditions in Asia. Zheng took Confucius out of that chapter and inserted twelve new chapters throughout that give prominence to the development of Chinese literature.

The idea of writing a comprehensive literary history for China was, according to Zheng, unprecedented. By that he meant a systematic assessment that adopts a broad perspective in relation to literary traditions around the world. The writing of world literary history was a new endeavor, but numerous anthologies of world literature had appeared in China in the 1920s and 1930s, largely through disparate efforts. Zhao Jingshen, who published several consecutive anthologies of translated foreign fiction in late 1920s and early 1930s, despaired at the fact that his peers made little good use of his vetted references.⁴⁶ Much of his collected fiction of world literature was gathered from journals in America, such as *New Masses* and *Modern Quarterly*. To turn literary history into a scholarly discipline with a proper methodology and systematic overview required a more specialized endeavor. The genre of capturing comprehensive knowledge in a nutshell appealed to not only Zheng and others in China but also to American academics.

The American scholarly milieu at the time was going through an expansionist phase. Writing an “outline” of any subject was observed to be a “literary vogue” by a contemporary in Drinkwater’s time.⁴⁷ His *The Outline of Literature* was, on at least one occasion, compared to H. G. Well’s very popular *Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind* (1922). Other works of similarly ambitious scale include J. Arthur Thomson’s *Outline of Science: A Plain Story Simply Told* (1922) and Clement Wood’s *Outline of Man’s Knowledge: The Story of History, Science, Literature, Art, Religion, Philosophy* (1929). The word “outline” was a must-have in book titles. Bewildering in scope, Wood’s undertaking used size to its advantage. It was advertised to be “a liberal education in only one volume” and “the ONE book, the only book.”⁴⁸ Consuming prepackaged information was a new popular diet. Any interested reader, the advertisement invites, can borrow *The Outline of Man’s Knowledge* directly from the publisher so as to try out the product. Rendering expert knowledge into a “plain story,” it promised to deliver “The Whole



Field of Science Reduced to Its Simplest Terms.”⁴⁹ One could well imagine what *The Outline of Literature* offered the world of letters: “an indispensable handbook for those who, in this hurried and unclassical age, wish to ‘know something’ of our great precursors in letters.”⁵⁰

Zheng, in a rush for China to join world literature, was taken in by this appeal of expediency. The chapters that he kept from *The Outline of Literature* were more or less translated verbatim into Chinese. To supplement Drinkwater’s Eurocentric coverage, Zheng took additional materials from John Albert Macy’s *The Story of World’s Literature*.⁵¹ Macy’s book was translated into Chinese and Japanese multiple times.⁵² Zheng politely and strategically acknowledged his debt, just as he had with Moulton in the postscript to “A View on the Unification of Literature”: “这篇是一年前以前的旧文字。因为忙碌之故,现在不能有改制的功夫了。文中有许多议论是从Moulton的 *World Literature* 里得来的,应该十分的感谢他” [“This old essay was written a year ago. I’ve been too busy to undertake revisions. Much of the argument from the essay is taken from Moulton’s *World Literature*. I should give him proper thanks”].⁵³ Similarly, Zheng confessed that he was 诱起 [seduced] by Drinkwater’s compendium into taking on the similar task of writing *Wenxue dagang*, the Chinese title of which he translated into English as also *The Outline of Literature*.⁵⁴

The parallel hints at an intended competition. The acknowledgment of sources gives the air of, among other things, a peer network of exchange. However, although Drinkwater and Macy’s books were translated into Chinese, Zheng’s *Wenxue dagang* was never translated into English or any other language. At a time when intellectual property was a vague concept and the use of footnotes not yet standard practice, Zheng’s deliberate citation seems rather out of place. He mentions Drinkwater and Macy as though they had been engaged in a collaborative effort toward a shared goal, despite the distance across the globe. The rest of the preface to *Wenxue dagang* makes this clear. It is as if by participating in the discussion of world literature, one was essentially promised a seat in the world:

文学是没有国界的;阿拉伯人的故事,可以同样的使斯坎德那维亚人愉悦,英国人的最精纯的创作,可以同样的使日本感受到他们的美好,中国的晶莹如朝露的词,波斯的歌着“人生如寄”的诗,俄国的掘发“黑土”之秘密的小说,也都可以同样的使世界上别一部分的人感受到与他们本土的人所感受的一模一样的情绪。文学是没有古今界的;希腊的戏曲,至今还为我们所称赏,二千余年前之《诗经》,至今还为我们所诵读,《红楼梦》写的是十八世纪的一个家庭的事,狄更司,



莎克莱写的六七十年前的英国,陶渊明抒写的是六朝时所感生的情绪...然而他们却同样的能为后来各时代的人所了解,同样的能感动了后来的各时代的无量数的人。所以我们研究文学,我们欣赏文学,不应该有古今中外之观念...《文学大纲》的编辑,便是要辟除以上的偏见,同时并告诉他们:文学是属于人类全体的...《文学大纲》将给读者“以文学世界里伟大的创造的心灵所完成的作品的自身之概略,”同时并置那个作品于历史的背景里,告诉大家以从文学的开始到现在,从最古的无名诗人,到丁尼生,鲍特莱尔,“的精神,当他们最深挚的感动时,创造的表白在文学里的情形,”并告诉大家,以这个人的精神,“经了无量数次的表白的,实是一个,而且是继续不断的。”这个工作真是一个伟大而艰难的工作;文学世界里的各式各样的生物,真是太多了,多到不可以数字计,一个人的能力,那里能把他们一一的加以评价,加以叙述!仅做一个作家的研究,一个时代,一个国的研究者,已足够消磨你的一生了。要想把所有文学世界里的生物全盘的拿在自己手里,那里能够做得到。然而已有许多好的专门研究者,做了那些一部分的研究工作了。也有好些很有条理的编者,曾经做过那种全盘的整理工作了。编者的这部工作,除了一小部分中国的东西外,受到他们的恩惠真不少。要没有他们的工作,本书乃至一切同类的书,其出现恐将不可能。⁵⁵

[Literature is without national borders. The tales of the Arabic peoples can delight the Scandinavians in the same way. The most refined creations of the English can similarly compel the Japanese to feel their fineness. The dewlike lucidity of the *ci* of China, Persia's songs about fleeting life in its poetry, and Russian novels that excavate the secrets of the Black Soil in Siberia can all, in the same manner, compel people from other parts of the world to feel the exact same passions as their own peoples would feel. Literature is without the distinctions between the ancients and the moderns. To this day, we still express our appreciation for the Greek tragedies. *The Book of Odes* from more than two thousand years ago is still recited by us. *The Dream of the Red Chamber* may portray the affairs of an eighteenth-century [Chinese] family, Dickens and Thackeray may be writing about an England of sixty, seventy, years ago, and Tao Yuanming may be rendering into words sentiments that were felt in the Six Dynasties, but they can all be understood by people in the different eras that came after. . . . Thus, when we study or appraise literature, we should not hold onto a preconceived



notion of the ancients or moderns, Chinese or foreign. . . . The purpose of putting together *An Outline of Literature* is to do away with such biases and to tell these people that literature belongs to the entire human community. . . . *An Outline of Literature* brings to its readers “a contour of the work itself, as was accomplished by the extraordinary, creative minds in the world of literature.” At the same time, it situates that work in a historical context, in order to let its readers know how, from the beginnings of literature to the present, from the most ancient anonymous poets to Tennyson and Baudelaire, “the spirit of man, when moved at the core of his very being, expressed his creative energy in literature.” Simultaneously, it shows how this individual spirit, “having undergone countless efforts at expression, is in truth one such embodiment and is, as such, continuous and unbroken.”

This is truly an extraordinary and difficult task. All the different kinds of living creatures in the literary world is truly too many. With this countless number, how can one person evaluate and give each and every one its own narrative? Just to study a single author in one period and one country is enough to waste away your entire life! How is it possible to hold all living things in the literary kingdom in one’s palm? Yet there have been several specialists who have completed parts of this task. And there have been several meticulous compilers who have done that kind of wholesale reorganization. As for my contribution, apart from the little part about China, it has benefited in no small way from their labors. Without their efforts, this book—and all other works of this kind—would not have been possible.]

Zheng’s *The Outline of Literature* puts forth an even more expansive view of a world literature for humanity than Drinkwater’s. At the same time, one can hardly miss the fact that the non-European literature it most focuses on is, by far, Chinese literature. But the hope for world literature does not seem much bothered by what it cannot deliver in coverage. The vision itself is almost enough to assume its own greater community. A chorus to Drinkwater’s idea, Zheng’s quoted comments are, in fact, translated straight from Drinkwater’s preface to the original *The Outline of Literature*:

The present *Outline* has two functions. First, it is to give the reader something like a representative summary of the work itself that has been accomplished by the great creative minds of the world in letters.



But, also, it aims at placing that work in historical perspective, showing that from the beginning until now, from the nameless poets of the earliest scriptures down to Robert Browning, the spirit of man when most profoundly moved to creative utterance in literature has been and is, through countless manifestations, one and abiding . . . showing how these men and their peers, for all their new splendours of voice and gesture, are still the inheritors of an unbroken succession.⁵⁶

In *Wenxue dagang*, Drinkwater's and Zheng's voices merge as one, as though rising above the uneven direction of this translation in dialogue. The belief that literature captures human sentiments and carries them far and wide is liberally assumed for the practice of world literary history as well.

Harnessing this vague idea of humanity to his advantage, Zheng, in essence, finds a shortcut to the world. It's not enough to be in the world. One has to be in the position to talk about it. Like many critics in contemporary times, Zheng too sighs at the numbing task of having to account for all "living creatures in the literary world." The same problem arises when he compares literary histories; many of these creatures, like Marvel and Walton and Pepys, Dryden, and the Restoration dramatists, subjects of chapters by Drinkwater, seemed like excessively local literary knowledge to Zheng. To catalog literary ecology by pedantically going from one to the other was an exhausting task, a long road to the glory of "hold[ing] all living things in the literary kingdom in one's palm." The idea of the world, in this sense, gives preference to hosting a general scene of liveliness over fussing over too many particularities. That the world literary kingdom contains works that, as Goldsmith put it, might be "too dull to be generally read" does not so much reflect an unevenness in quality as it bespeaks an inconvenience for sweeping gestures.

World literature, while distancing itself from the imperative of everyone reading everything, also relies on precisely those literatures produced from the "lonely literary ruins" to legitimate its worldliness. In the same way that the literatures of the oppressed served for the Chinese as a conduit to a revolution to come, singular works from the remote parts of the world will continue to be mined for someone else's purpose. There is empty space in the world literary topography. Even unwritten literary histories have already been assigned a meaning in their absence. Zheng Zhenduo's motivation for joining world literary history captures this ambiguity. The historical making of his compendium, similarly, offers an important commentary on the struggle against the power of worlding and its restricted access. As one of the voices



from afar, for the time being, his echo is perhaps just distant enough to be benignly welcomed into the current reflection on the history of world literature.

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Notes

1. Oliver Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World*, 2 vols. (London: J. M. Dent, 1891), 1:75–76.
2. See my *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), chap. 1.
3. Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora*, chap. 5.
4. Chen Jitong, “Fulu: Zeng xiansheng dashu” [“Appendix: Mr. Zeng’s Reply”], in *Hu Shi wenji* [*The Collected Works of Hu Shi*], 12 vols. (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1998), 4:614–22, esp. 617.
5. *Heinu yu tian lu* [*A Record of Black Slaves Lamenting, “Heaven!”*], trans. Lin Shu and Wei Yi (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1981), 1.
6. *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji*, trans. and ed. Lu Xun Zhou Zuoren, retrans. Ba Jin, Ru Long, et al., ed. Wu Guoqing (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1986).
7. Zhou Zuoren, preface, in *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji*, 1–3.
8. Zhou, preface, 3.
9. Zhou Zuoren, “Ren de wenxue” [“Humane Literature”], in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893–1945*, ed. Kirk A. Denton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 151–61.
10. Zong Baihua, “Gede yu Zhongguo xiaoshuo” [“Goethe and Chinese Novels”], in *Gede yanjiu* [*Goethe Studies*] (Taipei: Tianwen chubanshe, 1968), 189.
11. See n. 3.
12. Examples from European and Western nations, in contrast, comprised less than 18 percent. See statistics compiled by Cai Yuanyuan, “Ershi shiji chu dui ‘ruoxiao minzu’ wenxue de yijie” [“The Translation and Introduction of the Literature of the ‘Weak and Small Nations’ in the Early Twentieth Century”], *Wenjiao ziliao* [*Materials for Teaching Literature*], Dec. 2007, 33.
13. See Irene Eber, *Voices from Afar: Modern Chinese Writers on Oppressed Peoples and Their Literature* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1980), chaps. 1–3; Zhou Xun, *Chinese Perceptions of the “Jews” and Judaism* (London: Routledge, 2002), 67–92.
14. When world literature was again brought up by scholar Yue Daiyun in the 1980s, the discussion largely followed those of literary history and comparative literature in the American and European academy, the lineage of George Brandes’s *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature* (1906), Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett’s *Comparative Literature* (1886), Paul van Tieghem’s *La littérature comparée* (1931), Louis Paul Betz’s *La littérature comparée: Essai bibliographique* (1900), and Frédéric Auguste Loliée’s *Histoire des littératures comparées des origines au XXe siècle* (1903), which was translated into Chinese in 1935. Zheng Zhenduo, incidentally, had originally wanted to translate it but eventually delegated the task to Fu Donghua. See *Bijiao wenxue shi* [*A History of Comparative Literature*] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935). See also Yue Daiyun, “Bijiao wenxue de fazhan de xianshixing he kenengxing” [“The Practicality and Feasibility of the Development of Comparative Literature”], *Guowai wenxue* [*Foreign Literature*], Feb. 1981, 21–76.
15. Yu Dafu, “Xiaoshuo lun” [“On Fiction”], in *Yu Dafu quanji* [*The Complete Works of Yu Dafu*], 12 vols. (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1992), 5:141.
16. Stephen Owen, “The End of the Past: Rewriting Chinese Literary History in the Early Republic,” in *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital: China’s May Fourth Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 167–92.
17. Owen, “The End of the Past,” 188, 170.



18. Zheng Zhenduo, "Wenxue xunkan xuanyan" ["Statement of Mission of *Literature Trimonthly*"], in *Zheng Zhenduo quanji* (henceforth ZDQJ) [*Zheng Zhenduo's Complete Works*], 20 vols. (Shijiazhuang: Huashan wenyi, 1999), 3:388–89.
19. Zheng Zhenduo, "Zhongguo wenxueshi de fenqi wenti" ["The Problem of Periodization in Chinese Literary History"], in ZDQJ, 6:82–94.
20. Caleb Thomas Winchester, *Wenxue pinglun zhi yuanli* [*Some Principles of Literary Criticism*], trans. Jing Changji and Qian Kunxin (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1923).
21. Zheng Zhenduo, "Wenxue de dingyi" ["The Meaning of Literature"], in ZDQJ, 3:391; Caleb Thomas Winchester, *Some Principles of Literary Criticism* (Norwood, MA: Norwood Press, 1899), 43.
22. Zheng, "Wenxue de dingyi," 3:391.
23. Zheng, "Wenxue de dingyi," 3:394.
24. *A Memorial to Caleb Thomas Winchester*, 1847–1920 (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 1921), 188.
25. *A Memorial to Caleb Thomas Winchester*, 44, 183.
26. Mark Sullivan, *Our Time: 1900–1925* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 424.
27. Bonnie S. McDougall, "The Impact of Western Literary Trends," in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, ed. Merle Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 414nn29–31.
28. William L. Richardson and Jesse M. Owen, *Literature of the World: An Introductory Study* (Boston, New York: Ginn and Co., 1923); Zheng, "Shijie wenxue" ["World Literature"], in ZDQJ, 15:182–84.
29. Zheng, "Shijie wenxue," 15:183.
30. Zheng had access to a later 1864 edition and mistakenly thought it was the first ("Shijie wenxue," 15:184).
31. Richard Green Moulton, *The Modern Study of Literature: An Introduction to Literary Theory and Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1915), viii.
32. Sarah Lawall, "Richard Moulton and the Idea of World Literature," in *No Small World: Visions and Revisions of World Literature*, ed. Michael Thomas Carroll (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996), 3–19; Eugene Williamson, "R. G. Moulton and Modern Criticism," *Journal of English and German Philology* 70.4 (1971): 632–48.
33. Moulton, *The Modern Study of Literature*, 301.
34. Moulton, *The Modern Study of Literature*, 271.
35. Moulton, *The Modern Study of Literature*, 129.
36. Williamson, "R. G. Moulton and Modern Criticism," 634.
37. Williamson, "R. G. Moulton and Modern Criticism," 634.
38. See William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1954), 3–20.
39. Moulton, *The Modern Study of Literature*, 116.
40. Zheng, "Wenxue de tongyi guan," 15:139.
41. Moulton, *World Literature and Its Place in General Culture* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 1–2.
42. Zheng, "Wenxue de tongyi guan," 15:147–48.
43. Moulton, *World Literature and Its Place in General Culture*, 6–7.
44. Zheng, "Wenxue de tongyi guan," 15:148–49.
45. Lawall reads this same passage from Moulton in a much more positive light, describing Moulton's view as "openly positioned" rather than "assum[ing] a single universally valid canon of books drawn from different parts of the globe" ("Richard Moulton and the Idea of World Literature," 11, 14–15).
46. See Zhao Jingshen, afterword, in *Yijiu sanyi nian de shijie wenxue* [*World Literature in 1931*] (Shanghai: Shen Zhou guo Guang she, 1932), 1. See also his *Yijiu erjiu nian de shijie wenxue* [*World Literature in 1929*] (Shanghai: Shen Zhou guo Guang she, 1930), 1–2 and *Yijiu sanling nian de shijie wenxue* [*World Literature in 1930*] (Shanghai: Shen Zhou guo Guang she, 1931), 1–3.



Other world literary histories include Yu Mutaos's *Shijie wenxue shi* [*World Literary History*], vol. 1 (Shanghai: Huale tushu gongsi, 1932), Li Jiulin's *Shijie wenxue dagang* [*An Outline of World Literature*] (Shanghai: Yaxiya shuju, 1933), Xiao Nan, *Shijie wenxue shi dagang* [*An Outline of the History of World Literature*] (Shanghai: Lehua tushu gongsi, 1937), and Zhao Jingshen and Li Juxiu, *Shijie wenxue shigang* [*An Outline of World Literary History*] (Shanghai: Zhongguo wenhua fuwushe, 1936).

47. See Sullivan, *Our Time*, 6:424.

48. See the ad section in *Popular Mechanics*, Apr. 1929, 95.

49. See the full-page advertisement in *The Independent, a Fortnightly Journal of Information and Discussion*, July 8, 1922, i.

50. See review in *The Literary Review*, Oct. 27, 1923, 187. Reprinted in *The Book Review Digest* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 2008), 137.

51. Macy's book has won less praise. Though it was more socialist in its aspiration and focused on less prominent corners of the literary world, it was revisited in the late 1940s, in a Marxist reappraisal, as "a tasteless and ignorant hack book in the Van Loon tradition" (Stanley Edgar Hyman, "The Marxist Criticism of Literature," in *Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers*, 2nd ser., ed. Bob Jessop and Russell Wheatley (New York: Routledge, 1999), 265).

52. Though its more immediate audience may not find it up to snuff, Macy's book has been translated into Chinese at least five times: *Shijie wenxue shi*, trans. You Zhiwu (Shanghai: Shanghai shijie shuju, 1935); *Shijie wenxue shibua*, ed. Ma Si (Hong Kong: Jinxiu, 1960); *Shijie wenxue shibua*, trans. Chen Zhongwu (Hong Kong: Shijie tushu gongsi, 1974); *Shijie wenxue shibua* (Hong Kong: Zhongliu, chuban youxian gongsi, 1979); *Shijie wenxue shibua*, trans. Hu Zhongchi (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1992). *The Story of World's Literature* was also translated into Japanese by Uchiyama Kenji in 1926. The translation was issued three times under slightly different titles: *Sekai bungaku monogatari* (Tokyo: Arusu, 1926); *Sekai bungaku gojikko* (Tokyo: Daichi shobo, 1940); *Sekai bungakushi* (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1950).

53. Zheng, "Wenxue de tongyi guan," 15:150.

54. Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, 4 vols. (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1927). Also collected in *ZZDQJ*, vols. 9–11.

55. Zheng, *xuyan* [preface], in *ZZDQJ*, 10:1–2.

56. John Drinkwater, *The Outline of Literature* (New York, London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1923–24), 1:3–4.

