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What Is World Literature?
David Damrosch in Conversation with Wang Ning

David Damrosch was interviewed by Wang Ning at the Fifth Sino-American Symposium on Comparative Literature, held in Shanghai, August 2010. The conversation brings together two eminent scholars of comparative literature from the East and West. Wang Ning began by asking the status of world literature in an age of proliferating new media and popular culture.

I think you must have made some new Chinese friends and got acquainted with new readers and critics and university students during your visit to Shanghai. Since you are now well-known in China for your remarkable books, What Is World Literature? *and* How to Read World Literature?*, both of which will be published soon in Chinese, Chinese readers will regard you as a pioneering figure in promoting world literature in such an age of globalization. Would you please comment on the significance of world literature in an age of globalization, when literature is often reported to be "dead" and literary study is severely challenged by the rise of popular culture and consumer culture in postmodern societies?*

It seems to me that our global world has more need of literature than ever, and of world literature in particular, where so many people's horizons now are international and global in so much movement of people across borders, and academic institutions are so much more opened out to students around the world. This is certainly true in China; we are seeing a massive movement of Chinese students to many other parts of the world. I do think that literature provides a privileged mode of access to thinking about the problems of the globe and the inner life of a culture. Literary works never directly reflect the reality around them, but they refract it, they recreate it as an alternative world always closely connected in some way to our own, and give us a real way to think about the inner tensions and possibilities of the world. Concerning the

related question of popular culture, world literature faces competitive challenges into three directions.

First, there is always a tension between elite works of artistic literature and more broadly popular literature. William Wordsworth in the Preface to his *Lyrical Ballads*" in 1800 says that the works of Shakespeare were being overwhelmed by "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse." So he already expressed this concern two hundred years ago. Certainly today we have tremendous threat to elite culture from popular literature and a question of reading standards and reading interests. But I think that is just one change. A second change is simply that people are shifting away from reading literature at all in an internet age, and they are now just doing cellphone activities, computer games and so on. But even so, I think this is a very hopeful time for writers themselves, for circulation of literature, for several reasons. Third, I think literature now is fully entering again a multi-media space which is where literature traditionally lived all along. Most literature was not written to be read by isolated individuals.Literature was always part of the social world, whether it would be Tang Dynasty poets gathering together to drink and write poems, or giving poems as parting gifts or greeting gifts, so that poetry was a medium of social exchange almost as much as a source of private aesthetic pleasure. I think that we are probably coming out of the brief, rather artificial period in which the private study of high art was seen as somehow sacrificing everyday life via the social contact. Any great transformation will favour some writers, disfavour others, and probably some important writers will recede and the importance of some others will benefit by these changes. Even though Wordsworth was worried about Shakespeare no longer being read, he was wrong. Shakespeare turned out not to be eclipsed by the rise of the popular novel of Wordsworth's day. Shakespeare is ever more read and translated, more performed all over the world. And I think that if Shakespeare were alive today he would be writing scripts for television series and he would be getting produced and his series would be subtitled or dubbed around the world, with a much greater audience today than ever before.

Yes, I also have such a feeling. I think that in the contemporary era, especially in the age of globalization, people always think that literature is dead, and literature is no longer as important as it used to be, so many people who used to love literature have now shifted their attention to popular culture, internet culture, or TV, the football match and so on. But still, the more colourful material life might be, the more people want to draw rich nourishment from spiritual and cultural life. So in this way I think literature will certainly provide us with some good nourishment with which we can cultivate a new humanistic spirit and also raise our moral standard. That is one thing. The other thing is that since we are reading world literature we must read the best works which are circulated not only in one individual country but also in almost all the other parts of the world. In this way we are also selecting and appreciating different works in a critical way. We can certainly benefit from these literary works than from those which are superficially interesting, but actually not worth reading. I wonder whether you also think so.

I do. I have a question for you, which is that I have heard it said at times in the last decade or so, Chinese writers have become so tempted by the possibility of profit in writing popular fiction that most Chinese novels now are not serious literary productions but merely popular literature. Do you think this is a fair understanding or are you finding some really excellent writers in China today?

I think at the moment there are three types of writers in contemporary China. The first type includes those who are just writing about popular themes and gaining profits from writing. I think they make up about two-thirds of all the writers in China today. Many of them do not try to work hard to write excellent canonical works, but rather, they want to make money out of writing. So that is why they try to get some sensational events from daily life or simply want to parody or rewrite canonical works. They pay particular attention to those classical literary works that are already popular among the broad reading public. As a result, they could, on the one hand, deconstruct the established canon and on the other hand, attract the attention of ordinary readers.

A second type refers to those serious writers, who are not so many in number but who are still working hard to write remarkable works, such as

Wang Meng, Han Shaogong, Yu Hua, Mo Yan, Wang Anyi, Xu Xiaobin, Su Tong, Yan Lianke, Jia Pingwa, Ge Fei, Mai Jia and others. They are not as popular as they used to be, but they are really working hard and are read extensively. They try to publish the best of their works so in this way they are still appreciated by a certain number of readers who love literature, and also, they are studied by literary critics and university students and teachers, who take literary studies as a major. I am told that some of the above-mentioned writers have been nominated as candidates of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

A third type of writers are those who write not only for art's sake but also for the market. That is, they try to write great works, but in addition they want to live a good and decent life. As you know, some Chinese writers do have regular jobs in either government institutions or universities. But some are just freelance writers. They have to live on their writing, so, while they write some serious literary works, they also write TV plays or even write scripts for film or TV serials. In this way, they can make money to support themselves so that they could devote more time to serious literary writing. All these three types of writers represent the status quo of contemporary Chinese literary writing. I think that this phenomenon is also similar in the West, is it not?

The situation is relatively the same in the United States, where the bestseller list is dominated by detective fiction, spy novels and historical romances. I was looking at the bestseller lists in America in the 1950s and there were many more high quality art novels than we find today; among them were Vladimir Nabokov, Philip Roth, J.D. Salinger, and Norman Mailer. These works are considered as real classics, and were tremendously popular, they were bestsellers and they were already received as important works of fiction. And there is not on the current list one writer of that literary quality.

But when I talked to a friend who is studying this phenomenon, she pointed out that actually most of the difference is just that more people are reading than ever, more common people are reading. They have always liked detective stories, so many more detective stories have been sold. It's not that there are fewer copies necessarily of literary works being sold. So it may be similar to the situation in China; as you have

mentioned works of high quality are not as popular, but in the United States, it is an expansion of very broad basic readership, which means the bestsellers are now more popular works. But I think that probably, we will see a sorting out of artistic fiction to perform its true role, which, as you say, is to give spiritual values and a place for spiritual reflection, intellectual reflection, understanding the world. In the Victorian era most people who read Charles Dickens' novels were reading them the way they would read the detective stories, the way they would watch television series today; because they simply did not have television, they were forced to read Dickens. It is not a bad thing if what people really want is to watch television series, now they can do it. People can now read Dickens for the things Dickens can give them that television series do not; because he was a great artist who used popular medium, he made it more than it needed to be, that is the reason why we still read him today, rather than the thousand popular writers who have been forgotten.

Yes, it's almost true of the contemporary Chinese situation. Some of the classical works of literature are popularized by means of television or film. And some of the marginalized modern classics, such as the so-called "Red Classics" are also made very popular since they are screened or televised. As well, some translated foreign literature such as novels written by J. D. Salinger, Vladimir Nabokov and Philip Roth are still popular among ordinary readers, especially Catcher in the Rye*, which has had a print run of about 200,000 copies with different Chinese translations. When Salinger was reported dead, different newspapers and TV stations tried to interview me and asked me to write a new review of the translated version of* Catcher in the Rye*, because they also want to popularize the book so that they could sell more copies. I would say translated literary works occupy a very significant place in our reading list.*

Interesting! So the death of the author actually gives new impetus to sales of his works….

Yes, and compared with those translated American novels, some of the Chinese literary works are not so popular, especially those modern writers,

with exception of Lu Xun who has always been popular, even now. I think we could perhaps come to our second issue: the implications of world literature and its evolution in the past hundred years. Do you think that works read by people of different nations and different countries could be regarded as world literature? Or, as you have already pointed out, literature must be fictional, valuable and beautiful something that implies value judgment. Could you elaborate on these points a bit further?

Yes. The term "world literature" goes back to the great German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and in the 1820s he developed the term of *Weltliteratur* or "world literature", which he saw as a modern and new phenomenon, very much a result of the literary market becoming international, with a heightened circulation of texts, and also the kind of reaction abroad of different writers. So a writer becomes a world writer by being read abroad and Goethe himself as a world writer found it very exciting and illuminating to read his own work in different translations. He liked to read reviews of his work and particularly in France or England. And he wanted his works to be reviewed in prestigious journals abroad; he was very interested in prestige and in a way he was a first and early beneficiary of the circulation of modern world literature in the nineteenth century because in his later years he was starting to fall out of favour in Germany where he was thought of as conservative, just old fashioned. At that point his works become so world famous abroad that actually after his death he became popular again in Germany, thanks to his being popular in other nations. I think world literature is very much a matter of literature that circulates around the world outside of its initial home, usually in translation. A determining feature of world literature, therefore, is that it does well in translation. There are some excellent works that do not translate well. And that means that they almost never catch on abroad. So there is sometimes an irony that a work may translate almost better than it reads in the original or may gain a new sort of interest in the new language, in the new culture, and may actually do better abroad than at home. We had a conference speaker today who mentioned the case of Hans Christian Andersen, who is a popular author of world literature and yet not so highly regarded in Denmark

as he is in many other countries around the world, including China. In a way it is a good thing for the author to gain a new market in a new audience and for the work to take on a new form of life.

You suggest then that world literature implies not just broad circulation, but also good translations and evaluations. I share these ideas. On the other hand, I also try to develop some of your original ideas. To my understanding of world literature, if we want to judge whether a literary work should be regarded as world literature, we must have some objective criteria, which are of both universality and relativity.

In this sense, the first criteria to judge whether a work should be viewed as world literature should be whether it has gone beyond the boundary of nations or countries and languages. That is, it must go through translation. The second is that it must be included in some anthologies, especially some authoritative anthologies of world literature. Many people prefer to spend their limited time reading anthologies in which literary works are carefully selected by literary scholars. In this way, anthologies also imply the standard of both canonicity and readability. The third is to expand the reach of these writings among ordinary readers so that they become the inheritance of different generations of writers. If a work of literature appears in textbooks or major references by university students and teachers, it will also be read and appreciated by large numbers of educated readers. The fourth is that the author must be critically responded to or even debated about by scholars or critics of other countries or cultural contexts, because even if a work causes controversy, it means that the work has certain critical value; people will not spend time discussing a worthless work. On the other hand, I think, to anthologize world literature, we should also include literatures of different countries, especially those that have been relatively ignored. Douwe Fokkema's history of literature, for example, only devotes 130 pages to Chinese literature, while twelve times as large space is devoted to French literature. To take another example, one book called Weltliteratur *by a German theorist does not even touch any literature of non-western countries. So literatures are not equally considered. In this way we could find that to anthologize world literature also implies power relations and ideological tendencies. Do you agree with me on this point or not?*

I do agree. I have been spending a lot of time doing anthologies, first a large *Anthology of British Literature* and then more recently the *Longman Anthology of World Literature* in six volumes, and I have been thinking very hard about that. I think we do have some difference between us and our views, because you emphasize reception and certain authoritative presence in the dialogue. I think that very much describes the sort of works we can call masterpieces of world literature. But there are, in my view, also other ways that works that can be thought of as world literature. In my book *What Is World Literature?* I describe three basic modes: that a work of literature can be classic, or it can be a masterpiece, or it can be a window on the world. The old classical view, which was really disappearing or fading away in Goethe's time, was an old form of world literature, in which the classic really is something ancient, authoritative, so it would be the Confucian classics, it would be Virgil and Homer--those are the real works of world literature. Then comes the modern masterpiece which can be recognized in its own time even before it has been established as a classic. That is almost a more extreme version, a more thorough version of the authoritative quality. The masterpiece was Goethe's primary idea of world literature, which is an artistically excellent work that is circulating and being recognized by readers in its own time even if there is no great cultural heritage and no large critical discourse on it. Goethe could publish a masterpiece, a book reviews can recognize it, it can be translated into six languages, and it could become a work of world literature in the very year of its publication. That is very much the function of the modern literary marketplace. You could say that Voltaire's *Candide* was translated into ten languages already in the first year or two of its publication, and so it become a work of world literature even before it had been in an anthology or a critical discourse had developed about it. Both because it circulated and because it was recognized for its quality in Goethe's sense of the masterpiece, it was a masterpiece that became very rapidly world literature.

The idea of literary works as windows on the world is very significant today. Readers can approach world literature just to get a sense of what is going on in the world, what another culture is like. To me a work can function as world literature on a very individual basis for a reader

who read it and who is opened up to part of the world. And this work may be something I chance upon; it may be little known and it has not yet been made a canonical work. As an anthologist, I am playing both sides of this division because the major works that get the most space in the anthology almost entirely are works that fit all of your criteria, that they have been well known for a long time, they are often translated, and there is a lot of critical discourse about them, they are reviewed as artistic masterpieces. So works such as Dante's *Inferno* or *The Story of the Stone* tend to get most space in my anthology. But then I also want to put in works I am enthusiastic about. I want them to be read, even if no one knows about them. So I put in Aztec poetry that has never been anthologized before, and I tell my readers: "This is world literature; you should read it." In a certain sense you can say I want it to become so popular that it changes to fit your criterion eventually: I want the Aztec poems to inspire critical discourse, and more to be translated, but I am already saying: "This is now world literature and I am going to make that claim and I think it is valuable to read."

What I think is important for us as scholars and teachers of world literature is to expand our readers' horizons and boundaries; we need to do this as translators too. You and I are both involved in translating and publishing and getting works translated, and retranslating works that are not well-translated because the effort of translation is critical to perceiving something of literary excellence of the work. It is important also to assign works on our syllabus and also to get our readers and our colleagues to read more widely, because I think we both find that many of our colleagues settle for a rather comfortable well-known small canon. These may all be very great works, but our colleagues may not always be so curious to read beyond what their own teachers taught them. And so I think this is a very exciting moment of world literature now to give us new contexts, new ways to look at works that may have been sidelined within their own national tradition but become more interesting now when you connect them across boundaries with other works.

Do you lay more emphasis on the readability of works?

Yes indeed.

I lay emphasis on both readability and canonicity. In this way I think we almost have the same idea on world literature.

It is only the differences in emphasis within common terms.

Indeed. We could find that in this way an anthologizer will help a literary work to become world literature. It is similar to the case of the Nobel Prize committee, which awards the Nobel Prize for Literature, so as to make a writer more well-known and canonical. Although they try to argue canonicity is not their object, yet their awarding the prize to a certain writer arouses curiosity among readers, literary critics and scholars. Thus it is very significant to anthologize world literature not only for the broad reading public but also for canonizing literature.

I think that we make this canonical judgment because (in a sense) we make every course syllabus a miniature canon, so the teachers select groups of works, works important for you to read from this period, this issue, whatever it is; and as the semester is limited, we cannot include many more works, so the syllabus already provides a micro-canon, a temporary canon, which may change the next time we do the course. Every anthologist should be aware that we are making canonical claims for these works being worth reading.

Does quality always comes first as a criterion to be anthologized?

I would say quality is absolutely critical, but it is also not the only thing, that is, a work can be of high quality in different ways. I grew up in the kind of great books understanding, encountering literature in the form of the "Penguin Classics," the British book series that I started reading as teenager. There were a lot of Penguin Classics: Dante and Cervantes, the great tragedies and so on, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy. These are great works in terms of quality. But perhaps for me, for world literature to be worth having, it has to be a compelling work, but its compelling qualities can be a variety of things, though it definitely has to give readers an important aesthetic experience.

Let us approach another issue. People now often associate comparative literature with world literature. In China, in 1988 the Ministry of Education

decided to combine the discipline of "comparative literature" with that of "world literature," so the new discipline is called "comparative literature and world literature." At first, some of the comparativists argued against that. They said that in the Western countries, comparative literature has long been an independent discipline, then why should world literature be incorporated into this discipline in China? But nowadays we find that along with the advent of globalization in culture, the earliest stage of comparative literature is world literature. And when comparative literature has progressed for over one hundred years, the culminating stage of comparative literature will also be world literature. That is why in the age of globalization, although literary studies are often reported to be "dead" and comparative literature is also reported to be "dead," a new comparative literature has been reborn. I think this so-called new comparative literature should be called world literature. That is also why I designed the general theme of our conference as "comparative literature: toward the stage of world literature". For me it is a culminating stage of comparative literature. During the past hundred years of evolution, world literature, a utopian term coined by Goethe, is no longer of utopian characteristics, but it has become an aesthetic reality. It has actually helped comparative literature, which is often reported to be in crisis, to get out of such crises. That is why not only in China, but also in the United States, more and more scholars enthusiastically participate in various conferences on comparative literature. Is that so?

Yes. The American Comparative Literature Association has seen a tenfold increase in attendance over the last decade, and it has become more and more international. I was looking back at the program of the American Comparative Literature Association annual meeting for fifteen years ago, and there were about 150 papers delivered, and only three participants came outside of the United States. Last year at Harvard University, we hosted the association's conference and we had 2100 papers delivered, and participants came from fifty different countries, including scholars from mainland China and Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, India—basically from all over the world. I think the world literature emphasis has become very significant within comparative literature. There is still classic comparative work

being done. "Traditional" comparative literature really meant looking at the literary relations of two countries, comparing two national traditions, often France and Germany, looking at the image one nation had of another. That is still done today. But I think this world literature emphasis now has many different projects and they are involving many people coming from around the world, not only Western Europe and North America, the major centers of traditional comparative literature

We are seeing a lot of interest in China at present, as has become apparent in talking to some of your colleagues. Here we find an excitement of opening out to the wider literary world after the period before the Cultural Revolution where China and the West were relatively less closely interacting and China was more in connection with Russia; that then decreased during the Cultural Revolution, leading to a degree of isolation. Literature is never isolated in quite this way. One of the things we find when looking at the history of literature is that most national traditions rise out of broader regional circumstances and are nourished by international contact. Lu Xun is a particularly excellent example that he learned so much from his readings in Japanese and in German, he did so much translation, he translated hundreds of works, either from Japanese or German. He wrote his most famous story "The Diary of a Madman" shortly after translating Gogol's story of the same name from Japanese. So it is retranslating, it was written in Russian, but it was translated from Japanese into Chinese, so you could see it as an example of inspiration across national and linguistic boundaries. As one of the most popular founders of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun was himself completely a figure of world literature.

Lu Xun is also regarded as one of the founders of comparative literature in China.

That's right. We should also include Hu Shih, who studied at Columbia and got his PhD there and then came back to China. There is a lot of circulation cross institutions academically and mutual fertilization.

Yes. That is why since the Chinese Comparative Literature Association was founded in 1985, it has been open to all foreign participants in every one

of its triennial congresses. That is also why among all China's national associations for literary studies and even for the entire humanities, the Chinese Comparative Literature Association is the most open and most lively literary studies society. In every triennial congress of the CCLA, we invite foreign participants, especially from the Western countries, as well as from Japan, India and other neighbouring countries or regions. We do not have participants from as many as fifty countries; at most the participants are from twenty countries or regions. I think, although according to many American comparativists comparative literature studies in America was once in a crisis or reported to be "dead," comparative literature studies in China has never been in such a crisis. It has always flourished. I think that is where a difference lies. We always encourage our colleagues to participate in literary studies beyond our own native country and language. Actually, in this way world literature has already helped comparative literature to get out of its crisis, if there were such a crisis. I have also found in recent conferences in American Comparative Literature Association, in which I once participated in 2005, world literature has been one of the heatedly discussed topics, especially in Haun Saussy's Ten-year Report Comparative literature in An Age of Globalization, in which world literature is widely discussed. Do you think so?

Yes, world literature is increasingly a subject of interest to comparativists around the world.

What is the function of the anthologization of world literature and individual national literature? Shall we pay much attention to both canonicity and readability? Will it help to build up a canonical body of world literature or just merely circulate literary works of all countries in the book market?

I think probably China may be the originator of the great literary anthologies. China is perhaps the first country in which anthologies became important for circulating literature as early as before the Tang Dynasty, isn't that right? I think there were important anthologies going back to the third century. Because of so much production of poetry and literature in China so early on, already the national tradition far exceeded what any one person could ever read. Then my understanding

is that people began to rely on anthologies to know what to read in early periods. Perhaps a reason why China has been very hospitable to world literature is that the problems of encountering the vast array of world literature are not different in kind from the problem of anthologizing Chinese literature itself. It is the same problem in a way, since for 2000 years, before America had any literature, before England had any literature, you had already created so much literature. I think anthologists do have a powerful effect, to help guide readers, to guide teachers, to guide students, but they are also very popular for general readers to find their way around the world of literature.

What principles did you use to select works for the Longman Anthology of World Literature*? Did you always think that quality comes first or just consider the division of national literatures?*

In the *Longman Anthology*, we had a couple of major goals when we established it. One was to move beyond the Euro-centrism of the older American anthologies of world literature, for literature in the United States or Europe usually meant Western European literature and perhaps some American literature. There was the Japanese Comparatist Sukehiro Hirakawa, who remarked that studying comparative literature in Tokyo University in the 1960s, it seemed like "a Greater Western European Co-prosperity Sphere," as he said rather ironically. When world literature was used as a term, it referred to a very narrow subset of nations, and so there was the *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, first published in 1956, where "the world" was really just Western Europe. The field gradually started to open up but not very far, so my co-editors and I were seeking to make a truly global anthology.

The *Longman Anthology* was created for use in American colleges, so it depends very much on a dialogue with people who teach the course in different schools and it was somewhat guided by, even constrained by, what people were going to teach. It's not so much the matter of what students would read, but what the teachers would assign. And teachers are rather concerned often that if familiar texts work for them, they want to stay with that text. They do not necessarily want to try something new. It is a matter of building from where they are towards where

they want to go. The *Longman Anthology* now and even a new edition of the *Norton Anthology* has a proportion of about two thirds western writings and one third non-western, with about six thousand pages, 2000 pages are non-western literature, and 4000 pages are western literature. It is still unbalanced, not as various and inclusive as we would like it to be, but we are working within the constraints of the training of the current generation of teachers. We have to consider what they are going to teach.

In addition, we also wanted to give some sense of cultural context for the works we include. It is a great challenge in an anthology to show the variety of literary experience, to contextualize. Rather than have only isolated works one after another, we find groups of works to help teachers and students think together. For example, we have some sections on "What is literature?" In this section for Chinese literature there are readings on aesthetics, including the *Wen Fu* and others grouped together, to show traditional Chinese ideas of literature. We have another section like that for India, and for classical Greece we also have Aristotle and Plato. The result is that in different places we show what different cultures have defined as literature and its aesthetic nature and social role. Throughout the anthology, we group texts around issues that help to create bridges among cultures. We are certainly very concerned always to have works that we do have access to in good translations, since the quality of translation matters greatly to the success of a work.

I am told by Martin Puchner that Norton Anthology of World Literature *is mainly sold among English speaking readers. Is the* Longman Anthology *also sold among the English speaking readers?*

Yes, it is designed for the North American market. These anthologies are guided by market issues as much as by scholarship, so that it is a very large question in the United States and the market affects our choices, not only through what teachers want to use but also through what we can afford to pay publishers for permission to use the works. Even for classic works, the good translations are almost all recent, so they are in copyright, and you have to pay a large commission for the use of an excellent recent translation of Dante. To get a free "public domain" trans-

lation, you would have to go back 75 years, but such old translations rarely read well today. To buy the rights to publish in North America costs a lot, but the world rights would cost twice as much. The market is not there to pay the extra amount, so actually both the Norton and the Longman anthologies of world literature are almost entirely sold in the United States and in Canada because those countries are the initial rights market. I think some schools abroad can import our books, but North America is the dominant market. One implication is that world literature anthologies need to be published in different places and in different languages. This should not be done just by translating the same anthologies into another language, because a Chinese market must take into account what a Chinese faculty is interested in teaching, what Chinese students will be interested in reading, and the result is very likely to be a quite different set of writings, with some overlap to what is included in Longman or Norton, but a lot of different readings as well. What I would imagine is that there should be a more Asian emphasis in an anthology published in China and then there is anthology published in America.

So anthologizing world literature largely depends on literary market. In China, the situation is similar because, as you know, Chinese students and university teachers also have such anthologies of world literature which are called "selected works of foreign literature," with the exception of Chinese literary works. That means the anthology only contains works by non-Chinese, or "foreign," writers. Among all the anthologies the most popular and authoritative one is edited by Zhou Xiliang. He died in 1985, but his four-volume anthologies are still popular among ordinary readers and widely used by university teachers and students of literature. .However, I think their object is rather different from yours because they lay more emphasis on the canonicity and quality of the selected literary works, plus certain political and ideological tendencies. China has a huge market, we have many university students, and some of the courses are compulsory, so students and teachers have to use the textbooks. That is why they sell well. But it is not necessarily the same case for other anthologies edited by some less known and less authoritative scholars. I think that Zhou's anthology has more than one million

copies in print. So the publisher must have made a lot of money. Also I am an anthologizer myself. I have been awarded a large project by the National Administration of Press and Publications which is called "Canonical Publication Project: Anthology of Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature", in which I try to select the best literary works and the most canonical works of Chinese literature in the twentieth century to form six volumes. Volume One includes novels, about ten novels, all in excerpts. Volume Two includes twenty novellas and short stories. Volume Three includes over a hundred poems. Volume Four is devoted to prose writing because in China prose is very popular. Prose works are published not only in literary magazines but also in the supplements of newspapers. Volume Five is composed of some twenty plays. Volume Six focuses on literary theory and criticism, which is quite new. The Administration of Press and Publications knows that because it will be published in English, it will not necessarily have a big market. So they offered some financial support to encourage Chinese literature to go abroad. But even so, I am afraid in order to reach the English-language market effectively, we have to collaborate with either a British publisher or an American publisher. What do you think of this strategy?

The question is whether you have to do perhaps an abridged version, I believe that for American publishers, perhaps a two-volume version would be more practical rather than a six-volume version. Yes, I think you might have to adapt to what the American market would use.

So that means that we will edit two types of anthologies, one for the domestic market, and the other for the international market.

They will take different forms, which is very typical of world literature today. They will take shape differently to meet the interest in different places. I am thinking of Franco Moretti's wonderful collection on the novel, published in five volumes in Italy and two volumes in a selection published in the United States. It has taken these two forms, and that is within a western context by an Italian scholar teaching in the United States.

Now the last question: as a comparatist in an American university who is very interested in world literature and also Chinese literature, would

you please tell us about the position of Chinese literature in the context of global culture and world literature? If the status quo is not so satisfactory, what shall we do? You are the founding editor of Longman Anthology of World Literature*, how many writers and their writings have you included from Chinese literature, as compared with other anthology editors, such as* Norton Anthology of World Literature *by Martin Puchner, who told me that it includes more than twenty Chinese writers. It is certainly progress from the earliest* Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, which only included one Chinese author.*

I think the first one had nothing from China.

Perhaps the second edition included one Chinese author.

Yes, possibly Confucius's *Analects*…. We have thirty-two Chinese writers in the Longman Anthology, as well as many Japanese writers and also some Korean and Vietnamese writers, who I believe had never before appeared in an American survey anthology. The majority of our Chinese selections come from classical times, with good sections on the Confucian and classical texts, Lao Zi, Zhuang zi, Tang Dynasty poetry, and then later on we have good selections from *Journey to the West*, *The Story of the Stone*, about 75 pages each from those two major Chinese novels, and then we have a number of more recent works, including good selections from Lu Xun and Zhang Ailing in the early and mid-twentieth century. But we do not have any contemporary Chinese literary works now, so I think we need to include contemporary writers for our next edition, to find who are the most interesting contemporary short story writers and poets. I think the modern Japanese fiction is more widely known in the United States than modern Chinese fiction. I do not know why Japanese became known, but I think there are enough market reasons, with some publishers such as Kodansha making a real push to have Japanese works translated and published in America. Also, generations ago there were a lot more contacts for cultural and political reasons particularly in the postwar era between Japan and the United States then between China and the United States. Now is a great moment for increasing cultural exchange and circulation of Chinese writings in the United States. I

think you know that part of the pleasure for readers is discovering different parts of the world. American students, American readers are interested in reading literary works from around the world. We see this in the particular case of Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish writer who won the Nobel Prize in 2006. His novels have been translated into fifty-six languages. He came from a very small country with a language not widely spoken, and it is striking when he began to have worldwide success with his novel *My Name Is Red.* Then he was still in his forties, but I think he won Nobel Prize at the age of fifty-three, the youngest Nobel Prize winner of literature and that is due to the success of his works in translation. I expect that he has a much wider readership internationally that he could have in Turkey.

In China he is very popular among the broad reading public. So translation is a very important means of promoting Chinese literature in the world.

Indeed yes!

As an anthologizer, you certainly have made great efforts to make Chinese literature well-known in the English speaking world. Some of my colleagues always think that the reason why Chinese literature has long been marginalized in the context of global culture and world literature is largely for lack of translation. Do you think translation is the sole reason? Are there other possible reasons?

You have outlined several factors in your talk at our conference. One was Orientalism, though it was not alone orientalism that lead to the neglect. It was very strange that older literature was understood in the orientalist mood, as a depository of ancient wisdom should, and so there was a substantial Western reception of the *Book of Songs* and of Tang Dynasty poetry, but not so much interest in more modern writings. I think that unhappy orientalist heritage is fading away very fast. Now there is considerable interest in the contemporary. As an anthologist, my concerns are almost the other way. Americans have a very short historical memory and their tendency is to want to know what is new, and I have to nudge them also to read Du Fu and Lao Zi, not the only the latest work hot off the press.

Do you think that along with the growth of Chinese economy and the comprehensive power of China, Chinese literature will become more and more popular and Chinese will become one of the major world languages?

I am sure it will. The Chinese language is now taught in many American high schools, which was unheard of when I was a student. It has largely displaced German, which is almost impossible to study in American high schools now, whereas Chinese and Japanese are studied in my daughter's high school.

I think if a literary history of the world includes Chinese and Indian and other major literatures, it will really become a history of world literature. Let us welcome the coming of a real world literature!

That's right.