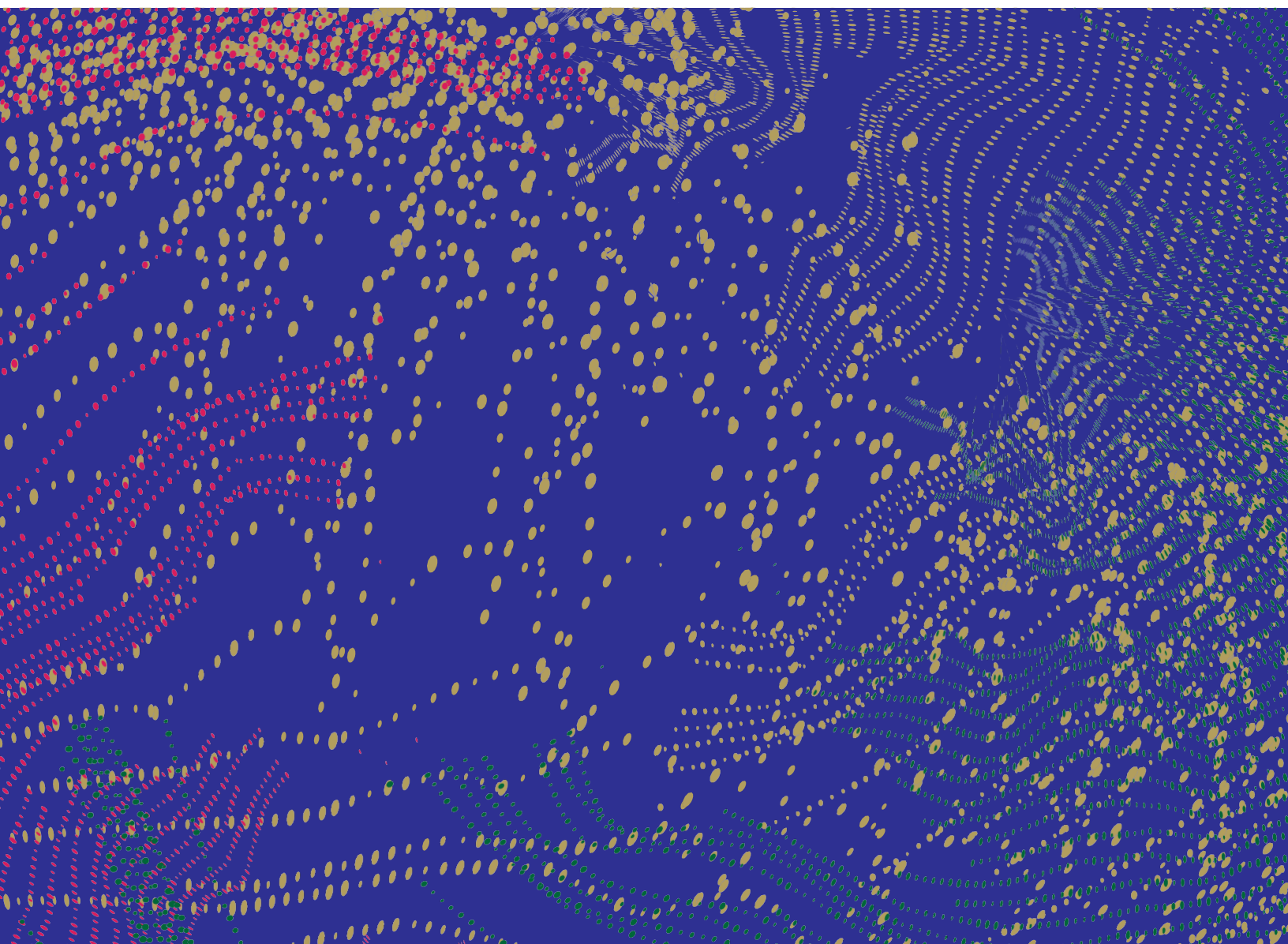


The World Humanities Report

Foreign Literature in China: African

Jiang Hui



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Foreign Literature in China: African

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The Discipline of African Literature Studies in China

The Chinese study of African literature began only in the 1980s but was preceded by more than eighty years of its translation. According to Tan Huijian and Luo Lianggong, the translation of African literature can be broken into two periods: the first a “period of translation and propaganda” (1901–76), and the second a “period of translation and study” (1977–present). “The history of translated literature in modern China is one in which the literature of weak nationalities [was favored], with a view that Chinese people and Black people, Indians, Malaysians, Jews, and Koreans were alike in being peoples without status.”¹ But at the end of the 1950s, Africa entered an era of national liberation movements, and after the 1955 Bandung Conference and the 1958 Afro-Asian Writers Conference, the Chinese attitude toward African literature shifted. African literature was no longer seen as the literature of weak nationalities but as a literature of resistance to colonial rule and of the struggle for national independence. The same year the Afro-Asian Writers Conference was convened, China’s most important journal of translated literature, *World Literature*, published translations of African literature in its ninth and tenth issues. Soon after, guided by Mao Zedong’s theory of the third world, the literature of Asia, Africa, and Latin America came to be referred to collectively as Ya-Fei-La literature.² From the 1960s onward, the Chinese translation of African literature continued; the year before Mao Zedong died, his wife, Jiang Qing, oversaw the publication of the *Poetry Anthology of the Mozambican War of Independence* to commemorate Mozambique’s independence.³ In the 1980s the translation of African literature

¹ Tan Huijian and Luo Lianggong, *Meiguo Feiyi zuojia lun* [African American writers: Introduction and criticism] (Shanghai: Shanghai waiyu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2016), 646.

² Ya, fei, la are Chinese pronunciations for Asia, Africa, and Latin America

³ Wang Lianhua, *Mosangbike Zhangdou shiji* [Poetry anthology of the Mozambican War of Independence] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1975).

reached a peak. Among its many contributions, the Foreign Literature Publishing House released an African Literature Series.⁴ After China's publishing world underwent marketization in the 1990s, interest in Africa weakened, and the translation of African literature survived only by following international trends. Only works of African literature that won international prizes had the opportunity to be translated, and during this time, African Nobel Prize-winning writers Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, and J. M. Coetzee were introduced to China. The relationship between the translation and the study of African literature has been very close, with the former proceeding far ahead the latter such that the Chinese study of African literature has, for a long time, been limited in scope to translated works. This situation has only begun to change in the past few years.

In 1980 the Soviet scholar Irina Nikiforova's two-volume *Modern African Literature* was published in Chinese, and it served as a prologue to the study of African literature in China. It took the entire forty-year period between 1980 and 2020 for China to establish a system for the study of African literature throughout the country. The years 2009 and 2010 were especially important. In 2009 Peking University's School of Foreign Languages officially launched the construction of a discipline of African languages and literatures. It became the nation's first department of Asian and African languages and literatures and the first formal program for training graduate students in the study of African literature.⁵ In 2010 Peking University invited scholars Biodun Jeyifo (professor of African and African American studies at Harvard University) and the Nigerian writer Femi Osofisan (at the time, a professor at the University of Ibadan) as visiting lecturers in its Department of Asian and African Language and Literature. Members of this first cohort now make up the first class of researchers from China in the field of African literature studies. Year 2010 also saw the publication of *The History of South African Literature* by Li Yongdai, a scholar one generation older. This book was the first Chinese literary history of an African nation, and its publication marked a new beginning for the study of the

⁴ Zha Jianming and Xie Tianzhen, *Zhongguo 20 shiji waiguo wenxue fanyi shi* [A history of foreign literature translation in China during the 20th century] (Hubei: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 1432.

⁵ Wei Liming, "Beijing daxue waiguo yuxue xueyuan Ya—Fei Xi Feizhou Yuyan Wenxue Xueke jianshe" [The establishment of Peking University School of Foreign Languages' Discipline of Asian and African Languages and Literatures], in *Zhongguo feizhou yanjiu pinglun: Feizhou wenxue zhuanji* [Review of African studies in China: African literature compilation], ed. Li Anshan and Jiang Hui (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2018), 16.

history of African literature in China. In 2010 projects to study Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz and South African writer J. M. Coetzee were the first research projects on African literature to receive national funding.

In the next few years, the country's investment in the study of African literature had become much more vigorous, as can be seen in a series of scholarly conferences and associations. In 2014 the inaugural African Languages and Literature Teaching and Research International Academic Conference was held at Peking University. In 2016 Zhejiang Normal University not only held the National African Literature Research Forum but also established the first African Literature Studies Center. In 2020 the first scholarly association for African literature studies, the Sino-African Language and Culture Comparative Research Association, was established. Allocation of national research funds generally indicates the importance accorded to a discipline, and in 2019 the National Social Science Fund named "The History of African English Language Literature" as one of its major projects. This designation shows that China intends to organize more resources to invigorate the study of African literature. Thus far, the study of African literature has begun to take its place among the disciplines, and, in the future, more master's and doctoral students will enter the field of African literature studies.

In 2018 the editorial department of Peking University's *Review of African Studies in China* conducted a survey of African literature research at sixteen institutions. According to their findings, the study of African literature occurs at four types of institutions in China: traditional major research universities of Peking University, Tsinghua University, and Fudan University; institutions focused on foreign language education and research, such as Beijing Foreign Studies University and the Communication University of China; the various normal universities, including Tianjin Normal University, Beijing Normal University, Shanghai Normal University, Zhejiang Normal University, Central China Normal University, and Hebei Normal University of Science and Technology; and institutions specializing in finance and economics, foreign trade, political science, and science and technology, including the University of Electronic Science and Technology, Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, University of International Business and Economics, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Yangtze University, Changsha University of Science and Technology, Lanzhou University of Finance and Economics, and

Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University.⁶ In addition to these four types of universities there are others that host researchers studying African literature, such as Huaqiao University, Yunnan University, Dezhou University, and Hui Zhou University.

Through their combined scholarly resources and traditions, these institutions have developed in different directions in terms of research and education. Peking University, Tsinghua University, and Fudan University are comprehensive research universities; with their robust disciplinary programs and strong faculty, the study of African literature has been able to develop in a context of interdisciplinary interaction. They all host faculty who study Africa in their foreign language colleges, history departments, international relations colleges, Chinese literature departments, comparative and world literature institutes, and African studies centers. At foreign language universities, the emphasis is primarily on the study of African languages, and literature is seen as teaching material for language study. Since 2012 Beijing Foreign Studies University has added seventeen majors in African languages.⁷ The Communication University of China established a Swahili major in 1960, and today spoken Swahili and Swahili literature are major research areas for this university.⁸ Many universities have no tradition of African literature studies, but the study of African literature has rapidly developed in recent years, in many cases because these schools have African studies centers or have set up Confucius Institutes in Africa. Zhejiang Normal University, for instance, has a well-known African Studies Institute, and by drawing on the resources of its African Studies Center and by mobilizing internal personnel, faculty studying Western English and French literature were encouraged to transfer to the study of African French and English language and literature, launching the African Humanities Classics Translation and Research Program. Shanghai Normal University draws support from the Confucius Institute it has established in Botswana to carry out research focused on the literature of Botswana. In addition, other institutions including Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University, Changsha University of Science and

⁶ Jiang Hui, “Zhongguo Feizhou wenxue yanjiu fazhan de zhuangkuang” [The state of the development of Chinese African literature studies], in *Zhongguo feizhou yanjiu pinglun*, 1–2.

⁷ Wei Yuanyuan, “Beijing Waiguoyudaxue Feizhou wenxue yanjiu jiankuang” [Summary of Beijing Foreign Studies Universities’ African literature research], in *Zhongguo feizhou yanjiu pinglun*, 28.

⁸ Li Kunruonan, “Zhongguo Chuanmei Daxue Feizhou wenxue yanjiu jiankuang” [Summary of the Communication University of China’s African literature research], in *Zhongguo feizhou yanjiu pinglun*, 31.

Technology, and Yunnan University rely on their African studies centers to carry out research on literature. Finally, African literature is studied at some normal universities without the support of an African studies center, but by carrying on their own Oriental literature studies traditions, carrying over the cultural theory and socialist perspective of Oriental literature studies into area studies.⁹ Tianjin University and Central China Normal University both had important programs of Oriental literature studies in the 1980s, and the faculty who wrote the Africa section of *The History of Oriental Literature* have naturally crossed over into African literature studies.

China's African literature studies belongs to the discipline of foreign literature studies, in which it occupies a position at the periphery. When compared to the large troop of researchers studying African American literature, the researchers studying African literature are few. Between 1993 and 2016, 948 foreign literature projects received national funding, and only 7 of them pertained to African literature.¹⁰ In the educational system, African literature studies is basically absent. Aside from the African literature and culture three-year program in the Department of Asian and African Languages and Literatures of Peking University's School of Foreign Language, foreign language colleges do not have complete academic programs in African literature studies; graduate students can undertake the study of African literature only according to the research interests of the faculty. So far, African literature studies has not entered the undergraduate academic programs of any university in China.

Trends in African Literature Studies

The study of African literature in China began forty years ago in a highly politicized period that was followed by a period of gradual and persistent depoliticization.¹¹ In the past few years, the government has come to organize African literature studies in an area studies framework. After the founding of the Peoples Republic of China, during the Cold War period, the Chinese study of foreign literature was divided into three main areas: Western literature, Oriental

⁹ The Chinese field of Oriental literature studies [*dongfang wenxue*] was influenced by Soviet Oriental studies and encompasses the literature of other Asian cultures as well as African literature.—Trans.

¹⁰ Huang Hui, "Feizhou Wenxue yanjiu zai Zhongguo" [African literature studies in China], *Waiguo wenxue yanjiu* 38, no. 5 (2016): 150.

¹¹ Wang Hui, *Quzhengtaihua de zhengzhi* [The politics of depoliticization] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2008).

literature, and Soviet/Russian literature.¹² As one might imagine, at that time the nation prioritized the development of the study of Western literature and Soviet/Russian literature. Oriental literature existed only as an area of academic interest; it had not yet undergone a period of systematic construction. The systematic construction of Oriental literature as a discipline began in 1981 and represents the first stage of African literature studies. In 1981 Oriental literature, as an important field within world literature, was included in the curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education for foreign literature education within university literature departments. At that time, Oriental literature included Asian and African literature but not Latin American. The field of Oriental literature emerged from the idea that “the twenty-first century will be the century of the recovery of Oriental civilization,” and it represented a break with the Cold War political blocs. For this reason, even though Japan was already a developed country, its literature was included in the category of Oriental literature.¹³ Scholars of Oriental literature aimed to look for commonalities across Oriental literature and its differences with Western literature. Nevertheless, the theory and methods of Oriental literature studies derived largely from the Soviet Union and so included socialist revolutionary features. This Soviet influence is reflected in many aspects: first, Chinese Oriental literature studies followed Soviet historiography, with Asian and African history divided roughly into three periods according to an ancient/medieval/modern model; second, following the Soviet Union, the Chinese category of Oriental literature primarily indicated Asia and Africa; and, third, the Chinese field of Oriental literature viewed Oriental literature as existing in the aftermath of anti-imperial and anticolonial struggles and emphasized realist orthodoxy in terms of literary form.¹⁴ In 1977 Soviet scholar I. S. Braginskii published an influential essay that summarized the Soviet debates around “Oriental literature,” which began in 1961. Braginskii wrote: “The outstanding representative figures of Oriental literature confront

¹² Wang Xiangyuan, “Jin si shi nian lai wo guo ‘Dongfang wenxue shi’ de san zhong xingtai ji qi jiangou” [The past forty years of my country’s Oriental literature studies: Three forms and their structures], *Renwen zazhi*, no. 2 (2019): 6–16.

¹³ Ji Xianlin, *Sanshi nian he dong, sanshi nian he xi* [The river flows thirty years to the east, thirty years to the west] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 2006); Yu Longyu and Meng Zhaoyi, *Dongfang wenxue shi* [The history of Oriental literature] (Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 1994), 2.

¹⁴ Wang Xiangyuan, “Jin si shi nian lai wo guo ‘Dongfang wenxue shi’ de san zhong xingtai ji qi jiangou,” 3.

reality in their creative work; they vigorously mirror life.”¹⁵ The essay was translated into Chinese and came to profoundly influence Chinese scholars’ understanding of Oriental literature. Such realism was the theoretical basis for Chinese commentary on African writers during the early stage between 1980 and 1990.

Beginning in 1983, multiple scholars published works on the history of Oriental literature.¹⁶ These histories of Oriental literature are the earliest achievements in African literature studies, and thus African literature studies in this period operated in the mode of “literary history.” African literature was basically divided geographically into North, East, West, and South African. These histories were written in the form of a general overview, followed by introductions to the lives and works of major authors of each African region. They emphasized works with content related to anticolonial struggle, Enlightenment, social criticism, nationalism, and internationalism.

Entering the 1990s, the Chinese academia experienced major changes, often expressed in the formula “scholarship took the stage, while thought exited.” Scholars were transformed from organic intellectuals into media intellectuals and creatures of the academy. The processes of marketization and academicization produced great changes in foreign literature studies. For nearly the entirety of the twentieth century, the translation and study of foreign literature had a close relationship to the modernization, self-transformation, and renewal of Chinese literature as well as the social thought and movements of various periods, but after the 1990s foreign literature studies became a base of operations for meeting market demands for foreign language training, a platform for the introduction of various Western research trends, and a factory for training graduate students. As a subfield of foreign literature studies, African literature

¹⁵ Bulajinsiji (I. S. Braginskii), “Sulian dongfang wenyi de ruogan lilun wenti” [Several theoretical questions in Soviet Oriental literary studies], *Guowai shehuikexue*, no. 4 (1978): 50.

¹⁶ Gao Huiqin and Luan Wenhua, *Dongfang xiandai wenxue shi* [The history of modern oriental literature] (Fuzhou: Haixia wenyi chubanshe 1994); Li Xianlin, *Dongfang wenxue shi* [The history of Oriental literature] (Changchun: Jilin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995); Liang Chao, Mai Yongxiong, and Lu Tiepeng, *Xin dongfang wenxue shi (Gudai zhonggu bufen)* [A new history of Oriental literature (Ancient and medieval section)] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1990); Yu Longyu and Meng Zhaoyi, *Dongfang wenxue shi* [The history of Oriental literature] (Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 1994); Zhang Chaoke, *Ya Fei wenxue jianshi* [A brief history of Asian and African literature] (Shenyang: Liaoning Daxue chubanshe, 1991); Zhu Weizhi, Lei Shiyu, and Liang Liji, *Waiguo wenxue jianbian—Ya-Fei Bufen* [Foreign literature compendium—Asian and Africa section] (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin daxue chubanshe, 1983); Zhu Weizhi, *Waiguo wenxue shi—Ya fei juan* [The history of foreign literature—Asia and Africa volume] (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1988).

studies experienced corresponding changes. The Oriental literature paradigm of the 1980s was set aside as scholars bid goodbye to the Soviet Union's Oriental studies, and the cultural marketplace and African literature studies from the West, particularly postcolonial studies, began to dominate research topics and methods. This trend continued until 2014 when the Chinese government began to strengthen its role in guiding African literature studies. It emphasized that Chinese African literature studies should draw on China's own experience of literary modernization, that it should be congruent with the Marxist philosophy guiding China's trajectory, and that its organization should be integrated with the newly established field of area studies.

After South African author Nadine Gordimer received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1991, many of her works began to be translated into Chinese, and research on them soon followed. The earliest studies of Gordimer began within the Oriental studies paradigm, but also carried early indications of the transition to postcolonial studies. Soviet authors initially set the tone for Gordimer studies. The fourth chapter of volume 2 of Irina Nikiforova's *Modern African Literature*, which was translated into Chinese, introduces Gordimer. The author writes: "In her novels, Gordimer is immersed in the description of moral conflict, but barely touches on political questions. She makes the relationships of Africans and White people an object of interior knowledge, but her novels do not rise to the level of advancing an important general analysis of this topic."¹⁷ In this criticism, we can make out Vladimir Lenin's criticism of Leo Tolstoy. This type of demand—that writers' social understandings advance from moral criticism to political analysis—is an important characteristic of revolutionary criticism. In the 1995 *History of Oriental Literature* edited by Ji Xianlin, Chinese scholars revised somewhat this Soviet view: "The South African authors led by Nadine Gordimer add to the brilliance of Black African English literature, particularly in that Gordimer's work expresses an intense hatred of racism, and the consciousness of the African people, for the rest of the world to see."¹⁸ Unlike Soviet scholars who emphasized the contradiction between ethics and politics, Chinese scholars emphasize Gordimer's "national consciousness" and spirit of resistance. This kind of Oriental literature studies paradigm is widespread in Nadine Gordimer studies. As one scholar points out: "Skimming Chinese essays in

¹⁷ Irina D. Nikiforova, *Feizhou xiandai wenxue (shang), (xia)* [Modern African literature, 2 vols.] (Beijing: Waiguo wenxue chubanshe, 1980, 1981), 237.

¹⁸ Ji Xianlin, *Dongfang wenxue shi* [The history of oriental literature] (Changchun: Guilin jiaoyi chubanshe, 1995), 1460.

Gordimer studies, one sees in the titles ‘South African woman writer for justice,’ ‘Nobel Prize recipient,’ ‘the Nobel Prize’s Oriental recipient,’ ‘anti-racism’s literary activist,’ ‘true warrior,’ ‘mother of South Africa,’ ‘conscience of South Africa,’ and so forth. The special status accorded to Gordimer in China is largely a result of the expectations of the Chinese audience, their understanding of African literature, and their ideological consciousness and value orientation. Appreciation of Gordimer’s work as it relates to political and cultural identity takes precedence over its literary and artistic attributes.”¹⁹ But even if Gordimer’s works were initially seen as models of “Oriental” literature, she soon received attention from postcolonial studies. Chinese African literature studies attempted to break free from the model of studying “progressive” authors and gradually turned toward the study of “postcolonial” authors.²⁰ With this new lens, Gordimer was interpreted from the perspectives of religious consciousness, identity crisis, feminism, representation of women, embodied writing, ecological aesthetics, narrative structure, themes of alienation, and more. However, these studies tended to apply Western theories to Gordimer’s text rather stiffly, while lacking genuine understanding of the social and intellectual background of Gordimer’s work.

By 2016 more than 73 papers had been written about Gordimer’s work; exceeding the number about Chinua Achebe (70) and Wole Soyinka (42) but remaining below the 445 papers on J. M. Coetzee.²¹ At present, studies of Gordimer are basically limited to her translated works (of Gordimer’s fifteen major works, eight have been translated into Chinese). A portion of her prose has been translated, as well as some of her short stories. Of her untranslated works, only *The House Gun* and *Sport of Nature* have received little commentary. The phenomenon of Gordimer translation and studies illuminates a few features of China’s African literature studies. The first is the Nobel Prize complex. African literature studies finally advanced because African literature included numerous Nobel Prize winners. Research frequently follows prize-winning authors. In addition to the Nobel Prize, China also attaches great importance to the Booker Prize. Chinese scholars’ selection of African texts for study depends on various major Western prizes, a situation that was obviously unheard of in the earlier

¹⁹ Yang Yuzhen, “Zhongguo Gedimo yanjiu lunping” [Chinese Gordimer studies discourse], *Jilin Daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 31, no. 2 (2010): 28–29.

²⁰ Lu Qingmei, “Lun na ding ge di mo hou zhimin xiezuo kunjing de chaoyue zhi tu” [On the way to surpass the dilemma of Nadine Gordimer’s postcolonial writings], *Dangdai waiguo wenxue*, no. 2 (2012): 22–31.

²¹ Huang Hui, “Feizhou Wenxue yanjiu zai Zhongguo.”

Oriental literature studies period. Second, research follows translation, which means that the cultural consumer market has a direct effect on research. Prizes–marketplace–research becomes a trinity. Gordimer’s untranslated works remain that way because the market for them is too small, and studies of them are few. Third, studying translations is easier than studying the originals. Gordimer’s work is regarded as difficult to understand, and translation to Chinese reduces this barrier. This explains why studies of Gordimer came only after translations of her work. Fourth, studies of Gordimer represent a turning point and mark a struggle within African literature studies in China to transcend the older Oriental literature paradigm and to complete the gradual conversion to postcolonial studies.

With the rise of postcolonial studies in the West, Coetzee superseded Gordimer, becoming the most-studied writer of South Africa and even Africa as a whole. Coetzee’s work is fairly estranged from the social history of South Africa, and his background is in the 1980s tide of “borderless” writing. Because of this, he is often treated as a diaspora writer. In China this current of “borderless” writing came to be referred to as “nonmainstream English” [*fei zhuliu xing yingyu*] literature, indicating an attitude of writing in opposition to British English literature and English literary classics. The intertextuality of Coetzee’s work was in keeping with the preferences of postmodern scholars; the treatment of the “absolute other” in his narratives also accorded with poststructuralist theory. As a result, Coetzee studies was all the rage in the West for a time.

Western Coetzee studies greatly impacted China’s African literature studies. From 1986 to 2016, 877 studies of African writers were published in China, and of these 455, or 50.7 percent, were studies of Coetzee, excluding several monographs about his work.²² Coetzee studies defines African literature studies in China to a certain degree, and its principal characteristics can be found in Coetzee studies. Why is Coetzee so influential? First, the great majority of African literature studies scholars in China lack actual experience visiting and studying Africa, but they do not need such experience to study Coetzee. Second, studying Coetzee does not require understanding Coetzee as an *African* author; he can be treated as a European author. Third, Coetzee’s work is particularly suited for literary analysis because it is open to interpretation and can be approached through any number of trends in theory. This richness makes it easier for scholars to establish their theoretical credibility. Fourth, via Coetzee, scholars from

²² Huang Hui, “Feizhou Wenxue yanjiu zai Zhongguo,” 148.

comparative literature, world literature, English literature, and African American literature have entered the field of African literature studies when, in fact, most studies of Coetzee do not belong to the field of African literature studies. Coetzee research incorporates many theoretical perspectives: “For research produced in China the leading perspectives are postcolonial studies and postmodernism. In addition, we see questions of identity, ethics, problems of subjectivity, politics, narrative structure, stylistic consciousness, comparative perspectives, and many other angles from which scholars have entered Coetzee’s literary world.”²³ The boom in Coetzee studies exemplifies the 1980 breach with the rich socialist experience represented by the Oriental literature studies paradigm in that almost all of these new perspectives came from the West, representing the first time Chinese African literature studies was truly integrated with the West. The topic of the first international conference held in China in African literature studies was Coetzee and postcolonial studies. In the background of the boom in Coetzee studies is the imbalanced nature of African literature studies. The literature of only a few African countries receives attention from scholars—South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Egypt—and from these countries only a selected number of writers are emphasized.

Around 2014 African literature studies began to develop more quickly and entered a third stage. In this stage, in addition to the previously mentioned national conferences on African literature, new African literature research associations have been established, as well as nationally funded research programs. But the most important development has been the introduction of Marxist research methods and the area studies model. In 2014 it became evident that the government favored Marxists research methods when it sponsored Cai Shengqin’s project “A Study of Twentieth-Century South African English Fiction in View of Western Marxism.” In 2019 Zhu Zhenwu’s “The History of African English Language Literature” was also named a major project of the National Social Science Fund. It will cover all African countries that have English as an official language and include the study of Ghanaian, Zimbabwean, South African, and Ugandan literature. “The History of African English Language Literature” will study the histories of the national literatures of Africa according to regional divisions, indicating a return to a nationalist framework for conceptualizing literature in place of diaspora perspectives.

²³ Gao Wenhui, “Quqie yanjiu zongshu” [Summary of Coetzee studies], in *Zhongguo feijiu yanjiu pinglun*, 148.

Today's African literature studies has an increasingly close relationship to government-encouraged area studies. In 2013 the State Council-issued "Degree Conferral and Talent Cultivation in First-Level Disciplines" included area studies for the first time. Subsequently, area studies became one of five research areas within foreign languages and literature.²⁴ This plan for the discipline requires that the study of African literature makes a breakthrough from simple textual studies to engaging with the broader society, economy, and culture of the country of origin. The next phase will trend toward African literature studies becoming more integrated with African studies.

In the past few years, Chinese intellectual circles have come to understand the urgent requirements of the unique path of Chinese Revolution and Chinese development, and this is already reflected in African literature studies. The Chinese imaginary of the Third World during the Maoist period has become a hot topic in African studies. Correspondingly, Chinese Enlightenment and revolutionary literary practice is also being used to attend to the successes and failures of modern Chinese literary practice.²⁵ Some scholars, while emphasizing the differences between African literature and modern Chinese literature, also advocate for bringing the study of African literature into the frame of reference of modern Chinese literature, the argument being that African literature cannot be studied only with a Western frame of reference. To allow for the comparison of Chinese and African literature, reconstructing a concept of Third World literature will be indispensable theoretical work.²⁶

Having undergone a shift from Oriental studies to postcolonial studies, Chinese African literature studies is once again returning to a research path centered

²⁴ Ning Qi, "Quyū yu Guobie yanjiu rencai peiyang de lilun yu shijian—yi Beijing Daxue wei li" [Talent cultivation and practice in area studies—taking Peking University as an example], *Waiyu jie*, no. 3 (2020): 37–43.

²⁵ Jiang Hui, "Cong minzu wenti dao houminzu wenti: dui xifang feizhou wenxue yanjiu liang ge shidai de fengxi yu piping" [From nationalist questions to post-nationalist questions: Analysis and criticism of the Western studies of African literature of two periods], *Wenyi lilun yu piping*, no. 6 (2019): 118–57; Jiang Hui, "Zaidao haishi xihua: Zhongguo ying you zenyang de feizhou wenxue yanjiu" [Carrying on values or westernization: What kind of African literary studies should China have?], *Shandong shehui kexue*, no. 6 (2017): 62–76; Jiang Hui, "Zhongguo feizhou wenxue yanjiu shengcheng se lishi tiaojian, pubian xingshi he jiben wenti" [Chinese African literature studies: The history of its production, its general form, and its basic problems], *Wenyi lilun yu piping*, no. 5 (2019): 127–41.

²⁶ Jiang Hui, "Zhuti jian de fangwen yu duihua: feizhou wenxue yanjiu de fangfa" [Intersubjective questions and dialogue: African literature studies methods], in *Quyū* [Regions], ed. Wang Hui, Wang Zhongchen, and Feng Naixi (Beijing: Sheke wenxian chubanshe, 2021), 9.

on the socialist experience, as had previously been established by the field of Oriental literature studies.

Translated from the Chinese by Sarah Veeck

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