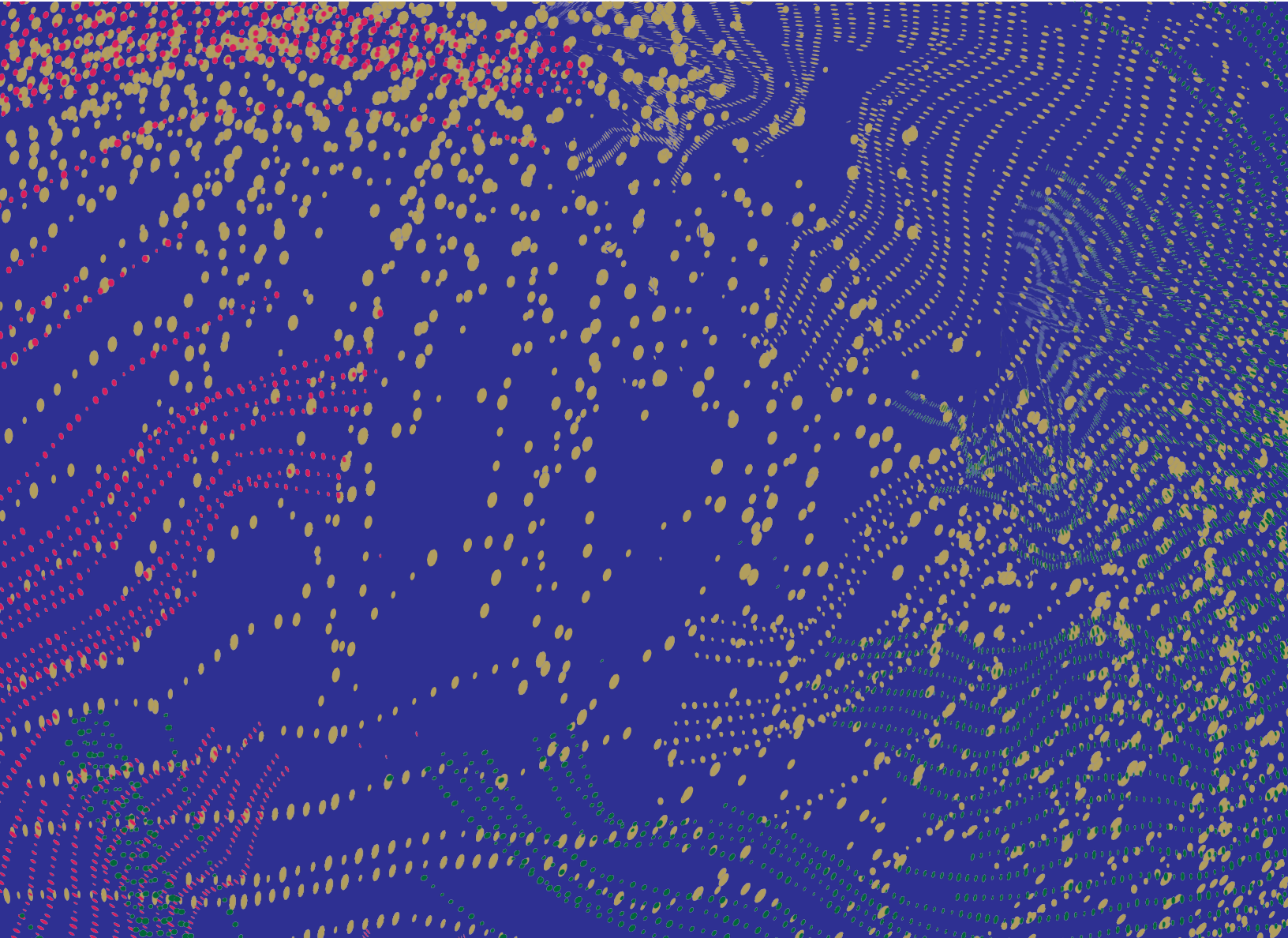


The World Humanities Report

# Foreign Literature in China: Latin American

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# Foreign Literature in China: Latin American

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## The Rise of Latin American Literature Studies

In 1921 young journalist and writer Mao Dun published a short piece in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* [Fiction monthly] (which he himself edited) introducing a Brazilian novel.<sup>1</sup> This moment can be considered the incipience of Latin American literature studies in China. That same year Mao Dun introduced more Latin American literature in the journal's special issue titled "Bei sunhai minzu de wenxue hao" (The literature of the injured nations).<sup>2</sup> Later, Zheng Zhenduo and Fu Donghua would edit a special issue of the journal *Wenxue* [Literature] with a similar title, "Ruoxiao minzu wenxue zhuanhao" [The literature of the weak and small nations].<sup>3</sup> These special issues invoke sympathy and support for the so-called weak and small nations, but they also project their ideas about China onto them. Like China, these nations had old civilizations, fertile land, and diligent people, and they also suffered invasion and plunder. Their past and present constituted a kind of mirror image of China, and, therefore, even if the literature of Latin America was introduced and received in China at this time, it remained more a reference point than a resource for modern Chinese literature.

The translation and introduction of Latin American literature by modern writers such as Mao Dun were sporadic and almost entirely conducted through third-language translations. This situation did not change until the 1950s, when the Spanish major was established and students majoring in Spanish began to be systematically trained in foreign languages. At its beginning, the People's Republic of China interacted with Latin America under the guideline of

<sup>1</sup> Mao Dun, "Baxi wenxuejia de yi ben xiaoshuo" [A novel by a Brazilian writer], *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 12, no. 2 (1921): 4.

<sup>2</sup> Mao Dun, "Yinyan" [Introduction], *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 12, no. 10 (1921).

<sup>3</sup> Zheng Zhenduo and Fu Donghua, eds., "Ruoxiao minzu wenxue zhuanhao," Special issue, *Wenxue* 2, no. 5 (1934).

“actively carrying out nongovernmental diplomacy, striving to establish friendly liaison, and developing cultural and economic exchanges, to gradually move toward establishing diplomatic relations.”<sup>4</sup> In 1951 Pablo Neruda became the first Latin American writer to visit New China. With his help, the Chinese government successfully convened the Peace Conference of the Asian and Pacific Regions in 1952, which attracted more than 150 representatives from eleven Latin American countries. After the conference, nongovernmental associations were formed between China and some Latin American countries. These associations played an active role in promoting bilateral nongovernmental cultural interactions. During this period, a large number of Latin American writers and artists visited China. These cultural exchanges expanded awareness of Latin American literature and art in China but also opened up multiple alternative paths for New China’s diplomacy.

Another fruit of the Peace Conference was the establishment of the Spanish major at universities. Because those from Latin America accounted for around one-third of all attendees at the conference and most of them either could not or would not speak English, the need for a Spanish major became apparent. In January 1953 Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai instructed that the Teaching Group for Spanish be formed at Beijing Foreign Studies University, which was the embryo of New China’s Spanish major. After the success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the Spanish major rapidly expanded across the country, and beginning in 1960, eight universities, including Peking University and Nanjing University, formed their Spanish majors in quick succession.

The five years after the Cuban Revolution saw the first upsurge of interest in learning Spanish and reading Latin American literature in China. But in the 1950s and 1960s those majoring in Spanish were trained for the country’s foreign service, rather than for translating and studying Spanish literature. Spanish majors went on to work in government offices or stayed in the universities to teach. Only later did institutions dedicated to the translation and study of Spanish literature arise and become central to the translation, introduction, and study of Latin American literature. Most of the foreign teachers at that time were left-wing intellectuals or artists from Spain and Latin America, and they compiled the textbooks and reading materials to be used in the classroom that often consisted of excerpts from progressive Latin American literature. Their work served

<sup>4</sup> Huang Zhiliang, *Rediscovery of the New World: Zhou Enlai and Latin America* [in Chinese] (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2004), 52.

as the basis for China's first-generation scholars of Latin American literature studies.

Because expertise in Spanish kept growing, more and more Latin American literary works were translated directly from Spanish into Chinese, and Latin American literature began to join China's literary horizon as a whole. From the 1950s to the 1970s, special issues on Latin American literature began to appear in domestic journals, various kinds of book series on Latin American literature and literary histories were published, and a set of Latin American literary classics were gradually established in China. Noteworthy among these books were Wang Yangle's translation of José Antonio Portuondo's *A Brief History of Cuban Literature* (1962) and Wu Jianheng's translation of Arturo Torres-Rioseco's *A Brief History of Latin American literature* (1978).

The Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s–early 1960s triggered a fierce debate in the international communist movement, and the Latin-American left-wing divided into a pro-Soviet faction and a pro-China faction. China thus stopped translating the works of pro-Soviet Latin American writers; not long thereafter the Cultural Revolution began in China, and translation of foreign literature stagnated as a whole over a long period of time. During the Cultural Revolution period (1966–76), there was only one Latin American literary work published in Chinese translation, not to mention Latin American literature studies. However, toward the end of the Cultural Revolution, in some journals that were not available to the public (such as *Waiguo wenxue qingkuang* [The condition of foreign literature]), there began to appear articles introducing and commenting on 1960s Latin American novelists like Gabriel García Márquez, foreshadowing China's translation, introduction, and study of Latin American literature in the 1980s.

### The 1980s: A Surge in Latin American Literature

Between the 1970s and the 1980s, people were eager to put an end to cultural poverty and seclusion and to absorb Western culture. At the time “four modernizations” was a phrase with the great power, and it was constructed into a social consensus.<sup>5</sup> People were led to believe that under the guidance of the four modernizations, China would enter an era of prosperity and bid farewell to poverty and backwardness, autocracy, and ignorance. Resorting to four

<sup>5</sup> The four modernizations referred to four areas of focused development: agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defense.—Ed.

modernizations made China go back to the historical framework of East/West and backward/advanced and focus its attention on “learning from the West.” As a result, the 1980s became another high tide of Western-oriented translation, as the May Fourth movement had been earlier in the century. In this process, the translation of foreign literature that had been a forbidden area during the Cultural Revolution, especially the literary works of Western modernists, rapidly obtained unprecedented legitimacy and directly participated in the shaping of the 1980s literature in China. However, during the high tide of translating and studying foreign literature throughout the 1980s, the translation and study of Latin American literature, especially contemporary Latin American new novel under the overarching name of magical realism, also had far-reaching influence on contemporary Chinese literature, even if this literature was “non-Western.” This may appear contrary to the logic of the time’s Western-oriented main trend, but on close examination, it makes sense.

### Translation Fever

Compared with the previous three decades, the 1980s saw a great increase in the number of published translations of Latin American literary works. Almost all major works of the best-known Latin American novelists were translated into Chinese, especially contemporary Latin American novels—nearly all published works of García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Juan Rulfo, as well as a major part of those of Jorge Amado and José Donoso. In addition, major foreign literature book series in the 1980s all included Latin American literary works. Two book series on Spanish-language literature that included Latin American literature were also published: Spanish- and Portuguese-Language Literature Series by Beifang wenyi chubanshe and Spanish- and Portuguese-Language Literature Series by Helongjiang renmin chubanshe. Since 1987, Yunnan renmin chubanshe has published titles in Latin American Literature Series, the largest book series dedicated to Latin American literature to date.

In the 1980s literature occupied a central position in society by becoming an important force of social criticism and enlightenment, and writers and translators were regarded as a part of social elite deserving of great respect. This esteem encouraged many people to take up translation of literary works in their spare time. Except for a few professional researchers, translators of most Latin American literary works were university students majoring in Spanish and Spanish teachers, as well as Spanish translators who worked at such institutions as the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, Ministry of Foreign



Affairs, Xinhua News Agency, National Radio and Television Administration, and Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade and translated literature in their spare time. The translation and introduction of Latin American literature in the 1980s still fell far behind those of European literature in terms of quantity, but the publication of so many translations made it possible for Chinese readers who did not understand Spanish to gain a relatively comprehensive grasp of Latin American literature on the whole. As a result, a major feature of Latin American literature studies in the 1980s was that the number of researchers without background in the Spanish language of Hispanic literature kept increasing, and the field grew bigger and bigger.

If the upsurge in translating and introducing Latin American literature in the 1950s and 1960s was driven by major political events such as the Cuban Revolution, the driving forces behind the 1980s so-called Latin American literature fever were rather different. One important factor was the direct effects of the Nobel Prize in Literature. In the fifteen years between 1967 and 1982, Latin American writers won the Nobel Prize in Literature thrice. This showed that Latin American literature was fully accepted and recognized by the world (the West), and on that basis the 1980s translators and introducers built a new legitimacy for translating Latin American literature. Nobel recognition also gave Latin American literature new research and interpretation dimensions.

### **Disciplinary Institutionalization**

In the 1980s China's Latin American literature studies began to further develop and become institutionalized. The most important signal was the establishment of the China Society for Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Literature Studies, since renamed the China Association for Foreign Literature—Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Literature Branch, in 1979. As one of the earliest associations for the study of literature formed in China, it was very active during the 1980s organizing conferences and arranging translations in collaboration with publishers. For instance, in April 1987, the society signed a five-year agreement with the publishing house Yunnan renmin chubanshe to put out the Latin American Literature Series. After that, Yunnan renmin chubanshe gradually came to specialize in Latin American literature.

In addition to the establishment of a nationwide society, the disciplinary institutionalization of Latin American literature studies in the 1980s was reflected in the offering of such university courses as Topics in Latin American literature and History of Latin American Literature, which were also sometimes

made compulsory for Spanish majors. Peking University and Beijing Foreign Studies University began to institute master's programs in Spanish, resulting in the advent of master's theses on Latin American literature. Many monographs and research papers on Latin American literature were published during this period, including Chen Guangfu and Chen Zhongyi on magical realism, Duan Ruochuan and Zhao Zhenjiang on Latin American poetry, Chen Kaixian on Jorge Luis Borges, and Li De'en on Juan Rulfo.

In addition, the founding and growth of Latin American scholarly associations—China Latin American History Association (founded in 1979), China Latin American Society (founded in 1984), and the Institute of Latin America, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (formed in 1961, but affiliated with CASS since 1981)—joined with China Society for Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Literature to advance the disciplinary institutionalization and professionalization of Latin America studies. To this day, these groups remain the central forces in China's Latin America scholarly circles.

### Research Fever

After García Márquez was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982, Latin American literature took center stage in the literary world. Not only were more and more literary works translated, but the study of Latin American literature kept growing in its specialization and depth. García Márquez was the most translated and introduced among the 1980s Nobel laureates, and he, the Latin American boom, and magical realism became the hottest topics in Latin American literature studies.

Following García Márquez's Nobel prize, the term "literary boom" became a kind of prestige and honor, a sign that a nation's literature has obtained the world's attention and recognition. Some researchers recall that the Latin American literature fever in the 1980s China was actually a "fever for literary booms."<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, what the boom brought Chinese researchers was an experience of shock: it seemed to show that Chinese literature was lagging not only behind Western literature, but also behind modern literature in Latin America. The former colonies that had needed China's solidarity and support in the 1950s–1970s were surpassing China's literary achievements. Latin American literature had become mainstream in the world, but Chinese literature, with its long history, did not have a single author who had walked onto the

<sup>6</sup> Liu Xiliang, "Dui 'La Mei wenxue re' de fansi" [Reflections on the "Latin American literature fever"], *Shijie wenxue*, no. 6 (1989): 279–82.



world stage. At the time, a question debated in many articles on the literary boom was how it had happened in “economically backward” Latin America.<sup>7</sup> As a result, research and discussion on Latin American literature turned from topics within the national and regional literature to the broader issues of how to “modernize” and “internationalize” Chinese literature.

Magical realism was also a hot topic in the 1980s. It was regarded as the key with which Latin American literature opened the door to the West. As it happened, toward the end of the Cultural Revolution, Spanish translators such as Wang Yangle and Chen Guangfu had paid attention to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and what they then called *Moshu Xianshizhuyi*.<sup>8</sup> Their research focused more on political position than on literary value, asking whether Márquez was a Latin American writer pulled over on the side of Soviet revisionism (Wang) and whether this novel was a traditional realist novel (Chen). More academic reviews began with the publication in 1979 of a review by Lin Yi’an.<sup>9</sup> This review contained probably the first use of the Chinese term *mohuan xianshizhuyi* for magical realism. It also enumerated a group of so-called magical realist writers. Duan Ruochuan in an essay about Juan Rulfo abandoned the political-ideological mode of criticism long applied to Latin American literature in order to analyze the artistic features of magical realist novels.<sup>10</sup> These two articles by Lin Yi’an and Duan Ruochuan kicked off China’s magical realist literature studies. Then, in 1980 Chen Guangfu wrote an article on magical realism that saw it as being close to critical realism but as a deepened realism that benefited from the techniques of Western modernist literature.<sup>11</sup> He sought to distinguish it from modernism, but critics of contemporary Chinese literature disagreed. Not only did they take magical realism as a school in modernist

<sup>7</sup> Wen Ren, “Laizi La Mei dangdai xiaoshuo de qishi” [Inspirations from contemporary Latin American novel], *Dushu*, no. 95 (1987): 131–37.

<sup>8</sup> Wang Yangle, “Gelunbiya de xin liupai xiaoshuo *Yibainian de gudu*” [Colombian new school novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*], *Waiguo wenxue qingkuang*, January 1975; “Yijiuqi wunian de Lading Meizhou wenxue” [Latin American literature in 1975], *Waiguo wenxue qingkuang*, February 1976; Chen Guangfu, “Lading Meizhou dangdai xiaoshuo yipie” [A glimpse of contemporary Latin American novel], *Waiguo wenxue dongtai*, no. 3 (1979): 37–60.

<sup>9</sup> Lin Yi’an, “Gelunbiya Mohuan Xianshizhuyi zuojia Jiaxiya: Ma’ergaisi jiqi xinzuo *Jiazhang de moluo*” (Colombian magical realist writer García Márquez and his new work *The Autumn of the Patriarch*), *Waiguo wenxue dongtai*, no. 8 (1979): 23–32.

<sup>10</sup> Duan Ruochuan, “Moxige zuojia Hu’an: Lu’erfu he ta de Mohuan Xianshizhuyi xiaoshuo *Peidelo Palamo*” [Mexican writer Juan Rulfo and his magical realist novel *Pedro Páramo*], *Waiguo wenxue dongtai*, no. 8 (1979): 32–41.

<sup>11</sup> Chen Guangfu, “‘Mohuan Xianshizhuyi’ ping jie” [Commentary on and introduction of magical realism], *Wenyi yanjiu*, no. 5 (1980): 131.

literature, but they also regarded it as a model for modernizing national literature. They hoped thereby to reflect upon the single-minded imitation of Western modernism in literature at that time. To some extent, the roots-seeking literature and avant-garde literature, which represent the high level of Chinese literature in the 1980s, are directly inspired by Latin American literature: in thinking about the national and global character of literature and about the relationship between literature and politics and between literature and history; and in its deep explorations into language, narrative, time, space, and theme.<sup>12</sup> In order to interpret roots-seeking literature and avant-garde literature, contemporary Chinese literary critics were keen not only to read and talk about Latin American literature, but also to publish a large number of articles discussing the influence between Latin American literature and Chinese literature and comparing their differences and similarities. After 1985 many articles compared roots-seeking literature and Latin American magical realist literary works, though mostly at a technical level.

Although Latin American literature studies were for a time extraordinarily bustling, the field lacked a deep, close, and comprehensive understanding of Latin American literature, and it lacked an effective dialogue with contemporary Latin American critics. Many questions remain. For instance, how does a kind of Third World literature face a postcolonial world? When Chinese researchers were envying the success of Latin American literature on the world stage, they did not see what was lost behind that success, nor did they reflect on the inevitable costs one must pay for obtaining the West's approval. Moreover, they attached too much importance to the sensational effect of the Nobel Prize in Literature and ignored the innovations in craft, form, and language in the texts. None of their innovations were driven only by a pursuit for revolutionizing the form, and researchers forgot to ask whether Latin American literature could have been able to boom outside of the global historical context of the 1960s. This research that steered away from revolution and politics made the Latin American literature studies of the 1980s appear misplaced and astray. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Li Tuo reflected that Latin American literature was strongly political: "In a certain sense, it could be said to be the

<sup>12</sup> Writers associated with "roots-seeking" sought to counter decades of anti-traditionalism by opening up literature to influences from traditional Chinese culture and aesthetics.—Ed.

pinnacle of twentieth-century literature in that regard. However, in the past, we did not pay enough attention to the complexity therein.”<sup>13</sup>

### The 1990s: Marketization and Internationalization

After it was made clear at the Fourteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1992 that the goal of reform was to establish a socialist market economy, the pace of marketization across the country quickly sped up. In the cultural sphere, a series of policies were promulgated to greatly advance marketization, pushing publishing houses to become corporations. As government cultural institutions, they were still subject to the old censoring system and ideological control, but the manner and the degree were now different, with the market factor playing an increasingly important role.

The new and old systems gradually adjusted to each other, and serious literature was ultimately marginalized in the entire social system, and Latin American literature once again fell back to its corner of a *xiao yuzhong* [minor language] literature. Because between the 1950s and the 1970s, thanks to China’s close associations with the Soviet Union and the Third World, Russian, Spanish, and Arabic had all been important foreign languages, but after China implemented the policy of reform and opening up, with its emphasis on foreign trade, the importance of Japanese and German surged. They ultimately replaced Arabic and Spanish as they joined the ranks of *da yuzhong* [major languages] in China. As a result, Spanish departments of some universities adjusted themselves to focus on practicality in course offerings, which led to a greater proportion of courses on economics and trade. When such courses were not on offer, students raced to the economics department for a minor or second degree. Students willing to read, translate, and study Latin American literature became fewer and fewer.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in the mid-1990s fissures arose in the China Society for Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Literature around marketization. These fissures weakened the team of translators for Latin American literature, who were already relatively weak among foreign language translators.

<sup>13</sup> Dong Zhilin, “Dangdai wenxue yu ‘dazhong wenhua shichang’ xueshew yantaohui ce ji” [Sidelights on “Contemporary Literature and ‘Mass Culture Market’” conference], *Wenxue pinglun*, no. 1 (2003): 138.

<sup>14</sup> Zhao Zhenjiang of Peking University also often lamented the lack of successors (see, e.g., Zhao Zhenjiang, “Wenxue baozha’ yi cheng lishi” [“Literary explosion” has become history], *Xin Jing bao*, January 13, 2005).

At the same time, with Chinese publishing industry was rapidly adjusting itself to international conventions. In 1992 China formally became a member state of the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, integrating itself with European copyright norms. However, this fundamental shift was a difficult adjustment, and as Berne Convention integration was just taking effect, the publishing of foreign literature fell into a chaotic and confused situation for a while during this period. Therefore, between 1990 and 1999 only about a hundred translations of Latin American literary works in total were published, and most of them were piling up in warehouses and gathering dust.

### Professionalization

China's march toward marketization and internationalization led to the marginalization of translation and study of Latin American literature, but reforms in graduate education and in the title appraisal and research assessment system also led Latin American literature to become more and more professionalized and academic. In 1978 China resumed its system for graduate student admissions (which was paused during the Cultural Revolution). Peking University established a master's program and accepted students into a Spanish-language literature. In 1979 Beijing Foreign Studies University accepted its first class of graduate students specializing in Spanish and in 1981 set up a master's program. However, the greatest leap in graduate education did not take place until the 1990s after a series of new government policies. The 1993 Outline of the National Plan for Education Reform and Development and the Opinions on Degree and Graduate Education Reform and Development set out a national plan to vigorously develop graduate education. In addition to Peking University and Beijing Foreign Studies University, other universities were authorized to confer master's degree in Spanish language, including Shanghai International Studies University (1986) and Nanjing University (1992). Beijing Foreign Studies University and Peking University were also authorized to confer doctoral degrees, in 1996 and 1999 respectively, and so they began to admit and train doctoral candidates in Spanish-language literature. The development of graduate education in Spanish-language literature required universities to attach more importance to academic training from faculty, rather than just emphasizing language education as in the past. In 1991 the State Education Commission and the Ministry of Personnel issued the Opinion on Continuing to Do Well in Appraisal of Teachers' Professional Titles in Institutions of Higher Education, signaling that the appraisal of university teachers' professional titles would be

formalized. All these factors drove university teachers specializing in Spanish to devote themselves to literature studies and literary criticism in addition to teaching and translating from Spanish.

When compared with English, French, German, and Russian literature, the study of Latin American literature was still at an early stage, but strongly wanting to catch up, researchers quickly contributed works worthy of being written into the history of the discipline, such as the first complete history of Latin American Literature written by Chinese scholars (Zhao Deming and Zhao Zhenjiang, *Lading Meizhou wenxue shi*, 1989); the first period history on an individual Latin American country (Chen Zhongyi, *20 shiji Moxige wenxue shi* [History of 20th-century Mexican literature], 1998); and a series of short literary histories of individual Latin American countries launched by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 1999. In commentaries on writers and works, noteworthy were Chen Zhongyi's *Jiaxiya: Ma'erkese pingzhuan* [A critical biography of García Márquez] and *La Mei dangdai xiaoshuo liupai* [Schools in contemporary Latin American novel], Duan Ruochuan's study of José Donoso, and Luo Xiaofang's introduction to Latin American drama.

### Borges Fever

Although interest in Latin American literature cooled down on the whole in the 1990s, interest in Argentine Jorge Luis Borges thrived. He became one of the hottest foreign writers at the end of the twentieth century, and contemporary Chinese avant-garde poets especially revered him. After the emergence of postmodern literary criticism, Borges became even more popular, so much so that in contemporary literary criticism, if one had not read Borges, one could not speak on avant-garde literature. In a 1990 article published in *Shanghai wenxue*, Zhang Xinying, for the first time, raised as a question the special relationship between Borges's work and the avant-garde novel in China. After Zhang, there appeared a great many follow-up studies, enriching discussions about this question. After the rise of postmodern criticism, avant-garde novels were only able to be called postmodern if Borges's influence could be identified in them. However, if Borges pointed only toward a series of so-called postmodern aesthetic features that were greatly simplified by contemporary literary critics, or if Borges became a writing template that could be imitated and applied mechanically, he became an empty signifier whose referent was hollowed out,

leaving a shell of form devoid of meaning. He is another case of China's profound misreading of Latin American literature, after magical realism.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the continuous growth of Borges's readers and researchers in the literary and learned circles, among the general readers there also many Borges fans. In the online communities that emerged at the end of the twentieth century, Borges was revered as one of the "must-read classics for petite bourgeoisie."

### New Approaches

In 1996 Wang Hui and Huang Ping assumed coeditorship of the journal *Dushu* [Readings]. They stimulate heated discussions on such issues as the "three rural problems" and education reform within China, and they advocated for reflections on mainstream Western political and economic views such as globalization and neoliberalism, as they expanded the critical landscape deep into the past and present of South Asia, Latin America, and Africa. In this context, a completely different set of problems from those in the past began to appear and draw the intellectual circles' interest and attention. In the 1990s Latin American literary studies, the work of Liu Chengjun (Institute of Latin America, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, writing under the pen names Wen Ren and Suo Sa) was especially refreshing. Although she had begun to publish articles on Latin American literature in the 1980s, she did not exert her real force until the late 1990s. From 1997, she began to publish essays on Latin American thought and culture in *Dushu*, "introducing to Chinese learned circles a critical history of Latin American culture and thought." Her work can be said to be "a kind of attempt to make up for blind spots in intellectual resources." Part of her writings were collected in an anthology *Fengrao de kunan* [*El dolor fertil* (Fertile pain)], published by Yunnan renmin chubanshe in 1998. The book's influence "went beyond the research circles on Latin America and was widely cited by researchers in other humanities fields."<sup>16</sup> Although Liu's research is not restricted to literature and touches upon numerous cultural spheres from religion to music, her approach of situating literature in the context of a critical intellectual history of

<sup>15</sup> Teng Wei, "Bo'erhesi shi 'Houxiandaizhuyi' ma?" [Is Borges a "postmodern" writer?], *Nanjing shifan daxue Wenxueyuan xuebao*, no. 1 (2009): 114–20.

<sup>16</sup> Wei Ran, "La Mei wenhua yanjiu" [Study on Latin American culture], in *Dangdai Zhongguo Lading Meizhou yanjiu* [Study on Latin America and the Caribbean in Contemporary China], ed. Institute of Latin America, CASS (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe, 2017), 206.



Latin America opened a new path for China's Latin American literature studies and inspired the younger generation.

### The Twenty-First Century: Thriving Once Again

China's relations with Latin America have leapt forward in the twenty-first century.<sup>17</sup> After the end of the Cultural Revolution, China's policies toward Latin America had attached importance to expanding economic and trade relations by upholding the principles of "peace and friendliness, mutual support, equality and reciprocity and shared development."<sup>18</sup> And because Taiwanese authorities promoted "pragmatic diplomacy" in the 1980s and had as many as sixteen so-called diplomatic allies in Latin America at one time, Sino-Latin American relations were hindered. In the 1990s, however, this situation began to change when China adopted the diplomatic strategy it had used in the early years of the People's Republic and sought a diplomatic breakthrough in Latin America. During the 1990s two Chinese presidents paid visits to Latin America, Yang Shangkun in 1990 and Jiang Zemin in 1993 and 1997, and over thirty heads of state in Latin America visited China upon invitation. By the end of the 1990s, China had established diplomatic relations with nineteen Latin American countries. But, still, it wasn't until the following decade that Sino-Latin American relations took great steps forward.

In 2001 Jiang Zemin once again visited Latin America, "making clear the direction of development for Sino-Latin American friendly and cooperative relations in the twenty-first century, i.e., building a comprehensive collaborative relationship between China and Latin America in the twenty-first century."<sup>19</sup> With the support of Latin American countries, which accounted for one-third of World Trade Organization (WTO) members, China formally joined the WTO in November 2001, which laid the foundation for the comprehensive

<sup>17</sup> Zheng Bingwen, Sun Hongbo, and Yue Yunxia, "Zhongguo yu La Mei guanxi 60 nian: Zongjie yu sikao" [Review and reflections on the Sino-Latin American relations 1949–2009], *Lading Meizhou yanjiu* 31, no. S2 (2009): 6.

<sup>18</sup> Premier Zhao Ziyang visited Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela in 1985, which was the first ever visit of a Chinese premier to Latin America. During his visit, Zhao put forward the four principles for developing Sino-Latin American relations. See "Zhongguo Gongchandang dashiji (1985)" [Chronicle of events of the Chinese Communist Party (1985)], official website of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, accessed Aug. 22, 2021, [http://www.gov.cn/test/2007-09/04/content\\_736838\\_4.htm](http://www.gov.cn/test/2007-09/04/content_736838_4.htm).

<sup>19</sup> Xie Wenze, "Gaigekaifang 40 nian Zhong-La guanxi huigu yu sikao" [Review on Sino-Latin American relations during the 40 years since the reform and opening-up of China], *Lading Meizhou yanjiu* 40, no. 1 (2018): 17.

expansion of Sino-Latin American economic and trade relations in the twenty-first century. China's state leader Hu Jintao visited Latin America twice, in 2004 and 2008, and Xi Jinping has so far paid six visits to Latin America, in 2009, 2011, 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2019. These trips promoted the comprehensive development of China's relationship with Latin America. By 2020, nineteen of the twenty-four countries that established diplomatic relations with China in the Latin American region had signed on to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Among the five countries that had not—Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, and the Bahamas—substantial progress was made in that direction.<sup>20</sup> China has become the second largest trade partner in the Latin American region, and Latin America is the second largest destination of China's overseas investment. Moreover, in addition to economy and trade, comprehensive cooperation was carried out in such fields as science and technology, security, tourism, culture, and education. China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, issued in 2016, mentioned comprehensive exchanges in the humanities, which included encouraging publishing, mutual translation, academic exchanges, and collaborations between institutions of higher education.

Thanks to the rapid advance in Sino-Latin American relations, China's focus on education in Spanish and Portuguese languages and research on Latin America also entered a new stage of explosive growth. By March 2020 the number of mainland Chinese universities and colleges with Spanish majors had reached one hundred and those with Portuguese majors reached forty-one.<sup>21</sup> As for institutionalization, the China Society for Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Literature has begun to radiate new vitality, and research institutes on Latin America have mushroomed all over China. By July 2019, there were fifty-six such institutes in China, fifty-two of which had formed after 2000.<sup>22</sup> Although these Latin American research institutes carry out research on more than literature, researchers with a background in literature account for more

<sup>20</sup> Yue Yunxia, "Jingmao hezuo ladong Zhong La 'Yi dai yi lu' gong jian xing wei zhi yuan" [Spurred by economic and trade cooperation, Sino-Latin American joint advancement of Belt and Road Initiative steering steadily and sailing afar], *Renmin ribao haiwaiwang*, October 21, 2020, accessed August 22, 2021, <http://news.haiwainet.cn/n/2020/1021/c3541083-31899089.html?nojump=1>.

<sup>21</sup> Zheng Shujiu et al., eds., *Quanguo gaodeng yuanxiao Xibanyayu jiaoyu yanjiu* [Spanish teaching in Chinese universities] (Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2015), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Guo Cunhai, "Zhongguo La Mei yanjiu 70 nian: Jigou fazhan yu zhuanxing tiaozhan" [Latin American Studies in China (1949–2019): Achievements, transformations, and challenges], *Lading Meizhou yanjiu* 41, no. 4 (2019): 6.

than any other field, and literary studies is one of the two most important fields (the other being international relations).<sup>23</sup>

All of these developments form the practical foundation on which the translation and study of Latin American literature have flourished now in twenty-first century China.

### Hot Spots in Translation and Study

Thanks to increasingly frequent exchanges with Latin America and growing familiarity with the practices of international copyright, China's translation of Latin American literature is thriving. Between 2000 and 2016, 355 literary works from Latin America by 106 writers were published in translation (including reissues and retranslations).<sup>24</sup> Magical realist writers remain the focus of translation, but new hot spots such as the work of Roberto Bolaño, Paulo Coelho, Isabel Allende, and Eduardo Galeano have emerged as well. In particular, the importation of Bolaño's collection of works gave rise to a whirlwind, with Bolaño becoming the most important recent phenomenon in the translation of Latin American literature. In poetry, Pablo Neruda, Gabriela Mistral, Jorge Luis Borges, Octavio Paz, César Vallejo, and Bolaño are the most translated and published. Neruda especially stands out. His works have been comprehensively translated and abundantly anthologized, and many of them enjoy high rates of reissue.

Compared with the past, the most obvious difference in the translation of Latin American literature in the new century is the participation of new publishers that emerged in the wake of the marketization and internationalization of cultural publishing at the end of the 1990s, such as Shiji wenjing, Xin jingdian, Nanhai chuban gongsi, and 99 dushuren. More proactive, flexible, and sophisticated in copyright negotiation and purchase as well as in tracking and grasping global literary trends, these publishers have had considerable success in importing foreign literature. They have also taken advantage of new marketing techniques, especially through the use of new digital media. A mode of operation that integrates offline with online media and produces peripheral products means that Latin American literature no longer caters to the minority

<sup>23</sup> Guo Cunhai, "Zhongguo La Mei," 10–16.

<sup>24</sup> Lou Yu, "Duli baogao: La Mei wenxue zai Zhongguo (1949–2016)" [Independent report: Latin American literature in China (1949–2016)], WeChat official account of Zhong La zhi xun (SinoLatinist), December 30, 2016, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/RhhRkiHJf0t4e5t9oEwmCA>.

taste of elite groups but has entered the mainstream of Chinese readers' daily reading.

### Routinized Foreign Literature Studies

As the translation of Latin American literature thrives in the new century, the number of new researchers increases as well. The field has gradually expanded, and the topics have become more and more diversified. The changes in the field can be grouped into six prominent developments. First, there are more and more doctoral degree holders specializing in Latin American literature (especially those returning from abroad). Second, the number of Latin American literature projects receiving the support of national and local government social science funds continues to increase. Third, monographs by Chinese scholars on Latin American literature keep appearing. Previously, China's research findings on Latin American literature were mainly in the form of stand-alone articles, collections of articles, and books of translation, with few monographs authored by scholars and even fewer with a high scholarly value. By the twenty-first century, however, the first generation of Spanish scholars from the beginning of the People's Republic has matured and begun to publish monographs, and the number of middle-career and younger scholars keeps growing. These three generations of scholars collaborate as well, and their collective work can be roughly grouped into the categories of literary history, commentaries, and comparative literature.

Notable works of literary history include *Xibanya yu Xibanyayu Meizhou shige daolun* [Introduction to Spanish and Hispanic American poetry] by Zhao Zhenjiang (2002) and *Xibanya he Xibanyayu Meizhou wenxue tongshi* [Comprehensive history of Spanish and Hispanic American literature] edited by Chen Zhongyi (volumes 1 and 2 already published). Important commentaries include Duan Ruochuan's *Andisishan shang de shenying: Nuobei'erjiang yu Mohuan Xianshizhuyi* [Divine vultures on top of the Andes Mountains: The Nobel Prize and magical realism] (2000); *Shanyan shang de xiaoxiang—Nieluda de aiqing, shige, geming* [Portraits on a cliff: Neruda's love, poetry, and revolution] co-authored by Zhao Zhenjiang and Teng Wei; Wang Jun's *Shi yu si de jiqing duihua: Lun Aoketawei'ao—Pasi de shige yishu* [Passionate dialogue between poetry and thought: On Octavio Paz's poetic art] (2004); Zheng Shujiu's *Lading Meizhou "wenxue baozha" hou xiaoshuo yanjiu* [A study of Latin American novel after "literary explosion"] (2013); Chen Zhongyi's *Bo'erhesi* [Borges] (2005); and Zhao Deming's *Lüesa zhuan* [A biography of Llosa] (2011). Especially worth

noting is avant-garde novelist Can Xue's monograph *Jiedu Bo'erhesi* [Interpreting Borges], whose author does not read Spanish but published this book of interpretation out of her love for the Chinese translations of Borges. From this body of work, we can see the extent of the influence that the translation and introduction of Borges have had on contemporary Chinese writers. A representative work in comparative literature is Teng Wei's "*Bianjing*" *zhi nan: Lading Meizhou wenxue han yi yu Zhongguo dangdai wenxue (1949–1999)* [South of the "border": Chinese translations of Latin American literature and contemporary Chinese literature (1949–1999)] (2011), which a reviewer described as "the first excellent book that interprets China's indigenous experience of Latin America with Western cultural theory."<sup>25</sup> In addition, Zeng Lijun's study on magical realism in China is an example of the interest scholars of modern and contemporary literature have in examining the influence of Latin American literature in China. In addition to monographs and articles, Latin American literature studies in the new century have also been presented in other forms: book reviews, essays, and lecture notes, such as Fan Ye's collection of essays *Shiren de chihuan* [The tardiness of a poet] and Zhang Weijie's collection of book reviews *Jitaqin de wuyue* [Whimpers from a Chinese guitar].

The fourth development in Latin American studies in this century is the appearance of histories of the discipline of Latin American literature. On the occasion of major historical moments such as the thirtieth anniversary of reform and opening up or the sixtieth and seventieth anniversaries of the founding of the People's Republic of China, batches of research works were published as "commemorative gifts." Among them, Latin American literature studies, as a major part of foreign literature studies, had the opportunity to organize its history of disciplinary development and academic research. Significant among them is the part on Latin American literature that Fan Ye et al. contributed in *Gaigekai fang 30 nian waiguo wenxue yanjiu* [Foreign literature studies in the 30 years of reform and opening up] (chief editor Luo Peng, 2018) and the part on Hispanic American literature that Wei Ran et al. contributed in *Dangdai Zhongguo waiguo wenxue yanjiu (1949–2019)* [Foreign literature studies in contemporary China (1949–2019)] (chief editor Chen Zhongyi, 2019). Guo Cunhai et al.'s "*Zhongguo 'Lading Meizhou yanjiu' fazhan qushi–Jiyu CNKI wenxian dashuju de fenxi (1979–2019)*" [Developmental trends in Latin

<sup>25</sup> Wei Ran, "La Mei wenhua yanjiu," 208.

American studies in China: An analysis of CNKI documentation big data (1979–2019)] also provided some data on literature studies.

The fifth important development is research topics becoming increasingly broad and diversified. Compared with the previous generation of scholars, young scholars now receive more coherent and complete doctoral training, have broader academic horizons, and absorb new theories more quickly. They often bring forth refreshing research with new highlights and features, such as Fan Ye's study of the Christian cultural tradition in Latin American literature; the historical and political interpretations of Rulfo, Amado, and Alejo Carpentier by Teng Wei, Fan Xing, and Zheng Nan, respectively; Yan Bo's study of Bolaño; Fan Xing's study on the translation and introduction of Brazilian literature; and the study of Latin American films and culture by Wei Ran and Teng Wei.

The sixth and final development is the internationalization of China's research on Latin American literature. Although earlier Chinese scholars could attend conferences on Latin American literature abroad, the opportunities were few, limited to experts in Spanish and Portuguese only, and favored foreign language rather than scholarship. Papers may have examined how individual writers fared in China but without the historical and theoretical horizons of a researcher. In the new century, with frequent scholarly exchanges between Chinese and foreign scholars, research papers from China's Latin American literature scholars now appear in academic journals and collections of papers outside of China. For instance, Teng Wei was invited to participate in such collections as *Roberto Bolaño as World Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2016), *Remapping World Literature* (De Gruyter, 2018), *The Oxford Handbook of García Márquez* (Oxford, 2021), and *Routledge Handbook of Latin American Literary Translation Studies* (Routledge, 2021). Moreover, Chinese students working abroad disseminate the research findings of other Chinese scholars, which increases the international visibility of Chinese researchers on Latin American literature. Previously, Latin American literature studies appeared to be unitary and conventional in methodology when compared with English, French, German, and other Western literature studies, but Latin American literature studies are making efforts to remove this obvious difference in methodology. The various theories that influence the direction of Western literary criticism, such as feminism, postcolonialism, new historicism, environmentalism, and cultural studies, are also shaping the new look of China's Latin American literature studies.



## Conclusion

Latin American literary studies is becoming more and more academic and specialized. This means that in order to become a researcher in a foreign language department at a university or professional institution one has to go through four to five years of undergraduate study in Spanish or Portuguese and then six years or more of graduate study to obtain a doctoral degree. Latin American literary studies has thus routinized academic production, similar to other areas of literary study, losing some of the emotional and intellectual value it once had in China when Latin American literature was approached as a Third World literature. Fortunately, a group of contemporary left-wing intellectuals active since the 1980s continue to uphold a certain kind of Third World position. Paying attention to Latin America's leftward turn in the twenty-first century (e.g., socialist praxis and anti-globalization praxis), they associate and interact with Latin America and other Third World countries and their people in a variety of ways. One is organizing translations such as the Owl Scholarly Translation Series planned by Wang Hui, Liu Jianzhi, Suo Sa, and others; and Dai Jinhua's translation of *Mengmian qishi: Moxige fusiling Makesi wenji* [Masked cavalry: An anthology of Subcomandante Marcos]). Others include the founding of the South-South Forum on Sustainability (jointly run by relevant academic institutions at Lingnan University, Peking University, and Tsinghua University)<sup>26</sup> and attendance at the World Social Forum. By drawing on the lessons learned through anti-capitalist globalization movements, these collaborations provide alternative thinking resources for China's learned circles. Some young researchers working on Latin America endeavor to continue this tradition by adopting a critical perspective in their own literary criticism and by trying to expand their studies into broader historical and practical spheres. Their work, such as the series Latin American Thought edited by Teng Wei and Wei Ran, are examples of younger scholars' efforts at applying critical thinking resources toward real world interventions.

*Translated from the Chinese by Jiyan Qiao*

<sup>26</sup> Eleven forums were held between 2011 and 2024, where Latin American and African intellectuals and social movement leaders were invited to dialogue with Chinese thinkers and young intellectuals.

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