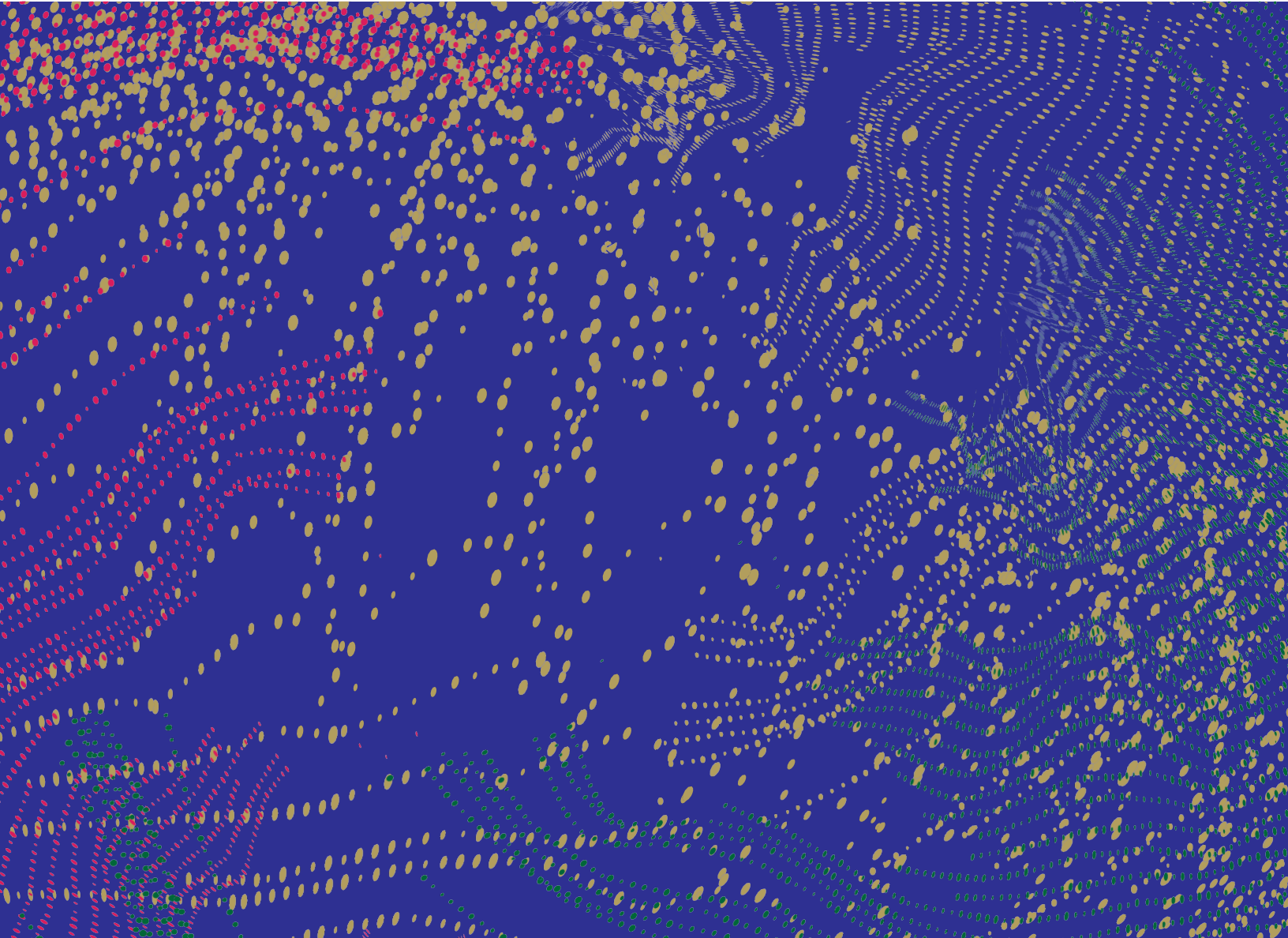


The World Humanities Report

Foreign Literature in China: English and American

Cao Li



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Foreign Literature in China: English and American

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The study of foreign literature in China is closely related to the process of modernization and the rise of modern academic thought. The translation, research, and teaching of foreign languages and literatures are also linked to the rise and development of higher education in modern China. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the translation and study of foreign literature became an integral part of the Western learning movement and the May Fourth New Culture movement in China's modern history. The May Fourth New Culture movement in the early twentieth century, the “cultural fever” of the 1980s, and the recent calling to construct “new humanities” under the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era all have intricate and intertwined relationships with the teaching, research, and extensive translation of foreign literature. The study of foreign languages and literatures will continue to influence and promote China's modernization process and produce a global impact through its unique academic features, paradigms, and practical character, alongside other disciplines of humanities.

The Reception and Rise of Foreign Languages and Literatures in China (1862–1949)

The preliminary translation and introduction of foreign literature in China can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century. The main channels were through Chinese newspapers such as the *Peking Magazine* and *Wan Kwoh Kung Pao: A Review of the Times* created by Western missionaries who translated, published, and disseminated foreign literary works. A larger-scale translation and dissemination began during the May Fourth New Culture movement in the early twentieth century. New Culturalists such as Lu Xun, Hu Shi, and Guo Moruo; early Communist leaders such as Chen Duxiu and Qu Qiubai; and conservatives or royalists such as Lin Shu, Gu Hongming, Yan Fu, and Wang

Guowei, all introduced Western ideas and European civilization to China through the translation and study of Western works, including literary works. This expanded and accelerated the process of Western learning and the development of modern Chinese academic thought and modernization. Whether it was literary reform or literary revolution, intellectual enlightenment or social transformation, they were all closely related to the translation and study of foreign literature.

In 1862 the Qing government established Jingshi Tongwen Guan, a tertiary school of foreign languages, which was incorporated into the Imperial University of Peking, the predecessor of Peking University, which in 1902 and was renamed Jingshi Yixue Guan (the Department of Translation and Interpretation). It predated the Department of Chinese at Peking University (established in 1910) and the Faculty of English at Cambridge University (1917). The establishment of Jingshi Tongwen Guan marked the beginning of institutional foreign language and literature education, as well as the rise of modern university in China.

Over the past century and a half, the discipline of foreign languages and literatures in China has undergone four developmental stages: foreign language education (1862–1926), the initial establishment of foreign language as a university discipline (1926–76), reform and improvement of the disciplinary system (1977–2013), and innovative development (2014–present). Among them, the teaching and research of English and American literature have always occupied a dominant and central position in the entire field of foreign languages and literatures teaching and research (except during the period of Cultural Revolution) as an academic discipline of humanities in China.

English and American literature, especially English literature, entered Chinese university lecture halls in the early twentieth century. In 1915 Gu Hongming, who had studied in Britain and Germany and engaged in diplomatic affairs, resigned from his public office and became a professor at Peking University, where he lectured on English literature, particularly on William Shakespeare's tragedies and sonnets. In the 1920s and 1930s, a group of Chinese scholars who had studied literature in England and the United States, such as Wu Mi, Liang Shiqiu, Lin Yutang, Ye Gongchao (also known as George Yeh), Wen Yuanning, Fan Cunzhong, and Chen Jia, returned to China after graduating from prestigious English and American universities such as Cambridge and Harvard. They successively taught English literature and Western literary theory at Tsinghua University, Peking University, Southeast University,

Zhejiang University, and Wuhan University.

If the Jingshi Tongwen Guan period focused primarily on foreign language learning, the establishment of the Department of Western Literature at Tsinghua University in 1926 (renamed the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures in 1928) marked the preliminary establishment of foreign language and literature as a degree subject in China. Wu Mi arrived in 1925 (via the Department of Western Literature at Southeast University and the Department of Foreign Languages at Northeast University) to serve in the faculty of Tsinghua University as the acting chair. He had previously been a student of Irving Babbitt, the founder of the New Humanism, at Harvard, where he obtained his master's degree in 1921. The curriculum developed by Wu Mi and his colleague Wang Wenxian at Tsinghua emphasized “understanding the spirit of Western civilization, integrating Eastern and Western thoughts” and stipulated two principles of general education and specialization: “studying the entire Western literature for comprehensive understanding; specializing in the language, literature of a specific country.”¹ This reflected the disciplinary and educational concepts of integrating general and specialized education, blending Chinese and Western studies, and combining the traditional and modern knowledge. In the half century between 1929 and 1978, renowned English literary critics and educators I. A. Richards and William Empson came to China several times to lecture at Tsinghua University, Yenching University, Southwest Associated University, and Peking University. During the existence of the National Southwest Associated University (1938–46), thanks to the efforts of William Empson and Robert Winter (Wen De) along with Chinese scholars such as Wu Mi, Ye Gongchao, Bian Zhilin, Qian Zhongshu, and Zha Liangzheng, and the outstanding performance of students like Wang Zuoliang, Xu Guozhang, Zhou Jueliang, Li Funing, Yang Zhouhan, Yuan Kejia, and Zheng Min, the academic status of English and American literary studies quickly rose, and the university's English department became a distinguished department of humanities. Later on, this group of enthusiastic and talented young students of modern criticism, translation, and modernist poetry turned out to be the founding fathers of the foreign literature discipline in post-1949 China.²

¹ Xu Baogeng, ed., *Huitong School of Thought Says So: A Collection of Wu Mi* [in Chinese] (Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1998), 204.

² See Xu Baogeng, *I. A. Richards: Science and Poetry* [in Chinese] (Tsinghua University Press, 2003); Cao Li, “Reflecting Modernity: The Significance and Limitations of Wu Mi's New Humanism” [in Chinese], *Journal of Hangzhou Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, no. 6 (2016): 34–41; Cao Li, “Among the Mandarins: The Impact of William

In terms of translation and dissemination, drama was at the forefront since the May Fourth movement. British/Irish playwright Bernard Shaw and Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen were welcomed by Chinese scholars and readers as critical thinkers and dramatists of social problems. In 1933, around the time when Shaw visited China, there was a craze for his work in the press and academic circles. However, attention was mainly focused on Shaw's Fabian socialism, rather than on the artistic strength of his plays. In the spring of 1936, Zhu Shenghao, an editor of Shanghai World Book Company, began translating *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. He translated thirty-one plays before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and published twenty-seven, earning acclaim from Shakespearean scholars both domestically and internationally.

Due to sociohistorical circumstances, the teaching and research of English and American literature in the first half of the twentieth century mainly revolved around classic authors such as William Shakespeare, John Milton, Samuel Johnson, Alexander Pope, William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, P. B. Shelley, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and modernist writers such as T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and D. H. Lawrence. The impressionistic criticism and popularizing translations of American authors such as Washington Irving, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Walt Whitman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain, and O. Henry followed, but rigorous academic research and disciplinary development had yet to begin.

The Revival and Development of English and American Literary Studies in Post-1949 China (1949–99)

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the translation, teaching, and research of foreign literature restarted. During this period (the first thirty years of post-1949 period), the Cold War mindset of confrontation between the socialist and capitalist camps along with ideological predominance, class struggle, and the literary policy and political-cultural environment dominated by critical realism, profoundly influenced and constrained the teaching,

Empson on Chinese Modernist Poetry and Poetics" [in Chinese], *Foreign Literature*, no. 6, (2018): 163–72; Cao Li, "Cambridge Critics and China: An Introduction," *Cambridge Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2012): 4–25; Chen Yue, "Reexamination and Discrimination: Translation and Response of the Literary Theory of I. A. Richards in Modern China" [in Chinese], *Modern Chinese Literature Studies*, no. 2 (2009): 95–107.

research, and evaluation standards of English and American literature. The socialist Soviet Union naturally became the model, while English and American literature was left out in the cold. High Romantic and modernist authors like William Wordsworth, T. S. Eliot, and George Orwell were labeled as passive romanticists, reactionary bourgeois literati, or anti-socialist and anti-communist writers and were critically attacked. Revolutionary, resistant, anti-capitalist proletarian works, such as Chartist poetry, Ethel Lilian Voynich's novel *The Gadfly* depicting an Italian revolutionary, Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Jack London's works featuring proletarian tough-guy heroes were favored as revolutionary literary masterpieces of the era in criticizing capitalism and the bourgeoisie. Although there was a brief period of relaxation and prosperity before 1956, the teaching, translation, and research of English and American literature during the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957–59) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) were almost dormant and closely aligned with mainstream ideology where political standards outweighed artistic ones.

In 1978, with the comprehensive launch of reform and opening up, foreign literary studies set sail again. With the nationwide college entrance examination reinstated in 1977, and graduate student admission resumed in 1978, English and American literature as a discipline in the humanities began to enter a normal development track and quickly occupy a position of core courses in the curriculum for university English majors. Corresponding textbooks were soon published. Liu Bingshan's *A Short History of English Literature* (in English, 1979), Chen Jia's *A History of English Literature* (in English, 4 volumes, 1982–87), Wang Zuoliang and colleagues' *An Anthology of English Literature Annotated in Chinese* (1983), Yang Qishen et al.'s *Selected Readings in English Literature* (3 volumes, 1981–86), *Selected Readings in American Literature* (3 volumes, 1985–87), Chang Yaixin's *A Survey of American Literature* (1990), Qu Shijing's *Survey of British Contemporary Fiction* (1998), and similar became the most influential and widely assigned textbooks and reference works powerfully advancing university courses of English and American literature in the 1980s and the 1990s.

With the deepening of reform and opening up since the 1980s, English and American literature along with Western critical theories were quickly and extensively introduced and translated, resulting in a massive wave of “cultural fever” and “Western learning fever” for the second time since the May Fourth New Culture movement. From traditional realism to avant-garde, from

modernism to existentialism, psychoanalysis, and poststructuralism, Western literary theories flew in and influenced contemporary Chinese literary creation. Roots-seeking literature and avant-garde literature emerged as a result. Compared with other areas, English and American literature and critical theory were among the first to enter the “carnival” of modernism and postmodernism.³ A batch of modernist works, represented by *Selected Works of Foreign Modernist Literature* (edited by Yuan Kejia and colleagues, 4 volumes, 1980–85), were translated and published in China. Meanwhile, academic journals dedicated to the study and translation of foreign literature were created one after another.⁴ European and American drama, due to its unique forms of expression and dissemination, once again came into spotlight for dissemination and research. Representative works of classical and modern playwrights such as Shakespeare, Bertolt Brecht, Arthur Miller, and Eugene O’Neill were successively brought to the Chinese stage. Foreign films adapted from literary works were frequently broadcasted on radio and television. Foreign literature and world literature received unprecedented attention and popularity.

During this period, the successive establishment of the National Association of Foreign Literature and its country-specific branches played a leading and coordinating role in the overall prosperity and promotion of foreign literary studies nationwide. In November 1978 the Institute of Foreign Literature of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences held the National Foreign Literature Planning Conference in Guangzhou, marking the establishment of the China Association of Foreign Literature. In September 1979, against the backdrop of reform and opening up and the normalization of Sino–American relations, the China Association for the Study of American Literature was established, giving an organized and systematic push to the study of American literature, especially of contemporary American writers and their works. The works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, Willian Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eugene O’Neill, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Arthur Miller, Joseph Heller, Ralph Ellison, and others received unprecedented attention due to their

³ Cf. Chen Zhongyi, “A Review of Seventy Years of Foreign Literature Research” [in Chinese], *Dongwu Academic Journal*, no. 5 (2019): 5–15.

⁴ Such as *Foreign Literature Studies* (1978) published by Central China Normal University, *Foreign Literature* (1980) by Beijing Foreign Studies University, *Translations* (1979) by Jiangsu People’s Publishing House, *Contemporary Foreign Literature* (1980) by Nanjing University, *Foreign Literatures* (1981) by Peking University, and *World Literature: Recent Developments* (1987) by the Institute of Foreign Literature of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

critical reflections on Western modernity. A number of American black humor novels, contemporary dramas, modernist poetry, as well as African American literature, Jewish literature, and Chinese American literature quickly became important content for academic exchange and teaching in Chinese universities. In 1997 the Association for the Study of English Literature was established at Hebei Normal University in Baoding. Ten years later, in 2007, the Association for the Study of Literature in English was established at Peking University. Thereafter, these three national associations formed a tripod structure, playing a significant role in promoting English and American literary studies in China.⁵

From the early 1980s, the study of English and American literature moved toward mature academic and disciplinary development. One of the main indicators of this was the announcement by the Degree Committee of the State Council in 1981 of the first group of doctoral supervisors in liberal arts. Subsequently, Peking University and other six universities obtained the right to confer doctoral degrees in foreign language and literary studies, marking a new level in the education and training in English and American literature. At the same time, classic writers and works such as Shakespeare, Milton, and a number of writers of Romanticism, symbolism, realism, and modernism were evaluated more completely and objectively with Chinese perspectives. Critical accomplishments made by scholars such as Bian Zhilin, Yang Zhouhan, Wang Zuoliang, Yuan Kejia, and Hou Weirui accurately grasped the temporal, ideological, and aesthetic characteristics of English and American literature, expressing pioneering viewpoints and insights that combined Western literary theory with Chinese poetics and experience, marking the initial stage of Chinese way of reading and criticism. The Chinese translation of the eleven-volume *Complete Works of Shakespeare* was first published by the People's Literature Publishing House in 1978. Two volumes of Yang Zhouhan's *Collection of Shakespeare Criticism* was published in 1979 and 1981, providing

⁵ Since the second decade of the twenty-first century, with the gradual increase of China's academic influence, Chinese scholars have begun to hold important positions in international academic organizations. For example, Zhang Longxi served as the president of the International Comparative Literature Association (2016–19), Cao Li and Jin Li served as copresidents of the International Association for University Professors of English (IAUPE) (2010–13), Cao Li served as vice president of the Fédération Internationale des Langues et Littératures Modernes (FILLM) (2014–21), and Zhang Longxi, Wang Ning, Nie Zhenzhao, and Jiang Hongxin were elected as Members of Academia Europaea. Cf. Cao Li, "Academics, Politics and Learned Societies in Contemporary China," *Beyond Babel: Scholarly Organizations and the Study of Languages and Literatures*, ed. Tom Clark (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2022), 113–28.

important overseas resources for Chinese Shakespeare studies. Yang Zhouhan's *Seventeenth-Century English Literature* (1985) used comparative methods to place seventeenth-century England and its literature within the context of world history, analyzing the historical traces left by the first bourgeois revolution and its failed outcome in literary works. Yang Zhouhan pointed out that the doubts and questions about life and death, religious beliefs, and spiritual belonging during turbulent times constituted the central themes of seventeenth-century English literature, demonstrating unique academic judgments and insights of a Chinese scholar. Wang Zuoliang's long essay *The Rise of English Romantic Poetry* (1980) comprehensively evaluated and affirmed the poetic achievements and historical status of William Blake and William Wordsworth, noting dual orientations in their poetic creation and aesthetic attitudes. Wang Zuoliang argued that the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution were double-edged swords for the two poets; while celebrating democracy, freedom, and people's revolution, they opposed bloody violence and absolute scientific rationality. Wang Zuoliang's new evaluation made pioneering contributions to breaking through the barriers of substituting ideological standards for artistic ones in the study of Romantic poetry in the new era, returning to the ontology and aesthetics of literature. In 1984 Wang Zuoliang published "Joyce and 'Terrible Beauty'" in the sixth issue of *World Literature*, introducing new trends in Western Joyce studies and reopening the horizon for Chinese academia to reexamine modern classics of British literature. Wang Zuoliang's *Introduction to Shakespeare and Chinese Shakespeare Studies*, published in 1991, focused on the main positions and contributions of Chinese Shakespeare studies, giving voice to China in the international Shakespeare community.⁶ In 1994 Yilin Publishing House published the Chinese translation of Irish modernist writer James Joyce's magnum opus *Ulysses* by Xiao Qian and Wen Jieruo. In 1996 the translation of *Ulysses* by Jin Di was also published by the People's Literature Publishing House. The publication of the Chinese translations of *Ulysses* was another milestone in the translation of modern English literature following Zhao Luorui's translation of Eliot's modernist poem *The Waste Land* in the 1930s. Starting in the early 1990s, Li Wenjun's extensive introduction and translation of William Faulkner and his major works became an important part of American literary studies.

⁶ Cf. Ge Guilu, *The Academic Progression of English Literary Studies* [in Chinese] (Chongqing: Chongqing Publishing House, 2016).

Since the 1980s, Chinese scholars have continuously followed contemporary Western literary theory, especially new trends in European and American critical theory. Zhao Yiheng's monograph *New Criticism: A Unique Formalist Literary Theory* (1986) and his edited volume *An Anthology of New Criticism* (1988) were among the first to introduce to Chinese academia Anglo-American New Criticism that had been popular in English and American academic circles for about forty years. For Chinese scholars who had long been weary of the extreme leftist ideology and instrumental rationality of the Cultural Revolution, the concept and methods of New Criticism, which emphasized the ontology and literariness of literature, were like a breath of fresh air, invigorating the study of Western literary theory in China. Discussions on the form and aesthetic value of literary art became a scholarly trend in the mid-1980s.

In the mid-1990s, *Dushu* magazine successively published discussions and reflections by Chinese scholars on postmodernism. Zhang Jingyuan, then a young scholar at Peking University, took the lead in editing and publishing collections of contemporary postmodern literary theories such as *Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism* (1992), *New Historicism and Literary Criticism* (1993), and *Postcolonial Theory and Cultural Criticism* (1999), systematically introducing the latest Western literary theories and cultural criticism to Chinese academia, causing continuous reverberations. At the same time, Chinese scholars' specialized studies on contemporary postmodern theories were subsequently published. *Postmodern Cultural Studies* by Wang Yuechuan (1992), *Towards Postmodernism and Postcolonialism* by Xu Ben (1996), and *Humanistic Inquiry and Reflection: A Critique of Western Postmodernism* by Sheng Ning (1997) were among the best known. The Great Contemporary Theorists Series, organized and published by Taiwan Shengzhi Publishing House, enlisted several mainland Chinese scholars for contribution. Works such as *Ludwig Wittgenstein* by Zhao Dunhua, *Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault* by Yang Dachun, *Martin Heidegger* by Teng Shouyao, *Frederic Jameson and Edward Said* by Zhu Gang, and *Gayatri Spivak* by Cao Li were published in the mid and late 1990s, becoming pioneers in similar studies. Zhang Longxi's *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* (1992; Chinese translation 2006) provided Chinese scholars with a Chinese key to understanding and studying Derrida and his deconstruction theory. At the turn of the century, *Dushu* and *Foreign Literature* magazines each launched the Keywords column, focusing on sorting out and analyzing the key terms of Western critical theory and cultural studies. The two-volume *Keywords of Western Literary Theory* (volume 1 edited by Zhao

Yifan, Zhang Zhongzai, and Li De'en, 2006; volume 2 edited by Jin Li and Li Tie, 2017), compiled by the editors of *Foreign Literature*, quickly became a guidebook for Chinese scholars to systematically study the keywords of Western theory.

In addition to the study of Western critical theory and its keywords, the period also saw the production of general histories of English and American literature written in Chinese by Chinese scholars. *A Brief History of American Literature* (2 volumes, 1978–86) by Dong Hengxun and coauthors was the first attempt by Chinese scholars to write a history of English and American literature in their native language. The rich content and incisive insights made the book a must-read for Chinese students and scholars to understand the history and development of American literature at the time. Wang Zuoliang's *A History of English Literature* (1992), *The Evolution of English Prose* (1992), and *A History of English Poetry* (1993) are exemplary works in which Chinese scholars combine historical materialism with historical narrative and textual citation. Liu Haiping and Wang Shouren's edited *New History of American Literature* (4 volumes, 2000–2002) also emphasizes the awareness of Chinese subjectivity. The second volume devotes an entire chapter to describing and evaluating over a century of Chinese American literature, aiming to connect American literature to Chinese readers through dialogue and confrontation in the bidirectional interaction of Sino-American cultures.

Innovations and Challenges in English and American Literary Studies in the New Century (2000–2024)

With the arrival of the twenty-first century, English and American literature studies enters a new stage of development. Chinese scholars have increasingly become interested in new historical novels, postcolonial writings, women's literature, minority literature, and works related to China from English-speaking and Commonwealth countries such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States, Canada, and Australia. Many universities have established centers for country-specific and regional literary studies and hosted symposiums and conferences on topics such as English and American women literature, Asian American literature, postcolonial literature, Oceanic literature, and Canadian literature.

Since the National Foreign Literature Planning Conference held by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Guangzhou in November 1978,

planned and organized research on foreign literature has been a defining feature of the progress of English and American literary studies in China. This characteristic of planned and organized research has become increasingly prominent since the first decade of the twenty-first century, driven by national social science funds, the Ministry of Education's humanities and social science projects, nationwide university rankings and evaluations, and the Double First-Class Initiative. Project-based research, assessments and awards, and various talent programs have significantly stimulated applications for projects and publications of studies by foreign literature scholars. Consequently, studies of foreign literature have flourished and rapidly developed, similar to philosophy and social sciences. New trends and remarkable achievements have emerged in areas such as the reception of classic English and American authors in China, the reception of Western critical traditions in China, English and American literature and the history of humanistic exchange, the representation of China and Chinese in English and American literature. Single-volume studies on English and American authors and works, retranslations of complete works and criticism of major authors, and studies of intellectual history in English and American literature have become areas of heated interest along with such timely topics as communities in English and American literature, progressive discourse in English and American literature, consumerism in English and American literature, urbanization and modernization in English and American literature, narrative studies, ecocriticism, and ethical criticism, and so on. *Dictionary of American Literature* (2017), edited by Yu Jianhua, is a large-scale American literature dictionary independently compiled by Chinese scholars that won the first Outstanding Achievements in Scientific Research in Higher Education Award by the Ministry of Education. Wang Ning's *A History of Foreign Literature Criticism in Contemporary China* (2019) comprehensively reviewed and evaluated the major developmental stages of foreign literature criticism since the founding of the People's Republic of China, highlighting the achievements of Chinese scholars in criticism from a Sino-Western comparative perspective. Other significant works include Lu Jiande's *Fragments of a Broken Thought System: Essays on English and American Literature and Intellectual History* (2001), Yin Qiping's *A History of Criticism of English Fiction* (2001) and *Studies on British Literature amid Changes in the Ideas of Culture* (2020), Huang Mei's *Debating the Self: Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (2003), Ma Hailiang's *Cultural-Political Aesthetics: A Study on the Eagletonian Critical Theory* (2004), Zhou Xiaoyi's *From Form Back to History: Studies on Twentieth-Century Western Literary Theory and the*

Academic System (2010), Li Weiping's *A History of British Literary Thought* (2012) and *A History of American Literary Thought* (2018), Qian Mansu's *A Documentary History of American Civilization: Forty Classic Documents That Shaped the United States of America* (2014), Nie Zhenzhao's *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism* (2014), Shen Dan's *A Study of Dual Narrative Progression* (2021), Jiang Hongxin's *A Study of T. S. Eliot's Literary Thought* (2021), and Cao Li's *Cambridge Criticism: China and the World* (2022) and *Cambridge Criticism: Inheritance and Transcendence* (2024). These works have expanded the academic landscape of English and American literary studies in China from the perspectives of intellectual history, critical history, academic history, the history of humanistic exchange, and studies of major writers and their works.

In recent years, more and more scholars have turned their attention to interdisciplinary and cross-border studies in English and American literature, exploring areas such as literature and national identity, literature and civil education, literature and law, literature and politics, literature and ethics, literature and cities, literature and countryside, literature and the sea, literature and disease, literature and the body, literature and war, literature and science, literature and magic, and so on. These topics have emerged one after another and moved toward generating equal dialogues with Western academia. In this process, innovation of academic studies and critical discourse have become a widespread concern among Chinese scholars. Whether in theoretical interpretation or the study of specific authors and works, whether in textual analysis or school differentiation, there is an implicit anxiety about Western influence. On the one hand, Chinese scholars are eager to overcome the aphasia in modern critical theory and form their own critical discourse and academic paradigms. Consequently, new approaches such as translation-introduction studies, variation studies, and ethical literary criticism have emerged. On the other hand, while striving to build an autonomous knowledge system and critical discourse free from reliance on Western theories and methods, there are questions to be asked and answered. How should Chinese scholars evaluate and handle Western academic reference systems with a true-to-fact and dialectical attitude has become a practical issue that must be addressed.

As new research trends and academic hotspots echoing Western academia, such as literary geographical studies, posthuman and posthumanism studies, emotional turn studies, and material turn studies, continue to prevail, there is a prevalent anxiety about adopting or aligning with Western theoretical frameworks among graduate students and some early or midcareer scholars. This

phenomenon reflects contemporary Chinese scholars' persistent ambition and openness on the one hand and the blind following and dependency on Western scholars and their theoretical discourses on the other. In this process, Chinese classical poetics, the aesthetics of literature itself are often absent. A considerable portion of scholarly works pays little attention to the formal, linguistic, or textual beauty and value of literature itself. It seems that without contemporary Western literary theory and some far-fetched nonliterary dimensions, foreign literary interpretation and research would be at a loss and unable to proceed. The insightful and meticulous examination and reading of authors and works and literary thoughts by earlier distinguished predecessors relying on rich learning and keen intellect rather than obscure theoretical discourses or conceptual jargons have become extinguished. As a result, scholarly and intellectual English and American literary studies have been taken over by theoretical and academic research.

With the state proposal of the strategic development idea of four confidences, namely confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics, China's foreign literary studies has increasingly presented a distinct awareness of overcoming theoretical aphasia and reconstructing an autonomous knowledge system and critical discourse of its own. This is reflected in project applications, achievement awards, journal columns, publication of papers and monographs, themes of academic annual conferences, and special topic colloquiums and symposiums. Large-scale research works with the theme of foreign literary studies and China have been published one after another, reflecting the subjective stance and national awareness of Chinese scholars. These research works and monographs, such as *Foreign Literature Studies in Contemporary China 1949–2019* (2011) and *Academic History of Foreign Literature Studies* (multivolume, 2011–) edited by Chen Zhongyi, *Sixty Years of Foreign Literature Studies in New China* (6 volumes, 2015) edited by Shen Dan and Wang Bangwei, *The Academic Progression of Foreign Literature Studies in China* (12 volumes, 2016) edited by Chen Jianhua, *A Series of Investigations on the Process of "Sinicization" of European and American Literature in the Past Hundred Years* (6 volumes, 2020) edited by Liu Jianjun, and *The Academic Progression of English Literary Studies* (2016) by Ge Guilu and *The Academic Progression of American Literary Studies* by Jiang Ningkan and coauthors (2016) have become the most comprehensive and notable contributions to the field, mostly in multivolume forms, reviewing and documenting the half century of progress of foreign literary studies in China.

However, it remains a long-term and challenging task to clarify and raise new academic issues, paradigms, and propositions of significant social value that are applicable both to Chinese and international academia through historical, comparative, and forward-looking perspectives and methods. The government's proposal of "new liberal arts" in the construction of the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics in 2016 provided new academic imagination and reformative space for the discipline of foreign language and literature's second century. A thorough and careful review of the old learning and the new theories is the first step to write new chapters and innovate new patterns.

From the establishment of the Tongwen Guan in 1862 to the founding of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Tsinghua University in 1926, from the announcement of the first group of doctoral supervisors in liberal arts by the Degree Committee of the State Council in 1981 to the determination of five major directions of foreign language and literature discipline (linguistic studies, foreign literature studies, translation studies, comparative literature and cross-cultural studies, and country and regional studies) by the Degree Committee of the State Council in 2013, and further clarification of fourteen subdisciplines in January 2024,⁷ China's foreign language and literature discipline has gone through a developing process over one and a half centuries. By 2024, there are 68 doctoral programs and 159 master's programs under the rubric of foreign languages and literatures nationwide (excluding Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan),⁸ with over 3,000 undergraduate institutions across the country all having established foreign language and literature departments, among which more than 1,000 institutions offer undergraduate majors in English language and literature.

With the fluctuating tides of globalization and anti-globalization and the rapid rise and development of artificial intelligence, especially ChatGPT, English and American literary studies face new historical opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, like other humanities and social science fields, foreign literary studies, with English and American literature as a crucial component,

⁷ These subdisciplines include English language and literature, Russian language and literature, French language and literature, German language and literature, Japanese language and literature, Indian language and literature, Spanish language and literature, Arabic language and literature, European languages and literature, Asian and African languages and literature, foreign linguistics and applied linguistics, translation studies, comparative literature and cross-cultural studies, and foreign language education.

⁸ These statistics do not include any of the subdisciplinary programs.

shoulders the historical mission of reconstructing autonomous knowledge system that includes disciplinary, academic, discursive systems. This can be seen as a continuation and upgrade of the traditional/modern debate and Chinese/Western dispute since the late Qing dynasty and the May Fourth New Culture movement. In order to construct a school of thought in foreign literary studies and a new system of discourse that are focused on China and serve China's needs, innovative reform and transformation are needed for the study of foreign literature and comparative literature on the basis of clarifying and carrying on the Chinese tradition. Whether we are able to put forward theoretical propositions and academic paradigms that bear both Chinese characteristics and global universality is crucial for forming autonomous knowledge system and discourse. On the other hand, the rapid rise of ChatGPT, accompanied by the symptom of devaluating foreign languages in the public media, the instrumental feature of foreign languages in the conventional sense and public perception, and the "uselessness of literature" argument continue to ferment. Foreign language and literature disciplines face unprecedented development bottlenecks and survival dilemmas in terms of student enrollment and disciplinary construction. "Foreign language + law," "foreign language + computer," "foreign language + artificial intelligence," and other "foreign language +" projects and programs have become provisional strategies for disciplinary development and even institutional survival. The ontological study of foreign literature further falls into minority learning or elite learning category. How can foreign literary criticism and research, with English and American literature as an important component, break out of the project-oriented and various quantitative assessment indicators' constraints and misconceptions and move from academic criticism to broader social and cultural criticism? In what way can the study of foreign language and literature be innovated so as to keep pace with the time in the dynamic historical alternation and competition between human historical subjects (experiential subjects) and machine subjects (intelligent subjects), while trying to create new leading scenarios and paradigms? How can such scenarios and paradigms, on the one hand, fit the spirit of the time and, on the other hand, and more importantly, lead the age by setting new trends, transforming ancient Chinese wisdom for modern use, and applying Western knowledge for Chinese use through intellectual and cultural enlightenment by way of translation, creative writing, academic debate, and higher education, while striving to foster new literatures, new ideas, new theories, new patterns, and new

methodologies? These are academic as well as practical questions that Chinese foreign literature scholars need to confront and resolve.

Faced with the new problems and challenges in the academic and disciplinary development of foreign language and literature studies, Chinese scholars need to adopt a comparative, historical, and realistic approach in order to further dialectically and comprehensively understand the individual and overall relationships between science and humanities, tradition and modernity, the local and the global, and the national and the international. Only “by breaking through the confines of old Chinese or new Western doctrines and embarking on new explorations and syntheses”⁹ can we come up with more valuable and meaningful theoretical discourses and academic propositions regarding language and literature, culture and society, China and the world in the course of advancing foreign literary studies, including the study of English and American literature.

⁹ Wang Zuoliang, “Thinking of Tsinghua University: Reflections on the 80th Anniversary of Tsinghua University” [in Chinese], *People’s Daily*, April 23, 1991, 8th edition, supplement, included in *Wang Zuoliang’s Complete Works*, vol. 10, (Beijing: Foreign Language Research and Teaching Press, 2016) 610–13.

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