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# Introduction

## Intrinsically Extrinsic

物无非彼，物无非是

AS WE LEARN in our first encounters with the Chinese language and civilization (for some, this event takes place practically at birth), the adjective that qualifies China in Chinese is *Zhong* 中, “center” or “inward”; what is not Chinese is *wai* 外, “outside.”<sup>1</sup> “In” and “out” are what we call in English prepositions: they describe relations, not essences. Over the long course of Chinese civilization, some practices or values have often been singled out as the core or essence of Chineseness: the *zhong* of the *Zhong*, as it were. My many years of fascination with China have not led me in that direction. The inquiry conducted in this book goes relationally and indirectly, asking how the *wai* defines the *zhong* for one of those practices deemed to be closest to the civilization’s core: writing, the effort to shape the world through and as a system of enduring traces. In other words, it is about the outside seen from the inside, as reconstructed by an outsider.

My inquiry into the intrinsic, the extrinsic, and the literary has taken shape in the space between two quotations from the early Chinese empire. First we have the proud proclamation of sovereign centrality and commonality, achieved through the

First Emperor's unification of *Tianxia* (All under Heaven) in 221 BCE:

今天下車同軌，書同文，行同倫。

Now, throughout the world, cart-tracks are of one width; writing is with the same characters; and for conduct there are the same rules.<sup>2</sup>

And next we have the no less proud prediction, deduced from Zhang Qian's 張騫 report of 125 BCE to Emperor Wu of the Han 漢武帝, that news of the Chinese sovereign's glory would attract people as yet unaware of any such unification of cartwheels, morals, and written marks:

天子既聞大宛及大夏、安息之屬皆大國，多奇物，土著，頗與中國同業，而兵弱，貴漢財物；其北有大月氏、康居之屬，兵彊，可以賂遺設利朝也。且誠得而以義屬之，則廣地萬里，重九譯，致殊俗，威德遍於四海。<sup>3</sup>

Thus the emperor learned of Dayuan [Ferghana], Daxia [Bactria], Anxi [Parthia], and the rest, all great states rich in unusual products whose people cultivated the land and made their living in much the same way as the Chinese. All these states, he was told, were militarily weak and prized Han goods and wealth. He also learned that to the north of them lived the Yuezhi [Tocharian] and Kangju [Sogdian] people who were strong in arms but could be persuaded by gifts and the prospect of gain to acknowledge allegiance to the Han court. If it were only possible to win over these states by peaceful means, the emperor thought, he could then extend his domain [by] 10,000 *li*, attract to his court men of strange customs and languages requiring ninefold translation, and his might would become known to all the lands within the four seas.<sup>4</sup>

“Nine” is here a rhetorically vivid substitute for “many.” The hypothetical “ninefold translation,” *jiu yi* 九譯 as it is usually abbreviated, is a bucket-brigade scenario of international communication,

the Chinese representative speaking to a bilingual Sogdian, who speaks to a bilingual Bactrian, who speaks to a bilingual Parthian, and so on. Such chains of translation would both spread the news of China and add to its majesty by linking to the centers of other worlds inhabited by people as yet undiscovered.

Within China, a unified script; outside it, the need for nine (or infinite) levels of translating. Between these poles arise complementary profiles of Self and Other, or Similar and Different, which I have sought to investigate through textual records. To those who know it, of course, China is not all the same. The cart tracks, even if cut to a standard width, wind through thousands of mountains and valleys and plains, each area unlike all the others. The words are pronounced in hundreds of different ways from place to place. The people go by one or another of the Hundred Surnames: the Zhangs, the Lis, the Chens, the Wangs. . . . But all these differences are linked, regulated, relativized by shared communicative norms. If the great achievement of the unified Chinese empire, according to the first quotation, is the imposition of a single set of rules, foreign cultures, as in the second quotation, are a proliferation of endless unregulated and unpredictable differences. The contrast is stark and so often repeated that its details are easily lost to consciousness. If in China everything is Similar, and if outside of it Difference reigns, the differences are not apt to matter very much to a person inside the circle of Similarity. If the meaning of the contrast of Similarity and Difference is its pertinence to saying something about the realm of the Similar, then it cannot matter very much what local differences arise in the land of the Different, or (to get a bit more specific) what the languages and peoples of the ninefold translation relays are. “They” are perceivable as “not-us”; “we” are tautologically “ourselves.” But if we consider the unity and diversity signaled by these quotations not as static facts but as processes, then the contrast takes on a different sense. It is not just that Chinese are one way and outsiders are another; how they got to be that way is the question. In that perspective, Chinese homogeneity results from a conquest (never quite complete)

of matter by sovereign will, and foreign diversity becomes tangible through the coordination of incomprehensible tongues, an “organization of distances” aimed at creating intelligibility for the Chinese end-listener.<sup>5</sup> Who exactly are these foreigners whose desire to enter into communication with China, or whose products’ attractiveness to the Chinese, magnetizes their outlandish idioms into a noisy chorus ending at the palace gate? It would be a pity to fold those nine acts of translation into a single concept, even an encompassing one such as foreignness, diversity, or plurality.

The chapters of this book ask in different ways about the specifics of those nine relays, those strange customs, and about what happens once they come into contact with Sinographic culture. While being a devoted reader of Chinese, that is, central, texts, I practice the eccentric discipline of comparative literature.<sup>6</sup> Centrality and eccentricity meet here in a loopy dance, a parabolic orbit.

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Comparative literature? But isn't that an essentially Eurocentric discipline? Even when it tries to be accommodating, comparative literature expresses its origins. Goethe in 1827 had an intuition that “national literature means little now, and the era of world literature is at hand”; he was brought to that revelation by reading a translated Chinese novel.<sup>7</sup> Marx and Engels declared in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) that “the bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country,” so that “from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.”<sup>8</sup> In this understanding, which is by now widespread, the “world” of “world literature” is a side effect of the “world system,” latterly known as globalization, understood as a network of political and economic relations set in motion by Columbus's voyages and the subsequent implantation of European colonies on all the continents.<sup>9</sup> And indeed accounts of the progress of world or

comparative literature are usually written around a European center and protagonist. For example, the editorial of the first number (1903) of Columbia University's *Journal of Comparative Literature* claimed for comparatists a "new citizenship in the rising state which—the obscurer or brighter dream of all great scholars from Plato to Goethe—is without frontiers or race or force, but there reason is supreme."<sup>10</sup> The "unity of mankind" and "upbuilding of the international state in a homogeneous civilization" to which George Woodberry, the journal's editor, looked forward were to be achieved by comparative scholarship capable of identifying the universals in literature and culture. After a solid basis had been achieved in European languages, Woodberry foresaw "the approaching exploitation of the old literatures of the Orient, which is the next great event in the literary history of the world." But those "old literatures" long preexisted Goethe and, for some of them, Plato too; only those literatures' unfamiliarity in the eyes of European latecomers made their "exploitation" "the next great event" in literary history. What would happen if our histories of literature began from those centers and progressed through the ages toward the discovery of those Europeans still living, at a recent date, "in the forests," as Goethe delicately put it?

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The term "comparative literature" in China is a little over a hundred years old. The act of comparison that began it is indeed a meeting of the *Zhong* 中 and the *wai* 外 on the premises of the *Zhong*.

文學進化觀念的第二層意義是：每一類文學不是三年兩載就可以發達完備的，須是從極低微的起原，慢慢的，漸漸的，進化到完全發達的地位。有時候，這種進化剛到半路上，遇着阻力，就停住不進步了...

一種文學有時進化到一個地位，便停住不進步了；直到他與別種文學相接觸，有了比較，無形之中受了影響，或是有

意的吸收人的長處，方才再繼續有進步... 我現在且不說這種「比較的文學研究」可以得到的種種高深的方法與觀念。<sup>11</sup>

The concept of literary evolution has two layers of meaning: no literature flourishes and comes to fruition overnight, it must rather arise from small beginnings and slowly, step by step, progress to a state of complete development. Sometimes this process of evolution is blocked in midcourse, stops, and then there is no more progress. . . .

A literature sometimes evolves to a certain stage, comes to a stop and makes no more progress. It is only through contact with other literatures that it is able to make comparisons, and either be influenced unconsciously or deliberately incorporate the strengths of others: then and only then progress may continue. . . . For the moment I will not go into the many great and deep methods and concepts that are to be derived from such “comparative literary research.”

As an assertion of a bare kind of causality in the cultural realm, Hu Shi's statement can hardly be faulted: sometimes a literary tradition runs out of things to say, repeats itself, becomes sterile or loses relevance, and awaits new impetus from outside. But the abstract language hides a more specific referent. Hu Shi in 1918 was not talking about enacting comparisons with just any “other”: the other relevant at the time to comparison with Chinese literature was “the West,” meaning chiefly modern literature in English, French, Russian, German, and Japanese. East-West comparison, of which this is by no means the first instance, had already risen to the status of obsession in philosophies of history and theories of national identity in both Europe and Asia, but Hu Shi here initiates the phrase *bijiao [de] wenxue* 比較 [的] 文學 and molds the practices that would come to define it. Such East-West comparison served a specific purpose.<sup>12</sup> The aim was not to come to know the countless variety of literary traditions around the world, including those of Asia, but to learn how to modernize (“develop”) Chinese literature. And that is how discussions of *Zhongwai*

*wenxue* 中外文學 (not the distinguished literary monthly, but the subject area, “Chinese-foreign literature”) have grown up: a particular set of examples dominates very nearly to the point of defining it. The *wai* of *Zhongwai* refers, in common usage, to contemporary Europe and North America as the sites of present-day literary prestige.<sup>13</sup> Theirs are the literary artifacts with which it is interesting or valuable to compare China’s. Any current comparative-literature journal’s table of contents will bear this out: the *waiguo wenxue* 外國文學 (foreign literature) with which *Zhongguo wenxue* 中國文學 (Chinese literature) of any period and genre is associated is a selective, often hyperselective canon: Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Kafka, Joyce, Woolf. . . . The intelligent young people who come to me to write papers and dissertations often have in mind models of scholarship that follow these precedents. But why should those examples occupy the near-totality of the comparative space? They represent, at the very least, a narrow selection among the possible values for *wai*. What makes those the right examples for comparison? Why not other examples, of which there is no shortage? Scholars turn out comparative studies of Sima Qian and Herodotus (but not the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, Garcilaso de la Vega, or the Kirghiz epic of *Manas*); Li Bai and Keats (and not Jayadeva or Peire Vidal); or Cao Xueqin and Marcel Proust (and not Ann Radcliffe or Abdelkébir Khatifi)—I make no promises as to the fertility of these alternative suggestions, though something can be learned from any comparison; the question is why some comparisons are always made and others are seemingly never made.<sup>14</sup>

In poetics, the domain that habitually is my main concern, the practice of *zhongwai* research has long meant calling up a few examples from the traditions to be honored (Wordsworth and Wang Wei, Aristotle and Liu Xie, and so forth) and deriving from them principles said to characterize the Chinese literary universe. Polarities available for use in other areas of critical discourse serve to mark off what is specifically Chinese from what is “Western”: metonymy versus metaphor, reality versus fiction, space versus time,



nature versus consciousness, emulation versus originality, process versus product, index versus sign. The supposed impossibility of translation (I am not denying its difficulty) prompts talk of incommensurate cultural worlds or, what is almost the same, leads to frowning on translation as necessarily denaturing the pristine original.<sup>15</sup> There is an inescapable irony in the way this often defensively inaccessible Self has emerged from its (mis)representation by the Other. But the first step was choosing the Other by which to mediate the Self.

I am not calling for objectivity in this matter, only for a recognition of whatever it is that determines our selectivity. To speak of myself, I can hardly spend a waking hour without thinking of French literature in one way or another. But France is only one of the countries on the face of the earth, and I can't even claim it as my own; the imbalance of attention is not a pathology, just a consequence of my personal history, taste, intellectual loyalties, admirations, challenges, and so forth. The case of *Zhongwai*, involving such a mismatch between an inclusive term and its limited applications, similarly testifies to contemporary attitudes about the kinds of literature that deserve attention, the works and styles and movements with which it is desirable to compare Chinese works, the sorts of jobs that are available, and the sorts of claim about literature in general that our contemporaries like to make. The result, however, is presentism and self-reinforcing narrowness of scope. Just as with ocular vision and attention, focus on one object causes other objects to retreat from view.<sup>16</sup> The dominance of leading examples leads, a hundred years after Hu Shi's opening gesture, to repetition and sterility in a field.

"Might it be possible," Eric Hayot asks, "that another world-view, no longer dominated by the kinds of modern historiography that have given us the two-worlds model, could provoke new strategies of comparison?"<sup>17</sup> The heritage of *Zhongwai bijiao wenxue* 中外比較文學 as constructed under the "two-worlds model" seems to me to constitute a problem, however grateful I am for the insights and connections it has made possible.

Now that the imbalance inherent to *Zhongwai* cultural study has been brought into view, some might detect “privilege,” some might adduce colonialism and self-colonization, some might point to practical constraints on language learning or commitment to national tasks; some might take the opportunity to call for a truly Chinese theory of *Zhongwai* cultural relations; but the response to the problem cannot lie in a reiteration of the polar scheme of Self and Other. Let us take a more inclusive inventory. There is a Self, partly consisting of internalized Others; there are Others; there are Other Others; there are Others who are so Other that they are not even recognized as Others; and a complex tissue of relationships binds them all. That fabric of relation is what we have an opportunity to rediscover in doing multilateral, comparative literary history.<sup>18</sup> In this book I am attempting to use the evidence of literary history—itself obviously biased in many ways—to restore some neglected objects to view, indeed to bring these usually silenced dialogue-partners into the conversation with the past that is literary history. To be specific, I will investigate the meanings that translation, adaptation, appropriation, and comparison of texts acquired on the boundaries of China long before Scottish merchants, Indian opium, and the British Navy began to interest the Qing court in the customs of Far Western peoples. The word *wai* has not always pointed to Europeans and Americans, nor has *xi* always designated an imaginary assemblage containing London, Paris, Berlin, New York, and California. I have stayed mostly within the boundaries of China and the Chinese language to pursue this first part of a larger investigation, attempting to show, first, how many different kinds of *wai* there are (enough to keep nine legions of translators busy, at least), and second, how many ways there are of relating to them, even if inveterate reflexes tend to press those relationships into a few set patterns. Looking beyond these chapters’ scope and my own limited abilities, I am proposing that people interested in Chinese literature and the comparative viewpoint turn at least part of their attention away from the hypostatized West and toward China’s historical neighbors, those

with whom translation, even of the “ninefold” variety, was most necessary.

The investigation I offer to readers’ attention here began with an invitation from the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) to begin planning a long-term, multiauthor project on the history of literary influences and developments in East Asia. Before that work could properly begin, I needed to take inventory of my own attitudes and knowledge. Motivating the ICLA’s plan was the idea of overcoming the Eurocentrism of its previous research committees and practices. I see Eurocentrism as a failure in knowledge entailing moral shortcomings, akin to presentism. Not knowing, or not being curious to know, others outside our immediate realm of reference and value, we act as if they did not (or did not fully) exist, or as if they could exist only by being translated into languages and value schemes reducible to our own. One way to repair this flaw is by making available the missing knowledge. Although I claim no particular moral authority, my cognitive experience as someone who has been trying to learn Chinese for forty years may be pertinent. Starting from the provincial perspective of a place, a family, and a history, and slowly becoming acquainted with other places, families, and histories, often being scandalized or repelled by them, I managed to acquire some understanding of Europe, then of China, so that in my thoughts the reflexes of Eurocentrism could at least be questioned and tugged by those of Sinocentrism. But Sinocentrism too demands to be overcome, and for the same reasons. The self-concept of literarily educated Chinese depends on ideas about others and outsiders, and it is by asking about those ideas of the other that we can learn things about the shared self-conception that otherwise would never rise to consciousness. The way to bring these implications to the surface, as always, required attention to particular texts, terms, events, and patterns, rather than broad endorsements or dismissals. These chapters offer an account of how I learned to think about some others’ others, which does not mean that the other of the other led back to the self—far from it.<sup>19</sup>

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