

**Contemporary Chinese Fiction  
in the Context of World Literature**

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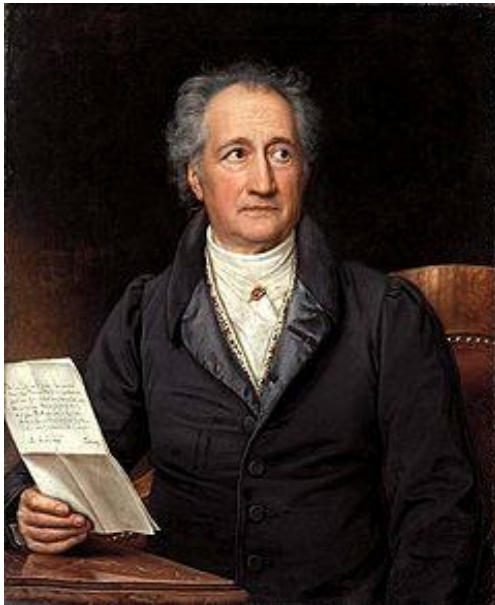
- As we know, world literature has close relations with Chinese literature as Goethe first conceptualized the term “Weltliteratur” largely because he had read some Chinese literary works through translation. But unfortunately, Chinese literature never occupies a prominent position on the map of world literature. This is what I will discuss in my lecture.

# (1) Word Literature Reconsidered

- We often hear such questions: is there only one world literature? If the answer is yes, what is the relationship between it and various national literatures? Indeed world literature has been a much talked about topic not only by comparatists but also by scholars of individual national literatures as the latter have found their literature is part of world literature. All national literatures, be they strong or weak, would move among the forest of world literature if they do not want to isolate themselves from the outside world. But as for what world literature really means still invites various debates and discussions.

- Obviously, the term world literature (Weltliteratur) was conceptualized by Goethe, if not first invented by him, in his conversation with Eckermann in 1827, in which he sums up after his access to some non-Western literary works, including some of the Chinese literary works of minor importance: “Poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men.... National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.”

- **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** (1749 – 1832) was a German writer and polymath. He is considered by many to be the most important writer in the German language and one of the most important thinkers in
- Western literature.



- So in today's context, to associate the phenomenon of globalization with the issue of world literature is fully reasonable. From a disciplinary point of view, world literature is the very early stage of comparative literature, coming out of the process of economic and financial globalization. In order to highlight the function of literary and cultural studies in the current era of globalization, we should certainly have a comparative perspective and international view on which we could achieve some new advances in our literary studies.

- If we say that the above-mentioned phenomenon is only the early form of a utopianist world literature, then, in today's context of globalization, along with the remapping of global culture and global Englishes, re-emphasizing the construction of world literature is of particular significance. As we all know, in today's literary studies, the traditional boundary of national literatures has been more and more obscured. No literary scholar can claim that he just studies one individual national literature only without referring to other literatures or social and cultural backgrounds.

- In this sense, world literature also means those literary works with “transnational” or “translational” significance, common aesthetic quality and far-reaching social and cultural influence. World literature is thus by no means a fixed phenomenon, but rather a traveling concept. In the process of its traveling and circulation, translation plays a very important role, without which some of these literary works might always remain “dead” in the contexts of other cultures and literary traditions, or even “marginalized”.



- And in the process of their traveling world wide, some of the literary works which are of originally national influence will become internationally well known and have continued life or “afterlife” in other cultural contexts. Others might well lose their significance and value in the process of traveling largely because of their inappropriateness to the particular cultural soil or literary context.

- When we talk about world literature, we usually adopt two different attitudes: cultural relativism and cultural universalism. The former emphasizes the equal value of different national literatures, while the latter lays more emphasis on the universal and common aesthetic and criterion of value judgment, which finds particular embodiment in anthologizing literary works in translation. Although various anthologies of “world literature” have often used the term to market a largely European canon, the past three decades have given rise to a much more expansive conception of literary interest and value.

- Recent books such as David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?*, for instance, define world literature as a category of literary production, publication and circulation, rather than merely using the term for the purpose of evaluation. It is also used for the domain of its objective influence. Arguably, this is closer to the original sense of the term in Goethe and Marx and Engels. Therefore, according to Douwe Fokkema, in the discussion of world literature, "two major problems will emerge".

- David Damrosch (1953- ), one of the most important scholars in world literature studies, is Ernest Bernbaum Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard University.



# Wang Ning is lecturing at Harvard Humanities Center



- Similarly, in viewing the acceleration of globalization in culture, one tends to see its homogenizing tendency while overlooking its diversifying aspect which is actually more and more conspicuous in the process of cultural globalization. In this way, I would rather adopt a cultural relativistic attitude toward cultures and literatures of all countries, thinking that such a world literature is represented in different languages. So it should sometimes be described in plural form.



- That is, there should be no such thing as singular world literature only. Thus we have both *world literature* in general, and *world literatures* in particular: the former refers to a universal criterion to evaluate the highest level of literature of world significance, and the latter refers to the different representations, including translations, of literatures from all countries. I will chiefly focus on the former from a theoretical point of view in this lecture due to the limit of time.

- In describing how world literature has formed through production, translation and circulation, Damrosch puts forward his threefold definition focused on the world, the text, and the reader:
- *1. World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures.*
- *2. World literature is writing that gains in translation.*
- *3. World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time.*



- Actually, in his insightful book, Damrosch touches largely upon non-Western literary works, and sometimes in their original languages and mostly through translations, which is undoubtedly a great progress made by mainstream Western comparatists. Since world literature is represented in different languages, one cannot read all the excellent works in their original languages even if they intend to. In this sense, translation plays an inevitable and important role in reconstructing such world literatures in different languages and cultural backgrounds.

- In the past decades, the postcolonial literary attempts have also proved that even in the same language, for instance, English, literary writing is more and more diversifying, hence the birth of international English literature studies. Thus the concept “world literature” is no longer determinate, for it has evolved in the historical development of literature of all countries.

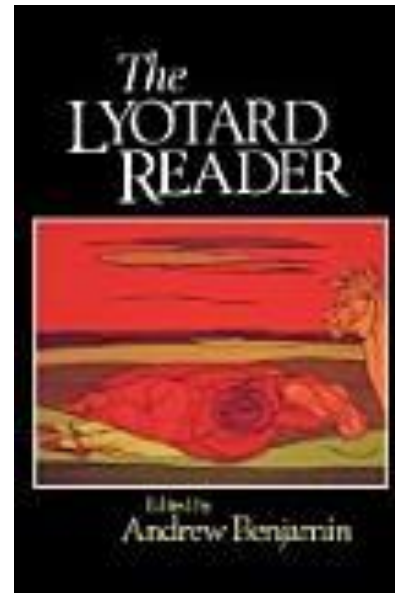
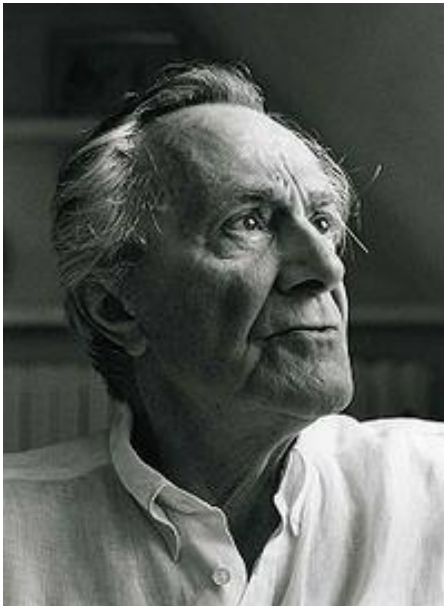
- Starting from Damrosch's definition, I should revise a bit further by referring to the development of Chinese literature. In my opinion, when we use the term "world literature," we actually endow it with at least the following connotations:
- A canonical body of excellent literature of all countries, whether Eastern or Western.
- A global and cross-cultural perspective and comparative horizon in our study, evaluation and criticism of literature in general.
- A literary evolution through production, circulation, translation and critical selection in different languages.

- Since we have a clear idea about what world literature is and how it means at the present time, I will deal with the relations of Chinese literature with world literature. My focus now will be on the critical reception of postmodernism in contemporary Chinese literature, through which we could find the position and significance of modern Chinese literature in the context of world literature.

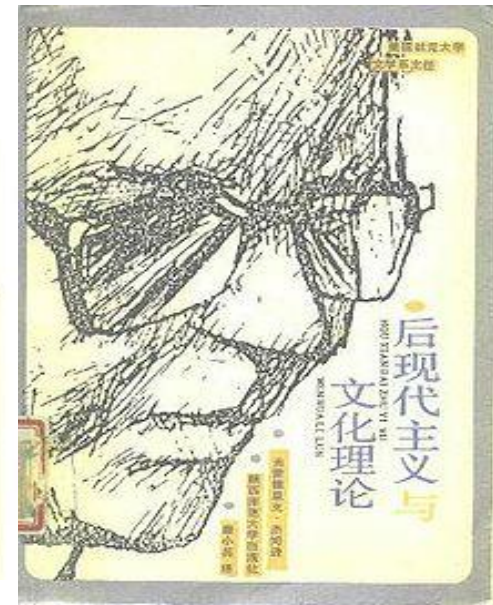
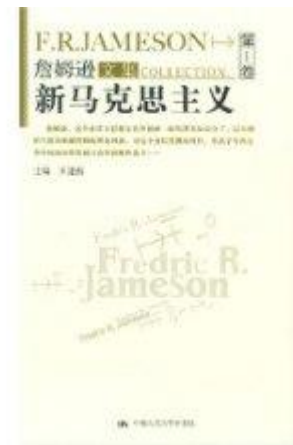
## (2) Postmodernism and China

- Since the beginning of the international postmodernism debate, postmodernism has undergone continual redefinition and redescription. Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, Matei Calinescu, Ihab Hassan, Leslie Fiedler, Douwe Fokkema, Hans Bertens, Linda Hutcheon, Jonathan Arac, and Brian McHale have all offered their own definitions and descriptions of this controversial concept. But their constructs are based largely on Western practices, seldom touching on Asian or Third World cultures and literatures.

- **Jean-François Lyotard** (1924–1998) was a French philosopher and literary theorist. He is well-known for his articulation of postmodernism after the late 1970s and the analysis of the impact of postmodernity on the human condition.



- **Fredric Jameson** (1934-) is an American literary critic and Marxist political theorist. He is best known for his analysis of contemporary cultural. He is currently William Lane Professor of Comparative Literature at Duke University.



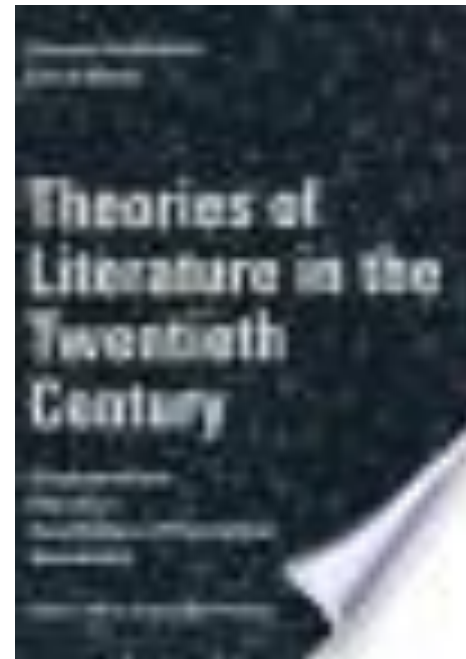


- Ihab Hassan(1925-2015 ) was born in Cairo, Egypt, and emigrated to the United States in 1946. He was Emeritus Vilas Research Professor at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee before his death.





- Douwe Wessel Fokkema(1931-2011)was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Before his death, he was Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at the University of Utrecht.



- But in reality, uneven development in its politics, economy, and culture undoubtedly manifests postindustrial symptoms in the economy and postmodern elements in political life and culture. Beginning with Jameson's and Fokkema's descriptions of the actual situation in China, postmodernism could be re-described in terms of the following eight forms it has assumed within the scope of literature and culture alone:

- (1) a fundamental cultural phenomenon in highly developed capitalist countries or postindustrial societies that occasionally appears in unevenly developed regions within underdeveloped countries;
- (2) a kind of worldview, or a way of looking at the world and life, in which the world is no longer a world of totality but rather one of plurality, fragmentation, and decentralization;

- (3) a main current of literature and art after the fall of modernism, both continuous and discontinuous with modernism, and relevant both to avant-garde experimentation and to popular literature;
- (4) a narrative style or a kind of discourse that is characterized by suspicion of “master narratives,” or “metanarratives,” and that resorts to nonselective or quasi-nonselective devices and to a certain “schizophrenic” structure of the text, in which meaning is actually decentralized in the course of a fragmentary narration;

- (5) an interpretive code or a reading strategy with which earlier and even non-Western texts can be analyzed from the perspective of postmodernity;
- (6) a philosophical trend that is contrary, in the current postindustrial and consumer society, to the elite preoccupation with the Enlightenment, or as a sort of post-Enlightenment phenomenon characterized by the crisis of legitimation and representation;

- (7) a cultural strategy adopted by Asian and Third World critics during their economic modernization and struggle against cultural colonialism and linguistic hegemonism;
- (8) a critical mode that emerged after the failure of structuralism and that is characterized by Foucauldian and Derridean poststructuralist approaches to literary texts, which dominate current cultural criticism and cultural studies.

- As an undercurrent, postmodernity can be traced back in history, for it is anticipated by the baroque period, by realism, and by the historical avant-garde in Western literature and art. But it emerged completely only after World War II, when modernism became more canonical and exhausted itself. In its belatedness, postmodernism might well be interpreted as a “culture of secondarity.”

- Thus mapping the presence of postmodernism in China may help us to understand what Chinese postmodernity means in a world of global capital and a globalized cultural context, how it is different from its original form(s) in the cultural context of Western society, the extent to which this translated thing has assumed indigenous characteristics, and how it has functioned in the current new century Chinese culture and literature as well as in contemporary Chinese society, which is colored by the market economy and a sort of post-socialism.



### (3) The Reception of Postmodernism in Chinese Literature

- Generally speaking, international postmodernism appeared in three forms: as a poststructuralist theoretical discourse, as an avant-garde intellectual rebellion against the modernist episteme, and as a contemporary consumer culture. There were signs of all the above three forms in Chinese culture, literature, and art, but the greatest impact seems to have occurred in literary circles, in part because writers and critics were most active in pursuing the most recent fads, and because they commanded the largest space for writing and publishing.

- As a literary movement, postmodernism was launched in China in 1980, with the publication of the Chinese translation of John Barth's essay "The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodernist Fiction" in *Report on Foreign Literature* (Waiguo wenxue baodao), a journal published in Shanghai that stopped publication in the late 1980s. Since then, other journals devoted to foreign literature---for instance, *World Literature* (Shijie wenxue), *Foreign Literature and Art* (Waiguo wenyi), the *Bulletin of Foreign Literature* (Waiguo wenxue tongxun),

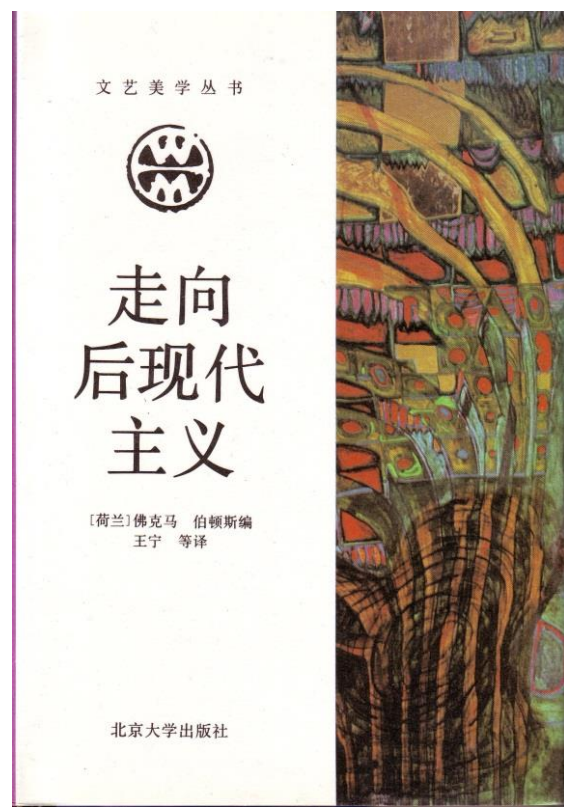
- *Literature Abroad* (Guowai wenxue), *Foreign Literatures* (Waiguo wenxue), and *Contemporary Foreign Literature* (Dangdai waiguo wenxue)---have published literary works by postmodernists such as Garcia Marquez, Borges, Nabokov, Barth, Barthelme, Salinger, Mailer, Heller, Beckett, Pynchon, Vonnegut, Robbe-Grillet, Calvino, and others.

- They were joined in short order by academic journals of literature and culture, such as the authoritative *Social Sciences in China* (Zhongguo shehui kexue), which was published in both Chinese and English; *Reading* (Dushu); *Peking University Journal* (Beijing daxue xuebao); *Contemporary Cinema* (Dangdai dianying); *Studies of Literature and Art* (Wenyi yanjiu); *Literary Review* (Wenxue pinglun); *Foreign Literature Review* (Waiguo wenxue pinglun); *Literature and Art Gazette* (Wenyi bao);

- *Foreign Literature Studies* (Waiguo wenxue yanjiu); *People's Literature* (Renmin wenxue); *Shanghai Literature* (Shanghai wenxue), *Purple Mountains* (Zhongshan); and *Flower City* (Huacheng), all of which also published translated articles on postmodernism by Western scholars such as Ihab Hassan, Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, William Spanos, Douwe Fokkema, Jonathan Arac, Linda Hutcheon, and Hans Bertens, and included, as well, introductory and critical essays by Chinese scholars.

- With regard to translated theoretical books, two of the early books in postmodern studies deserve special mention: Jameson's *Postmodernism and Cultural Theories* (Houxiandaizhuyi yu wenhua lilun) (1987, in Chinese) and Fokkema and Bertens's edited volume, *Approaching Postmodernism* (Zouxiang houxiandaizhuyi) (1991, in Chinese).

- 后现代主义与文化理论，唐小兵译，陕西师范大学出版社，1987年版。
- 走向后现代主义，王宁等译，北京大学出版社，1991年版。



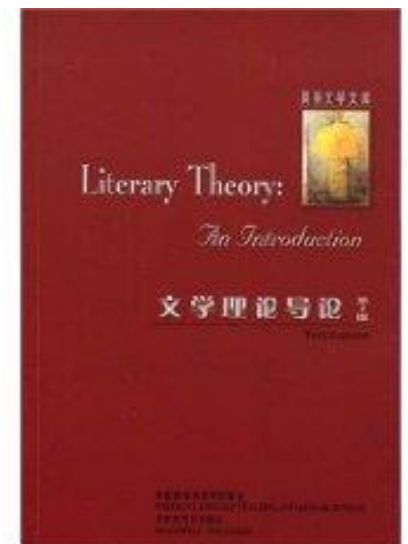
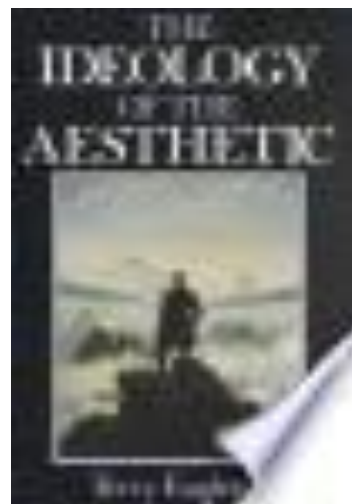
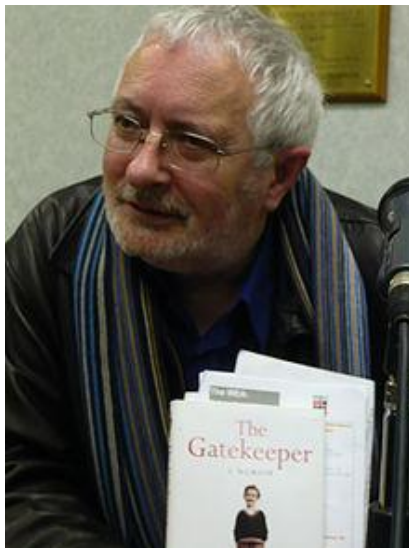
- In addition, such international prestigious scholars as Hassan, Jameson, Fokkema, Arac, Bertens, Ralph Cohen, and Terry Eagleton have been invited to participate in conferences or to lecture on postmodernism in some leading Chinese universities and research institutes, bringing with them the results of their most recent research and helping to push forward the study of postmodernism in China.



# Wang Ning and Douwe Fokkema



- **Terence Francis Eagleton** (1943-) is a British literary theorist widely regarded as Britain's most influential living literary critic. He has been Distinguished Professor of English Literature at the University of Lancaster, and as a Visiting Professor at the National University of Ireland, Galway.





# Wang Ning and Ralph Cohen



## (4) The Six Versions of Chinese Postmodernism

- The first version of postmodernity can be found in the so-called avant-garde fiction (xianfeng xiaoshuo) and experimental poetry (shiyantai shige) of young novelists then such as Liu Suola, Xu Xing, Wang Shuo, Sun Ganlu, Yu Hua, Ge Fei, Ye Zhaoyan, Hong Feng, Ma Yuan, Mo Yan, Can Xue, and Lü Xin, and avant-garde poets such as Daozi, Zhou Lunyou, and others of the so-called Feifeiist school of poetry (Feifeizhuyi shipai), who appeared after 1985 with experimental writings that challenged canonical realist and modernist writings.

- The second version of Chinese postmodernity is marked by the rise of the “new realist school” (xin xieshi pai) and its practitioners’ reaction to, and challenge against, the radical experimentation of the avant-gardists. The school appears to anticipate a return to tradition and representation but in reality indicates a parody of traditional realism and a transcendence of modernism. It is not in actuality a literary school, but some might consider it as such and include in its ranks novelists such as Chi Li, Fang Fang, Liu Zhenyun, Liu Heng, and even Su Tong and Ye Zhaoyan.

- The third version of postmodernity is very unique: largely attacked by humanistic intellectuals but more popular among ordinary people, especially young university students. This is the controversial “Wang Shuo phenomenon,” which represents a kind of commercializing orientation in literary creation and cultural life. This version is characterized by pastiche literature (pingcou wenxue), which combines many irrelevant events to make up a story; by the literature of entrustment (shou weituo de wenxue).

- 王朔(1958- ), 作家, 编剧。出生于南京市, 祖籍辽宁岫岩, 1978年开始创作, 先后发表了《玩的就是心跳》、《看上去很美》等中、长篇小说。出版有《王朔文集》、《王朔自选集》等。



- The fourth version of postmodernity is characterized by the “new historicist” attempt to recast controversial historical figures in a parodic way or to create popular histories both in literary writing and in mass media production. For example, the characterization of Empress Wu (Wu Zetian) in novels, or *Wu Mei Niang* as in films and TV productions, made this controversial empress known to almost every household.



- The fifth version of postmodernity is completely different from the first four versions, in that it is closely related to the development of the international postmodernism debate. Along with the introduction and translation of contemporary Western critical theory in China, Chinese critics are increasingly indebted to the Foucauldian theory of power, knowledge, and discourse, with power at the axis, and to the Derridean theory of deconstruction. In this respect, two eminent avant-garde critics should be mentioned.

# Zhang Yiwu (张颐武)



# Chen Xiaoming (陈晓明)



- The sixth version is the postcolonial postmodernism in China. Postcolonialism, especially as it relates to the so-called Third World culture and Third World criticism, is another Western cultural trend that has been introduced in China. It is viewed as one of the joint forces of neoconservatism, and it may also be considered the sixth version of postmodernity. Of course, this is a rather controversial and complicated case, and it has aroused heated debate in overseas Chinese journals.

## (5) Three Most Important Chinese Writers

- In the previous parts, I have already described how postmodernism has come to China and made strong influence on contemporary Chinese literature. On the other hand, the coming of postmodernism has also enabled Chinese fiction to move toward the world and function as part of world literature. This finds particular embodiment in Mo Yan's Nobel Prize winning in 2012.



- 莫言，原名管谟业（1955-），祖籍山东高密，是第一个获得诺贝尔文学奖的中国籍作家。他自1980年代以一系列乡土作品崛起，充满着“怀乡”以及“怨乡”的复杂情感，被归类为“寻根文学”作家。主要作品包括《红高粱》《檀香刑》《丰乳肥臀》《生死疲劳》《蛙》《酒国》等。

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- Apart from Mo Yan, there are other three most important novelists to be discussed as they are as good as Mo Yan. Yan Lianke is one of the best-known Chinese novelists who is most promising to be awarded the Nobel Prize, but as we know, apart from the excellence of his works, there are other factors enabling him to win the prize. Yan's writing career is not smooth although he has won lots of prizes in China. It was in the beginning of the 21st century that he has become internationally renowned. Like Mo Yan, he has also been influenced both by Western literature and modern Chinese literature.

- But unlike Mo Yan, Yan Lianke has a strong sense of theory and profound attainment in Western literary theory. He openly recognizes that he admires such Western writers as Kafka, Faulkner and Marquez, especially he likes their masterpieces such as “*Metamorphosis*”, *Castle*, *The Sound and the Fury* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.



- 阎连科（1958-），河南洛阳人，被文学界普遍认为是莫言之后最有希望获诺贝尔文学奖的中国作家之一，被誉为“荒诞现实主义大师”。作品已经被翻译成二十几种文字。代表作有《日光流年》《受活》《丁庄梦》《风雅颂》《四书》等。



# Wang Ning and Yan Lianke in Los Angeles (2018)

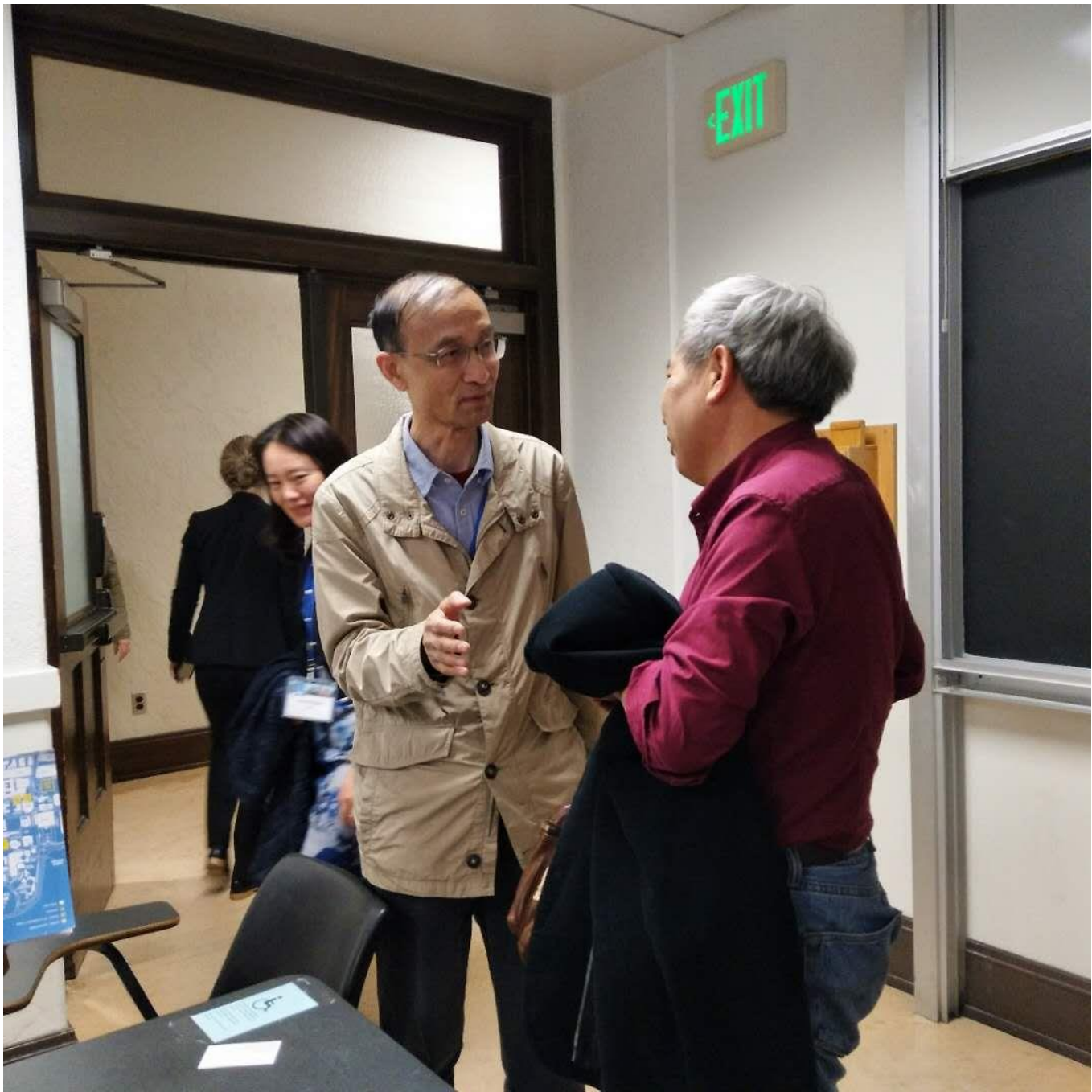


- This indicates that he started from the very beginning of his writing career with high objective that he would not only write for his domestic readers but also to those of other countries or language environments. So he explores in his writings the fundamental problems confronting all human beings. In this way, he could write his works into a sort of allegorical works of eternal life and value.

- He is thus called a “master of absurd realism” which is not recognized by himself. It is true that Yan Lianke is particularly good at creating various surreal absurd fictional stories with fantastic plots and comic color. It merges with striking black humorous and hyperbolic descriptions which make readers neither laugh nor cry. In this aspect, his work is closer to Kafka’s fiction and the theater of absurdity.

- Confronted with the criticism for the absurd characteristics of his works, Yan simply replied, “It is not my work that is absurd, but it is life proper that is absurd.” But like Mo Yan, the stories he tells exclusively take place in China, with full of local characteristics. With his superb narrative, these seemingly fragmentary events become universally true not only attracting domestic readers but also attracting readers from different countries and language environments.





- Also, Yan Lianke, like Lu Xun, offers sharp critique of the weakness of Chinese peasants. So he is often compared by critics with Lu Xun. Furthermore, some critics have even seen in his works a sort of utopian idealistic tendency. He intends to create a sort of Shangri-la without any conflicts or sufferings. This certainly reveals a sort of anarchist (cosmopolitan) ideal. All the above are what could be understood and appreciated by his international readers. Similarly, these factors have undoubtedly enabled his works to become world literature.

- As we all know, one of the most important criteria for Nobel Prize is that the prize should be awarded to someone who has written “literary works of idealistic tendency”. In the current consumer society, literature has long been “marginalized” with its market shrinking in face of the impact of commercialization. Those who love literature can not but complain that the “golden age” of literature has been past. What is the use of literature today? Yan Lianke, who always regards literary creation as his lifetime career and possesses some idealistic feelings, still works hard at literary creation.



- Yu Hua is perhaps the most influential contemporary Chinese writer next to Mo Yan. Judging by his age, he became well known a bit earlier than Mo Yan and Yan Lianke, and his major works have long been translated into many foreign languages, such as English, French, German, Russian, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian, Korean and Japanese attracting the international critical and scholarly attention. Some mainstream American journals, such as *boundary 2* and *Modern Language Quarterly* have published scholarly articles discussing Yu Hua's works or dealing with him as one of the representatives of contemporary Chinese avant-garde fiction. Although he is younger than Yan Lianke, he has long been studied as a typical Chinese postmodernist novelist overseas.

- 余华，当代作家（1960-），浙江海盐县人，祖籍山东高唐县。著有中短篇小说《十八岁出门远行》、《一九八六年》、《四月三日事件》、《世事如烟》、《河边的错误》等，长篇小说《活着》、《许三观卖血记》、《兄弟》，也写了不少散文、随笔、文论及音乐评论。



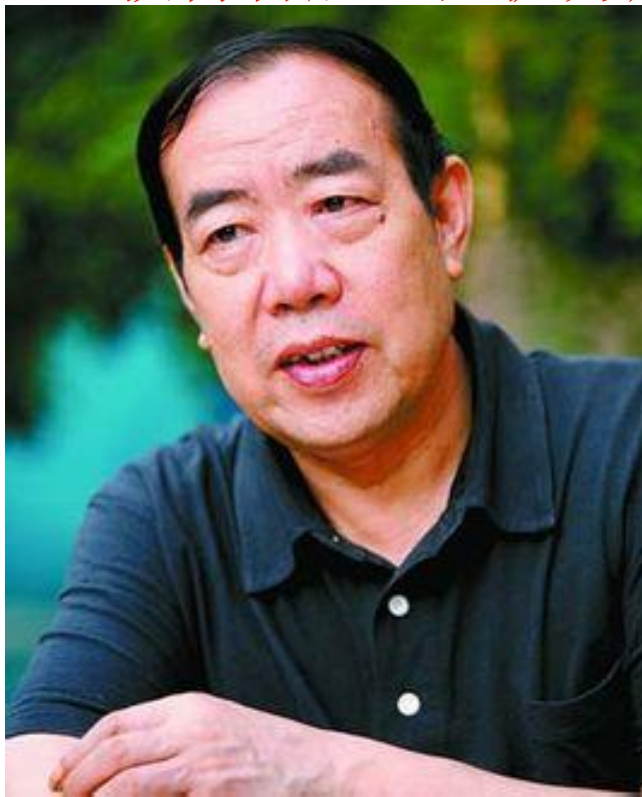
- The screening of his novel *To Live* by Zhang Yimou has or the more expanded his international reputation. Moreover, Yu Hua has also won quite a few international prizes for his writings. In 2004, Fredric Jameson, in celebrating his 70th birthday, invited him and me as well as some of his colleagues and former students to his birthday banquet at his home. This at least indicates that Yu Hua has not only attracted critical attention but also scholarly attention of mainstream international academics. It is true that from the very beginning of his writing career, Yu Hua has been influenced by modern and postmodern Western literature which he never denies.

- To him, those who have most inspired him are not classical Chinese writers, let alone modern Chinese writers, but rather, those world-class literary masters. Not so productive, Yu Hua is extremely good at powerful and precise narration which breaks through established linguistic order and constructs his own autonomous system of writing discourse. That is why narratologists are most interested in analyzing his novels. Furthermore, he has also constructed one fantastic, absurd and ruthless textual world after another which certainly reaches a sort of textual verisimilitude.

- All the above has undoubtedly made his writings identical to Western postmodernist fiction. Critics usually think that his novels published since the latter part of the 1990s are quite different from those stories he produced in the middle and late 1980s. He is now most famous for the novels like *To Live* and *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* which are closer to the reality of life. He provides an alternative historical narrative with a plain and firm power. Yu Hua seldom writes about love stories and death is a frequent theme dealt with by him. But he always describes death in a calm and indifferent manner, very much like American novelist Hemingway.

- As the oldest of the above three writers, Jia Pingwa is also the one whose writing is of most local flavor and color. Also, his writing is also most characterized by national character. Even his language is full of northwestern Chinese flavor which finds particular embodiment in his use of native dialects. So his writings are regarded as “untranslatable”. Nevertheless, it will not prevent his writings from being circulated world wide. Although his works are not so influential as Yu Hua’s, they have also been translated into more than 20 languages, some of which are done by Howard Goldblatt, and he has won various national and international literary prizes.

- 贾平凹（1952-），陕西省商洛市丹凤县棣花镇人，1974年开始发表作品，1975年毕业于西北大学中文系。主要作品包括《鬼城》、《浮躁》、《二月杏》、《废都》等。1997年凭借《满月儿》，获得首届全国优秀短篇小说奖。





# 贾平凹作品专题研讨会暨首届中国文学国际传播论坛在上海交大举行（2018）





- Jia is usually regarded as one of the most talented writers in contemporary China. Most rebellious and most original as he is, he is viewed as one of the very few that will be recorded in both Chinese and world literary history. He started his writing career early in the 1980s, but he is most famous for his novel *Abandoned Capital* published in 1993 which has endowed him with both wide national reputation as well as controversy. Critics usually hold that his writing is between traditional and modern, both sticking to reality and being lofty. His language is simple, innocent and honest, but inside rather sophisticated.

- This is one of the reasons why his works are of profound and heavy narrative force. Also, his works, with subtle narrative and careful detailed description, successfully describes a true state of daily life. Similarly, his works describe and interpret with pure feelings the various contradictions and confusions China faces in its changing process. *Shaanxi Opera* is usually viewed as his representative work full of national characteristics.

- Jia vividly represents in his works drastic changes that have taken place in Chinese society in the past two decades by describing the bitterness that the peasants in Qingfeng Street have suffered. His narrative perspective is particularly unique with “detailed chronological description” focusing on the changes in value notion and interpersonal relations in the countryside in the years of the reform. He reflects on the state of such social transformation in his native place. Coming from the Northwester plateau, Jia writes in such a unique style characterized by local flavor which easily enables him to be recognized by international literary scholarship.

## **(6)(Re)Constructing Postmodernism in the Chinese Context**

- As we have entered the new century, the world we face is one of detotalization, deterritorialization, and contingency, in which all “repressed things” have been released and human imagination has been totally emancipated. Will there appear such a phenomenon as cultural decadence, as was the case with the last turn of the century? This is a question we should answer.

- One may well say that postmodernism was produced in the West largely because of the right cultural soil and the long-standing project of modernity. In contrast, in Asian societies such as China, there is no such background for a gradually evolving cultural tradition and an increasingly innovative literary convention. The project of modernity in China is obviously incomplete, owing to various political, economic, cultural, and intellectual reasons although China has become the second largest economic power in the world.

- Furthermore, because of the inadequacy of the cultural soil and the unreceptive atmosphere, it would be almost impossible for postmodernism to be produced in a non-Western culture and literature. The fact is that China should still be viewed as a developing country in which various elements are blended: premodern, modern, postmodern, and even primitive.

- In an economically rising society such as this, which is subject to contingencies and uneven development, anything can happen at any time; so why not postmodernism? Moreover, postmodernism appears as a mutation, largely different from its original form(s) in the West. So Chinese postmodernity is a consequence of the encounter between Chinese and Western cultures; it encompasses a combination of both foreign and domestic elements.



# Wang Ning Spoke at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Conference of the Academy of Latinity (2010)



- Hence, a tentative conclusion: postmodernism is not restricted to the Western model, even though it did originate in the West. It has not only taken different forms in the West but has also generated mutations and produced different versions in several non-Western countries, including China. What postmodernism means in the Chinese context, however, is very different from what it originally meant in the Western context.

- So in this sense, just as postmodernism is always incompatible with mainstream modernism in the West, it can never become a cultural dominant in Asian or Third World societies, especially in China. It is certainly true that the postmodernist fad has already become a past event in China as it did decades ago in the West. The immediately passed postmodernist fad in some Third World countries is just a temporary phenomenon.

- Postmodernism still remains secondary, no matter how influential it has been in the contemporary era. On the other hand, confronted with mainstream culture and the dominant ideology, it may be assimilated into a new pluralistic context, and may instigate previously unanticipated cultural developments. It is in this sense that a mapping of postmodernity is both historically necessary and culturally significant.

Thank you  
for your attention!