

WORDS BY THE GUEST EDITORS: DECOLONIZING KNOWLEDGE: CHINA AND ROMANCE-LANGUAGE LITERATURES IN DIALOGUE

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“Here you behold the great machine of the World” (“Vês aqui a grande máquina do Mundo”). In Canto X of *Os Lusíadas*, Thetis presents Vasco da Gama with the “machine of the world”: stars, seas, lands, routes, and the names of remote places are gathered into a totality that can be contemplated. Europe, Africa, the Indian Ocean, China, and the territory then called Santa Cruz, which would later become Brazil, all find their place within this broad cosmographic and geographical vision. The force of this scene lies not only in its presentation of an early modern global space, but also in its revelation of how the “world” may be organized through a mechanism of mediation: it is reduced, arranged, named, and exposed to an authorized gaze.

This imagination of the world as an organized and visible totality also offers us an entry point for understanding contemporary literary relations. Since the second half of the twentieth century, English-language academic journals, citation indexes, databases, university rankings, and theoretical discourses on world literature have come to form new apparatuses of legitimation. Although these apparatuses constitute only a limited part of literary relations as a whole, they nevertheless increasingly shape the conditions

under which texts, translations, critical discourses, and theories may attain “international” visibility. Many pre-existing connections among literatures and cultures outside Anglo-American systems did not disappear with the rise of these mechanisms. Yet they often need to be renamed, classified, and cited within English-language systems in order to be more readily recognized as part of world literature.

This dossier, entitled “Decolonizing Knowledge: China and Romance-Language Literatures in Dialogue,” seeks to respond to this question by examining the relations between China and literatures written in French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. The choice of this set of relations is not intended to establish China as a new interpretive center; rather, it is justified by its specific methodological relevance. Unlike exchanges that take place within geographically or historically proximate regions, the relations between China and Romance-language literatures unfold across relatively distant languages, histories, and civilizational inheritances. At the same time, these relations have a long tradition predating contemporary globalization and remain active today in scholarship, publishing, translation, and reader reception.

This does not mean that the dialogue between China and Romance-language literatures is free of mediation. We know that literary and cultural exchanges are never entirely transparent. From missionaries, travelers, and translators of past centuries to researchers, editors, and readers today, many agents participate in the constitution of these relations. Misunderstandings, rewritings, appropriations, and reinterpretations are not merely deviations; they often become important ways through which new cultural forms respond to new problems. What requires attention is the moment when a particular language, academic institution, or theoretical genealogy comes to be regarded as the sole legitimate channel, transforming mediation from a creative process into a hierarchical mechanism of selection. In this sense, the dossier gives concrete form to the question of the “decolonization of knowledge” by examining, through studies of reception, translation, and interpretation, how China and Romance-language literatures read, translate, and reconfigure one another.

The article “Une nouvelle littérature ou une autre littérature ? – Les littératures francophones du Sud global vues depuis la Chine” offers a broad entry point into the dossier. By examining the reception and study of Francophone literatures of the Global South in China, the author shows that so-called “reception” is not the endpoint of a text’s journey once it enters another language, but an interpretive activity that continually readjusts itself according to national conditions and historical change. Chinese readings of these literatures have involved learning from, and expressing solidarity with, anticolonial experiences, struggles for national liberation, and social transformations. At the same time, encounters with these literary traditions

may also allow Chinese literature and thought to reflect on their own historical experience from a renewed perspective. Thus, the idea of “another literature” points not only to an alternative mode of classification, but also to a possible point of departure for rethinking world literature.

The following two articles take up this point of departure in a different configuration, showing how foreign literary classics were mobilized by Chinese intellectuals as resources for thought and historical transformation. In “La fortune de Victor Hugo dans les révolutions chinoises modernes (1900-1949),” the author examines the trajectory of Victor Hugo in the context of Chinese revolutions in the first half of the twentieth century, showing that once incorporated into China’s literary and intellectual field, Hugo was reinterpreted in response to the historical demands of the struggle against despotism, national salvation, and social transformation. The article “‘Literature of the Soul’ of Dante in the *Cremation* (*Huozang*) by Lao She” turns to a more deeply embedded relationship between Italian literature and the modern Chinese novel. In Lao She’s work, Dante is more than a foreign reference: amid the moral crisis of war, the judgment of the soul, and the writing of national suffering, he becomes a spiritual resource for interpreting Chinese reality. Together, these two articles indicate that the circulation of French and Italian literatures in China did not result simply from the influence of the classics, but from a process through which Chinese intellectuals, confronted with the crises of modernity, turned to foreign traditions and reconfigured their own frameworks of reflection.

The relationship between China and Romance-language literatures, however, cannot be reduced to the ways in which the Chinese intellectual field has drawn on foreign literary traditions. It also allows us to examine forms of cultural transmission that, though never transparent, can be highly revealing. It is precisely in long-distance literary flows that questions about how a text is seen, how it is classified, and how it passes through certain mediators—or circulates outside them—become especially visible. In the article “Visibilidad condicionada: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda en una historia literaria china,” the notion of “conditioned visibility” is employed to describe Avellaneda’s position in Chinese literary history, showing that the inclusion of a foreign woman writer does not guarantee her full visibility: she may be acknowledged while remaining limited by established historiographical frameworks. In “Décentrer la médiation: lire Christine de Pizan en Chine au prisme d’une épistémologie de la distance,” the author transforms “distance” itself into a condition of knowledge, suggesting that mediation may obscure a text, yet it can also create opportunities to reorganize itineraries of reading and to move away from dependence on a single Anglophone channel of mediation. The study “Clarice Lispector na China: tradução, mediação editorial

e recepção digital de *A Hora da Estrela* no eixo Sul-Sul” brings this discussion into the contemporary field of publishing and digital reception. Focusing on the translator, the editor, and the publishing institutions involved—and drawing on data from digital platforms—the article shows how Chinese readers were able to perceive affinities with Clarice Lispector’s work without relying entirely on Western critical mediation. These three cases all point to an acute awareness of mediation. This shared concern may not be accidental, since the writers and texts discussed here are, in different ways, positioned at the margins of dominant literary and critical orders, whether by gender, region, language, or routes of circulation. Their reception across linguistic and cultural distance can therefore open up new interpretive possibilities.

It is also important to note that China has not functioned solely as a recipient in literary exchange. The study “Du savoir chinois à l’imaginaire français : Honoré de Balzac, Théophile Gautier, Jules Verne” precisely captures the process through which knowledge about China entered the French literary imagination. Taking Balzac, Gautier, and Verne as its points of departure, the study examines how this knowledge was reworked in French literature, turning material forms, images, and taste into elements capable of shaping representations of distant worlds and modern experience. Although this process remained shaped by European epistemic frameworks and the tastes of its time, it reminds us that the dialogue between China and Romance-language literatures did not begin with China’s reception of foreign works. It was already taking place within Romance-language literatures themselves, in their ways of understanding, appropriating, and reimagining China.

This two-way relationship is not confined to nineteenth-century French literature; it continues in contemporary practices of translation between Chinese and Portuguese, especially along the Sino-Brazilian axis. In “A tradução de poesia na China: das práticas tradutórias às reflexões teóricas”, the author draws on the Chinese tradition of poetry translation to reconstruct the development of its practices and theoretical reflections and to show how this tradition can contribute to a Sino-Brazilian poetics of translation beyond hegemonic Western forms of mediation. The article that follows develops this discussion through the analysis of a specific case of translation. In his article, “(Re)construindo caminhos para a descolonização do cânone literário: ‘Construção’, de Chico Buarque, em chinês”, the author examines how the translation of “Construção” into Chinese reconfigures the relationship among form, sound, and social critique. In doing so, he draws on ZHANG Longxi’s reflections on intercultural interpretation and contrasts the song with two Chinese songs. It is particularly significant that Chinese poetic traditions, translation experience, and aesthetic structures are taken up by researchers

working from different linguistic and cultural positions as active resources for the reinterpretation of works in Romance-language literatures.

If recourse to ZHANG Longxi can help a Brazilian sinologist rethink the emblematic song “Construção,” the final articles in the dossier further show that Chinese thought and its critical categories may offer promising interpretive directions for Brazilian literary studies. The decisive point here is not to apply a Chinese theory to Brazilian texts as an external framework, but to examine whether the two literary experiences contain structures of questioning capable of illuminating one another. The article “Entre os dois Jecas de Lobato: o labirinto da rusticidade brasileira à luz de Lu Xun” rereads the figure of Jeca in Monteiro Lobato through Lu Xun, bringing into dialogue the reflections of modern Chinese literature on “national character,” rural dilemmas, and the ethics of enlightenment with Brazilian writings on backwardness, rural populations, and anxiety in the face of modernization. The following article, “Land, Body, and Collective Claim: Reading *Torto Arado* through Chinese *Xiangtu* Thought,” turns to contemporary Brazilian literature from a related perspective. The study draws on the Chinese concept of *xiangtu* (“native soil”) to understand the relations among land, body, and communal claim in Itamar Vieira Junior’s novel, showing that Chinese experience thus moves from an object of comparison to a method capable of opening new lines of inquiry into the ethics of land and the collective subject in contemporary Brazilian literature.

In “Felicidade Clandestina, Felicidade Primeira: Clarice Lispector e a expansão das Categorias da Poética Chinesa,” the author extends this line of inquiry to questions of form and theory. While the articles on Monteiro Lobato and Itamar Vieira Junior draw more directly on Chinese thought to explore the social and material dimensions of Brazilian literature, this article asks whether categories of Chinese poetics can be brought to bear on the formal analysis of the modern novel and acquire new explanatory power in reading a narrative as interiorized, fragmented, and poetic as Clarice Lispector’s. The study not only broadens our understanding of Clarice through Chinese poetics; it also tests and expands, through Claricean texts, the boundaries of the very concept of the “poetic novel.” In this way, the dialogue between China and Romance-language literatures extends beyond objects, materials, and themes, opening up critical categories and understandings of form, while expanding theoretical boundaries on both sides.

Returning to the overarching problem addressed by the dossier, the concept of the “decolonization of knowledge” does not presuppose an already completed theoretical program. Many of the articles gathered here are likewise not content to follow the safest and most standardized theoretical paths; rather, they seek to establish new connections among materials, languages,

and problems. They dare to set the center aside, instead of merely repeating “anti-centrist” declarations; they dare to juxtapose distant literary traditions without presupposing that they can meet only through some already established theoretical system; they dare to draw on the knowledge of others while also developing ideas of their own. Such attempts may not produce definitive conclusions at every step, but they can open up new questions, new relations among materials, and new interpretive directions.

What this dossier seeks is not an endpoint, but a point of departure. It aims to show that the “Global South” cannot be reduced to an easily invoked slogan, but must take shape as a concrete practice of knowledge production through writing, translation, reading, and critical reflection. We also hope that the articles gathered here may, in this way, strip concepts of their rhetorical excesses and allow the relations among China, Romance-language literatures, and Global South literatures more broadly to take on more material, more substantive, and more mutually transformative forms.

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