

*World Literature and
Cultural Transformation
in Modern Chinese Literature*

World Literature and National Modernization

As the person who coined the term World Literature, Goethe once said, “Left to itself, every literature will exhaust its vitality, if it is not refreshed by the interest and contributions of a foreign one” (Damrosch 2003: 7). A look at the history of China before the mid-nineteenth century reveals the fact that reading and study of Western literatures in China have been relatively scanty owing to geographical, social, linguistic, political and cultural factors. The traditional “insularity” of the Chinese, the “closed door” policy, the lack of competent translators as cultural ambassadors, the Chinese pride in their culture, and their general fear of things “foreign” have all accounted for the absence of a systematic introduction and study of foreign literature, especially European literature, in China for centuries. The situation has drastically changed, however, since the latter part of the nineteenth century with China’s changing diplomatic relations with the world’s great powers. China came to see her vulnerability in face of foreign invasion and decided to initiate fundamental changes on all fronts in the country with the hope of reviving and strengthening the country through modernization. In retrospect, the “zhiqiang” campaign (1861–1895) was characterized by the Chinese intellectuals’ conscious effort to revitalize the country through Westernization. For the first time in Chinese history, many Chinese intellectuals turned to the West for inspiration and to great canonical works in particular for ideas, models and direction. Actively they sought to learn from world masters for the purpose of nation building while using Chinese learning as their anchor or point of reference throughout this massive “self-strengthening” campaign. Students who were sent to study abroad have played a significant role in broadening and shifting their countrymen’s literary knowledge and taste, thus paving the way for the massive dissemination of world literature in the country in early twentieth century. By studying the literary relations between a number of world masters and selected influential literary figures in early twentieth-century China, one will see how

Chinese literature has been enriched in theme, characterization, form and technique as a result of its contact with world literature. A close study of the influence of selected canonical works of Gogol, Ibsen and Goethe on modern Chinese writers further shows how these Chinese writers have received and responded to these world literary masters in their conscious assimilation of various literary elements in these Western canonical works in their own creative writings. The present study will also take a close look at how such literary contacts have resulted in the rejuvenation and enrichment of Chinese literature, the illumination of the specificity of modern Chinese literature, as well as the shaping of Chinese national and cultural identity in early twentieth century.

Determined to bring about a cultural and intellectual change nation-wide, the Chinese government have made conscious efforts to propagate the spirit of self-strengthening or “*zhiqiang*” on the one hand and actively learning from Western great masters on the other during the last few decades of the nineteenth century. “New schools” [*xinxuetang*] modeled after Western ones were established in the country and a number of missionary schools and colleges found their places in major Chinese cities by the turn of the twentieth century (Link 1981: 189–195). All these developments have resulted in a significant rise in literacy rate as well as an interest in and a zest for foreign cultures among the young urban intellectuals by the time the young Republic was established in 1911. The flourishing of the Chinese publishing industry further played a significant role in shaping the literary trends and the cultural orientation of the reading public as publishers and editors of literary magazines or journals were supportive of the young nation’s modernization and Westernization. It was estimated that there were about seven to eight hundred Chinese magazines in circulation during the first two decades of the twentieth century (*Xinhai geming* 1982: 1). Reading of literary magazines and of special literary supplements of newspapers was no longer taken as mere popular or trendy entertainments to pass time but as serious intellectual endeavours for many enlightened individuals in the cities. Literary writing and translating, too, ceased to be mere hobbies for the educated. Instead, such activities were regarded as meaningful cultural activities by young urban intellectuals, who considered creative writing and translating as effective means to promoting modern, which is equated with foreign, outlooks of life and in advocating socio-cultural reforms. Intellectuals such as Lu Xun (1881–1936), who was first trained as a medical doctor in Japan, and Cao Yu (1910–1996), who translated and played the role of Nora in “*A Doll’s House*” during his days in Tianjin

Nankai High School, were among the early few who took to creative writing to address socio-moral problems in society on the one hand and to advocate social, moral and cultural change on the other. Young writers like Tian Han (1898–1968) and Guo Moruo (1892–1978), who were both students returned from Japan, also took it as their mission to introduce world masterpieces to China and to explore new themes, experiment with new modes of writing, or create new types of characters in order to deal with pressing problems faced by the individual as well as to help shape the national and/or cultural identity of the young Republic. In short, these writers devoted themselves to the dissemination of foreign canonical works through Chinese translation, engaging themselves at the same time in creative writing that aims at exposing socio-moral “evils” in China and at liberating the minds of the Chinese readers. It is this zest for creative inspiration, intellectual enlightenment and cultural rejuvenation amongst the young Chinese intellectuals that has fostered a favourable climate for a full assimilation of world literature in China, resulting not only in unprecedented changes in the literary and cultural scenes but also in the transformation of the Chinese self.

Nikolai Gogol and Lu Xun’s Advocacy for Socio-Moral Change

Lu Xun was among the early few to play a leading part in promoting cultural renewal and nation building through the dissemination of world literature in China. He advocates the liberation of the self from confining Confucian ideology, seeing the former as the first step toward the modernization of the young nation state. Painstakingly, Lu Xun translated and promoted those European literary canons, such as the works of Huxley, Gogol, Byron, Nietzsche, Shelley, Heine, Pushkin and Petőfi, that he regarded as relevant to the socio-moral demands as well as intellectual and cultural circumstances of China in early twentieth century (Wang 1988: 54). Fully aware of the need to re-vigorate not merely the writings of China, but more importantly the spirit of the Chinese, Lu Xun has identified Gogol’s “The Diary of a Madman” (1834) as one of the world masterpieces relevant to the Chinese for he noticed in the Russian short story the detrimental effect of a rigid social system on an individual, subverting the development and free expression of the self. Trained as a medical doctor in Japan during the period from 1902 to 1909, Lu Xun decidedly turned to creative writing with the hope of saving the Chinese soul as opposed to a medical doctor’s devoted attention to saving human lives.

Influenced by Gogol's "The Diary of a Madman," Lu Xun wrote the first modern Chinese short story "A Madman's Diary" [kuangren riji] in 1918 in which he criticises the cannibalistic nature of Confucianism that tends to devour the Chinese spirit:

In ancient times, as I recollect, people often ate human beings, but I am rather hazy about it. I tried to look this up, but my history has no chronology and scrawled all over each page are the words: "Confucian Virtue and Morality." . . . I read intently half the night until I began to see words between the lines. The whole book was filled with the two words – "Eat people."

Adopting Gogol's theme of madness and the literary diary form, which were both "foreign" in Chinese literature then, Lu Xun depicts in vivid terms the frustrations and desperation of a man who is labelled mad by his fellow countrymen, including his own brother, for his attempt to dissuade people from cannibalistic practices. As Lu Xun's spokesman, the fictional madman enables Lu Xun to avoid censorship in his indictment of Confucianism that devours the individual spirit with its emphasis on collectivism, relational self, role identity, as well as social hierarchy and harmony that necessitate the socialization of the self. For Lu Xun, Confucianism has served for centuries as a regulating force that defines the Chinese spirit by subsuming the individual self under the collective role identity and by subverting all individual attempts for free expression and full exploration of one's potentiality. It is this same regulating force that Lu Xun considers as the dominant reactionary force in society that has prevented the nation from radical moral reform, social progress and national modernization. Like Gogol, Lu Xun has also identified the rich and the powerful as the privileged minorities, who were resistant to reforms since such moves would inevitably unsettle their privileged positions in society, jeopardize their vested interests, challenge the dominant Confucian morality and upset feudalistic social hierarchy. In his allegorical story, Lu Xun scrutinizes prevailing Confucian ideologies and values, and advocates a reconstitution of the entire socio-moral system in China. It is apparent from reading Lu Xun's short story that he has fully assimilated Gogol's "The Diary of a Madman" in theme, form and characterization in his attack on conventional Chinese socio-moral practices, showing his determination in arousing his readers from their spiritual inertia. Successfully producing the first modern Chinese short story written in vernacular Chinese, Lu Xun has introduced madman as a new type of character in Chinese literature – a lonely fighter who

battles his way with conviction through a society hostile to social, moral and cultural change. His protagonist has come to be perceived as a cultural icon representing all individual effort to seek freedom and fulfilment in life. It is thus not surprising to find his short story "A Madman's Diary" first published in *La Jenness* [New Youth], a Chinese literary magazine that aims at nurturing a generation of enlightened new youths by introducing them to highly selective world masterpieces and writings that propagate reform of the self, seeing it as a prerequisite to the reform of the nation.

Henrik Ibsen and Tian Han's Celebration of the Female Self

With the introduction of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in 1908 and *The Lady from the Sea* in 1920, many Chinese came to take note of Ibsen's revolutionary ideas of individualism and iconoclasm (Tam 2006: 113). They came to see how self-fashioning is closely related to individual quest for selfhood based on a moral position, which may place the individual at odds with conventional and collective forces in operation within defined social communities such as the family. Regarding himself as a "budding Ibsen" in China in 1920, Tian Han assiduously devoted himself to translating and promoting Ibsen studies and other European literatures in China in the 1920s with the aim of transforming the Chinese spirit and liberating the minds of his people through cultural and intellectual fertilization or enrichment (Tian Han 1920: 159). Well known for his ability in presenting new or progressive ideas in traditional Chinese milieu, for his mastery in transplanting European literary models on the Chinese soil, and for his conscious act of blending Western romantic individualism with Chinese sentimentalism, Tian Han attempts to reconstruct the Chinese self, especially the female self, in his play "Return to the South" [Nanguì] published in 1929 by incorporating the Ibsenian notion of the romantic self in his exploration of the future of China. Adopting Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) and Ellida in *The Lady from the Sea* (1888) as models, Tian Han presents a new type of Chinese women characterized by their ardent quest for selfhood and determination to seek freedom and self-fulfilment in tradition-ridden China. In his correspondence with Guo Moruo in 1920, Tian Han discusses the cultural relevance of Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* to the Chinese readers. He takes note of the social and moral resemblances between Norway and China and highlights the sources of despair and frustration experienced by young Chinese women, who often found themselves trapped between social obligations and family duties on the one hand and individual desire for self-

realization and autonomy on the other. For Tian Han, *The Lady from the Sea* is illuminating for it addresses effectively the notion of self and depicts the courage and determination of an Ibsenian woman character in her quest for happiness and recognition. It is evident from Tian Han's enthusiastic response to *The Lady from the Sea* that Ibsen's masterpiece has succeeded in transcending national and cultural boundaries owing to its socio-cultural relevance to the receiving nation. For Tian Han, *The Lady from the Sea* represents an exemplary world masterpiece, a model for Chinese women, because the Norwegian play advocates freedom of choice and celebrates self-actualization, which Tian Han regards as conditions essential to autonomy not only at the individual level but also at the national level (Tian 1920: 97–98).

Registering Ibsen's emphasis on individual free will and moral choice, Tian Han shows in his own play how Chinese culture can be transformed and moved away from its social conservatism, moral orthodoxy and Confucian collectivism by gaining inspirations from such a world masterpiece as *The Lady from the Sea*. As a young advocate of Ibsen studies in modern China, Tian Han underpins the importance of women's self-consciousness and moral choice as delineated in *A Doll's House* in his own creative works, the purpose of which is to explore the notion of the modern self, especially the female self, by re-examining the Chinese attitude toward and mentality on matters related to self-fashioning, love and happiness, as well as familial obligations and marital relationship. In his one-act play *Return to the South* [Nanguì], which is set in a remote Chinese village, Tian Han traces a young village girl Chun's process of individuation. Like Nora and Ellida, Chun is led to see the limitations of her hometown and yearns to free herself from all forms of entrapment. Emotionally tied to her mother, who upholds Confucian morality, Chun has been brought up to perform her socially-assigned gendered roles. However, being a born romantic who yearns for a free life and for a free exploration of her potentiality as an individual, she finds herself drawn toward the unknown world beyond her village as a result of her contact with the Wanderer, a "world traveller" from the exotic North. Not fully conscious of her romantic dream and desire for selfhood when the Wanderer left her village the first time, Chun has passively waited in her hometown for the latter's return. Her childhood playmate Zhenming's subsequent marriage offer, however, prompts Chun to re-examine her self and her position in the tradition-ridden village. She is forced to make a moral choice by rejecting her childhood playmate's offer, which has got her mother's blessing, because she regards such a marital tie as a form of confinement that tends to bind her to a life of domesticity. For Chun,

Zhenming represents all the things she abhors. He belongs to the world familiar to Chun; he symbolizes the known, the native, and the conventional that Chun struggles to relinquish. With the Wanderer's mysterious and exotic qualities filling her entire life, Chun decisively chooses to turn away from the ordinary and secure life offered by Zhenming in favour of a life of adventure, excitement and possibility. As she confides in Zhenming,

THE GIRL [Chun]: My brother Ming, you shouldn't have grown up with me. You shouldn't have stayed at my side all the time, protecting me all the while. Take a look at him [the Wanderer], he is so different from you. When he first showed up, I had no idea from where he came. When he left, I had no idea to where he had gone. He's like a god in my heart. Sitting or standing, he always has his eyes gaze at the distance. I don't know much about the world out there, but in my heart I know that distant place must be an interesting place full of freedom and happiness. (Tian Han 1984: 169)

It is clear from the above that the Wanderer signifies the unknown, the faraway and the exotic world beyond Chun's enclosing village; he is a free agent, the embodiment of the romantic spirit that Chun has been unconsciously yearning for in the past. Using Nora and Ellida as his models, Tian Han depicts Chun's search for self with the emphasis placed on her individuation. It is interesting to note that home is presented as a place of stagnancy and suffocation stifling the individual spirit, while marriage is seen as a concrete form of women's domestication. Like Nora in "A Doll's House," who chooses to leave home at the end in order to lead an autonomous and responsible life, and Ellida in *The Lady from the Sea*, who chooses to stay home with her husband when she gains her freedom of choice (Ibsen 1986: 313), Chun faces a moral dilemma. Her rejection of Zhenming's marriage offer thus signifies not only her rejection of a life of domesticity and security, but also her refusal to a life of subjugation and passivity. Chun's self-awakening and assertive moves at the end immediately place her alongside with Ibsenian new women. Like Nora, who tells her husband Helmer squarely that she must leave him, "There is another task that I must finish first – I must try to educate myself. And you're not the man to help me with that: I must do it alone. That's why I'm leaving you" (Ibsen 1986: 227), Chun decides to leave home in order to seek happiness and fulfilment in life as well as to explore her own potentiality as an individual. Comparable to Ellida, who discusses her situation with her husband Wangel,

I know that you can keep me here – you have the power and the right, and no doubt you will use them. But there's my *mind* – all my thoughts and my longings and desires – you have no hold over *them*. They will reach out and yearn for the unknown that I was created for, and that you have kept me from!
(Ibsen 1986: 327)

Chun is determined to run her own life and be her own master by braving the unknown world beyond her village. As Tian Han observes, it is Ellida's incessant assertion and Dr. Wangel's selfless love that save Ellida from a "half-dead" existence. And it is Ellida's insistence on being her own "master" that Tian Han considers culturally relevant to Chinese women's socio-moral circumstances at the time. Conscious of the growing impatience and frustration of Chinese women who were brought up with no other roles but performative gendered roles – to borrow Judith Butler's term – and no prospect but mere familial obligations and duties, Tian Han highlights the importance of spiritual awakening, assertion, determination and courage in one's quest for selfhood. Using the Western form of drama based on dialogue, Tian Han has not only created new types of character such as the new woman, the enlightened woman, and the romantic quester, but has also introduced new themes such as individuation, freedom and confinement, alienation, Nora theme, romantic quest, spiritual awakening and self-fashioning to modern Chinese drama. Written at a time when China was struggling hard to shed her traditional past, Tian Han's *Return to the South* registers his enthusiastic response to Ibsen's plays dealing with women's choice and quest for self, as well as his conscious act of reshaping the Chinese self based not on Confucian role identity but on European romantic individualism.

Ibsen's positive influence and warm reception in early twentieth-century China certainly denotes a case of successful literary assimilation and cultural "transplantation." At that critical moment in modern Chinese history, the Chinese response to *A Doll's House* and *The Lady from the Sea* bears great cultural significance in that it triggers off a rethinking of those core values prevalent in Chinese culture and initiates a process of soul searching amongst the Chinese intellectuals as they embarked on a journey of modernization. Viewed in this light, Tian Han's *Return to the South* represents a young Chinese writer's effort to address major socio-moral concerns affecting not just the individual but also the nation. That explains why *Return to the South* remains one of Tian Han's celebrated plays because it exemplifies the Chinese

enthusiastic response to and meaningful cultural assimilation of a world masterpiece in modern Chinese literature.

Henrik Ibsen and Cao Yu's *Walking Ghosts*

While Tian Han voices the need for redefining the self as a condition for social and ideological change, Cao Yu discusses the need for the Chinese to move away from their traditional past in order to establish a new China at the national level and a modern self at the personal level. Fascinated by Ibsen's use of the retrospective technique in *Ghosts* (1881) that deals with notions of fate, self, freedom and moral choice, Cao Yu experimented with such a dramatic technique unfamiliar to the Chinese audience at that time in his world-renowned play *Thunderstorm* [Leiyu] in 1931. Family is presented as an inferno where its inhabitants, young and old, all lead a hellish or ghostly existence loaded with secrets and sins and characterized by hypocrisy and hysteria. Like Ibsen's "Ghosts," Cao Yu reveals the darkest aspects of human nature or vices in the play, thus forcing his readers to go through a journey of self reflection and self discovery. As he confesses in his Preface to *Thunderstorm*,

It was my emotional need that has prompted me to write *Thunderstorm*. I thought of the pathetic situation of human beings, who all embrace their lives with confidence and aspirations at the beginning, thinking that they are masters of their own fate, only to find out later in life that very often that is not the case. They might be tricked or teased by their feeling or reasoning, or by an unknown force – fate or circumstances. But with pride they stay in their confining "cages" thinking that they have all the freedom under the sky. Claimed to be the most intelligent species in the world, human beings are so stupid, aren't they? It is with great compassion that I present the conflicts of my characters. . . . In the play, the universe is like a cruel well. Anyone falling into it has no chance of escape from this dark abyss no matter how hard one cries for help. (Cao Yu 1934: 4–5)

A close look at *Thunderstorm* will show how human folly and refusal to face one's true self may bring catastrophe not only to one's own self but also to others around. In the play, the male protagonist Zhou Puyuan is the only one with power to bring about fundamental changes in his family and in society. Yet Puyuan fails to meet all socio-moral challenges posed on him. Although he was educated in the Western style in Germany, Puyuan continues to observe the outdated Confucian morality dutifully and adhere to traditional social

conventions and gendered norms. Presented as a tyrant in the family and in business, Puyuan “rules” with his iron will. It has never occurred to him that his compliance and compromise may bring suffering to himself and others. As seen in the play, Puyuan remains weak in character and ineffectual before torrents of change that demands a reconstitution of the self. He has accepted his mother’s arrangement and let his maid-lover Shiping, the mother of his two sons, leave the family in the past, without knowing the high price he would have to pay for his non-resistance. Not only has he killed his own chance of living a happy and fulfilled life, but his concession has actually deprived all parties involved of any chance of life or happiness in the process. The fact that he has kept all the furniture in the house unchanged after Shiping’s departure more than thirty years ago is a clear indication of his emotional and spiritual death.

Furthermore, Puyuan’s willingness to enter a marriage of convenience with a young woman Fanyi has also proved to be a fatal mistake. Spiritually and emotionally dead after Shiping’s departure, Puyuan has lived on like a walking ghost incapable of love or feeling. His marriage with Fanyi and the latter’s subsequent incestuous relationship with his eldest son Zhou Ping all point to Puyuan’s moral blindness, hypocrisy and cowardice as an individual, whose wrong decisions in life have literally forced everyone around him to a life of falsehood. As the only one with power to initiate change in the family or make a difference in others’ lives, Puyuan has failed, thus causing everyone to become lost souls or walking ghosts in life. Through the mistakes or misdeeds made by this single character, Cao Yu shows how individuals live and suffer under the shadow of the past that takes the form of tradition and convention. Inspired by Ibsen’s “Ghosts,” Cao Yu scrutinizes the notion of Confucian self against a backdrop of Chinese modernity and highlights the need for the Chinese to redefine themselves based on the romantic notion of self and the importance of facing one’s true self with honesty.

By presenting his main characters in *Thunderstorm* as products of their own past and victims of socio-cultural circumstances, Cao Yu takes Ibsen’s play as his model in advocating a fundamental change of the Chinese family system based on Confucian collectivity and of the Chinese self defined by socially assigned roles. As revealed in the play in which the Zhou family is presented as a microcosm of the Chinese society at the time, no one can live a fulfilled or happy life if one continues to cling on to outdated Confucian morality with its emphasis on absolute obedience to authority and on effacement of the individual self. Echoing Ibsen’s belief that “what is really wanted in society is a revolution of the spirit of man” (Egan 2003: 425), Cao Yu shows the pressing

need for change by bringing to the foreground the discrepancy between appearance and reality and between hypocrisy and honesty. While *Thunderstorm* reveals Cao Yu's severe indictment on social hierarchy and moral rigidity, it also epitomizes the Chinese ardent desire for socio-moral transformation by reforming the family through a re-examination and reconstitution of the self.

Goethe and Guo Moruo's Construction of the Modern Self

From the examples discussed above, one may conclude that the "fortune" of world masterpieces in another cultural milieu represents not so much the personal interest or literary preference of individual writers or translators as the readers' literary taste and socio-cultural demands of the receiving culture or country. The Chinese interest in Goethe's major works in early twentieth century is another good example testifying how the Chinese have selectively introduced world masterpieces that were considered relevant to the cultural climate and changing literary orientations in modern China. Goethe was introduced to China at a time when the Chinese were eager to find new directions in life or explore new frontiers in the literary domain. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and *Faust* definitely serve the Chinese cultural need at the time, contributing significantly to the shaping of the modern Chinese self characterized by individualism and self liberation at the personal level and by self-reliance and resistance against old morality and social conventionality at the national level (Yip 2000: 117). That helps to explain why Guo Moruo's full-length translation of *Werther* was first published in the *Creation Quarterly* [Chuangzou zhikan], a literary journal devoted to recreating, including revitalizing, Chinese culture. In his preface to the *Werther* translation, Guo Moruo clearly states his intention to "create" in China, through his translation of the German work, a universe of love and freedom out of a decadent and stifling environment. He shares Werther's pantheistic view of life, his love of nature, and his preference for simple or primitive life. In the preface to the 1955 revised edition of *Werther*, Guo emphasizes the resemblance in spirit he sees between the German novel that delineates a young man's reaction against old morality and the Chinese young intellectuals' struggle against feudalism and Confucianism during the May fourth era (Guo 1955: 3-4). Taking *Werther* as his spiritual guide and comrade, Guo battles his way through those subversive forces that tend to hinder the full exploration of life and free expression of the self.

This awareness of the need for the Chinese to undergo a spiritual and cultural rejuvenation in early twentieth century has motivated Guo to launch his translating, writing and publishing projects with the aims of introducing world literature to liberate the minds of the Chinese, of propagating revolutionary ideas to mobilize the people, and of disseminating progressive ideas to construct a new China.

Influenced by Goethe's well-known characters like Werther and Faust, Guo questions institutional regimes and challenges prevailing socio-moral practices that tend to confine individuals to stereotypical roles. What he wants to bring to China through his translating and writing projects is a new socio-intellectual consciousness (Yip 2006: 52). Noticing Goethe's warm reception and good fortune in China, Guo launched his second major project on translating *Faust* through which the importance of liberation of the self is promoted as the first step toward self autonomy and national self-reliance. In the postscript to the second part of *Faust*, Guo aspires the emergence of many Fausts in China who "would never get old again, nor would they be blind folded and die. They would never feel satisfied with reclaiming the shore land, nor with the feudal-lord-type of granted democracy, until they have changed the whole of China into an ocean of democracy where people become their own masters" (42). It is the Faustian spirit of perseverance and integrity that has prompted Guo to write "The Rebirth of the Goddess" in 1921 in which he advocates spiritual regeneration and cultural revitalization. Injecting new life into the Chinese mythical story about conflicts between two legendary leaders, Guo calls for a total departure from old practices and social order in favour of a new world filled with light, hope and warmth. As the goddesses proclaim,

The sun is still far away,
 The sun is still far away
 In the water one hears the morning bell ringing:
 Ding Dong, Ding Dong, Ding Dong.

To shoot Sirius with thousands of golden arrows,
 To make Sirius wane in the dark,
 In the water one hears the funeral bell tolling:
 Ding Dong, Ding Dong, Ding Dong.

Let's drink some wine,
 Let's give a toast to the undying new sun,
 In the water one hears the sound of glasses clinking:
 Ding Dong, Ding Dong, Ding Dong. (Guo 1978: 12-13)

Echoing Faust's progressive attitude toward life, Guo voices his belief in change as the only hope for the Chinese people who were then trapped by outdated morality and troubled by political upheavals at the time. Guo Moruo's desire for the emergence of a new China is presented through vivid images in "The Rebirth of the Goddesses," and its publication has brought instant fame to Guo. Thus a look at Guo's enthusiastic response to Goethe and his conscious act of promoting Goethe's great works in modern China clearly shows his purpose of introducing and promoting world literature in modern China has been primarily for social betterment, spiritual enlightenment, cultural transformation and nation building. Guo's effort has resulted in the mushrooming of the revolutionary romantic spirit amongst the young intellectuals in the 1920s, and in the emergence of a type of revolutionary romantic questers, who seek change not for personal happiness and fulfillment but for nation building and social, political and cultural reform.

The intricate interplay between the introduction of canonical works from world literature and the production of national literature as demonstrated in the above-discussed examples shows how world masterpieces have been carefully selected, interpreted and assimilated with distinct purposes in modern China. The "fortunes" of world masters and their representative canonical works in modern China thus reflects not so much the personal interest of individual writers and translators or the commercial considerations of publishers as the local literary taste, cultural relevance and social, intellectual, political and moral circumstances of the time. The warm reception of the world masters discussed in this paper further affirms the literary accomplishments and appeal of these world masterpieces that succeed in transcending time and cultural boundaries to get transported to and transplanted in a foreign milieu. What has been equally illuminating is that in the Chinese rendition of, discussions on and assimilation of these world masterpieces, one comes to have a better understanding of and a holistic view on the Chinese changing cultural conditions at the time. As Madame de Staël once said, "The nations must serve each other as guides. . . . Every country would do well, then, to welcome foreign thoughts, for, in such matters, hospitality makes the fortunes of the 'host'" (quoted in Weisstein 1973: 168). A look at the fortunes of the selected world masterpieces in modern China and the Chinese writers' adaptation and assimilation of these texts in their national literature illustrates in a succinct way how Chinese literature has been enriched and expanded in themes, characterization and techniques as a result of its contact with world literature. It is also evident that such meaningful encounters and dynamic interactions have

contributed to the Chinese expression of the self characterized by a sense of urgency, a cry for recognition, a desire for change, a sense of hope and a quest for fulfilment. Viewed in this light, world masterpieces for the Chinese have often been regarded as voices of comrades from afar echoing comparable, if not similar, experiences or of spiritual guides providing light, insight and/or direction to a time when the young Chinese intellectuals were groping their way forward. That is to say, world literature has served a functional role as change agents in initiating or facilitating cultural change in modern China, the result of which is, as illustrated in the examples above, the emergence of new themes, the experimentation with new forms or techniques, as well as the development of new types of characters in modern Chinese writings. In more specific terms, the impact of world literature is deeply felt in its significant contribution to the shaping, or reshaping to be more accurate, of the Chinese self in modern Chinese literature.

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