

Zhu Zhenwu and Chinese African Literaturology: The New Quality Idea

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Abstract Prof. Zhu Zhenwu, a prominent translator and scholar of world literature in China, has captured great attention and accolades among his peers for introducing his concepts of “non-mainstream literature,” “four major diasporas,” and “Africanness” based on his perceptions about mutual learning between civilizations and the significance of cultural diversity. In his recent studies, he has made amazing yet timely significant stride in pioneering a new field of literary studies with his theory on what has been termed as the “Chinese African Literaturology: The New Quality Idea,” namely, the Chinese studies of African literature. So far, his groundbreaking work and his grand vision for this field have garnered enthusiastic response and widespread support from numerous scholars of world literature. The reason lies in their shared commitment to incorporating the adumbrated and marginalized African literature into the new system of world literature and redrawing the landscape of world literature studies. This article tries to clarify the definition of Prof. Zhu’s theory of “Chinese African Literaturology: the New Quality Idea”.

Keywords Chinese African Literaturology: The New Quality Idea; non-mainstream literature; four major diasporas; Africanness

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Introduction

African literature, with its unique historical and cultural background, is an important part of world literature. The African continent has a great ancient civilization and a long oral tradition, nevertheless, under the oppression of colonialism and racism, African culture has been severely marginalized. In this context, African writers ground their work in the culture and history of the African continent, drawing strength

from oral literature, and absorbing the outstanding achievements of world literature to develop independent written literature with a unique artistic style and expression. The achievements of African literature not only inject new vitality and connotation into world literature, but also provide an important way for us to understand African history and culture. Amid the growing global attention towards African literature, research on African literature within Chinese academia has also achieved a milestone breakthrough. In 2019, a research project titled “History of African Literature Written in English”, led by Prof. Zhu Zhenwu (朱振武), received funding support from the prestigious National Social Science Fund of China, indicating that African literary studies in China has entered a new era. Prof. Zhu’s team published a series of influential papers in top-tier journals such as *Social Sciences in China* and *Foreign Literature Studies*. Building on the various research, Prof. Zhu formally proposed the theoretical framework of “Chinese African Literaturology: the New Quality Idea”. This theory emphasizes interpreting African literature from a “Chinese perspective,” avoiding the entrenched frameworks of Western academia, while also advocating for the exploration of new ideas and values generated through cross-civilizational dialogues in African literature. It provides an innovative theoretical paradigm for African literary studies both in China and globally.

African literature in the Global Canon

With the European colonization coming to its end in the mid-20th century, African nations declared independence one after another, thus launching a process of decolonization and enhancing, gradually but tenaciously, the cultural awareness across the African continent. Since the 1960s, African literary writing has entered an explosive phase. Seven African writers have won the Nobel Prize for Literature, including Albert Camus from Algeria, Wole Soyinka from Nigeria, Naguib Mahfouz from Egypt, Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee from South Africa, Doris Lessing from Zimbabwe, and Abdulrazak Gurnah from Tanzania. In addition, more writers have received the Booker Prize, the Goncourt Prize, the Camões Prize, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, and the Caine Prize for African Writing. The achievement of African literature garnered broad attention from the academia around the world, but the academia in the West seems unable to free itself from the bondage of Eurocentrism, or stop its usual practice of scrutinizing and defining African literature as “the other” in accordance with Euro-American criteria either in its literary criticism or in its selection of award/prize recipients.

Such a phenomenon is clearly evidenced by Africa’s lack of a well-deserving position within the global literary space and a respectable presence in world

literature. We know that the term “Weltliteratur” (“World Literature”) was first coined in 1827 by Goethe, who proclaimed at the time: “The epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach” (qtd. in Damrosch 21-22). Unfortunately, to the academia in Europe and North America, the term largely meant “classics” like Homer’s epics or *Beowulf* onward, or other popular writings by their writers. Some scholars of postcolonial literature, such as Robert Young and Pheng Cheah, claim that postcolonial literature is what world literature should be because their scholarship has addressed African literature well. Other scholars, such as David Damrosch and Martin Puchner, disagreed. In their view, postcolonial literature is politically active, and it merely covers African writings during the period of European colonialism, not before and after, so it has its limitations. World literature, they assert, is politically neutral, and it covers a much broader and deeper history of literature. Since the early 2000s, a series of major publications, especially David Damrosch’s *What Is World Literature?* (2003) and *World Literature in Theory* (2014), Theo D’haen’s *World Literature in an Age of Geopolitics* (2021), and Martin Puchner’s *Literature for a Changing Planet* (2022), have introduced and promoted the idea of “new world literature,” advocating re-reading literature, not just from the West but also around the world, exploring the need for the “decanonization” and “reanonization” of world literature, and expanding the borders of world literature studies.

There is no disputing that the balance in world literature has been shifting with the sweeping changes, both political and economic, in the world. As a result, European and North American literatures, which used to be considered the dominant part of world literature, are gradually losing their importance and influence, whereas the interest in African literature has been quickly increasing due to its rising position in the world order through its robust economic growth and powerful political voice. While such a long-awaited change is encouraging, many people wish it to go beyond various anthologies and sustain in the field of world literature studies. In other words, non-Western writers and critics should have a viable voice in this debate over the transition from postcolonial literature to the so-called “new world literature.”

Zhu Zhenwu (朱振武), a prominent translator, critic, and professor at Shanghai Normal University, is one of the first scholars of world literature in China to question the long-established Eurocentric canonization in world literature and demand a voice for the under-represented literatures in the formation of a “new world literature.” In his article, “Revealing the Diversity of World Literature and Constructing Chinese African Literaturology,” published in *Chinese Social Sciences Today*, one of China’s most prestigious academic journals, Zhu redefines the concept of world literature in

the fast-changing world and shares his approach to facilitating the mutual learning between civilizations: “The world literature, as we know it today, is lack of diversity. As a matter of fact, the world literature as defined by Goethe, or the world literature from Westerners’ perspective today, or even the world literature accepted and acknowledged by all of us in the academia, does not represent the world literature per se. At least, it does not contain the initial features of world literature. Conversely, it is the so-called “world literature” constructed by Westerners primarily based on the literary elements from a few major European countries, along with limited selections from other countries and regions. Accordingly, the mutual learning between civilizations is hard to accomplish”.

Due to a late start in its study of African literature and a persistent influence from the West, the Chinese academia mostly followed Western theories and research methods in reading and critiquing the works by African writers, and it has failed to evince its independence, innovativeness, and systematicity. To break the existing mindset and norm in the Chinese studies of African literature, Zhu took the lead in calling for a thorough reform that would generate a fresh and distinctly Chinese perspective, approach, and discourse. He urged people to rediscover and understand Africa, with a deep cultural awareness, in consonance with the universal values of mankind, such as peace, development, equality, justice, democracy, and freedom: “With concrete steps like conducting field research, combing through first-hand material, making direct contact with Africa, its writers and personnel working in literary and cultural fields, integrating into the texture and interstices of African culture, and delving into African literary texts, we may reset the objectives of our research, define our aesthetic standard, and position the coordinate system for African literature as well as the literature and culture of the world. That, in turn, will enable Chinese scholars not only to share our insights and findings, but also to actively facilitate the inter-cultural, inter-disciplinary, inter-spatial, and cross-perspective theoretical thinking and international dialogue by using Chinese literature and culture as a starting point and relying on the literatures and cultures around the world as reference” (Qian and Zhu 19).

Here, Zhu lays out his vision, plan, and action for the reform. Since 2012, Zhu and his team have been moving forward fruitfully in this direction. They have focused their studies on a representative part of African literature, namely, the origin and flow of African literature written in English and English literature in African countries, so that they could present a wide range of writings from African literature to the readers and scholars around the world, analyze the complex relationship between native and foreign cultures, colonial and postcolonial cultures, African and

Western civilizations, and demonstrate the long-neglected value of African literature and, particularly, its significance to the advancement of cultural diversity and the “recanonicalization” of the new world literature.

The fact that the research project, “History of African Literature Written in English,” led by Zhu, received the sponsorship from the prestigious National Social Science Fund of China in 2019 indicates that the Chinese studies of African literature has entered a new phase. Since then, Zhu has published a series of articles, such as “Diasporic Literature as A Reflection of the Age and Its World Significance” and “African Literatures and the Diversity of Civilizations,” in *Social Sciences in China*, sharing his theoretical consideration of African literature as a whole, establishing his theory of “Chinese African Literatology: the New Quality Idea.”

Theoretical Foundations of Chinese African Literatology

At the heart of Prof. Zhu’s intervention into world-literature studies lies a normative claim: the epistemic legitimacy of any newly emergent field is inseparable from the ethical ends it serves. Rather than treating African writing as an empirical corpus awaiting neutral description, Chinese African Literatology begins by foregrounding two mutually reinforcing axiological commitments—cultural diversity and inter-civilizational dialogue. These commitments, I contend, do not serve as extrinsic ideological window-dressing, instead, they constitute the field’s methodological point of departure, heuristic lens, and ultimate telos. In what follows, I excavate the Confucian and Mohist genealogies that underwrite this stance, demonstrate their compatibility with contemporary UNESCO paradigms of “pluralism” and “conviviality,” and argue that their activation within a Chinese critical idiom offers a necessary corrective to the asymmetrical tolerance long embedded in Euro-American world-literature discourse.

Advancing cultural diversity and promoting mutual learning between civilizations are the core concepts in Zhu’s theory of Chinese African Literatology, a theory that stemmed from the traditional ideas of Chinese culture, namely, “seeking harmony but not uniformity” and “only when everyone’s beauty is beauty and everyone appreciates others’ beauty, can all beauties co-exist, and universal harmony be possible.” Such a concept aligns with the universal values of a happy, rich, equal, just, peaceful, and harmonious life. These values, as they are all desired by mankind, may resonate with people from different races, regions, and nations and prompt their recognition of psychological sensibility and humanistic spirit.

The idea of “harmony” has a long history in Chinese culture. Lao Tzu once explored the idea about “downsizing a country with a sparse population” just to

ensure “delicious food, beautiful clothes, comfortable houses, and joy in life for its citizens” (*Tao Te Ching* Chapter 18). It seems a little conservative, but it implies a simple hope for peace and health. Mozi’s interpretation of universal love might serve as a prototype for empathy and mutual learning between different schools of thoughts: “see others’ country as you would see your own, see others’ family as you would see your own, and see others as you would see yourself” (*Universal Love* Part II). The idea about the Mean and Harmony constitutes the core of Confucianism, and it is one of the key components of Chinese culture as well. Confucius attached special importance to the Doctrine of the Mean: “The Doctrine of the Mean is the highest virtue, but its practice has been rare for a long time” (*The Analects of Confucius* Yong Ye). He regarded the Mean as the consummate tactic and realm of life, but some people discarded what he said as a variation of opportunism, eclecticism, and reconciliationism. What he really meant by the Mean has nothing to do with reconciliation or being an eclectic. Instead, he tried to stress the importance in being moderate, adaptive, appropriate, suitable, and timely. The essence of being “moderate” is acting according to the norms and seeking harmony but not uniformity, because harmony is the discipline or principle in the Chinese way of living and handling affairs, the code of gentlemen’s conduct, and the ideal approach in dealing with the relationships between nations, cultures, and literatures.

In Zhu’s cultural consciousness, there exists a deeply rooted faith in the Chinese culture of harmony. His proposal to use the two goals of “enhancing cultural diversity and facilitating mutual learning between civilizations” as the guiding principles in constructing the “new world literature,” with a proper coverage for African literature and other Third-World literatures, could be seen as a brilliant move that has effectively taken the advantage of the Chinese cultural heritage on the one hand and, on the other, perfectly corresponded to the values commonly advocated by various countries around the world, such as peace, development, equality, justice, democracy, and freedom, hence underscoring the burgeoning innovative spirit and cultural confidence of Chinese academia. Zhu articulates his intent and vision confidently: “We must keep a foothold in Chinese culture while breaking Western discourse patterns, critical clichés, and cognitive liminality and constructing our own literary and cultural concepts, so that we can draw a new cultural landscape in the world and establish a new system of world literature. By then, I am sure, mutual learning between civilizations could take place, in a true sense, within the context of a diverse world literature, and a Chinese critical discourse and theoretical system would be established and fully capable of contributing to the endeavor to bring about cultural diversity all over the world and

construct a dynamic community of literatures and cultures” (Qian and Zhu 21).

A change in concept often leads to an innovation for a disciplinary theory and a new discourse system. Replicating the existing one from Europe and America will not enable us to present any objective, fair study and evaluation about African literature or literatures of other Third-World countries. To this end, a group of Chinese scholars, led by Zhu, have come up with their theories on a range of issues, such as “non-mainstream English literature,” “colonial diaspora,” “native diaspora,” “foreign diaspora,” and “Africanness,” by drawing from excellent traditions in Chinese literature, cultivating the mainstream literature in the West, and consulting the translation and study of Chinese literature by sinologists in the West. What they have accomplished so far is much more than just starting a new chapter for the Chinese studies of African literature because their research findings, textual appreciations, and theoretic conclusions have been disseminated incessantly through journal articles, conference presentations, and scholarly books. One of their major and widely endorsed claims is that “the interconnection, or integration, among issues, such as decolonization, diaspora, and hybridity, has made it possible for African literature and other non-mainstream literatures to transcend themselves across the gaps and differences of time, place, and race” (Zhu and Li 164-65).

From Non-Mainstream Literature to Chinese African Literaturology

Obviously, the Chinese African Literaturology, envisioned and constructed by Zhu and his peers, is quite different from the African literaturology in Africa, let alone the West. It is nothing like a mechanical carryover, or replica, from the conventions in the Euro-American or African academia. It was established in consequence of a turn in China’s study of non-mainstream literature, which is part of the big cultural aftermath from the European colonization, i.e., the huge amount of literature written in the languages of suzerains. Written away from the suzerains, it is not considered part of the literature in the suzerains, but it is not wholly accepted as part of the native literature of colonies, because it is the literature written in the suzerains’ languages either by the migrant writers from suzerains or the writers in colonies. Former colonial empires, including Britain, France, Spain, and Portuguese, produced an abundant non-mainstream literary legacy, such as non-mainstream literature in English, French, Spanish, etc., during and after colonization. Since the beginning of the 20th century, non-mainstream literature has been flourishing continuously. To a large extent, the Irish literature represented by Joyce, Yeats, and Beckett, the Canadian literature by Atwood and Munro, the Australian literature by Lawson and White, the African literature by Soyinka, Gordimer, Coetzee, and

Gurnah, the Caribbean literature by Walcott and Selvon, and the Indian literature by Tagore have redrawn the chart of mainstream literature in Europe and America.

How did these literatures influence the cultural and literary development in the colonized countries? How did they affect the cultural and literary development in the suzerains? Did they have an impact on the value and significance of world literature? Given their ties to the relationship between different cultures and their involvement in the writing and propagation of literature with a new style, they are definitely worthy of scholarly research. In fact, they have already become the hot topic in the study of world literature and increasingly expanded the scope of this field. The team of Chinese scholars, headed by Zhu, was the first to initiate this “turn,” clarify the relationship between three kinds of literature, and introduce a new chart for the study of world literature: “the First-World literature” represented by US and the UK; “the Second-World literature” represented by Japan, France, German, Italy, Russia, and Spain; “the Third-World literature” represented by China, Africa, and Latin America. The first two categories belong to “mainstream literature,” while the last one belongs to “non-mainstream literature” (Zhu, “Revealing” 4).

To understand Zhu’s theory of Chinese African Literaturology, it is imperative to know what the study of the non-mainstream English language literature is all about. Generally, non-mainstream literature refers to the literary works written and published in English by writers in countries and regions around the world, excluding the works in English and American literature. It is different from English and American literature, but it is not the same as native literature, either. Its writer may have been influenced by the historical and cultural traditions conveyed through the English language and, at the same time, the literature he/she has created in English may have been deeply immersed in the native culture, the geographic environment, and the political atmosphere of his/her region or country.

African literature is a typical part of non-mainstream literature. Before the 20th century, African literature was almost ignored by the world, whereas the image of Africa was mostly presented by the literary works written in colonizers’ languages after the 20th century started. It is primarily through these works that the world came to know and understand Africa. Most of the time, the translation, award selection, and literary criticism of African literature started from non-mainstream literature and operated on the long-established conventions and standards that were often mixed with Eurocentric prejudices. Zhu’s research is different since he refuses to follow the Eurocentric approach. Instead, he has upheld his belief in cultural consciousness and the advancement of cultural diversity and ventured into the uncultivated territory of literary studies. So far, he has successfully initiated a new research field for non-

mainstream literature and the nation-based English literature in Africa. To lay out the premise, framework, and goal of this field, Zhu has authored or edited a series of scholarly books, including *Introduction to the Chinese Study of English Literature in Countries Other than England and America* (2013), *The Study of Canadian and New Zealand English Literature in China* (2013), *Root and Flow of African English Literature* (2019), *Study of African English Literature* (2019), and *Study of English Literature in African Countries* (2019). The most striking success in his research is the way in which his analysis starts with a look over the origin and development of the English language literature around the world before examining the English language literature in different African countries, from its source and flow to its time period, its leading writers and writings, its relationship with its suzerain, and its contribution to world literature. After their research program, “History of African Literature Written in English,” received the sponsorship from the National Social Science Fund of China in 2019, Zhu and his team have published a series of research papers, introducing their new concepts and presenting their objective assessment of the characteristics and achievements in African literature. They have fully confirmed, based on their findings and conclusions, that the non-mainstream literature has already dropped off its “non-mainstream” label and caught up with, or even overtaken, the mainstream literature. With his persistent probe on the “frontiers” of literature over the years, such as the non-mainstream literature, the non-mainstream English literature, and the history of African literature written in English, Zhu has taken all the necessary steps to build the scholarly foundations, one layer at a time, for the establishment of Chinese African Literaturology.

The Four Major African Diasporas: a Typology

Given a combination of factors, such as its rare misfortunes in colonialization, the trade of black slaves, and its complex indigenous cultures, Africans went through the ordeals of the physical cross-border migration, the spiritual and cultural exile, and the marginalization of national identity. So many people, namely, migrants, settlers, natives, and immigrants with double or multiple nationalities, fell into the interstices of diasporic domains. The diaspora literature generated from these domains, therefore, is much richer and far more complicated than that of any other region. It has been a major component of literature in most of the African countries, except Egypt, Algeria, and very few other countries north of the Sahara Desert, and “diasporicity” has become a dominant representation of African literature. Based on his analysis of various diasporas and their literary performance, Zhu summed up four major paradigms in African diaspora literature: Native diaspora, Foreign

diaspora, Colonial diaspora,¹ and Foreign-native diaspora (between two or more countries).² These paradigms, as a whole, may work well in delivering accurate observations on a range of issues, such as the clash, reference, fusion, variation, and the “chemical reaction” and consequence in its generative process, that would occur in the interplay between African and other heterogenous literatures.

The concept of diaspora often evokes images of people dispersed across geographical boundaries, yet Africa presents a distinctive variant—the “native diaspora”. Unlike traditional diasporas characterized by physical displacement, this phenomenon describes a condition where indigenous Africans experience a form of cultural displacement within their own homelands. This paradoxical situation arises from the complex interplay of colonial policies, cultural subjugation, and the imposition of foreign cultural norms. As we delve into this unique aspect of African cultural history, we uncover how colonial forces created a state of internal exile, marginalizing Africans within their own cultural and social landscapes.

Regarding Native Diaspora, Zhu accurately defined its connotation: “It refers to those African natives who were forced into a kind of diasporic cultural environment in their own country by the colonial policies, through which the colonizers tried to promote their colonial language and Christianity, plunder the land of the colony, and enforce racial segregation and the divide-and-conquer plans, even though the natives never had any migration experience overseas, let alone in the First-World countries, nor faced any cultural conflict that was usually caused by one’s “spatial shift,” nor dealt with the consequent problems after barging into a foreign country, such as identity predicament, anxiety over their rootlessness, search for home and recognition, and isolation” (Zhu and Yuan 144).

The African continent is second to none in terms of its prolonged experience under colonization, the depth of impact on its culture, and the intensity and scale of its conflict with colonizers. As a dominant power, the colonial culture marginalized Africans and their cultures and confined them, culturally and spiritually, in a similar diasporic situation. Though living on the land of their own country and in their own culture, they had no voice whatsoever. Such a state of dispersion is more unfair, tragic, and painful, and the composition of its “hybridity” is more complicated. Frantz Fanon, a black theorist who migrated to France, provides a pertinent explanation of the

1 See the article by Zhu, Zhenwu and Junqing Yuan, “Diasporic Literature as A Reflection of the Age and Its World Significance: A Case Study of African Literature in English,” *Social Sciences in China*, no. 7, 2019, pp. 135-58.

2 For a detailed definition of the term, see the article by Zhu, Zhenwu and Dan Li, “African Literature and Culture,” *Social Sciences in China*, no. 8, 2022, p. 170.

dissociative identity disorder among native Africans under colonization: “The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question” (Fanon 17).

In this relationship, the black man’s identity is in crisis, while the white man’s identity is strengthened because he sees his own superiority from the black man’s identity as the other. The black man’s vulnerable position of being governed and dominated induce his sense of self-inferiority about his identity and his urge to imitate and attach himself to the white culture: “Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle” (Fanon 18).

As Western colonizers forcefully carried out their cultural colonization and imposed mother countries’ languages, cultures, and discourse systems in education, literary writing, publication, and media, black writers resorted, extensively and heavily, to the methods of Western literary writing in their literary writings, so as to give themselves a voice in front of the Western world. Naturally, literature served as a tool for propagating the Western culture in colonies and precipitated the spread and fusion of surrealism and symbolism in black literary writings and cultural activities. Once they realized that an excessive drawing from, or a blind imitation of, others would lead to the abandonment of one’s own national traditions, native writers tried to figure out how to learn from the West but free themselves from the cultural hegemony of colonialism while ensuring the independent development of their national culture. This appears to be the only choice for African literature to be integrated into world literature.

The colonial enterprise, as a historical phenomenon, was not merely a political and economic endeavor but also a profound cultural and literary project. The movement of people from the colonizing powers to the colonies created complex webs of cultural interaction, conflict, and hybridity.

The idea of “Colonial diaspora” may help explain the cultural experience and literary production in colonies among the migrants and their descendants from mother countries. It is intended to answer the following questions: How did the colonizers, as a minority, adopt a powerful cultural attitude in writing about, or dealing with, their relationship to the culture of colonies? How did they

affect the culture in colonies? How did the culture of colonies, in turn, affect the colonial diasporas? What is the specific cultural consequence, or regeneration, of their mutual influence? The literature of the African “colonial diaspora” mostly consists of the works written by white writers and their descendants from European countries, such as Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal, whose writing went through a drastic transformation from depicting African society based on the perspective of their superior culture to reconsidering the impact on Africa from the colonization, revealing the widespread confusion after the powerful culture’s loss of its position, and exploring issues concerning cultural compromise and integration.

J.M. Coetzee’s literary evolution epitomizes the transformative characteristic of the colonial diaspora. His early works, such as *Dusklands*, exemplify the imperial gaze, objectifying the South African landscape and indigenous bodies to reinforce white supremacy. This phase aligns with the initial colonial project of cultural dominance and territorial subjugation. However, Coetzee’s mid-career novels, particularly *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life & Times of Michael K*, pivot towards an introspective critique of colonial violence. Here, the narrative lens shifts to the internal mechanics of the colonial apparatus, exposing the moral bankruptcy of imperial discourse. The protagonist K’s “escape” symbolizes a subversive act against the spatial and ideological order of colonization. In his later oeuvre, including *Disgrace* and *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee delves deeper into the postcolonial predicament. Set against the backdrop of democratic South Africa, these texts portray the descendants of empire grappling with linguistic disempowerment and existential crises. The erstwhile cultural capital of the colonizers is relegated to a “second language,” necessitating renegotiation. Throughout this trajectory, Coetzee consciously employs a stylistic “de-anglicization.” His prose becomes increasingly austere, divesting the symbolic framework of colonial romanticism. The narrative voice adopts a detached, “outsider” tone, mirroring the “re-alienation” of colonial progeny within their ancestral terrain. Thus, his writing transcends mere exoticism, evolving into a site of mutual interrogation and transformation between the metropole’s language and the colony’s historical reality.

Coetzee’s case illuminates the central paradox of colonial diaspora literature: it must first enter the discursive center via the imperial language to progressively hollow out its hegemonic content and ultimately cede aesthetic ground to the colonized space. This process not only reconfigures the narrative authority of white writers in Africa but also furnishes a microcosmic model for observing how colonial culture can retroactively permeate the colonized culture. In other words, the more the diasporic writer clings to a superior perspective, the more their text internally generates fissures

in their cultural positioning. It is within these fissures that the new hybrid identities and ethical imaginaries required by postcolonial society begin to germinate.

The term “Foreign Diaspora” has long been associated with the traditional notion of migration, where individuals and communities are displaced from their homelands to other countries. This movement often involves a complex interplay between the minority culture of the diaspora and the dominant culture of the host country. In the context of Africa, the foreign diaspora represents a significant and multifaceted phenomenon, particularly in Euro-American countries.

Foreign diaspora usually means diaspora in its traditional sense, namely, people migrating to other countries. It denotes a mode of exchange, the weak culture of diasporic minority and the powerful culture of the majority in the adopted country. Specifically, African foreign diaspora refers to people migrating, voluntarily or involuntarily, to Euro-American countries or regions. Take the black diaspora in America and England for example. As strangers in a foreign country, their living conditions went through transnational, cross-lingual, cross-cultural, and interracial changes. Africans and their descendants scattering all over the world (mostly in their former suzerains) have created a rich history of the black foreign diaspora literature, which has evolved through suppression, marginalization, awakening, and resurgence, is accompanied by a historical process in which the national consciousness of blacks was awakened and the struggle against colonial and racial oppression was sustained around the globe. The ideological trends of globalization and multiculturalism accelerated the process in which the black diaspora literature moved from edge to center and, thereby, flowed like a branch into the mainstream.

The history of the African foreign diaspora in the Global North is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of communities in the face of significant challenges. From the early struggles of migration and marginalization to the eventual rise of a vibrant and influential literary tradition, the black diaspora has consistently demonstrated its capacity for cultural renewal and resistance. The ideological currents of globalization and multiculturalism have played a crucial role in this evolution, facilitating the transition of black diaspora literature from the periphery to the mainstream. This shift not only reflects a broader recognition of the contributions of African communities to global culture but also underscores the ongoing struggle for equality and representation. As we continue to explore the complexities of the African foreign diaspora, we are reminded of the enduring power of literature to articulate the human experience and to foster a deeper understanding of our shared humanity.

“Foreign-native diaspora” (Been-to Diaspora) refers to migrants who dispersed

to foreign countries and then returned, or the transnational sojourners who moved between their homeland and foreign countries, or “multiple transnational residents” who migrated to a third geographical and cultural space. This term denotes a mode of “double or multiple cultural dwelling.” The Trinidadian-British writer, V. S. Naipaul, for instance, wrote about Trinidad, England, India, and Africa in English and often went back, as a visitor, to these countries. Many characteristics of the multiple transnational diasporas are well presented in his works. Major African transnational writers include Chinua Achebe (America and homeland) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (England, America, and homeland) from Nigeria, Peter Abrahams (homeland, England, and Jamaica) from South Africa, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (America and homeland) from Kenya, all of whom lived and worked under double or multiple cultural environment and developed their multiple perspectives toward different cultures as the “other,” “observer,” “self,” and “participant.”

“Foreign-native Diaspora” reveals a unique migratory pattern where individuals experience a cultural oscillation between their homeland and foreign countries. This movement is not just physical but deeply cultural, as these migrants often return to their native lands with a transformed sense of identity. They bring back foreign cultural elements, which they integrate into their native contexts, creating a rich tapestry of hybrid cultural expressions. Writers such as V. S. Naipaul and Chinua Achebe exemplify this phenomenon, as their works reflect a deep engagement with multiple cultural milieus. Naipaul’s narratives, for instance, often explore themes of cultural displacement and reconnection, while Achebe’s writings highlight the complexities of maintaining a connection to one’s roots while navigating foreign cultural landscapes. This dual cultural dwelling allows these writers to develop a multifaceted perspective, where they can critique, observe, and participate in different cultures simultaneously. This dynamic not only enriches their literary output but also provides a deeper understanding of the complexities of identity and belonging in a transnational context.

The theory of these “four diasporas” may assist us, as Zhu suggests, in drawing a clear line between various African diaspora literatures in terms of their orientations and levels, expanding the scope of the research on diaspora literature well beyond the limitations of the study on classical and modern diasporas, and highlighting the internal pattern of its diasporicity, hybridity, and cultural reproductivity. Given its extensive scope and logical stratification, the theory of the “four diasporas” developed by Zhu and his team can help the ever-growing study on the transnational diaspora in the context of globalization and serve as a vital source of reference in our handling of different cultural relationships as well. At the same time, Zhu also

pointed out the internal connections between the four types of diaspora: “There are similarities and differences among these four types of diaspora, and they have a certain degree of overlap, all facing conflicts and integrations between different cultures, especially heterogeneous cultures”(“Mutual Appreciation” 57). This provides a Chinese theoretical perspective for the academic community to better understand and study African literature.

Africanness: The Core Quality of African Literature

The quintessential quality of African literature is its “Africanness” or “Africanity,”¹ which embodies the very innate provisions that have made African literature what it is and the core of the African literature studies, just as what “Chineseness” does for Chinese literature or what “Americanness” does for American literature. Such a quality determines that African literature, as a cultural system, is as independent as literatures in Europe, rather than a marginalized appendage under the cultural hegemony of colonization. Furthermore, it warns us that literary studies can no longer treat it as a follower or a derivative of mother countries’ literature.

“Africanness” represents the African cultural and literary concept that contains a relatively consistent connotation but keeps changing constantly. It changes along with the development of African society, culture, and literature, and it generates more vitality and cultural flexibility, such as blackness, nativeness, coloniality, postcoloniality, diasporicity, hybridity, and foreignness. “Africanness” epitomizes different characteristics during the different historical periods of the African continent and the different developmental phases of African culture and literature. According to Zhu, the term, “Africanness,” “emphasizes African people’s and their descendants’ firm identification with the history and culture originated from the African continent and their deep attachment to the native land. What it embodies is a distinct cultural quality, namely, a determination to uphold selfhood, break down barriers, remember history, but always look forward toward the future” (Zhu and Li 164). In other words, this quality is a unity between the unchangeability and changeability of African culture. Its rich connotations have been figuratively expressed, in varying degrees, in the works by Gurnah and other writers. National and native factors, such as the natural environment, geography, history, culture, and language of the African continent, constitute the relatively stable cultural quality of “Africanness,”

1 The two terms, “Africanness” and “Africanity,” are frequently seen in the Western scholarly discourse. Their suffix, -ness or -ity, carries the implication of “quality, state, and characteristic.” “Africanness” has been mostly used in the study of African literature since the 1990s to represent the “African characteristics” in African literature objectively and specifically.

a quality that is always forward-looking, changeable, and abreast of time in the face of international challenges. What's more, "Africanness" is an ideological concept that crosses geographical, historical, and cultural spaces because it has redefined the meaning and value of African culture as well as its position in world culture, rather than a colonialist (imperialist) definitive schema.¹ Zhu's analysis of "Africanness" is centered around the historical foundation of African literature and the various connotations of "Africanness" concerning coloniality, diasporicity, and hybridity.⁵²

"Africanness" is the soul of African culture and literature because it is deeply rooted in the native history and culture of Africa that has been passed on continuously among the African people. The former Director-General of UNESCO, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, put it well, "The efforts of the peoples of Africa to conquer or strengthen their independence, secure their development, and assert their cultural characteristics must be rooted in historical awareness renewed, keenly felt and taken up by each succeeding generation" (M'Bow xx-xxi). Such an awareness has been concretely represented in the history, culture, literature, and other civilizational achievements created by the African people. The history of Africa is not the history of a tribe, and the history of African literature is not a literary history of merely one country or nation, either. Rather, it encompasses the history and literature of the entire African continent. In short, "Africanness" stands for the unity of African culture's entirety and hybridity.

Due to the impact from the European transatlantic slave trade and the massive migration within Africa during the 16th and 19th centuries, the cultural collisions between the cultures in and outside Africa went on frequently and extensively. Under such circumstances, the tragic destiny of slaves and their memories of the native land back in Africa became perpetual themes in African diasporic black literature. Around the late 19th and early 20th centuries, European colonists invaded into the spheres of politics, economy, culture, and education in Africa and caused so much serious damage on the independence and self-reliance of African culture that Africans rose in resistance using the European languages, ideas, and cultural concepts to search for the control and legitimacy of their own culture. They put forth a series of ideological concepts, such as "blackness," "Africanity," and "Pan-Africanism," in attempt to identify, safeguard, and advocate the original values of African culture on the one hand and, on the other, seek their national independence and the self-esteem,

1 For more details, see Ali A. Mazrui's *Africanity Redefined: Collected Essays of Ali A. Mazrui*, Africa World Press, 2002.

2 See the article by Zhu, Zhenwu and Dan Li, "African Literatures and the Diversity of Civilizations." *Social Sciences in China*, no. 8, 2022, pp. 163-84.

pride, and self-sufficiency of their culture. Their endeavor facilitated the revival of black culture and highlighted its diasporic, revolutionary, decolonial, and hybrid traits. After the 1950s and 1960s, nations in Africa declared independence one after another. African culture and literature started to advance in full swing, displaying a set of reflective, autonomous, and innovative trends as well as a yearning for a co-existent community in its development. Zhu's idea about the unity of the variance and invariance of "Africanness" provides us with a scientific dialectic approach in understanding and studying the ever progressing African literature.

The great achievement in African literature in the last 50 years resulted from the "positive-sum game." While reflecting on the history of African ordeal in nearly one thousand years, African writers also looked back at the centennial history of their revolution. To integrate the Western and Eastern civilizations more organically, they opened a two-fold dialogue through literature—one among themselves and the other for reach out—to maintain the cultural spirit of the African continent, while drawing appropriate lessons from foreign cultures for their own benefit. In doing so, they cultivated the deep soil for "Africanness" and, accommodated the diverse elements (international elements) in modern and contemporary African literature. There is no doubt that such an experience of African literature is not just a direct confutation of the argument about "the clash of civilizations," but rather an excellent model for mutual learning between cultures in the world and the construction of a more diverse world literature.

Conclusion

Zhu's intervention is not a regional addendum to extant world-literature debates but an epistemic re-grounding of world literature. His quartet of diasporic paradigms—Native, Colonial, Foreign, and Foreign-Native (Been-to) diaspora—illuminates the historically obscured vectors of African literary mobility, while the articulation of "Africanness" as a mobile, self-reflexive cultural grammar destabilizes the residual taxonomies that continue to position African writing as Europe's ontological Other. What emerges is a theory whose methodological core—cultural diversity as an ethical imperative and mutual learning as a procedural protocol—reorients comparative literature from a cartography of centers and peripheries toward a polycentric lattice of co-eval negotiations.

If these trajectories are pursued with the reflexivity that Zhu advocates, Chinese African Literaturology will not merely supplement world literature; it will reshape its operative logic, replacing the zero-sum calculus of canon-formation with what could be termed a "positive-sum aesthetics," in which every act of critical

recognition enlarges, rather than delimits, the commons of world letters.

Overall, the Chinese African Literatology has already embarked on a path of further construction and prosperity. We have ample reason to believe that with the studies of African literature written in English, French, Arabic, Spanish, and Portuguese unfolding and the study of African languages and literatures further expanding, the discipline formation, scholarly community, and discourse system of the Chinese African Literatology will be improved and consolidated continuously, so it will surely make greater contributions to the construction of a new world literature and a new paradigm for the mutual learning between civilizations.

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