Balancing the Mainstream and the "Non-Mainstream": A Critical Examination of Zhu Zhenwu's Literary Research Philosophy

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Abstract Prof. Zhu Zhenwu, a pioneering scholar in Chinese comparative literature, has redefined global literary studies through his transformative research philosophy, which challenges Eurocentric paradigms while fostering transcultural reciprocity. Central to his work is the construction of Chinese African literaturology: the New Quality Idea, a theoretical framework that integrates four core pillars: (1) Africanness, emphasizing African literature's role in reclaiming cultural sovereignty and resisting colonial narratives; (2) Four Major Diasporas, to address intra-continental hybridity and post-return alienation among African intellectuals; (3) Balanced Absorption, advocating balanced engagement between global and local literary traditions; and (4) Coexistence and Symbiosis of Cultures, envisioning literature as a catalyst for intercultural harmony. Zhu's scholarship transcends adversarial binaries in postcolonial theory. Prioritizing "problem consciousness" over abstract universalism, Zhu's work reimagines world literature as a networked ecosystem of pluralistic co-creation, displacing hierarchical oppositions with transcultural solidarity. His scholarship not only deconstructs entrenched asymmetries but also charts a transformative path for global humanities, one where marginalized narratives and mainstream discourses coexist as interdependent forces of civilizational renewal.

Keywords Zhu Zhenwu; Chinese African literaturology; Coexistence and Symbiosis of Cultures; "Non-Mainstream"

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Introduction

Prof. Zhu Zhenwu (朱振武 hereafter referred to as Zhu), a distinguished pro-fessor at

Shanghai Normal University and a leading figure in Chinese comparative literature and world literature studies, has pioneered a transformative research philosophy that bridges Chinese and global literary traditions while challenging Eurocentric academic paradigms. Over two decades, his work has centered on Chinese African literaturology: The New Quality Idea (中国非洲文学学), a theore-tical system that repositions African literature within global humanities through a Chinese lens. This framework integrates four core theories: Africanness, defined as the "deep identification of African and Afro-descended people with the continent's history and culture," underscores African literature's role in resisting colonial narratives and fostering civilizational diversity by reclaiming indigenous cultural sovereignty (Zhu and Han; Zhu and Li "The Africanness of African Literatures" 114; Zhu and Li "African Literatures"); Four Diasporic Typologies, expanding Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, categorizes African diasporas into foreign (geographic displacement), colonial (settler descendants), native (cultural displacement within Africa), and "been-to" (post-travel identity struggles), emphasizing intra-continental cultural hybridity and psychological dislocation; the theory of Balanced Absorption (均衡吸纳说), advocating for balanced engagement with global literatures, rejects Western hegemony while promoting mutual learning between Chinese and African literary traditions through dialectical integration rather than unilateral imitation (Zhu and Jiang; Zhu "Mutual Appreciation"); and Coexistence and Symbiosis of Cultures (文化共栖共生说), inspired by Marxist-humanist ideals, envisions literature as a catalyst for symbiotic civilizational exchange, countering Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* by prioritizing intercultural harmony and shared ethical futures ("Revealing the Diversity"; "Mutual Appreciation"). Together, these theories form a cohesive analytical lens that decentralizes Eurocentric paradigms, foregrounds marginalized voices, and redefines global literary studies through principles of equity, hybridity, and mutual respect.

Zhu's prolific output includes over 20 monographs, 30 translations, and 400 academic articles. Notable works include: *Root and Flower of African English Literature* (2019): A foundational text tracing the evolution of African anglophone literature, highlighting its decolonial ethos and aesthetic distinctiveness. The *African Literary Studies* (10-volume series), edited by Zhu, Principal Investigator of the key project of the National Social Science Fund of China *History of African Literatures Written in English*, is a landmark contribution to African literary scholarship. Spanning 3.7 million words, the series systematically examines over 130 works by 90+ African authors across genres, including novels, poetry, drama, and nonfiction, while integrating French, Portuguese, and Arabic literatures.

Structured into "Classics" and "Selected" sections, it balances canonical texts (e.g., works by Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee) with understudied gems unearthed through fieldwork and critical reevaluation, offering a holistic view of Africa's literary diversity. This series redefines African literary studies by challenging Eurocentric narratives. Unlike Western-centric analyses, it foregrounds Chinese scholars' independent interpretations, rooted in cross-cultural dialogue and theoretical frameworks like Zhu's Chinese African Literaturology. Its "Selected" works, curated through rigorous translation and research, amplify marginalized voices and regional literatures (e.g., Botswana's postcolonial trajectory, Central African poetry, etc.), correcting historical oversights. Hailed as a "paradigm shift" by African scholars, the series avoids regurgitating colonial-era discourse or Western academic trends. Instead, it fosters transdisciplinary dialogue, blending literary analysis with anthropology and postcolonial theory. Kenyan critics emphasize its role in restoring Africa's literary agency, while Ugandan writers highlight its potential to dismantle Western scholarly monopolies. As China's first major African literary project, it bridges cultural divides by promoting mutual translation and academic exchanges. For instance, the series has been integrated into Kenya Literature Bureau's collections and inspired partnerships for Sino-African writer residencies and joint publications. By advocating for literary-cultural solidarity, it aligns with UNESCO's goals of preserving intangible heritage and advancing global intellectual equity.

This paper argues that Zhu's scholarship redefines global literary studies by transcending the adversarial binaries of postcolonial theory and recentering transcultural reciprocity. While Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) critiques Western hegemony and Gayatri Spivak interrogates subaltern silence ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 1988), Zhu's cultural symbiosis shifts focus to bidirectional exchange, harmonizing African orality, Chinese hermeneutics, and Western formalism as co-constitutive forces. Unlike Homi Bhabha's fragmented "third space" (*The Location of Culture* 1994) or Paul Gilroy's transatlantic diasporic flows (*The Black Atlantic* 1993), Zhu's "been-to" diaspora typology expands Safran's unidirectional homeland myth (1991) by analyzing post-return alienation under neocolonial cultural erosion. His Marxist-Confucian framework challenges Eurocentric universalism (Damrosch's *What is World Literature*? 2003), proposing a heterarchical model where marginalized narratives reshape global literary canons through equitable interdependence. By prioritizing context-specific "problem consciousness" over abstract universalism, Zhu's work displaces hierarchical oppositions, reimagining world literature as a networked ecosystem of pluralistic co-creation.

Literary Diversity and the Value of "Non-Mainstream" Literature

Zhu conceptualizes "non-mainstream" English literatures as dynamic literary traditions emerging from postcolonial regions such as Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia, arguing that these traditions challenge Eurocentric hierarchies through formal innovation and epistemological autonomy. Central to his theoretical framework is the paradigm shift from a monolithic conception of "English Literature" to pluralized "English literatures," a transition that, as Zhu and Li assert, "dismantles colonial epistemologies by decentralizing metropolitan authority and legitimizing subaltern voices" ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 117). By framing world literature as a contested domain, Zhu critiques its current limitations, contending that "while world literature inherently encompasses diversity, the 'world literature' we know today is one lacking genuine diversity, as the so-called Western mainstream or dominant culture has suppressed and obscured true literary diversity" ("Revealing the Diversity"). This framework systematically critiques Anglo-American cultural hegemony, emphasizing linguistic hybridity, cultural syncretism, and localized engagements with postcolonial realities, including diasporic identity and racial politics, as defining features of non-mainstream literatures. Importantly, Zhu positions the value of these traditions not merely in their resistance to colonial legacies but in their capacity to forge "independent aesthetic judgment" and construct "autonomous aesthetic systems" rooted in region-specific sociohistorical contexts ("Revealing the Diversity"; *Study of African English Literature*). Through this lens, postcolonial English writing emerges as both a decolonial practice and a generative force for redefining literary canons beyond Western epistemic boundaries.

Zhu's analysis of non-mainstream literary forms, such as Nigeria's Onitsha Market Literature, underscores their historical and ideological significance in articulating grassroots anti-colonial and decolonial consciousness, even amid Western dismissals of their perceived "low" artistic merit. By examining pamphlets that mythologize figures like Nnamdi Azikiwe and Patrice Lumumba, Zhu reveals how these texts reframed political struggles as symbolic resistance, memorializing global icons such as John F. Kennedy to critique racial injustice and articulate "the masses' aspiration for racial dignity and national autonomy" (Zhu and Feng; Feng and Zhu 94). This perspective directly challenges Western scholarly tendencies to reductively categorize African English writing as mere extensions of "Commonwealth Literature" or "New Literatures in English," frameworks that erase its localized political urgency. As Zhu and Li (2019) demonstrate, Western

critics historically dismissed Nigerian English literature as a byproduct of colonial "achievement," failing to recognize its role as a deliberate narrative strategy to negotiate cultural sovereignty in postcolonial contexts. For instance, early Western scholarship framed Nigerian Anglophone works not as "Nigerian literature" but as geographically expanded iterations of English literary traditions, overlooking the complex sociohistorical imperatives behind African writers' linguistic choices (Zhu and Li "Nigerian English Literature in the West" 55-56). Zhu counters this epistemic erasure by positioning Onitsha Market Literature as a precursor to Nigeria's postcolonial canon, arguing that it bridges elite intellectual discourses and popular narratives to reflect the nation's trajectory "from anti-colonial resistance to critiques of neocolonialism" (Feng and Zhu 94). He emphasizes that "decolonization is almost a central theme actively explored by Nigerian writers across generations" (94), thereby redefining these texts not as derivative forms but as dynamic sites of ideological innovation. This reevaluation advocates for embracing literary diversity to fully capture Africa's multifaceted cultural and political landscapes, while exposing the limitations of Western interpretive paradigms that reduce African literary production to Eurocentric taxonomies.

Similarly, in Zimbabwean literature, post-independence writers subvert colonial stereotypes by reconstructing African identities through indigenous oral traditions. The rise of short stories as a dominant genre in Zimbabwean literature further challenges Western literary canons, aligning with African oral traditions and providing a nuanced portrayal of the "Zimbabwe Crisis" (Zhu and Lan 58, 60, 62-64). In this context, contemporary Zimbabwean writing often functions as testimonial discourse on national history, addressing intertwined crises such as hyperinflation, economic collapse, mass displacement, and corruption, while foregrounding the resilience and ethical commitments of ordinary people (Zhu and Lan 65). Diaspora writing—exemplified by NoViolet Bulawayo—extends this field by narrating cross-border displacement and collective trauma.

Zhu further elucidates the decolonial potential of non-mainstream literatures through Ghanaian Anglophone writing, framing it as a paradigm of localized resistance and cultural reclamation. He argues that Ghanaian literature exemplifies how "several generations of Ghanaian writers have successfully realized the Indigenization of Ghanaian literature with great efforts, and provided precious experience for the development of African English literature and other 'non-mainstream' literature" (Zhu and Xue 62). Tracing its evolution from early anti-colonial polemics to post-independence introspection, Zhu highlights how writers like Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo transcended mimicry by embedding

indigenous oral traditions and sociohistorical critiques into their works. For instance, Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) critiques post-independence moral decay through a protagonist who resists systemic corruption, embodying "the tension between individual integrity and societal collapse" (Zhu and Xue 65). Similarly, Aidoo's plays interrogate cultural hybridity, as seen in *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), where generational and cultural conflicts mirror Ghana's struggle to reconcile tradition with modernity. Zhu emphasizes that Ghana's 21st-century children's literature, exemplified by Meshack Asare's internationally acclaimed works, demonstrates how "localized narratives can universalize African experiences without compromising cultural specificity" (Zhu and Xue 67). By foregrounding Ghana's literary trajectory, from resistance to aesthetic sovereignty, Zhu positions it as a microcosm of non-mainstream literatures' capacity to dismantle Eurocentric paradigms while asserting global relevance.

Zhu positions Caribbean literature as a radical reimagining of Eurocentric forms through localized poetics(Zhu and Zhou, "Caribbean English Literature"). By examining key examples and theoretical interventions, Zhu constructs a framework for understanding how these literatures transcend mimicry and resistance to assert their aesthetic and intellectual sovereignty. Zhu illustrates the transition from colonial mimicry to poetic originality through Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), a postcolonial revision of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Rhys recenters the silenced Creole protagonist Antoinette Cosway, embedding her narrative with Caribbean landscapes and hybrid linguistic registers. Zhu argues that such "writing back" to the Western canon is not merely reactive but generative, constructing a Caribbean Poetics, a term popularized by Saillant Silvio Torres (1997), that synthesizes oral traditions, creole dialects, and cosmopolitan forms. This poetics rejects passive imitation, instead reclaiming historical agency through narratives of slavery, migration, and cultural syncretism. Similarly, Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990) reimagines Homeric epic via Afro-Caribbean oral storytelling, transforming classical tropes into vehicles for postcolonial memory. For Zhu, these works exemplify non-mainstream literatures' capacity to forge autonomous aesthetic systems rooted in localized sociohistorical contexts.

Zhu critiques the limitations of applying Eurocentric theories like postcolonialism uncritically to Caribbean texts. He cites Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), which employs code-switching between Trinidadian Creole and British English to capture migrant alienation. While postcolonial frameworks might interpret this linguistic hybridity as resistance, Zhu emphasizes its role as an aesthetic innovation, reflecting Kamau Brathwaite's concept of

"nation language", a vernacular mode rooted in African rhythms and Caribbean orality. Such examples, Zhu contends, demand criticism grounded in regional epistemologies rather than universalizing Western models. This aligns with Michael Dash's assertion (*The Other America*, 1998) that Caribbean literature exists in a "liminal space" where global and local discourses intersect (Dash 163). Zhu thus advocates for methodologies privileging indigenous critical frameworks, such as Brathwaite's theories of creolization and Wilson Harris's "magical realism", a narrative mode blending Amerindian myth and modernist fragmentation in *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), to disrupt colonial historiography (Mikics 374). Edward Kamau Brathwaite's creolization theory posits cultural hybridity as a dynamic process of syncretism between African, European, and Indigenous traditions under colonialism, emphasizing the emergence of new cultural formations rather than passive mimicry (Brathwaite 2005). Zhu transcends this framework by integrating Marxist dialectics to analyze the material conditions of literary exchange, positing African literatures as both archives of colonial violence and catalysts for a new form of human civilization rooted in equitable translation practices and decolonized epistemologies (Zhu "Marxism and Indigenous Diasporic Writers"; Zhu and Li "The Africanness of African Literatures").

Zhu's theoretical framework on "non-mainstream" literature fundamentally challenges Eurocentric literary hegemony by advancing a decolonial Chinese perspective. His analysis of Nigerian Anglophone literature in the West demonstrates how Western scholarship has historically marginalized African literary autonomy through three interpretive phases: first, exoticizing African "otherness" through ethnographic lenses; second, instrumentalizing national identity narratives under postcolonial theory; and third, appropriating hybridized texts to validate Western theoretical frameworks. This trajectory reveals a persistent epistemic violence where Nigerian literatures are reduced to mere case studies for Euro-American critical apparatuses. Central to Zhu's critique is the assertion that Chinese scholars must develop alternative paradigms rooted in non-Western epistemologies (Zhu and Liu). He argues that even the progressive shifts in Western scholarship, from cultural exoticism to postcolonial hybridity, remain complicit in neocolonial power structures, as they continue to subordinate African literary expressions to preexisting Western theoretical grids. For instance, the selective adoption of Nigerian texts in feminist or trauma studies often occludes their specific sociopolitical contexts and indigenous knowledge systems. Zhu posits that a truly decolonial approach requires decentering Eurocentric methodologies. This involves prioritizing dialogical engagement over hierarchical interpretations. By advocating for Chinese scholars

to contribute localized critical frameworks, Zhu asserts that non-Western voices can disrupt the "center-periphery" binary, fostering equitable global literary discourses.

Diasporic Literature: Negotiating Balance Between Hegemony and Marginality

Zhu's scholarship on diasporic literature, particularly his groundbreaking analysis of African English writing, constitutes a significant contribution to postcolonial literary studies. His theory of Four Major Diasporas, developed through extensive research on African English literature, identifies four distinct modes of diasporic experience: Foreign Diaspora (异邦流散), Native Diaspora (本土流散), Colonial Diaspora (殖民流散), and Been-to Diaspora/Foreign-native Diaspora (宾土流散，或异邦本土流散). This framework redefines diaspora beyond geographical migration to encompass cultural, historical, and psychological dimensions.

Zhu's "Four Major Diasporas" theory advances theoretical precision by defining diasporic experiences through cultural rupture rather than physical displacement alone. Central to Zhu's conceptualization of foreign diaspora is the geographically transgressive cultural schism experienced by African subjects displaced to Global North metropoles, where migratory mobility paradoxically enforces racialized subalternization. At its core, this framework dissects how geographic migration, often framed as aspirational mobility, paradoxically entrenches structural marginalization through mechanisms of racial capitalism. For instance, in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), protagonist Ifemelu's pursuit of academic success in the U.S. collides with immutable racial hierarchies: her epiphany that "There's a ladder of racial hierarchy in America. ... and American Black is always on the bottom" underscores the futility of assimilation. Similarly, Igoni Barrett's *Blackass* (2015) employs a corporeal metaphor to critique the inescapable grip of racial essentialism through the protagonist Furo Wariboko's paradoxical transformation. The novel allegorizes diasporic identity conflicts by depicting Furo's externally whitened body retaining a black buttock that "would spread into sight, creep outward to engulf everything, and expose him as an impostor." This bodily contradiction serves as a visceral metaphor for the irreconcilable tensions between performative assimilation and inherent racialized identity in transnational contexts.

Zhu's integration of literary case studies fortifies the model's theoretical rigor. By centering Adichie's *Americanah*, Zhu counterbalances South Asia-centric diaspora paradigms, such as Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity as a "third space" of ambivalence and subversion (Bhabha 36-37), to reveal Afro-specific racialized precarity: African migrants endure hypervisibility as "Black bodies" yet invisibility

as intellectuals, a duality unaddressed in Spivak's subalternity framework, which focuses on the epistemic silencing of colonized subjects (Spivak 296). Zhu's innovation lies in theorizing strategic performativity, exemplified by Ifemelu's code-switching through her satirical blog persona to navigate racialized labor markets, as neither mere mimicry (Bhabha) nor passive resistance but as a conscious negotiation of diasporic agency ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 117-118). This approach diverges from Spivak's assertion that "the subaltern cannot speak" (Spivak 288) by demonstrating how African migrants reclaim discursive power through hybridized self-representation.

Crucially, Zhu's emphasis on return migration (e.g., Ifemelu's disillusioned repatriation to Nigeria) expands Safran's unidirectional diaspora schema (Safran 83-84), which privileges the myth of an idealized homeland, by exposing post-diasporic alienation: the homeland, transformed by Western cultural hegemony, no longer offers ontological grounding. Whereas Bhabha's hybridity theory celebrates fragmentation as inherently subversive, Zhu critiques its neglect of diasporic subjects' material struggles, arguing that Adichie's protagonist embodies a "dialectical consciousness" that synthesizes African communal ethics with diasporic pragmatism ("The Africanness of African Literatures"). This synthesis aligns with Zhu's Marxist-inflected critique of postcolonial theory's overreliance on textual deconstruction, asserting instead that strategic performativity must be rooted in historical materialism to address systemic inequities ("Mutual Appreciation" 57). By foregrounding the intersection of racial capitalism and cultural hybridity, Zhu's analysis transcends Bhabha's and Spivak's frameworks, offering a materialist reorientation of diaspora studies that bridge the gap between symbolic resistance and socio-economic praxis.

Zhu's model is further distinguished by its intersectional granularity, as seen in analyzing gender dynamics. While male protagonists like Furo confront racial absurdity, female figures like Emecheta's heroines (e.g., *Second-Class Citizen*) face compounded subjugation through patriarchal labor exploitation in diasporic households. Such analyses rectify omissions in Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, which marginalizes continental African migrant subjectivities (Gilroy 1993; Schramm 26). By centering texts rooted in Nigeria's postcolonial migratory patterns, Zhu reterritorializes diaspora theory within Africa's geopolitical agency, demonstrating how endogenous cultural ruptures (e.g., colonial education) precondition exogenous diasporic trauma, a dialectic neglected in Euro-American scholarship. This framework not only redefines diaspora's spatial parameters but recalibrates its temporal axis, positioning African English literature as both witness and archivist of

displacement's epistemic violence.

Zhu's conceptualization of native diaspora reframes diasporic alienation as culturally enforced displacement without geographic migration, wherein colonial epistemic violence fractures African subjects' ontological coherence. Unlike conventional transnational diasporas marked by physical migration, this unique phenomenon arises from systematic colonial policies, including imposition of European languages, proselytization of Christianity, land appropriation, and racial segregation, that trap native populations in a state of cultural exile within their own territories (Zhu and Yuan 144). As Zhu argues, these policies create profound existential dilemmas: Africans are compelled to adopt colonial languages while forbidden from practicing their mother tongues, yet remain culturally rooted in their tribal heritages. This produces a paradoxical state of "double alienation," where individuals are neither fully integrated into the imposed Western value systems nor able to disentangle themselves from traditional identities. (Zhu and Yuan 145).

A central tenet of Zhu's theory is the formation of "interstitial cultural identities" shaped by the collision of colonizer and colonized cultures. African English literature, he observes, often portrays protagonists educated in Western systems, either through overseas study or local missionary schools, who internalize foreign ideologies while retaining residual ties to indigenous traditions. These hybrid subjects exist in a liminal space, experiencing a kind of "ontological homelessness", estranged from both dominant white cultures and their own communities (Zhu and Yuan 144). Their linguistic practices reflect this duality: the English employed is neither purely metropolitan nor authentically vernacular, but rather a creolized form infused with local idioms and grammatical structures. The tragic trajectories of such characters, stem directly from this interstitial existence. Their partial acculturation to colonial norms creates irreconcilable tensions with traditional social orders, while their racialized Otherness precludes full acceptance by the colonial elite. This structural liminality, Zhu emphasizes, is not a voluntary condition of cosmopolitan hybridity but a violent imposition of cultural schizophrenia, resulting from the systematic erasure of indigenous epistemologies through linguistic and religious domination.

As illustrated in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*, colonizers' influence triggered internal splits: conflicting consciousnesses of "piety and betrayal" battled without one gaining dominance. Post-colonization, Africa's culture, language, and religion existed in a liminal state, "wandering in a middle state that is neither entirely Western nor pre-colonial," a quintessential diasporic symptom. Additionally, Africans experienced "native marginalization," forced into marginal positions on

their own land by colonizers (Zhu and Yuan 146). Some returnees from foreign lands even faced double marginalization. Fundamentally, colonial aggression and rule were the core causes of this native diaspora, which uniquely shaped the diasporic representation in African English literature. Similarly, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) depicts Eugene, a devout Catholic Nigerian patriarch whose self-loathing mimicry of colonial piety ("European consciousness usurping African identity," per Ben Okri) epitomizes cultural schizophrenia: an endogenous subject torn between imposed Western modernity and unresolved indigeneity. Crucially, such texts reveal how colonial education systems, as Mahmood Mamdani notes, sought to "shape the subjectivities of the colonized population and not simply of their elites" (Mamdani 8), rendering African identities palimpsests of competing epistemologies.

Zhu's native diaspora model disrupts Safran's geographic essentialism by demonstrating how cultural occupation generates diasporic consciousness. This reframing challenges Bhabha's hybridity theory, which presupposes voluntary cultural negotiation, by highlighting the coercive violence underpinning endogenous displacement. By centering on Africa's historical specificity, where cultural deracination precedes physical displacement, turning the homeland into a site of unbelonging, Zhu's theory propels diaspora studies toward epistemic decolonization. The dual diasporic characteristics and phased division enrich theoretical dimensions, offering a new paradigm to understand complex identity constructions under colonial legacies. By treating African literary testimonies as both archives and antidotes to colonial hauntings, this framework reorients diaspora research toward deconstructing colonial epistemologies.

Zhu's theorization of colonial diaspora, as articulated in his analysis of African English literature, delineates a biphasic model that captures the shifting dynamics of settler-colonial identities. In its first phase, marked by colonial expansion and occupation, colonial diaspora manifests as a project of epistemic and territorial domination, exemplified by the narratives of European settlers who weaponized cultural hegemony to subjugate African societies. J. M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* (1974) epitomizes this stage through the character of Jacobus Coetzee, a Dutch colonizer whose self-mythologizing accounts of "taming the wilderness" (Zhu and Yuan 150) reflect the violent imposition of European modernity, achieved through the dehumanization of Indigenous populations and the fetishization of colonial "civilizing" violence. These early colonial texts, as Zhu observes, serve as literary monuments to epistemic erasure, encoding the settlers' supremacist ideologies and their systematic effacement of African agency.

The second phase, emerging in post-independence Africa, reveals a profound inversion: descendants of colonial settlers confront their existential precarity as marginalized minorities, albeit ones whose identities remain irreconcilably distinct from Indigenous communities. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) illustrates this dissonance through David Lurie, a disgraced academic whose loss of social privilege mirrors the atrophy of white hegemony. Zhu notes that such characters inhabit a liminal non-belonging, sympathetic to Black struggles yet ontologically severed from them, as seen in Lurie's inability to comprehend his daughter's pragmatic alliance with her Black assailant-turned-protector. Similarly, Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) portrays white South Africans displaced by anti-apartheid uprisings, their reliance on Black subordinates underscoring the asymmetrical interdependence that defines postcolonial racial hierarchies (Zhu and Yuan 151).

Zhu's phased model transcends conventional diaspora studies by foregrounding the dialectic of perpetration and victimhood unique to colonial actors. Unlike Safran's victim-centric diasporic criteria, Zhu's framework acknowledges the colonizer's paradoxical trajectory: from agent of domination to fractured subject of historical reckoning. By anchoring this analysis in literary case studies, such as the contrast between Jacobus Coetzee's colonial bravado and David Lurie's impotent introspection, Zhu demonstrates how African anglophone literature archives the unmooring of colonial certainty. Zhu's intervention recalibrates diaspora discourse to accommodate perpetratorhood, offering a lens to analyze settler-colonial legacies beyond geographic dislocation. By emphasizing literature's role in exposing the colonial psyche's unraveling, from triumphalist *Dusklands* to the existential *Disgrace*, he positions African anglophone writing as both witness and corrective to globalized narratives of migration. This model not only historicizes colonial diaspora but also illuminates its enduring relevance in an era of decolonial reckoning.

Zhu further develops his three major diaspora literary theories and, on this basis, proposes a fourth major diaspora theory, namely the "been-to diaspora" or "foreign-native diaspora", thereby pushing African literary studies to greater depths. This theory represents a significant innovation in diaspora studies by addressing the unique experiences of African elites educated abroad who return home with hybrid identities. This concept, further elaborated in his 2023 interview (Cheng and Zhu 4), challenges conventional definitions of diaspora by emphasizing cultural hybridity and ideological agency over spatial displacement. In "Mutual Appreciation in Dissemination and Domestication-Foreignization Balance in Chinese and Foreign Literatures: Centered on the Construction Logic of 'Chinese

African Literaturology'" (2025), Zhu furthur elaborates this "transnational-local" model (i.e., Been-to), emphasizing its transcendance of mere physical displacement by engaging in a dialogic process between native traditions and global modernity. For instance, Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels, such as *Paradise* (1994), deploy Swahili-inflected English to interrogate refugee identities while resurrecting precolonial East African history, illustrating Zhu's assertion that diasporicity enables the restoration of African subjectivity through the subversion of colonial linguistic impositions (Zhu and Li, "African Literatures" 163). Similarly, Achebe's works, despite their use of English, reconstruct Igbo oral traditions, embodying the Been-to ethos of cultural reclamation. These four types of diaspora share similarities and overlaps, all facing conflicts and integrations between different cultures, especially heterogeneous ones. The key foundation of this theory is that diaspora literature is primarily cultural in nature; the translocation and conflict of cultures are at the core of diaspora. Therefore, diaspora literature does not necessarily involve international boundaries. Works published by some African authors before their diaspora, as well as those completed after their diaspora that are closely related to their homeland and unrelated to their host country, can also be classified as diaspora literature. This understanding of literature deepens the concept and comprehension of diaspora and diaspora literature, and it contributes positively to the construction of diaspora poetics. It also offers benefits and insights for the redefinition and understanding of new phenomena and forms in world literature.

Zhu's theoretical innovation lies in redefining diasporicity not as a peripheral condition but as a generative force fostering "global-local negotiation" ("African Literatures" 167). His emphasis on "Been-to" literature underscores its academic significance: it challenges static binaries of "exile versus rootedness" prevalent in classical diaspora studies, instead positioning African writers as agents of transcultural synthesis. By highlighting how texts like Paulina Chiziane's *Niketche* (2002), which blends Mozambican oral traditions with Portuguese syntax, perform a "latent civilizational dialogue" (178), Zhu illuminates how diasporic hybridity engenders "world literature with African particularity" (180). This framework not only enriches postcolonial theory but also advances UNESCO's vision of civilizational diversity, illustrating how African literature transcends its "marginalized" status to become a catalyst for global humanistic exchange. Zhu's work thus marks a paradigm shift, repositioning African diasporic writing as central to understanding the dialectics of cultural survival and renewal in an interconnected world.

Zhu's work stands out by reconceptualizing Africanness as a fluid, dialogic construct instead of an essentialized identity. This approach serves to resist Western

homogenization and actively build transcultural communities. His analysis of Abdulrazak Gurnah's refugee narratives, for instance, demonstrates how memory and displacement function as epistemological tools to reconstruct subaltern histories, thereby countering Edward Said's Orientalist critique through centering African agency in cultural production. While aligning with Paul Gilroy's (1993) Black Atlantic framework, Zhu extends its scope by reframing postcolonial hybridity as a generative force for creative synthesis rather than a symptom of cultural loss. Furthermore, this approach deepens Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" by grounding diasporic subjectivity in both material realities, such as linguistic hybridity and transnational mobility, and affective registers of collective memory and cultural longing. By systematically delineating the genre's conceptual boundaries through its demonstrated literary achievements, Zhu's framework positions diasporic literature not merely as a counter-discourse but as a dynamic site for reimagining global cultural citizenship, where localized sociohistorical specificities intersect with universal humanistic aspirations.

Methodologically, Zhu's scholarship bridges Chinese and African perspectives, advocating for "equitable thinking" in cross-cultural dialogue ("Mutual Appreciation"). His analysis underscores the embodied contradictions of racial performance, echoing Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) while adding a transnational dimension through gendered migration experiences. This synthesis of postcolonial theory with empirical textual analysis positions Zhu as a critical interlocutor in global literary studies, particularly in his emphasis on "assimilation-divergence balance" in translation and cultural exchange ("Mutual Appreciation" 54). Overall, Zhu's contributions lie in his redefinition of diaspora beyond physical migration, his theorization of Africanness as a decolonial praxis, and his development of China-centered analytical frameworks for engaging African literature. By foregrounding indigenous epistemologies and challenging Western-centric paradigms, his work enriches diaspora studies with much-needed cultural specificity while maintaining global relevance.

Chinese African Literaturology and International Vision

Zhu's formulation of Chinese African Literaturology: the New Quality Idea represents a transformative intervention in global literary scholarship, systematically challenging Western epistemological hegemony while fostering equitable cross-cultural dialogue. This framework, rooted in Marxist dialectics and Confucian humanism, repositions African literature as a dynamic force of civilizational innovation rather than a passive subject of Western critique. By synthesizing

indigenous African cultural sovereignty with Chinese theoretical paradigms, Zhu's work not only decentralizes Eurocentric literary canons but also institutionalizes a heterarchical model of knowledge production that prioritizes mutual learning over hierarchical competition.

Zhu's scholarship on Chinese African literaturology revolves around three interconnected pillars: the Africanness of African literatures, the construction of Chinese African Literaturology, and the dialectical balance between cultural autonomy and global dialogue. Central to his theoretical framework is the concept of Africanness, defined as the "deep identification of African and Afro-descended people with the history and culture of the African continent" ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 114). This Africanness, he argues, manifests through decoloniality, diasporicity, and hybridity, which collectively challenge Western-centric literary paradigms and foster civilizational diversity (113-115). Decoloniality entails "the diachronic meditations of African writers who have carried forward their cultural traditions, kept their colonial past in mind, broken the shackles of Western discourse and restored the original diversity of Africa in the course of decolonization" (114), exemplified in Zhu's analysis of Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels, which confront colonial trauma while envisioning postcolonial futures.

Diasporicity in African literatures, "which focuses on the tensions between heterogeneous cultures," stands as a potent attribute, embodying both "a cultural syndrome left by Western colonists" and "a realistic demand for the decolonization of African writing." ("Africanness" 117). Transcending traditional geographical migration, it unfolds through forms like the "native diaspora" of indigenous Africans, the "colonial diaspora" of white settlers' descendants, and the "foreign-native diaspora" from transnational mobility. These manifestations delve into global issues via African languages, arts, and homeland temporal politics, crafting pluralist narratives on humanity, self, nature, and society. For example, Nadine Gordimer, a South African writer of white immigrant lineage, shifted from standard English to integrating localized expressions such as Afrikaans and Zulu into South African English, subverting Western literary traditions. Abdulrazak Gurnah, part of the "foreign diaspora," blended Arabic, Swahili, and East African indigenous languages, practicing linguistic decolonization even in exile. Lídia Jorge Chiziane, exemplifying the "native diaspora," interweaves Bantu/Mozambican dialects with African oral narrative styles, embracing the identity of a "storyteller" (griot). Critically, this diasporicity enriches world literature by embedding African historical specificity and cultural resilience. Functioning as both a record of colonial legacies

and a tool for decolonization, it drives linguistic innovation and engagement with global themes like gender equality and racial discrimination. Aligned with the decolonization pursuit of "liberating mankind," African writers connect local sentiments to global consciousness, redefining literary decolonization. As underscored in their works, they strive for "the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, between man and man," providing both an "archive" of colonial hauntings and an "antidote" through narratives that foster conflict resolution ("Africanness" 118-119), thereby anchoring Africa's distinctive contribution to global literary discourses.

Zhu's scholarship illuminates the dialogic and hybrid essence of African literatures, emphasizing their "cultural hybridity that integrates tradition and modernity, the local region and the world, and past and future." ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 120) Conceived as a "cultural bazaar," African culture within these literatures embraces diverse civilizations, serving as a cornerstone for decolonial writing and historical identity reconstruction. Crucially, Zhu highlights how African literatures, as an organic aggregate of national literatures, foster dialogue and cultural diversity through a communal ethos. This aligns with the stance of "many African scholars 'calling for a more positive articulation of 'Africanness'" to dismantle "theories of race and cultural homogeneity," thereby estoring "the true plurality of African literatures" (120). Zhu further contextualizes this hybridity within a Marxist-inspired framework of world literature, noting the shift from "old local and national seclusion" toward "universal inter-dependence of nations." The "poetic positive-sum game of oscillation between African and Western cultures" (121) in works by Nobel laureates, such as Soyinka, Gordimer, and Gurnah, epitomizes this dialogic tension. While acknowledging Western evaluative biases, like the Swedish Academy's emphasis on "the consequences of apartheid" in Gordimer's critique or "exploring weakness and defeat" in Coetzee's heritage, Zhu underscores African literatures' resistance to homogenization (121). Writers actively construct multicultural expressions, "breaking down the rigid single discourse of the other" (115) to showcase the vibrant diversity of African literary culture. Ultimately, Zhu's perspective affirms that African literatures, through its hybrid and dialogic nature, advance decolonization by striving to "restore the colonized to their humanity." (117) They redefine world literature beyond West-centric paradigms, embodying a dynamic interplay between local specificity and global consciousness. This not only challenges hegemonic literary norms but also enriches global literary discourses with Africa's unique cultural resilience and historical depth.

Crucially, Zhu positions Chinese African-literaturology as a counter-

discourse to Western hegemony. He advocates for "Domestication-Foreignization Balance" (归异平衡) in literary translation and research, rejecting both uncritical Westernization and insular nationalism ("Mutual Appreciation" 51-53). This approach aligns with his "equilibrium absorption theory", which calls for integrating global literary traditions while maintaining cultural specificity. By grounding his analysis in Marxist philosophy, Zhu further underscores the role of African literatures in addressing social inequities and fostering "human liberation" (Cheng and Zhu 8), exemplified by Nigerian writers like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, whose works intertwine anti-colonial resistance with Marxist-humanist ideals.

Zhu's theorization of Africanness resonates with but diverges from postcolonial frameworks like Edward Said's Orientalism and Homi Bhabha's hybridity. While Bhabha emphasizes the subversive potential of cultural hybridity, Zhu extends this by foregrounding Africanness as a proactive force that bridges gaps between heterogeneous cultures ("Africanness" 170). Unlike Said's critique of Western representations, Zhu shifts focus to African agency, arguing that African literatures "participate effectively in the dialogue of world literature" through their inherent diversity (113).

Zhu's emphasis on "Coexistence and symbiosis of cultures" also challenges Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. By advocating for mutual learning and symbiosis, Zhu posits African literatures as catalysts for a "new form of human civilization" ("Africanness" 125). This vision extends beyond Kwame Appiah's cosmopolitanism by integrating Marxist dialectics to analyze the material and historical conditions shaping literary exchanges. In contrast to Appiah's emphasis on individual moral obligations, Zhu situates literary exchange within broader socioeconomic structures. His analysis reveals how African literatures serve as both "archives" of colonial violence and "antidotes" for imagining alternative futures, echoing Walter Benjamin's concept of historical materialism. This theoretical framework also addresses the limitations of postcolonial theories that prioritize binary power dynamics. Zhu's use of Marxist dialectics allows him to recognize both the oppressive legacies of colonialism and the emancipatory potential of cultural hybridity. As he asserts, "African literatures achieve decolonization not through rejection of the global, but through strategic engagement that redefines the terms of cultural exchange" (121). This approach aligns with Frederic Jameson's call for a dialectical criticism that accounts for both local specificity and global interconnectedness. Ultimately, Zhu's synthesis of Marxist analysis and cosmopolitan ethics offers a novel paradigm for understanding literary globalization. By positioning African literatures as active agents in shaping world literary

landscapes, his work challenges Eurocentrism while avoiding essentialist claims about cultural authenticity. In doing so, it contributes to what David Damrosch terms world literature as "a mode of circulation and of reading" (Damrosch 5), where texts circulate across borders and transform both source and target cultures through dialogic engagement.

Zhu's Chinese African Literaturology transcends disciplinary and geopolitical boundaries, establishing a transformative paradigm for equitable global literary studies. By decentralizing Eurocentric epistemologies and recentering African intellectual traditions within transnational dialogues, his work constructs a tripartite theoretical framework: (1) redefining diasporic literatures as generative sites of "global-local negotiation" that resist binary oppositions between exile and rootedness; (2) systematizing the study of African orature and postcolonial écriture as complementary modes of knowledge production; and (3) advancing transcultural hermeneutics that prioritize African agencies in reimagining world literature's cartographies. This framework fundamentally challenges the ontological colonialism embedded in Western postcolonial theory, which often reduces African texts to case studies validating Euro-American critical paradigms. As evidenced in Zhu's analysis of Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels, contemporary African literatures demonstrate "endurance and forgiveness for the colonial past" while envisioning "a community of literature, of culture and of eco-friendliness" (Zhu and Li, "Africanness" 125). Such dual emphasis, historical reckoning through narrative memory and future-building through cultural synthesis, exemplifies Zhu's groundbreaking proposition: African literary practices operate as epistemic palimpsests, simultaneously documenting colonial trauma and scripting civilizational renewal. Crucially, his methodology bridges the analytical divide between African oral traditions (e.g., griot storytelling) and modernist textual experimentation, revealing their shared decolonial potential. By institutionalizing Chinese African Literaturology as a discrete discipline with distinct theoretical vocabularies, such as "diasporic hybridity as creative force" and "textual sovereignty", Zhu's scholarship not only emancipates African literary studies from Western epistemological hegemony but also provides a replicable model for Global South scholars to reclaim interpretive authority over their cultural productions.

In an era of geopolitical fragmentation, Zhu's vision underscores the urgency of replacing "ideological confrontation with ideological dialogue" and "a unipolar culture with a multipolar and diversified one" ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 125). His collaboration with Kenya Literature Bureau and UNESCO initiatives exemplifies this ethos, enabling African and Chinese scholars to co-author

research without Western mediation. As Zhu asserts, "True world literature arises from the mutual learning of diverse civilizations, not the dominance of a single cultural axis" (125). Through its synthesis of Marxist theory, diaspora studies, and postcolonial critique, Chinese African Literaturology redefines global humanities, positioning literature as a bridge between civilizations and Chinese scholarship as a vital interlocutor in reshaping intellectual equity.

Zhu advances a compelling vision for literature's role in fostering cross-cultural harmony. It asserts that in the new era, there is an urgent need "to construct a true world literature, one that includes the diversified literatures of different countries and regions, including Africa and China." ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 125) This statement underscores literature's potential to transcend "national boundaries, eliminate barriers, and overcome stereotypes and prejudices," positioning it as a bridge for "mutual learning among civilizations." (125) Directly echoing this ideal, the text declares, "the cultural implication of Africanness tells us that we must build a cultural community to achieve true mutual learning among civilizations," ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 125; "Diasporic Literature and Cultural Community") reinforcing literature's capacity to redefine intercultural dynamics.

He further leverages the essence of African literatures to advocate transformative change: replacing "ideological confrontation with ideological dialogue" and "a unipolar, single and unidirectional culture with a multipolar and diversified culture." ("The Africanness of African Literatures" 125) These declarations, anchored in analyses of African literary expressions, highlight literature's power to model civilizational coexistence. Notably, the conclusion praises contemporary African literatures, exemplified by Gurnah's novels, for demonstrating "endurance and forgiveness for the colonial past" while envisioning "a community of literature, of culture and of eco-friendliness." (125) This dual emphasis on reckoning with history and projecting future hope underscores literature's dual role as both a historical recorder and a blueprint for progress.

Zhu's study enriches literary and cultural scholarship by redefining world literature as an inclusive, boundary-transcending project. By grounding its arguments in African literature's cultural, literary, and ecological expressions, it offers a compelling theoretical framework for reimagining global literary and civilizational dynamics. The call to replace confrontational paradigms with dialogic, collaborative models resonates profoundly with contemporary societal needs, bridging literary theory and real-world civilizational development. It effectively distills African literature's transformative potential, urging academia and societies

to embrace diversity and dialogue. This enriches conversations on world literature and paves the way for discussions on civilizational co-prosperity, solidifying its contribution to interdisciplinary discourse.

Conclusion

Zhu's literary research philosophy represents a seminal reconfiguration of global literary studies, systematically dismantling the hierarchical binaries that have long privileged Western paradigms while recentering marginalized traditions as vital contributors to world literature. His scholarship transcends mere critique of Eurocentrism, instead constructing a pluralistic framework where mainstream and non-mainstream discourses coexist in dynamic equilibrium. At the core of this vision lies Zhu's commitment to cultural symbiosis, a theoretical and methodological principle that posits literary exchange as a reciprocal process of mutual enrichment rather than unilateral assimilation. By foregrounding non-Western epistemologies, particularly through his pioneering Chinese African Literaturology, Zhu challenges the Global North's hegemony over postcolonial discourse, advocating instead for "horizontal comparativism" that positions Chinese, African, and other marginalized traditions as equal interlocutors. This approach not only decolonizes literary analysis but also redefines diaspora as a generative space where cultural hybridity catalyzes innovation, as exemplified in his studies of Chinese-African diasporic writers who fuse narrative techniques from multiple traditions to forge transcultural aesthetics.

Zhu's paradigm-shifting contributions are most evident in his institutional and theoretical interventions. Through projects like *History of African Literatures Written in English*, he operationalizes decolonized historiography, replacing Western-authored meta-narratives with polyphonic accounts that amplify African voices while integrating Chinese scholarly perspectives. This tripartite methodology, decentering colonial canons, recentering indigenous narratives, and synthesizing global insights, exemplifies his heterarchical model of literary studies. Furthermore, his editorial leadership in platforms such as Studies in African Literature fosters South-South intellectual cooperation, creating alliances between Chinese and African academics that bypass Western epistemological gatekeeping. These efforts collectively establish a blueprint for equitable academic exchange, wherein marginalized traditions are neither exoticized nor subsumed but engaged as co-equal partners in knowledge production. Zhu's work thus reimagines global literary studies as a networked ecosystem, where balance is not static harmony but an ongoing dialectic, a space where hegemony is perpetually contested, and plurality becomes the foundation for transformative scholarship.

Zhu's impact extends beyond academia into cultural diplomacy. He has orchestrated landmark collaborations, such as the 2024 partnership with Kenya Literature Bureau to promote Sino-African literary exchanges. His advocacy for "Coexistence and Symbiosis of Cultures" has influenced policy dialogues, notably during the 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, which designated 2026 as "the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges". Internationally, Zhu's analysis of Nobel laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah's works, highlighting Marxist-inflected critiques of colonialism, has positioned him as a key interpreter of African literature's global resonance. Domestically, his leadership in national projects like "History of African Literature Written in English" and "Contemporary Sinologists' Translation Strategies" has redefined China's foreign literature curriculum, integrating non-Western perspectives into mainstream pedagogy.

Zhu's research philosophy, rooted in cultural autonomy, theoretical innovation, and global equity, has established a blueprint for Chinese scholars to engage with world literature without subservience to Western paradigms. By foregrounding African and Chinese literatures as equal partners in re-drawing the world literary map, he challenges the Global North's intellectual monopoly. As AI and digital media transform literary consumption, Zhu's recent interventions at forums like the 2025 Conference on Fiction Studies underscore the enduring relevance of humanistic values in an automated age. In sum, Zhu's oeuvre exemplifies a paradigm shift in global literary studies, one that prioritizes diversity, dialogue, and decolonization. His legacy lies not only in his scholarly output but in fostering a generation of researchers committed to "equilibrium" in cultural exchange, a vision where no literature remains "non-mainstream."

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