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Past and present in translation collaborative practices and cooperation

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Showcasing Australian literature in China

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Abstract

This paper explores how literary translations from Australia make the passage to mainland China. It looks at institutions and individuals as well as the interpersonal relationships that contribute to this collaborative process. In exploring mainland China as the target market for translations of Australian literature, this paper maintains that the translations themselves support a so-called Australian 'national archive' or canon, directly addressing perceptions of nation (in this case, Australia and Australianness) held by overseas audiences. Furthermore, it examines the extent to which the presence of certain economic-support mechanisms for the translation of Australian literature, in the form of government funded literary events or translations, fostering of translator-writer relations, as well as the support provided to Australian Studies centres in mainland China, impact on the creation of social, economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977) and ultimately affecting the dissemination of Australian literary texts in China.

Keywords: Australian, literature, translation, China, archive.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the understanding of literary translation as a market-driven enterprise has seen its definition broaden. Following Goethe's notion of *Weltliteratur* (1827), which considers the exchange of literature around the globe (Apter 2001; Moretti 2003; Damrosch 2003; Casanova 2004), there is increasing awareness around the "global textual mobility" of literary translation (Damrosch 2003). As Heilbron and Sapiro assert, the view of translated literature as "goods which circulate across the borders of states and the boundaries of languages" causes translation flows to "depend on the relations between languages and language groups" (2016: 376). Through translation, and often via the intervention of agents, literary objects gain currency as a form of 'cultural diplomacy' (Wilson 2013: 179), whereby texts act to reinforce a particular, often positive image of a nation. As Benedict

Anderson has claimed, "Nation, nationality, nationalism – all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse" (Anderson 2016: 3), and with China's interest in world literature having gained momentum in recent years (Helgesson and Vermeulen 2016: 8), this paper seeks to explore how literary translations from Australia make the passage to mainland China, thus shaping a particular image of Australia. It looks at institutions and individuals central to this act of migration, as well as the importance of interpersonal relationships that contribute to this collaborative process. It presents research conducted as part of a project funded by the Australia China Council (ACC) in the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) from 2018-2019, which sought contribution to only a handful of studies into the translation of Australian literary texts in a series of national (French, Chinese, Italian, Japanese and German) markets (Wang 2000; Frank 2007; Cain Gray 2008; Jose 2009; Formica 2011; Wilson 2013; Tobias, Gerber and Sell 2013; Gerber 2014).

In exploring mainland China as the target market for translations of Australian literature, this paper maintains that the translations themselves support a so-called Australian 'national archive', directly addressing perceptions of nation (in this case, Australia and Australianness) held by overseas audiences. Not only are literary translations (re)created by translators, but the selection, commission, publication, circulation and reception of a translated work materialises only via human interaction between various agents (Qi 2018). The extent to which the presence of certain support mechanisms impact the creation of social, economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977), ultimately affecting the dissemination of Australian literary texts in China will also be explored, whether in the creation of economic capital (government-funded literary events or translations), or in social capital (fostering translator-writer relations), or cultural (through the institutional support provided to Australian Studies centres in mainland China). This research investigates the minutia of these considerations: what is the nature of Australian literary translation in China and why are certain authors/genres/themes/translators favoured by Chinese publishers? Does the dissemination of cultural goods via events supported by the Australian government such as the DFAT-sponsored Australian Writers' Week (AWW) in China influence the formation of attitudes towards Australia in the Chinese market? What do publishers in both China and Australia think about the current state of the market? The initial research phase surveyed the market by tracing the tradition of Chinese translations of Australian literature, followed by interviews with key figures

in the field, including Chinese translators and both Australian and Chinese publishers in order to examine whether situational factors, such as author/ translator collaboration and agency, affect the translation outcome. Part of the project also placed researchers in situ at AWW in China, where they observed how various players (authors, moderators) interacted with the public, how events were run etc. The results of this study will help us to gain a more enhanced understanding of (a) how to promote Australian literature to Chinese publishers and Chinese readers, and in turn (b) how Australian publishers can market their texts for translation into Chinese.

1.1. Australian literature in the world

A handful of studies focus on the mobility of Australian texts in different national contexts (Wang 2000; Formica 2011; Wilson 2013; Gerber 2014). Commenting directly on the idea of 'mythmaking' as significant to the Chinese view of Australian literature, Wang writes that Australians are generally represented as "homogeneously simple, innocent, friendly and helpful people who address one another as mates" (Wang 2000: 126), labelling both the omission and inclusion of certain writers for translation into Chinese a form of "critical selectiveness" (126). Formica, writing on Italian translations of Australian literature, suggests that the selection of texts may represent

> the symbolic capital of a particular author or a specific literary tradition and the commercial interests of publishers […] Perhaps more significantly, the selection process reflects the complexity of the relationship between translated literature as cultural artefact and commodity. (Formica 2011: 11)

Wilson (2013: 178) also emphasises the importance of understanding what is being translated, which agents dominate and furthermore, what readers expect. This enables us to understand that "Australian texts in translation constitute an extension of a national archive" and

> the translations of contemporary novels, together with the paratexts (e.g., critical reviews, promotional materials) that accompany them, contribute to shaping the image of Australia and its culture. (Wilson 2013: 179)

Within the more specific setting of Australian children's literature in translation, Leah Gerber similarly argues that

> a range of aspects combine to impact on the translation of literature in general, with particular external influences (the development of national book markets, past and present publishing trends, as well as the notion of national identity) influencing both the creation of the source text and the manner in which the text is translated and received. (Gerber 2014: 299)

Furthermore, Wilson maintains that Australian literature remains "a relatively peripheral subsystem within the literary world system" which

> has gone hand in hand with shifts in the international perception of Australia itself: from colonial backwater, to destination of economic migration and, subsequently, with the changing international status of Australia, from a destination for economic migration to a destination for lifestyle migration or tourism. (Wilson 2013: 180)

Equally, Gerber asserts that, while expressions of Australian identity have literally 'travelled the world', the images have altered very little over time (2014: 300-301).

As part of the 'transnational turn' in Australian literary studies (Gelder 2005, 2010; Dixon 2007; Carter and Galligan 2007; Carter 2016; Mead 2009; Huggan 2009; Jacklin 2009), scholars attempted to re-position the traditional image of Australian literature in a global world. Following studies into world literature (Moretti 2003; Damrosch 2003; Casanova 2004) at the beginning of the 21st century, the transnational turn signalled a shift "away from a localised, Anglocentric approach to Australian literature and its writers, and a necessary extension beyond national and Anglo-Saxon traditions" (Ommundsen 2011: 83). Scholars questioned the very notion of 'Australian' writing, with Jacklin (2009) positing that the lack of non-Anglo-Saxon writers in the Australian literary canon was just one of the factors limiting a truly global understanding of Australian literature. Dixon called for a "transnational Australian literary practice" that would encompass, amongst various things, a consideration of how Australian writing responds to the economies of the international publishing industry, as well as the reciprocity of literary translation (Dixon 2007: 18). The lack of indigenous voices in Australian (and New Zealand) literature was also identified

(Wevers 2009: 6-7). Wevers paints a damning picture of the way in which judges act as agents in the awarding of literary prizes, relying on a carefully curated shortlist of titles that inescapably represents the "geopolitical aesthetic" of a nation, e.g. one Indigenous author, one female, one debut novelist, etc. (2009: 3).

Yet while the complexity of defining Australian literature from within has been well-documented, it is equally important to present a comparison from beyond its national borders. Following Zhang's definition of world literature, we argue that

> the 'world' in world literature has to be truly global […] it should be planetary, in a geographical sense. That is to say, when discussing world literature, the sampling of literary works must not only cross over languages and cultures, but also regions and continents, beyond Eurocentrism or any other ethnocentrism. (Zhang 2014: 517)

By focussing on mainland China as the receiving culture and exploring Australian literature as a 'peripheral literature' that traverses both national and international borders, we first address the initial 'canon' of 20th century Australian literature in Chinese translation. Secondly, we explore translation as a social, collaborative activity, whereby the translator is an active agent in the translation process (Wolf and Fukari 2007; Milton and Bandia 2009). Finally, we look at the emergence of a canon of Australian literature translated into Chinese. We may then begin to understand the degree to which this selection is motivated by agency plus the desire to present a particular canon of Australian texts to Chinese readers.

1.2. The circulation of Australian texts in China

Texts from Australia first began to move beyond national borders in the mid-19th century, when early Australian novels circulated in Britain. These texts, which were traveller's or emigrant's tales, held immense exotic appeal for overseas audiences. Early settler novels were popular too, published from the 1830s onwards and aimed primarily at readers abroad who were eager to hear about life in the colonies (Webby 2000: 51). Carter claims, "Convicts, bushranging, searching for gold or settling the wilds remained popular themes in fiction through to the end of the century" (Carter 2016: 354), feeding overseas readers' expectations about a 'strange' and 'distant' Australia, and presenting what Huggan terms a "highly selective, even myopic view of Australian colonial literature" (2007: 48).

As is so often the case when exploring national literatures in translation, it is near-impossible to locate one single comprehensive list of the titles that have been translated. In the case of Chinese translations of Australian literature, this holds true, due to the haphazard way in which cataloguing of translations is often undertaken. The AustLit database, housed in the National Library of Australia, is a vital touch point for those working in this field (Dixon 2007: 18) and provides a useful starting point for this kind of bibliographical research. However, there are many gaps in the recording of information about translations; publication information such as the name of the translator or the source text title might be missing and translated titles are incorrectly recorded, most likely by library staff who are unable to understand or interpret information contained in foreign language editions. Thus, the first aim of this project was to consolidate information about the authors, titles, translators and publishers of all Australian literary texts that have been translated into Chinese from the start of the 20th century to the present.

Our database study indicated that in 1906, within the first fifty or so years of Australian texts in global circulation, Fergus Hume's hugely popular *Mystery of the hansom cab* (1888) became the first Australian novel to be translated into Chinese. It was released in England in 1889, followed by a US edition and German translation in 1900. Interestingly, this crime fiction text, set in the former penal colony of Australia, was considered an "international blockbuster" and a "generic innovator" (Sussex 2019: 23). As Christopher Pittard argues, it "would have appealed to an audience raised on sensation fiction, throughout which Australia features as a geographical other, a site of unknown adventure and mystery" (Pittard 2011: 38). Hume's depiction of iconography closely associated with Jack the Ripper's 'Whitechapel' murders in London during the late 1800s (Pittard 2011: 42) sold the text to audiences already invested in this narrative. While Hume was the first Australian author to be translated into Chinese, Guy Newell Boothby was the first one to have his work published in China, albeit in English. In 1898, Boothby's short story *Uncle Joe's legacy* was published in an English journal *The North-China Herald* and *Supreme Court & Consular Gazette* in Shanghai. The first Chinese translation of Boothby's novel *The viceroy's protegé* appeared only a few months after Hume's *Mystery of the Hansom cab*. Within the following decade, six novels and short stories by Boothby, ranging from adventure stories set in Australia to horror and gothic fiction, were translated into Chinese, including *A sailor's bride* (1907), *Farewell Nikola* (1908), and *The marriage of Esther* (1914), with some of these translations

reprinted several times.

Over the turn of the century, which marked the demise of the imperial Qing dynasty and the rise of the Republic of China, a more significant number of Australian texts were translated into Chinese. Boothby, with a total of 14 novels and short stories, was arguably the most-translated Australian author during this time. However, as alluded to above, locating precise information about other Chinese translations of Australian texts from this period is a challenging task. For example, it is not always easy to identify the authors of the STs by looking at the bibliographic details of the translations alone. The authors' names were transliterated into Chinese characters in these translations but there was no established convention for the transliteration of Anglophone names in China at the time. More often than not, multiple transliterated names of the same author were used by different translators and publishers. Furthermore, many Australian authors translated in the first few decades of the 20th century were incorrectly presented as either British or American, more than likely due to the fact that the translation rights would have come from British or American publishers (there were very few Australian publishing houses in operation during this period).

Following the establishment of the socialist People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, an alternative canon of Australian texts began to form in China. During this period, a number of Australian social-realist writers were translated into Chinese, including Cristina Stead, James Aldridge, Frank Hardy, Wilfred Burchett, Jack Lindsay and Katherine Prichard.[1] With their links to the Australian communist movement, at its peak in Australia during the 1940s, these writers were presented in China as both left-wing and progressive. It is interesting to compare the situation in the PRC with the movement of Australian literature into East Germany, during the founding years of socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) (Moore and Spittel 2016), where the state actively pursued a political agenda via cultural means, i.e. through the translation of particular authors with socialist leanings. Nicole Moore comments that the GDR regime

[1] Among others, James Aldridge*: The diplomat* (1953), *The sea eagle* (1955), *The hunter* (1958), *Signed with the honour* (1959), *Heroes of the empty view* (1959); Frank Hardy: *Journey into the future* (1954), *Power without glory* (1957), *The tracks we travel* (1959); Wilfred C. Burchett: *Changing tide* (1956); Mona Brand: *Better a millstone* (1957); Katharine Susannah Prichard: *The roaring Nineties* (1959); Judah Waten: *The unbending* (1959), *Alien son* (1960); Jack Lindsay: *Betrayed Spring* (1960); Henry Lawson: *Send round the hat* (1960). In addition, a handful of poems and novellas were published in literary magazines during this period.

> favoured highly critical books from Australia's then disenfranchised cultural left, especially early on, often indicting Australia as an imperial gulag and racist colonizer, exploitative industrialist economy or a sexist slum. From this failed utopia came a string of popular titles, while the ironic parallels for GDR readers were manifest, in their utopic prison state, even when refused and reframed by the authorities. (Moore and Spittel 2016: 2)

We can argue that the same occurred in the PRC. James Aldridge, for instance, had five of his novels translated into Chinese within a matter of a few years (see footnote 1). Writers such as Hardy, Aldridge and Prichard, with their firm communist party affiliations, contributed to what Jennifer Wawrzinek has called, in the context of East Germany, a particular "social imaginary", that was adopted or subsumed, via translation, into the East Germany socialist idea of nationhood (Wawrzinek 2016: 74). Furthermore, with recreational travel practically non-existent in China prior to the 1980s, and international movement beyond the Chinese borders under tight state control, reading the world via translated literary works served as an important means of education. Thus, through the establishment of an independent social-realist canon of texts translated into Chinese, Australian literature undoubtedly contributed to Chinese nation-building in the early years of the PRC, where, according to Nick Jose, the canon's origins were "partly in Australian socialist and nationalist traditions and partly in China's own socialist construction of culture (Jose 2009: 3). Hardy, Aldridge, Prichard and others were championed not for their 'Australianness', but for their critique of Australian society, which rested almost solely on their representation of the working class and their ability to support socialist ideology (Moore and Spittel 2016).

However, interest in translated foreign literature decreased significantly during the Chinese Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 70s. Indeed, almost all aspects of social life were slowed during this time, giving way to the political class struggle advocated by Mao Zedong. In the 1950s, fifteen Australian literary works were rendered into Chinese; the number dropped to five in the 1960s and only three in the 1970s (Peng 2014: 27). The Australia-China relationship normalised in 1972 and, in the following year, Australian author Patrick White won the Nobel Prize for literature, generating a new interest in Australian literature amongst Chinese audiences. 1978 marked the beginning of a new 'Open-up and Reform' era in China, during which period the Australian government actively promoted cultural exchange between the two nations. For example, the Australia-

China Council (ACC) was established in 1978, which proved instrumental in strengthening understanding and engagement between China and Australia.[2]

Through the creation of institutional initiatives such as these, as well as the establishment of Australian Studies Centres and Associations in China during the 1980s and 1990s, there was a period of rapid growth in the translation of Australian literature. In Australia, government funding for Australian literature had also increased (Huggan 2009: 5), while in China, by 1987, the Chinese government became increasingly tolerant of foreign literatures, which resulted in a "near obsession with Western (especially American) culture" (Ommundsen 2011: 85) and a further rise in the translation of Australian literature.

2. Institutions and translators as agents

The institutional support of Australian literature in China during the 1980s cemented the understanding of "Australian literature as a collective national project" (Huggan 2009: 5), which could then be exported internationally. At the same time, various individuals were working as active agents within these Chinese institutional frameworks.[3] For example, alongside prolific Chinese translator and scholar Li Yao, Australian writer, translator and scholar Nicholas Jose played a crucial role in the development of Australia-China cultural exchange, first travelling to China in 1986 to teach the earliest courses in Australian literature at Beijing Foreign Studies University and East China Normal University, Shanghai.[4] As a writer of Australian literary works, and a translator of Chinese literature, Jose was instrumental in

[2] The ACC closed at the end of 2019, and was replaced by the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations in 2020.

[3] Formica also details how one translator, Franca Cavagnoli, similarly shaped the archive of Australian literature in Italy, through translations of David Malouf (Formica 2011: 8).

[4] In Jose's own words, he became "an Australianist by accident, out of sheer love of the material" (2009: 1). In Shanghai, Jose met two Professors, Hu Wenzhong and Huang Yuansheng, responsible for setting up China's inaugural Australian Studies Centres. Hu and Huang became part of the so-called "Gang of Nine" – the first Chinese scholars permitted to study abroad following the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s, who read Australian Literature at Sydney University. In 1987, Jose was tasked by then Education Minister Susan Ryan and Ambassador Ross Garnaut to help develop Australian Studies in China and was appointed 'Cultural Counsellor' at the Australian Embassy in Beijing (Jose 2009: 2).

championing the migration of literature in both directions. In 1987, he was tasked to help develop Australian Studies in China. After the first Chinese Australian Studies conference took place in 1988 in Beijing, Chinese scholars researching Australian literature were funded by ASAL to attend conferences in Australia throughout the 1980s (Jose 2009: 2). Professor Hu Wenzhong, whom Jose met in Shanghai, was pivotal in introducing translator Li Yao to Australian literature; Li would later become known in China as "the pioneer of Australian literature in translation" (Australian Embassy 2016). When Li embarked on his translation enterprise in late 1970s, Hu not only introduced him to Australian literature, but also co-translated *The tree of man* by Patrick White. In the following decades, Li translated over 30 Australian titles and it has been claimed that "without him, the works of some of Australia's most famous literary icons would be out of reach for international audiences" (Sandham 2018: n.p.). Writer, translator and scholar Ouyang Yu, who also took part in these early exchanges and went on to undertake a PhD in Australia, is another formidable agent in Australian-Chinese literary relations. Ouyang is a well-regarded Australian author who has translated prominent novels by Cristina Stead, Jessica Anderson and Alex Miller into Chinese and has written many scholarly articles on the representation of China in Australian literature.

Subsequently, in the 1990s, globalisation signalled a shift towards a so-called "global translation economy" (Heilbron and Sapiro 2016: 381), leading to exchanges that were decidedly "asymmetrical", with the effect of increasing the supremacy of English via a steady increase in the translation of Anglophone texts into other languages (Heilbron and Sapiro 2016: 378-381). By the 1990s in China, postmodernist and postcolonial approaches had replaced the social-realist voices of the 1950s, accompanied by an interest in "the Chinese presence in Australian writing" (Jose 2009: 3). In Australia during the same period, the Translation Grants Program, run by the Literature Board of the Australia Council for the Arts from the early 1990s up until 2000, actively supported the translation of Australian books into other languages (Gerber 2014: 18). Today, the Translation Fund for Literature offers support to overseas book publishers, who may apply to the Australia Council for the Arts for assistance (AUD 5,000 per title to assist with translators' fees) with the translation and publication of the work of living Australian writers. While the number of Australian literary works translated and published in China between 1949 and 1999 was "over sixty titles in all" (Pugsley 2004: 89), the first two decades of the 21st century, from 2000 to 2018, has seen the rate of translated works soared to over 600.

A range of genres has undergone translation into Chinese, including fiction, poetry, non-fiction and children's literature.

2.1. Publishers as agents

As part of this project, interviews were conducted with 5 major Chinese publishers and 2 Australian publishing houses, including: Yilin Press in Nanjing, the People's Literature Publishing House and the Foreign Languages Teaching and Research Press in Beijing, the Shanghai Translation Publishing House, the Changjiang Children's Publishing Group in Wuhan, and Text Publishing and Giramondo in Australia, both of which publish works in translation. The Chinese publishing market underwent a dramatic restructure over the last decade, forcing new competitiveness between publishing houses. Previously, Chinese publishers tended to work within clearly defined speciality areas; however today, most publishing houses have repositioned themselves as generalists, in order to compete for a greater variety of titles. Yet the growth in the publishing industry has not translated into a proportional increase in the importation of foreign works, which was particularly evident recently when the Chinese government decided to limit the importation of foreign rights. Previously, publishers were able to purchase the rights of as many books as they liked, but in recent years the percentage of foreign titles has been capped. Today, China vigorously promotes a nationalistic stance towards the concept of 'cultural confidence' (文化自信 *wenhua zixin*) which, in the publishing industry, requires publishers to produce original Chinese works, rather than translations. One interviewee disclosed that in 2016, more than 70% of children's books published in the first half of the year were foreign titles in translation, which prompted the regulators to block the publication of any imported children's books in the second half of the year. While the result is a more equitable balance between original Chinese works and translated books, it also means that quality books from overseas markets may be overlooked in favour of home-grown titles, causing the rate of translations to plummet. The economics of translation also come into play, with interviewees consistent in their claim that the rate for literary translation in China is very low – between RMB 60-80 (i.e. AUD 12-16) per 1000 Chinese characters. This figure has been corroborated by other publicly available sources (Yang 2014), which means that most translators of Australian literature into Chinese do it out of a passion for translation, not for the money.

All publishers interviewed mentioned the crucial role played by individuals (rights agents) and the importance of cultural events (such as the AWW) in improving the visibility of Australian literature and Australian authors. There is also a tendency to favour particular genres of Australian literature, including non-fiction (particularly popular science), self-help and parenting books. Children's picture books are also highly sought after (Scribe), confirming findings of other studies (Gerber 2014) that Australian children's titles do extremely well in foreign markets. Another Australian publisher noted that Chinese audiences are interested in "big names", as well as authors with Chinese descent (Giramondo). Australian publishers revealed that face-to-face meetings with publishers at book fairs (Scribe) and personal connections (Giramondo) are vital to the dissemination of Australian titles in China, confirming the important brokering role played by agents such as writers, translators and academics, as well as social networks linked to the publishing industry. Rights agents also play an important role, as they provide a

> direct link to the Chinese market. They have extensive knowledge and expertise and can target specific publishers on our behalf. They are very familiar with the publisher's lists, know the editors personally, and handle all negotiations and administrative tasks. (Scribe)

Australian publishers believe that

> Any event or marketing opportunity can only help to boost the profile of Australian books and authors in China. Having a presence at the Beijing and Shanghai Book Fairs is of enormous benefit to the individual publishers and helps to foster greater awareness of Australian books. (Scribe)

However, Australian publishers overwhelmingly agreed that "Chinese publishers are acquiring fewer foreign books now" (Scribe), and that the interest in Australian literature has waned (Giramondo), therefore the projection of growth is low. Publishers have also told us that they face insurmountable challenges while operating in the Chinese book market, particularly in "understanding the government regulations and controls on publishing foreign books, the differences between the state run and private publishing companies and how they operate in the marketplace" (Scribe).

2.2. AWW, selection of authors and other cultural or institutional agents

The roles played by cultural and government agencies such as the ACC, ASAL and the Australia Council are central not only to the promotion of Australian literature in China, but also in connecting Australian authors with influential agents in the Chinese publishing industry. Perhaps the most influential cultural event is AWW, which forms part of the ACC's 'Australian Writes' platform. AWW, beginning in 2008, aims to support the dissemination of Australian literature in China. It has operated for the past 12 years, as part of the Australian Embassy's scheme to increase the number of Australian literary voices in China.[5] 'A*ustralia Writes'* operates around several key literary platforms in China, such as the Shanghai International Literary Festival and Bookworm Literary Festival in March, Beijing International Book Fair in August, and China Shanghai International Children's Book Fair in November. AWW, managed by the Australian embassy in Beijing, has helped to raise the profile of 72 Australian authors in the Chinese market, facilitating stronger relationships between Australian writers, Chinese publishers and readers. AWW literally makes Australian literature mobile, flying a number of Australian writers per year to China, promoting their works and inviting them to participate in literary events in several major Chinese cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Xi'an, Wuhan, Chengdu and Guangzhou. Australian publishers have confirmed the magnitude of AWW, "first in giving visibility and authority to the writer, and second in arranging meetings with prospective publishers" (Giramondo). AWW is intended, however, to be a strictly asymmetrical exchange – AWW events feature Australian writers, although Chinese writers do take part, often as interviewers or in the form of a panel discussion. Yet while the overwhelming aim is to showcase Australian culture, it does not always work out in this way. In observing AWW events, we noted that panel discussions usually (as expected) included Chinese writers from the same literary genres, areas or themes. Panel discussions were organised around the themes of participating Australian authors, but the invited Chinese writers were encouraged to participate equally and fully in the discussions, and indeed, in some cases, they contributed more than their Australian counterparts.

[5] The annual AWW is usually in March each year, but in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was moved online in November as "Australia Writers 2020", featuring Tom Keneally, Alexis Wright, Peter Carey, Gail Jones, John Marsden and Graeme Base (https://china.embassy.gov.au/bjng/AustraliaWritesonlineliteraturefestival.html).

At the very juncture of exchange around Australian literature and its place in the world, and following discussions on the transnational turn, Jose has questioned the national image of Australia represented in our literature, which both embraces and moves beyond the past, with new voices from around the world contributing to the Australian canon (2009: 5-6). The selection of writers invited to take part in AWW since 2008 (see Table 1) is carefully curated to review a range of ages, genders, genres and ethnicities.

2019 Graeme Simsion, Julie Koh, Morris Gleitzman, Richard Fidler
2018 Richard Flanagan, Charlotte Wood, Alexis Wright, Fiona Wright
2017 Tom Keneally, Bronwyn Bancroft, Geraldine Brooks, John Marsden
2016 Robert Drewe, Clare Wright, Graeme Base, Jane Godwin
2015 A.J. Betts, Maxine Beneba Clarke, Tim Cope, Brooke Davis, Zohab Zee Khan, Paul Kelly, Jennifer Mills, Damon Young
2014 Ali Alizadeh, Jenevieve Chang, Benjamin Law, Alison Lloyd, Oliver Phommavanh, Gabrielle Wang, Pamela Williams, Leanne Hall, Dominique Wilson
2013 George Megalogenis, Meredith Badger, Ambelin Kwaymullina, Alison Lester, Pam Macintyre, Robert Newton, Ann James, Anne Spudvilas
2012 Tim Flannery, Janette Turner Hospital, Margo Lanagan, Maria Tumarkin, Ouyang Yu, Mark McKenna.
2011 Brian Castro, Kate Jennings, Mabel Lee, Julia Leigh, Jessica Rudd, Craig Silvey, Shirley Shackleton, Christos Tsiolkas
2010 Linda Jaivin, Robert Dessaix, Graham Freudenberg, Les Murray, Alice Pung, Alexis Wright
2009 Jane Godwin, Kate Grenville, Lucinda Holdforth, Mara Moustafine, Henry Reynolds
2008 Lily Brett, Anna Funder, Gail Jones, Nicholas Jose, Christopher Koch, Christopher Kremmer, Ouyang Yu

Table 1: Authors participating in AWW 2008-2019

In the list of writers featured in Table 1, over 10% have Asian-Australian heritage, including Ouyang Yu, Alice Pung, Brian Castro, Mabel Lee, Gabrielle Wang, Jenevieve Chang, Benjamin Law, Leanne Hall, Oliver Phommavanh, Zohab Zee Khan and Julie Koh. As Heilbron and Sapiro point out, "migratory phenomena" can play "a role in the circulation of works, depending on the socio-economic and cultural status of migrants"

(2016: 394). With 595,630 Chinese-born people living in Australia by June 2021, migrants from the PRC make up the third largest migrant community in Australia (Australian Government 2023). Within this migratory setting, and despite many Australian writers offering the experience of what Ommundsen calls "'Distant reading' – reading texts from cultural traditions very different from one's own" (2012: 4), there has been a firm attempt by the ACC to prioritise the work of Australia's talented writers who hail from an ethnic Asian background. Giramondo suggested that authors published in China "[…] have to be iconic names. Chinese descent is also useful". However, Chinese publishers were somewhat ambivalent about the attraction of writers with Asian background. On the one hand, they harboured the hope that the authors' Asian heritage could make their works resonate easily with the Chinese readers. On the other hand, they appeared very reluctant to run any commercial risk by selecting an author purely due to heritage, especially if the author in question enjoys no established reputation. Generally speaking, the literary reputation of the author creates a large amount of capital and takes priority over ethnic background. In interviews conducted with Chinese publishers, it was revealed that one of the key challenges in publishing Australian literary works is that, unlike the literary market in the U.S. or the U.K., a literary award of significant and symbolic international influence is missing in Australia, and thus selection of authors and works has no solid and convenient evidence base.

Chinese readers – many of whom may travel to Australia for the purpose of study, tourism or to visit relatives who have migrated – do appear drawn to Australian writers. But despite the apparently deliberate selection of many authors with Asian ethnicity featured in AWW, the list is unambiguously representative of many other migratory voices as well: authors who write about otherness, place and space within Australian culture and society such as Ali Alizadeh, Maria Tumarkin, Lily Brett, Christos Tsiolkas, Mara Moustafine and Maxine Beneba Clarke, or those who write from a transnational perspective, such as Nick Jose, Linda Jaivan, Anna Funder and Gail Jones. Whilst a range of genres is represented, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, journalism and children's literature, the most notable gap is in Indigenous voices; only three Indigenous writers – the highly successful Alexis Wright (translated by prominent Chinese translator Li Yao), Ambelin Kwaymullina and Bronwyn Bancroft – are on the list. Here, it is the absence of writers like Tara June Winch, Anita Heiss, Melissa Lukaschenko, Bruce Pascoe, Kim Scott, Sally Morhand, Larissa Behrendt, Tony Birch, Boori Monty Pryor, Nakkiah Lui, Jackie Huggans

and Marcia Langton that appears particularly palpable and it would seem that a rise in Indigenous representation on the AWW list would further diversify this canon of Australian writing for Chinese audiences.

3. Key findings and conclusion

Just as individuals are instrumental to the creation of literary networks across Australia and Mainland China, the AWW clearly acts as an important cultural driver for the selection of Australian works in translation.

One key finding was that literary works penned by writers featured as part of AWW were more often or more likely to be selected for translation into Chinese. For instance, with the assistance of the Australian Embassy in Beijing, Australian children's author Graeme Base was introduced to the editors of Changjiang Children's Publishing Group in Wuhan, who subsequently purchased the Chinese rights of all of Base's children's titles and planned for their systematic publication. An Australian writer invited to the 2019 event was, as a result of meeting authors, publishers and translators at AWW in China, in discussions with translator Li Yao about the translation of her latest novel. Australian writers also emphasised the importance of a dialogue and true cultural exchange between Australia and China: by taking part in AWW, they viewed themselves not only as ambassadors of Australian literature in China, but of Chinese literature in Australia.

The professional and inter-personal relationships that developed between writers and translators were also interesting to note. All writers stressed the crucial role played by translators and translation in this exchange: translators would often act as agents in the Chinese market, taking the writer to meet with Chinese publishers, for example, and providing interpreting. One writer expressed how important it was to him that his translator understood the 'voice' of his narrator and the humour of the text, without which, the translation would have fallen flat. The case of Alexis Wright and her translator Li Yao was particularly interesting; a firm friendship had formed between the two, hinging partially, it seemed, from Li Yao's keen interest in Wright's Chinese ancestry. As a translator and prolific agent of Australian literature in China, Li appears to be a particularly instrumental force, with considerable institutional sway. He has almost single-handedly introduced various Australian texts into China, beginning with his self-funded translation of Brian Castro's *Birds of passage* in 1991.

With the help of Nick Jose, Li Yao has translated Australian writers Kim Scott, Anita Heiss and Alexis Wright, aided in part by subsidies granted by the Australia China Council.[6]

Australian writer Graeme Base presents one of the best examples of success in the Chinese market. His children's titles have led to not only the purchase of the Chinese rights to his whole oeuvre by Changjiang Children's Books Company, but also the co-production of new titles, such as 龙月 (Long yue, or *The dragon moon*), whose Chinese translation was published in China in 2017, while the English-language version published later in Australia as *Moonfish* (2019). The conventional sequence of publication is clearly disturbed in this case, which also calls into question the concepts of translation and translator.[7] As part of this project, we joined Graeme Base for three days on one of his book tours in China in 2019, during which the Chinese translations of his titles sold an average of over 2,000 copies per day. By contrast, Chinese translations of most Australian titles would usually only undergo one print run of between 2,000-4,000 copies (Lawrence 2002: 46). Both Scribe and Giramondo cited the interest in children's books as particularly notable in the Chinese market, with Scribe claiming that "That sector of the market has definitely grown in recent years".

Scribe also noted that "Chinese publishers are acquiring fewer foreign books now, so I don't anticipate huge growth over the next few years". With China increasingly restricting the number of imported titles and encouraging exporting of Chinese works, what Scribe has observed might also be shared by other publishers attempting to get into the Chinese market. Base's Chinese publication, *The dragon moon*, was actually the Chinese publisher's effort to circumvent the governmental restrictions. By packaging the book as a co-production rather than a 'translation', the Chinese publisher effectively turned itself into an author and owner of the title. In other words, *The dragon moon* could be promoted by the Chinese publisher in China not as an imported title, but as an original work, which then had to be 'translated' into English in order to be published in Base's home country, Australia. Whenever the title is introduced into another language,

[6] He has translated, as part of an Australia Council and UWS grant, various classic Australian children's texts, including Ethel Turner's *Seven little Australians*, Dorothy Wall's *Blinky Bill*, May Gibbs' *Snugglepot and cuddlepie*, Ruth Park's *The muddle-headed wombat*.

[7] This is an interesting phenomenon worthy of further exploration, which is nevertheless beyond the scope of this paper.

the Chinese publisher could therefore claim that it has successfully exported the book to the international market.

As Zhang (2014: 521) writes,

> From Goethe and Marx to Casanova, Moretti, and Damrosch, the concept of world literature has been theorized mostly in the context of Western literary studies. Today, in world literature's tendency to go beyond Eurocentrism and any other ethnocentrism, the question necessarily arises: Is world literature to expand not only its coverage or reading materials to a global dimension, but also its critical and theoretical horizon to embrace the entire world, beyond the great East-West divide?

In conclusion, it appears that the national archive as represented in China, speaks to a much more diverse canon of Australian literature that embraces our migratory voices, although it quite clearly omits those of our Indigenous peoples. Thus, the canon of Australian literature as emerged in Chinese translations in the 21st century does appear to come some way to responding to a transnational literary practice, perhaps more so than Australia's own national canon.

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