Translation is an important way to transform Chinese literature into world literature. In 2022, Chinese Literature in the World: Dissemination and Translation Practices, co-edited by Junfeng Zhao, Defeng Li, and Riccardo Moratto, was published by Springer, focusing on the dissemination and translation practices of Chinese literature in the context of “world literature.” In addition to the “introduction,” the book is divided into three parts and a total of twelve chapters, each of which is written by well-known Chinese and non-Chinese scholars, discussing issues related to Chinese literature “Going Global.”

The first part, entitled “The International Dissemination of Chinese Fiction,” consists of five chapters. Analyzing the translation and reception of Chinese fiction in terms of literary genre or subgenre identification, Nicoletta Pesaro points out that textual genre influences the translator’s behavior and guides the reader’s taste and horizon of expectation, and therefore has an impact on the dissemination of translation.

In Chapter 2, Lintao Qi examines the construction and consumption of an exotic China in the Anglophone world by means of literary translation through the lens of (neo-)Orientalism, focusing on both texts and agents. Qi points out that “Orientalism” influences the choice of translated texts in the West and causes readers to misinterpret them. The cultural configurations in the Anglophone literary field have enabled such agents as translators, publishers, critics, and readers to construct and consume Chinese otherness.

Chapter 3, authored by Qiang Geng, conducts a meta-discursive examination of a large number of texts and discourses centered on the discursive stance of foreign translations of Chinese literature. Geng coins the term “translation discourse model,” which is a discursive form of translation or a specific way of discussing and doing translation which views the outbound translation of Chinese literature as a discursive event. Geng points out that four translation discourse models have been adopted in China’s modern history, which are cultural universalism (before 1949), cultural diplomacy, gaining cultural confidence, and increasing cultural soft power.

Chapter 4, authored by Huawen Liu and Hongyu Zhang, focuses on Chinese new historical fiction in the West, examining “historiography via translation.” If writing historical fiction is rewriting history, translating historical fiction is rewriting the rewritten history again. The authors point out that in the West, Chinese contemporary fiction is received in a critical or a translational way, or even in a more complex critical-translational way, and that translated contemporary Chinese fiction has been reified as comprising variations on linguistic utopia, dystopia, or heterotopia.

Based on the theory of “language-worldview,” Le Li and Riccardo Moratto discuss the ancient Chinese language and the worldview it conveys. Based upon the “Timely Mean” (時中), which first appeared in the I Ching and later became part of the thinking of Confucian scholars, referring to respecting differences, advancing with the times, and being willing to change, the authors propose a translation strategy for the Chinese canon that is intended to maintain the heterogeneity of the ideas conveyed by the canonical sphere.

The second part, entitled “Chinese literature in Europe,” consists of three chapters. Paolo Magagnin and Riccardo Moratto examine the challenges and prospects of Chinese Literature in Italy during the last decade. In recent years, the Italian market for modern and contemporary Chinese-language literature in translation has begun to show some signs of...
improvement, which is attributed to the work of medium-sized and small publishers, Chinese official support and funding programs, and a boom in some genres and literary forms (especially science fiction and children’s literature).

Maialen Marin-Lacarta examines translations of modern and contemporary Chinese literature in Spain (1949–2010). Between 1949 and 2010, most of the translations of modern and contemporary Chinese literature published in Spain were indirect translations from English or French. By analyzing the paratexts and commentaries of Spanish translations of Chinese literature, the author finds that the reception of Chinese literature in Spain was influenced by European Orientalism and regional studies, which echoes chapter 2.

Chapter 8 is a general survey of the English publications of modern and contemporary Chinese literature during the period from 2006 to 2016 on the basis of data from three Euro-American book-purchasing platforms, namely GObI, OTTO, and OASIS. During this decade, there were remarkable achievements in the publication of English translations of modern and contemporary Chinese literature. On the one hand, due to the growing interest of English-speaking readers in China, Western publishers or translators have taken the initiative in translating Chinese literature; on the other hand, the role played by China’s adoption of its “go-global” initiative and related projects should not be ignored, which echoes chapter 6.

The third part consists of four chapters, which are case studies of Chinese literary translations.

Baorong Wang examines Yijin Lin’s translation of Lu Xun’s works from the perspective of translation history. Although Lin’s translations were not so natural and fluent, the practice of translation by a native speaker for publication in the source language country made Lu Xun’s works accessible to foreigners in China at that time, and Lu Xun began to enjoy an international reputation.

Chapter 9, authored by Lu Shao, focuses on iconicity and metaphor in translating poetry into sign language, cognitively analyzing the emotional metaphors in Chinese sign language. Through a comparative study of Alai’s The Song of King Gesar and its English translation by Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin, it addresses repetition and rhyme, symmetry and balance, neologisms, ambiguity, themes, metaphor and allusion, and performance in the translation of poetry into sign language.

From the perspective of translation ethics proposed by Chesterman, Junfeng Zhao, Yan Dong, and Yang Li examine ethical choices made in the complex translation environment by Andrew Jones, the English translator of Yu Hua’s Chronicle of a Blood Merchant, discussing how Jones reproduces the heterogeneous culture of the source language in the translated text and eliminates the reading barriers caused by the retention of heterogeneous culture to realize cultural exchange.

In the last chapter, the Italian sinologist Riccardo Moratto discusses the translation of nüshu (female script), a unique part of Chinese cultural heritage discovered in Jiangyong, Hunan Province in 1983. Western translations of nüshu are few and far between and in some cases are indirect translations from English or other Western languages. Moratto points out that nüshu should be translated based on the local dialect of the county of Jiangyong in order to be faithful to its original meaning and that the translation strategy of foreignization should be adopted to preserve the cultural characteristics of nüshu.

The twelve chapters are written by renowned Chinese and non-Chinese scholars, who take multifaceted and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of the process of Chinese literature “going global.” The book explores both the current dissemination of Chinese literature (part 1 and 2) and translation practice (part 3), providing both theoretical understanding and methodological guidance. It focuses not only on modern and contempo-
rary Chinese literature (chapter 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11), but also on the Chinese canon (chapter 5), as well as a unique aspect of Chinese cultural heritage, nüshu (chapter 12).

The book provides some insights into the dissemination and translation of Chinese literature. First, the support and funding programs from the Chinese government and the international awards won by Chinese authors have had a positive impact on the dissemination of Chinese literature in the world (chapter 3, 6, 8). Second, “Orientalism” still restricts the dissemination of Chinese literature (chapter 2, 7). Third, relative to the market for translation into such languages as English and French, there is still a large market for translating Chinese literature into niche languages like Italian and Spanish (chapter 6, 7). Finally, the mode of translation and publication of Chinese literature as well as translation strategies still need to be further studied.

However, the book is not free from limitations. First, the data used in some chapters, such as chapters 7 and 8, is not up-to-date and does not reflect the latest situation of the translation and dissemination of Chinese literature. Second, the book is entitled “Chinese Literature in the World,” but it lacks attention to the translation and dissemination of Chinese literature in countries outside the Western world. Third, one of the key terms in the subtitle of the book is “translation practices,” but it is pity that there is a lack of articles dealing with translators’ practice experience. More insights into the current practice of outbound translation of Chinese literature could have been provided if the book had also included a few articles on translators’ experience, as in the volume A Century of Chinese Literature in Translation (1919–2019): English Publication and Reception (Gerber & Qi, 2021), in which American sinologist-translators Carlos Rojas and Allan H. Barr share their voices.

Guohui Jiang, School of Foreign Languages, Southwest Jiaotong University.

REFERENCE