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“When we translate from one language to another, we not only reinvent ourselves, but we free up the constrictions of our own language” (Brian Castro quoted in Wang, 88). In this quotation Brian Castro, one of the most prominent Australian writers, touches upon the fundamentals of comparative studies, world literature, and translation studies that are, in fact, intertwined under the influence of the literary market.

Moreover, it epitomizes the key issues of the book as quoted in the title: *Translation in Diasporic Literatures*. Guanglin Wang’s book brings translation, diaspora and literature together under the scope of Chinese diasporic literature, as well as through questions such as: What is the limit and function of translation? Is there anything that is not translatable? What is the relationship between source and target texts, root and route in the context of diasporic literatures? Not limited to these intricate questions, Wang makes the reader encounter the concept of “fluidity”, which counters the idea of solidity/fixity in language and interrogates binary oppositions throughout the complex dynamics of “roots and routes” in diasporic literature. The book’s title, however, may be misleading, as it suggests that the work focuses on translation in diasporic literature(s) in a broader sense, while Wang’s central interest lies, in fact, in Chinese diasporic literature in Australia.

The audience familiar with Wang’s work may notice that some of the chapters are the recollection of articles published in various journals from 2012 to 2018. The book consists of seven chapters out of which five are based on previously published articles. Most of those articles are on Brian Castro’s oeuvre, a fact which again stands in sharp contrast with the plurality advertised in the title. Also, as a technical detail that

comes from the “article” structure, every chapter has been designed as a journal article with abstracts and keywords. Those readers who cherish a conventional book format may find themselves perplexed or disappointed by this structure. Nevertheless, through its unique format, readers are also endowed with the reiteration of the theoretical framework and summaries of key concepts, which help to navigate the work.

The main idea around which chapters are organized is that of cultural translation. In addition, chapters are bound together via the discussion of the concepts of diasporic literature, translation, and world literature chiefly through Homi Bhabha, Walter Benjamin, and Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical approaches. However, it is not possible to observe diversity in geo-cultural space since the focus does not shift to any other spaces other than Australia.

In the “Introduction,” Wang explains his devotion to the topic of translation and cultural identities of Chinese diasporic writers. Besides theorizing key concepts (translation, world literature, diaspora, exile), Wang positions himself as a “translatability” defender throughout the book starting from the Introduction. Regarding the engagement with key concepts, two points seem to need clarification: firstly, Wang uses “cultural translation” as a leading frame in the book, yet he does not give a concrete definition of it, nor does he challenge it. Instead, he simply characterizes cultural translation as “a means whereby they [Chinese diasporans] survive” (40). Secondly, although Wang criticizes binary oppositions, he fails to detect the binarism contained in the source-target, root-route pairs that, according to him, are the basis of cultural translation.

By referring to Salman Rushdie’s famous quote “we are translated men” (38), Wang reaffirms his perspective on cultural translation as a product of exilic life and expands it to a fruitful creation of origin and host cultures, root and route. And yet, since it can also be seen as a “domesticated translation” as Harish Trivedi pinpoints in his “Translation Culture vs. Cultural Translation,” Wang’s work would have benefitted from discussing different perspectives on the concept.¹

¹ Harish Trivedi. “Translating Culture vs. Cultural Translation.” Paul St-Pierre and Prafulla C. Kar (eds.), *In Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*, 277-289. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007.

For Wang, originality comes with motion – or translation: “A route, on the other hand, sets the localized community into motion and brings creativity and vitality” (5); “only by crossing the national borders can a nation maintain its nationality in the form of a pure language, which is embodied in all languages” (10). Likewise, for Wang, diasporic literature due to its multi-dimensional nature is creative and able to go beyond non-exilic or exilic literature. To him, Kafka’s, Beckett’s, and Joyce’s works are examples of fruitfulness that comes with exile (42). He criticizes western scholars such as Pascale Casanova or Emily Apter for being orientalist, adding that: “Perhaps they are afraid that the traditionally marginalized writers deprive them of their sense of superiority and literary power of discourse in *The World Republic of Letters*” (27).

The diversity in cultural translation that Wang celebrates is notwithstanding imbedded in the book itself: a Chinese academic writing in English and using western-based theoretical framework. That is to say that *Translation in Diasporic Literatures* seems to epitomize the very notion of its central message: cultural translation or diasporic literature brings diversity and/or widens the perspective of readers/writers and enhances creativity in literary products. Although Wang does not define his conception of diasporic literature, it is framed in the book as the set of literary products by Chinese descendant writers in Australia. In this sense, the book targets both Chinese critics and western scholars, in order to demonstrate the richness of this diasporic Chinese literature.

By emphasizing his stand as opposed to the idea of “incommensurability” (rejection of intercultural equivalence) and by defending the uniqueness of diasporic literatures, Wang shows his position: he puts forward a euphoric conception of translation. Wang defines the task of the translator as the capacity of conveying Chinese-Australian cultural identity to the Chinese reader “as mutually inclusive, both destructive and reconstructive, negative and positive, critical and creative” (17). One can claim that the mission Wang puts in front of the translator is to become an ambassador of culture in the name of multiculturalism in the homeland while from the exilic writer he expects him/her to be a translator/voice of the home who is outside of home.

The second chapter is the manifestation of the “translated man”: “[O]ne might say that author is dead, and the translator is born” (23). Regarding Roland Barthes’s “The Death of the Author” (1977), Wang presents the birth of translators through the “after life”² of a Chinese book in translation. The chapter focuses on the translator’s subjectivity and celebrates translation as “a medium for world literature,” “allowing us [readers] to cross borders,” and “challenging” the stories that we already know (28). Wang also highlights the idea that multilingualism creates “more windows” to look into and creates conditions for negotiation and “forming their own [multilingual] creations” (29). That overexuberant description of multilingualism appears to be blind towards certain layers of the world’s system. It must be considered that multiculturalism-multilingualism is also part of the postcolonial, immigrant and exilic experiences, and it is not always a positive experience to those people affected by it: it bears alienation, isolation and longing towards homeland and it may happen to avoid imprisonment/execution or political oppression (135).

For as much as Wang criticizes binary oppositions, it is hard to find a deconstructive approach or an alternative proposal for those oppositions in the book. According to him, Chinese culture, for example, is a counter-cultural capital that challenges western culture. Also, Chinese diasporic literature provides a fruitful dichotomy of origin and exile, and for Wang this is fundamental for creativity in diasporic literature. Likewise, in the third chapter, Wang exhibits Brian Castro’s *The Garden Book* (2005) as the hybrid product of such dichotomy.

In the fourth chapter, Wang operates with Benjaminian translation theory. The “broken vessel” is the critical metaphor for translation in this chapter. In this light, the translation is a new original, not a mimicry, yet – like a broken vase that was glued back together – it holds fragments of the authentic, primal work. The chapter concludes with an appreciation of a transcultural life filled with “brokenness”, a phenomenon of which, according to Wang, Brian Castro’s *Shanghai Dancing* (2003) is a good example.

² Walter Benjamin. “The Task of the Translator.” *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, 71. New York: Schocken Books, 2007.

The following chapter, in addition to considering the wholeness of a “broken vessel,” implies the productiveness that those “broken” parts can carry through Roman Jakobson’s concept of “intersemiotic translation” (74). According to Jakobson, intersemiotic translation is “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language”, and for Wang, this semiotic perspective “releases us from the prison house of language and poses a great challenge to logocentrism in the West where language is cherished above everything and dictates the traditional practice of translation” (74). Wang reminds us of the customary disregard of Chinese culture in the West which he attributes to the discrepancy between the Chinese writing system and the western alphabet, and he points out that: “Chinese language is quite rich as it includes both pictographic and ideographic elements” (80). Because the book incorporates images such as photos and postcards, some with Chinese characters on them, Wang considers *Shanghai Dancing* as an example of intersemiotic translation.

As is evident from the preceding chapters, the sixth one shows Wang once again objecting to the idea of untranslatability and relating the concept to the West’s “sense of incommensurability and binary oppositions” (107). In other words: Wang asserts that the notion of untranslatability is a product of a western way of thinking more than a theoretical issue. According to Wang, for example, considering the “sign or logos of the tribes” as “incomprehensible” and “untranslatable” is falling into the “scientism” trap. To further elaborate on this, Wang refers to the opening line of the Genesis – “in the beginning was the word” – and associates it with western culture in order show its limits: “In their mind, writing expresses serious thought while pictures are evanescent, and literature and philosophy deal with grand ideas while visual art is short lived and of little importance” (111). Wang escalates this perspective by describing untranslatability as a “linear mode of thinking” and adding that: “If Emily Apter argues for untranslatability, it is because the praise of fluency that has dominated the Anglo-American book market increases the hegemony and the concept of world literature dictated by the English curriculum and publishing industry, brought about by globalization” (118). While doing this, Wang mainly refers to Barbara Cassin’s *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (2014)

and Emily Apter's *The Translation Zone* (2005) and *Against World Literature* (2013) for a critique of untranslatability. According to Wang, translatability is the key to international communication, and debates on untranslatability only limit this communication and the creativity that comes along with translatability.

As a matter of fact, the sixth chapter displays richness in Chinese script and introduces an artistic work by B.K. Zora, *Encounter Series*, as a fruitful inspiration for intercultural encounter. The art of Zora, in Wang's view, is "a very good parody of the superiority of one language over the other or incommensurability between languages and cultures" (109). In *Encounter Series*, one can observe figures that combine Chinese characters with the English alphabet, which for Wang is a sign of intercultural creativity. In this chapter, yet again, Wang defines translation as a glamorous act, as he puts it, "a projection of a piece of literature into new possibilities" (116).

By looking at the chapters in general, it can be said that Wang's book gives both a broad view of translation studies and of world literature, as well as glances from postcolonial studies, whilst at the same time allowing the reader to focus on Chinese diasporic literature. For those readers who are interested in any of these areas of study, *Translation in Diasporic Literatures* promises a fluid and informative journey.