

Remembering Raymond Williams: His Theoretical Heritage to China's World Literature and Culture Studies

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Abstract: Raymond Williams, the eminent British Marxist literary theorist, was introduced to China in the late 1980s, and his theories have since been increasingly attractive to China's literary and cultural studies. He not only touched upon some of the fundamental issues of Marxist literary theory, such as ideology, culture, hegemony and aesthetics, but also developed it with his dynamic construction of a sort of cultural materialism, thus bridging between Marxist socio-historical and aesthetic criticism and cultural and linguistic factors. While literary and cultural theory is in decline in the West, Williams's legacy is still appreciated in international circles, which ought to be cherished and inherited by us Chinese scholars in our studies of world literature and culture.

Keywords: Raymond William, *Marxism and Literature*, world literature, literary theory, cultural studies, China

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When we talk about the issue of world literature in today's context, we cannot but remember how Goethe first conceptualized this topic even though he was not necessarily the first to use the term. Contemporary Western scholars are usually inspired by Goethe's conjecture on world literature viewing it as a process of literary production, circulation and translation.¹ Although they recognize the foundational contributions made by Marx and Engels to the formation of world literature as a theoretical concept in their co-authored book *Communist Manifesto*, they seldom follow this line of thought or explore the irreplaceable contribution of Marxism to the study of world literature and culture. As a matter of fact, Marx and Engels have made many insightful comments and criticisms on such classical writers in the history of world literature as Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Balzac, Dickens, Ibsen, et al., and their literary achievements. Their insightful ideas are undoubtedly of foundational value and significance to the Marxist thought on world literature studies, especially when literary studies are confronted with various challenges raised by cultural studies in the contemporary era. Following Marx's instructions, contemporary British Marxist literary and cultural theorists, including Raymond Williams, have also contributed a great deal.

1. British Studies of Marxism and World Literature

It is true that the fragmentary thoughts by Marx and Engels on literature and literary criticism have been interpreted and developed by the later Eastern and Western Marxist theorists, of whom, in the English-speaking world, British Marxist literary theorists like Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton have also contributed. Although they were not involved in the debate on the issue of world literature which started at the beginning of the present century, their theoretical contributions have frequently been quoted and dealt with in current world literature studies and debates, especially those written from a Marxist point of view. Frankly speaking, their insightful ideas and critical works on Marxist literary critical principle have also inspired us Chinese scholars in our literary and cultural studies. 2021 witnessed the commemoration of the centenary of Williams's birth, Marxist theorists throughout the world cherished him all the more as a pioneering figure of Marxist literary theory and attached particular importance to his literary and cultural as well as theoretical heritage.²

To discuss the issue of Marxism and world literature, we should start by reading the works of the founders of Marxism. Although Marx and Engels paid great attention to world literary phenomena, they were greatly inspired by the conception of world literature constructed by Goethe. According to the ready-made research, the term "Weltliteratur" is generally regarded as a "Utopian" concept elaborated by Goethe in conversations with the young scholar Johann Peter Eckermann in 1827. Goethe, then in his 70s, concluded after reading several non-Western literary works, including a few Chinese and Indian literary works: "I am more and more convinced [...] that poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men. [...] I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise everyone to do the same. National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach" (qtd. in Damrosch 1).

Here Goethe uses "poetry" to refer to literature in general, pointing out the common aesthetic features of the literature of all countries and nations, especially oriental literature which has largely been ignored but was attractive to readers throughout the world for a long time, thus constructing his view of world literature. Goethe does not think that there is much difference between Chinese and European writers as expressed in their literary works. But it should be admitted that, on the whole, Goethe's view of world literature still has a tinge of Eurocentrism, or more specifically, of German-centrism. It is ironic, however, that Goethe's concept of "world literature" was largely inspired by his reading of non-Western literary works, including some Chinese literary compositions of minor importance. Today's Chinese readers may have forgotten such minor works as *Hau Kiou Chooan or the Pleasing History* (Hao Qiu Zhuan) and others that Goethe read through English or French translations, but it was these works that inspired Goethe to come up with the idea of "world literature." This is something that we comparatists should pay particular attention to.

Later, in their co-authored book *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels borrowed the term to describe the "cosmopolitan character" of bourgeois literary and cultural production and circulation as a direct consequence of global capitalization. After examining the global expansion and growth of capitalism around the world, they concluded: "And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous

national and local literatures, there arises a world literature” (Marx and Engels 69). Here, Marx and Engels, obviously inspired by Goethe’s earlier conjecture, want to point out that the formation of world literature has its own law. They actually view the appearance of world literature as a consequence of globalization in culture. Thus they have largely broadened the scope of world literature which even includes all bourgeois cultural and intellectual production and circulation in a cosmopolitan way. As a result of such production and circulation of intellectual culture, world literature and world culture are closely related to the transnational material production and circulation, and that is also a natural consequence of it.

No doubt the Marxist way of observing literary and cultural phenomena has influenced and inspired British Marxist literary theorists, including Raymond Williams, in their study of world literature and culture. Although Marxism has been a guiding principle in China’s socialist revolution and construction, there is not much domestic introduction to the study of world literature by the Western Marxists. Williams in China seems to be more important in cultural studies than in literary fields. One academic monograph available in the Chinese context that deals with the topic of Marxism and world literature is the book *Karl Marx and World Literature* by Siegbert Solomon Prawer, who was then the Taylor Professor of the German Language and Literature at the University of Oxford. The book was published in Britain in 1976 and its Chinese version became available in 1981. This book primarily reviews Marx’s critical comments on some outstanding writers and works in the history of world literature, which was soon introduced to China and has been highly evaluated by Chinese scholars since its publication in Chinese in 1981. However, Prawer does not view world literature as a theoretical concept, nor is his book a substantial study of Marxist literary thought. But, admittedly, the book still reveals the fact that Marx’s interest in literary creation and criticism is not isolated, but is linked to his reflections on the great social and political problems in which he finds himself. It is true that according to the author,

This is not a book about Marxism nor an attempt to construct yet another Marxist theory of literature. It seeks, instead, to present to the English reader, as fairly and fully as the author’s own orientation allows, what Marx said about literature at various times in his life; what use he made of the many novels, poems, and plays which he read for enjoyment, recreation, or instruction; and how he introduced, into works not overtly concerned with literature, the terminology and concepts of literary criticism. (Prawer vii)

It is true that the book is not theoretical but it is rather very interesting for its stories and anecdotes about Marx’s interest in and love for world literature. No doubt the author wants to let the English-speaking reader know that Marx’s own love for literature and commentaries on literary creation and criticism have laid the foundation for Marxist literary theory and world literature studies. Although Marx was primarily a great thinker and philosopher, he never wrote a book-length work of literary criticism, from time to time his economic, philosophical, and political writings reveal his insights into literary creation and theoretical discussion. If, in commenting on Marx’s own reading and criticism of world literature, Prawer utilized a wealth of primary sources, then discussing the social and cultural realities of the second half of the 20th century is certainly a reality that Marx himself cannot experience. So the value of his book also lies in its creative elaboration of Marxist

fundamentals to explain today's socio-cultural realities:

The prophecy of *The Communist Manifesto* has not, however, gone wholly unfulfilled. We have seen, in this our twentieth century, a world-wide dissemination and mingling of "national and local" literatures, through translations, paperbacks, theatre-tours, broadcasts, films, and television, which have transformed our cultural perspective in ways that would not have surprised Marx. "World literature" has arrived with a vengeance—as a vast Imaginary Museum, as a great Library of Babel. (Prawer 146)

What Prawer tries to emphasize here in the book is that, although Marx himself could not foresee the rapid development of modern society, and therefore did not foresee the literary situation in today's post-industrial and postmodern society, yet Marx still accurately predicted some of the symptoms of the present age, in accordance with the inexorable laws of history. Indeed, as a result of the development and renewal of the means of production and circulation, the production and circulation of literature have been greatly facilitated, which has led to the expansion of the dissemination of literature into a universal sphere, rather than merely being limited to specific ethnic groups and countries as was the case in the past. Therefore, contemporary Marxist theorists and scholars in the creative and constructive interpretation of Marxism has a lot of space. In this respect, Williams has published quite a lot of both literary works and critical and theoretical works from the Marxist point of view enabling British Marxist literary theory and criticism to be unique among various Western Marxist theories.

2. Re-reading Williams's *Marxism and Literature*

If we say that Prawer's pioneering book merely describes some of his own personal views regarding how Marx himself admires and discusses world literature and its classical authors, then we should say that it was Williams who has made a thorough and systematic study of Marxist literary theory and achieved considerable innovations. His monumental book *Marxism and Literature*, as the "best and most fully coherent" of Williams's "Marxist theoretical series" explores in a critical way some of the fundamental issues in Marxist literary theory:

On the one hand, it conducts a characteristically coded struggle against French notion of the arbitrary sign. On the other hand, the text is a rewarding encounter with all the elements of a Marxist cultural and literary theory, on which numerous improvements are convincingly worked (Fekete 733).

It is true that Williams starts his exploration of Marxist literary theory from its most basic element: language, which various formalist and structuralist theorists have also attached great importance. Thus Williams could pursue a dialogue with the linguistic-centered formalist and structuralist literary theories while developing Marxist dialectical and historical materialism. He points out in a pertinent way, "The formalists were then right to give priority to the specific material articulation which is a literary work. But they were wrong to specialize this emphasis to 'literary language.'

They were right to explore the articulation in concrete ways, as in the doctrine of specific ‘devices’” (Williams 191). Thus Williams tries to bridge Marxist dialectical and historical materialism and various formalist doctrines with the factor of culture. Unlike some of the Western academic Marxist theorists, who only view Marxist doctrine as one of the Western philosophical doctrines, Williams had a certain natural affinity with Marxism. The fact that Williams became known in Britain as a Marxist theorist is by no means surprising. Born into a working class family, Williams knew clearly how hard the working class people’s lives were at the time, of which he had ample personal experience. It was thus easier for him to accept Marxist theory and involve himself actively in the British Marxist movement. He understood Marxism in a correct way: “Yet in the transition from Marx to Marxism, and in the development of mainstream Marxism itself, the proposition of the determining base and the determined superstructure has been commonly held to be the key to Marxist cultural analysis” (75). His belief in Marxism led him to explore the essence of Marxist literary thought regarding literary creation and criticism.

Also, as we know, Britain has had a long tradition of Marxism, and Marx in his own lifetime paid particular attention to Britain’s working class movement and wrote many of his books and articles at the British Library. There are still today quite a few scholars in British universities who call themselves Marxists. As leading Marxist theorists in Britain, Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton are really outstanding and the most influential, not only in Britain but also elsewhere, including in China. They are both literary scholars and critics, with many of their works translated into Chinese and are frequently discussed in the Chinese context. So their works have themselves become world literature. I myself became acquainted with Terry Eagleton in the 1990s and invited him to attend the international conference I organized in Dalian in 1995. He gave an eloquent keynote speech which impressed all the audience.³ Although neither Eagleton nor Williams have made a comprehensive and in-depth study of the topic of world literature, their thoughts and discussions on some fundamental theoretical issues have indeed provided important basis for today’s scholars to further their investigations of world literature and culture.

Unlike Marx and Engels, Williams pays particular attention to the dimension of language and culture in his literary theory which was largely neglected even by Marx himself. To Williams, “literature is the process and the result of formal composition within the social and formal properties of a language” (46). So he attaches particular importance to language in constructing his system of Marxist literary theory. For him, “Literature, it is said, is a particular kind of work in the medium of language. Anything else, though important, is peripheral to this: a situation in which the real work is begun, or in which it is received. The work itself is in ‘the medium’” (158). If we sum up Orthodox Marxism as dialectical materialism and historical materialism, then Williams’s Marxist literary and cultural critical principle can be summed up as a kind of cultural materialism in which language and culture play a key role; where language functions as a “medium.” But on the other hand, he holds, “Language is not a pure medium through which the reality of a life or the reality of an event or an experience or the reality of a society can ‘flow.’ It is a socially shared and reciprocal activity, already embedded in active relationships, within which every move is an activation of what is already shared and reciprocal or may become so” (166). Thus language is also a sort of social, cultural, and aesthetic medium rather than merely linguistic and formal medium. Just as Eagleton surmizes, “The phrase ‘cultural materialism’ had been coined in the 1980s by Britain’s premier

socialist critic, Raymond Williams, to describe a form of analysis which examined culture less as a set of isolated artistic monuments than as a material formation, complete with its own modes of production, power-effects, social relations, identifiable audiences, historically conditioned thought-forms" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 198). It is true that in his theoretical system, Williams not only inherited some of the fundamental principles of Marxist dialectical and historical materialism, but also developed them in a creative and constructive way by incorporating in it the cultural factor, according to specific conditions in the contemporary era. In the first chapter "Basic Concepts" of *Marxism and Literature*, Williams begins with his own definition of literature as distinguished from other concepts like politics, ideology, and sociology:

It is relatively difficult to see "literature" as a concept. In ordinary usage it appears to be no more than a specific description, and what is described is then, as a rule, so highly valued that there is a virtually immediate and unnoticed transfer of the specific values of particular works and kinds of work to what operates as a concept but is still firmly believed to be actual and practical. Indeed the special property of "literature" as a concept is that it claims this kind of importance and priority, in the concrete achievements of many particular great works, as against the "abstraction" and "generality" of other concepts and of the kinds of practice which they, by contrast, define. Thus it is common to see "literature" defined as "full, central, immediate human experience," usually with an associated reference to "minute particulars." (Williams 45)

Since literature is viewed as an art of language, it should be characterized by being "imaginary", "symbolic" and "poetic" different from those concepts like politics, ideology and even (material) culture, for Williams was also an eminent writer who has published a number of creative works. Then he makes a careful examination of his own nation's literature as a particular case, the history of British literature, although his focus is mainly on the canonical works: "Appeals to the history of literature, over its immense and extraordinarily various range, from the *Mabinogion* to *Middlemarch*, or from *Paradise Lost* to *The Prelude*, cause a momentary hesitation until various dependent categories of the concept are moved into place: 'myth,' 'romance,' 'fiction,' 'realist fiction,' 'epic,' 'lyric,' 'autobiography'" (46).

As we know, English literature is important part of world literature with quite a few great writers as world-class authors, so the works he mentioned above are also classics of world literature. Their significance and influence have already transcended the boundaries of the English-speaking world and entered a global cultural context, therefore, the theoretical problems of universal significance that he raised are also applicable to the study of other national literatures, especially to us contemporary Chinese literary and cultural scholars. In addition, Williams visited Western Europe, North America and a number of Asian countries in order to investigate the Marxist movement and the state of research there, while writing this almost "pure theoretical" academic monograph, *Marxism and Literature*, in order to highlight the relatively universal significance of his literary thought. On the basis of his extensive reading of Marx's original work, he found that Marxism, by contrast, had contributed little to the theory of language itself, so he set out from there with the important idea of "cultural materialism":

Many of the problems which have emerged from this history are relevant to Marxism, and in certain areas Marxism itself has contributed to them; by extension from its basic revaluation, in historical materialism, of the received major categories. Yet it is significant that, by comparison, Marxism has contributed very little to thinking about language itself. (Williams 21)

Thus he started with the issue of language as he knew that literature should be viewed as an art of language, and thinks it necessary to further his elaboration of cultural materialism from language. If we look at the reception of his book in countries and regions outside the Western world, including in China, we can say that his goal has basically been achieved.

As we know, both Marx and Engels paid particular attention to realist literary creation: Marx even sums up the characteristics of Shakespeare's works as "Shakespeareanization," namely, the conscious literary content combined with Shakespeare-like characterization. Engels defines realism by highlighting the truth of the details. Williams also explores such fundamental issues in literary creation:

The simplest theories of "reflection" were based on a mechanical materialism. But a different account appeared possible if "the real world", instead of being isolated as an object, was grasped as a material social process, with certain inherent qualities and tendencies. As earlier in idealism, but now with altered specification, art could be seen as reflecting not separated objects and superficial events but the essential forces and movements underlying them. This was in turn made the basis for distinction between "realism" (dynamic) and "naturalism" (static). (96)

Since according to the Marxist literary principles, the force of an excellent realist work should be characterized by representing the typical character under the typical circumstances, apart from its truth of the details. Thus Williams also pays considerable attention to the Marxist key concept of typification and tries to distinguish it from type:

But "type" can still be understood in two radically different ways: as an "emblem" or "symbol", or as the representative example of a significant classification. It is the latter sense that has been predominant in Marxist thinking.... There is a persistent presupposition of a knowable (often wholly knowable) reality in terms of which the typification will be recognized and indeed (in a normal process in "Marxist criticism") verified. This presupposition repeats, if in more complex and at times very sophisticated forms, the basic dualism of all theories centered on the concept of "reflection" or, in its ordinary sense, "mediation," or, we can now add, the ordinary sense of "typification." (102-103)

Thus Williams has grasped the essence of Marxist literary principles and also developed the Marxist idea of typification into a sort of paradigm which can be followed and practiced by contemporary and future writers and artists.

Although I first read Williams's book many years ago, I still feel it is very fresh as I read

it now in the new context. To recollect a bit about my reading experience of this book here is also necessary. I first read this book in the late 1980s when the name of Raymond Williams was unfamiliar to Chinese readers. But I was immediately impressed by his unique ideas and dynamic understanding and creative development of Marxist literary theory which is entirely different from the Marxist literary theory interpreted by those dogmatists and vulgar sociologists. Nor are they similar with those formalist-oriented structuralist literary doctrines. Today, when I read this work once again in the context of globalization and world literature, I still find that many of the fundamental problems addressed by Williams are still being discussed in the current theoretical debate on the issues of world literature and cultural studies. Many years ago I thought that we Chinese literary theorists and critics needed them in constructing our own Marxist theoretical body of literary and art criticism. Then I wrote a short book review and had it published in a leading Chinese journal of literary and art studies for I had recognized at the time that it was Williams's original contribution to world Marxist literary studies.⁴ Some of the key concepts like hegemony, dominant, residual, and emergent forms of culture are still key concepts in today's cultural studies circles. So the book, apart from being regarded as world literature and world poetics, it should also be viewed as a significant contribution to global culture. Later, when elite literature and culture was on the decline, Williams still remains very central in China's literary and cultural critical circles due to his great works and significant influence in the field of cultural criticism and cultural studies, about which I will say a little in the final part of my article.

3. Williams's Legacy to China's Literary and Cultural Studies

People may well ask this question: Why could William's theory still attract Chinese readers as well as China's literary and cultural theorists as literature and elite culture have been in decline during the current age of globalization? I think one of the reasons is that Williams does not deal with literature from the abstract notion of ideology, but rather, bases his theoretical elaboration on his own literary creation and criticism. Even in the book *Marxism and Literature*, he still spends much time discussing cultural issues and trying to distinguish between literature and culture and ideology. Thus it does not read dogmatically but is still convincing to readers. Similarly, his theoretical doctrine certainly has something to do with the critical situation at the time, when China had just entered the era of reform and opening-up to the outside world, and there was a "linguistic turn" in the field of literary theory and criticism. That is to say, the previous Marxist socio-historical criticism had little regard for the reading and interpretation of literary texts, so that this mode of criticism was challenged by the later introduction and practice of formalist criticism and then the new criticism translated from Russia and the English-speaking critical circles. Obviously, the formalist criticism pays considerable attention to the form of literature, that is the language with which literary works are created. But since it pays too much attention to the formal dimension of a literary work, it lacks historical consciousness, critical analysis and theoretical interpretation of literary works. Furthermore, it asserts so-called scientism while overlooking the social and cultural factors in literary criticism. Williams's cultural materialist approach has bridged the gap between the two since he attaches importance to both ideology and language never going far away from literary works proper.

Since the end of the 20th century and beginning of the new century, confronted with the impact of globalization and various newly emergent commercial and technological trends, literature and its theory have been increasingly marginalized. Even the more inclusive cultural theory is no longer so attractive as it used to be. Thus it is not surprising that Eagleton, who became well known in China in the 1980s largely for his popular textbook *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, could not but use the new term cultural theory instead of literary theory. But even in speaking of cultural theory, he still does not have full hope, but claims rather pessimistically:

The golden age of cultural theory is long past. The pioneering works of Jacques Lacan, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault are several decades behind us. So are the path-breaking early writings of Raymond Williams, Luce Irigaray, Pierre Boudieu, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said. Not much that has been written since has matched the ambitiousness and originality of these founding mothers and fathers. (Eagleton, *After Theory* 1)

Although theory may be on the decline in the West, it is not necessarily on the decline elsewhere, especially in China where scholars of literary and cultural theory are still keen on the most cutting edge international theoretical trends. Thus when we remember Williams, we certainly cherish all the more his tremendous contributions to Western Marxist literary and cultural theory and we try to assume his critical and theoretical heritage. He always maintains the position that “Literary theory cannot be separated from cultural theory, though it may be distinguished within it. This is the central challenge of any social theory of culture” (145). But what is the significance of Williams’ heritage to us Chinese scholars of literary and cultural studies? This is what I want to sum up before ending this essay.

As I have already briefly discussed Williams’s contribution to the study of world literature and culture, I here want to mention another important aspect of his influence. As we all know, Williams has made great achievements in the following three fields: (1) literary creation, for he has published novels, short stories, and plays, thus his official title at Cambridge before his retirement was professor of theatre; (2) literary theory, especially for his monumental work *Marxism and Literature*, which is not only characterized by the rise of a sort of cultural materialism, but itself also functions as world literature and world poetics; and last but not least: cultural criticism and cultural studies, for which he has been recognized as one of the pioneering and leading figures in Britain as well as in the entire English-speaking world. His “most important legacy” is largely regarded as the “emergent interdisciplinary field of cultural studies—a field that he, more than anyone else in the English-speaking world since the 1940s, pioneered and consolidated” (Fekete 731). Even when literary theory is on the decline in today’s post-theoretical era (Wang, “Gender Studies” 14-30), Williams is still viewed as one of the most important spokesmen and pioneers of British literary and cultural studies. Different from those dogmatic Marxist theorists, Williams applies the Marxist fundamental principle to contemporary social and cultural realities in a creative way and offers his insightful analyses of various social problems, thus developing Marxism in the new era. He believed that there were three cultures in Britain: The “dominant,” the “residual” and the “emergent” (121-122), which could also find embodiment in current China when we deal

with so-called Chinese modernity which is viewed as a sort of alternative modernity composed of premodern, modern, and postmodern elements (Wang, "Multiplied Modernities" 617-622). To Williams, "Since we are always considering relations within a cultural process, definitions of the emergent, as of the residual, can be made only in relation to a full sense of the dominant" (Williams 123). Namely, Williams stresses that culture is a dynamic process of formation rather than something stagnant, nor is it a simple reflection of "foundation" as it is "productive." He thereby always tried in his lifetime to seek for a common culture.

Just as Eagleton pertinently sums up, "For Williams, a common culture is one which is continuously remade and redefined by the collective practice of its members, not one in which values framed by the few are then taken over and passively lived by the many. For this, he prefers the term 'culture in common'" (Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* 119). This has certainly given us insightful illuminations to understand Williams's cultural heritage. I am particularly indebted to Williams for his above achievements in all the three fields. I did cultural studies and even introduced this research approach to the Chinese scholarship as early as in the 1990s when I had been chiefly engaged in comparative and world literature studies. Inspired by Williams's practice in the above three fields, I also try to combine cultural studies with literary studies by putting the analyses of world literary phenomena in a broad cultural context. What has inspired me most is that in Williams, literary studies are not necessarily opposed to cultural studies, but rather in a dialogic state of co-existing and complementing with cultural studies. It is not surprising that Williams attached great importance to both in literary critical field as well as in that of cultural studies, for he did well in both fields.

Following Williams's example, I, as a comparatist, always try to expand the narrow domain of literary study trying to put literary phenomena in a broader cross-cultural context. And when I am doing cultural studies, I always try not to go too far away from literature and literary studies. The same is true of many of my Western precursors like Northrop Frye, F. R. Leavis, and Raymond Williams. This is also a characteristic of China's cultural studies which are somewhat combined with literary studies, with so many eminent literary scholars involved in both. It is indeed that due to the joint efforts made by these literary scholars, current China's cultural studies have taken on a new look different from its counterpart in the West. Or we should say that we are now moving toward the construction of a sort of cultural studies with Chinese characteristics. In the contemporary era, the connotation of culture has also been largely changed. Just as Eagleton correctly points out when dealing with the idea of culture,

This idea, like most officially sacred spaces, was both venerated and ignored, centred and sidelined. Culture was no longer a description of what one was, but of what one might be or used to be. It was less a name for your own group than for your bohemian dissenters, or, as the nineteenth century drew on, for less sophisticated peoples living a long way off. For culture no longer to describe social existence as it is speaks eloquently of a certain kind of society. (*The Idea of Culture* 31)

Thus, this sort of cultural studies in the Chinese context will not only incorporate many of the issues discussed and being discussed in current Western academia, but also combine studies

of cultural issues and phenomena, such as traditional Chinese culture and its products (local operas and folk literature, etc.), as well as contemporary Chinese culture and its products (film and TV), consumer culture and community culture, and even internet writing and TikTok. Only by maintaining such an open and pluralistic attitude toward different cultures can we push China's cultural studies forward and make it able to exchange and carry on equal dialogue with literary studies as well as international cultural studies scholarship.

Judging by the above practice, I should say that many of us Chinese scholars of literary and cultural studies are more or less indebted to Raymond Williams for his theoretical doctrine and the critical principles he left us over thirty years ago, but his theory and works are still discussed in today's literary and cultural studies circles, which will continue to guide us in China's literary and cultural studies in the future. Perhaps that is the best way for us to remember Williams and his great contribution to developing Marxist literary and cultural theory in the contemporary era.

Notes

1. Cf. David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* Princeton UP, 2003.
2. In order to commemorate the centenary of Raymond Williams's birth, Swansea University, in collaboration with Shenzhen University organized an online symposium on 27 October 2021. I was invited to give a keynote speech, based on which I revised and rewrote it into the present essay. I just expressed my heartfelt thanks to the organizers for their kind invitation. Thanks also go to Yanyu Zeng and Haiyan Ren who invited me to deliver online part of the essay in the International Colloquium "Building Bridges, Broadening Horizons: China and Latin America" held on 20-21 April 2022 in Changsha.
3. At the invitation of Ralph Cohen, Editor of *New Literary History* then, who also gave a keynote speech at the conference, Eagleton revised his keynote speech and had it published. Cf. Terry Eagleton, "The Contradictions of Postmodernism." *New Literary History*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1997, pp. 1-6.
4. Cf. Ning Wang, "Williams' *Marxism and Literature*" (Chi.), *Literature and Art Studies* (Chi.), no. 1, 1986, pp. 135-136.

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