DAVID DER-WEI WANG

Introduction
Chinese Literature across the Borderlands

This special issue seeks to explore the shifting definitions of the borderland as a geopolitical space, a territorial gateway, a contact zone, a liminal terrain, a "state of exception," and an imaginary portal. In eleven essays, this issue explores the intersection of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and ecological dynamics that inform the cartography of the Chinese borderland, from the Northeast to the Southwest, from Inner Mongolia to Tibet, and from Nanyang 南洋 (Southeast Asia) to Nanmei 南美 (Latin America). It reflects on the recent, interdisciplinary growth in understanding the characteristics of borders and frontiers, including migration and settlement, cultural hybridity, and transnationalism. It also examines the boundaries of literature as it manifests itself in multiple forms of media and mediation.

The Chinese equivalents to "borderland" include expressions such as *bianjiang* 邊疆, *bianchui* 邊陲, *bianjing* 邊境, and *biandi* 邊地, among others, all denoting the highly contested space in which people of different beliefs, ethnicities, and communities interact with each other. We call attention to the rich etymological roots of *bian* 邊. As a noun, *bian* means marginality, tangentiality, partiality, and waywardness, as opposed to the center or centrality, thus suggesting a state of precarity and uncertainty. As a verb, however, it means to bring close two entities or lands instead of contrapuntally defining them in terms of centers and peripheries. As is suggested by its Latin equivalent, *proximare*, *bian* refers equally to the acts of bringing close and setting apart. Hence borderland studies engages with the polemics of proximity as it arises from the meeting and parting of diverse regions, peoples, cultures, histories, literatures, and concepts.

Methodologically, borderland studies looks into the dynamics—and disavowal—of encounters and entanglements. Whereas "encounter" implies the meeting up of two or more parties (entities) and the negotiation of human relationships, as well as the delimiting of ecological and even cosmological boundaries, "entanglement" points to the taxonomy of the causes and consequences of

PRISM: THEORY AND MODERN CHINESE LITERATURE • 18:2 • OCTOBER 2021
DOI 10.1215/25783491-9290623 • © 2021 LINGNAN UNIVERSITY

said encounter, and more, the rhizomic relations, potentialities, and contingencies embedded therein. As such, borderland studies seeks to examine the affective and cognitive responses to circumstances ranging from political mutations to psychological provocations, from environmental shakeups to territorial alterations.

When we come to the borderlands of China and "Chineseness," the *problématique* of ethnicity and territorialization looms large. For centuries, whereas the center part of the Chinese mainland has constituted the "Middle Kingdom," its borders and resultant cultural manifestations have constantly shifted. There were even times when the centers of today's China, such as the Beijing area or the Yangtze River valley, were deemed borderlands. This fact necessitates a more rigorous critique of discourses based merely on the logic of polarization (inside versus outside; the civilized versus the barbarian) both in history and in our time. Let us revisit the debate over the (Han-centered) Chinese *hua* 華 and the barbarian *yi* 夷, a tradition traceable to the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE) or ever earlier. While *hua* could be understood as "Chineseness" writ large, it is conceptually bound to its constitutive outside, *yi*, which broadly encompasses the "non-Chinese" other. Nevertheless, insofar as *hua* indicates not only (Han-centered) identity but also cultural upbringing and the outcome of ethnic assimilation, one observes numerous accounts in Chinese historiography in which *yi* was cultivated in such a way as to become *hua* while, vice versa, *hua* lost its valence and transformed into *yi*. "Bordering" the Chineseness of China has been a far more mercurial experience than what would have been expected by dogmatic historians.

The recent emergence of Sinophone studies has shed significant light on Chinese borderland studies, particularly in the area of language and literature. But the extant paradigm of Sinophone studies tends to reject mainland China and embrace overseas Chinese-speaking communities in terms of the postcolonial, dichotomous model, thus simplifying the tentacular relations in between. As a matter of fact, it replicates the conventional *hua* versus *yi* model by reversing its order, favoring *yi* over *hua*. Granting the rationale of the paradigm, we argue that the dynamics of territorial, ethnic, and cultural alterity and changeability have always already existed within and without China. A truly engaged Sinophone studies, therefore, has to be historically grounded; instead of invoking merely the politics of the "other," it has to critically contemplate on the "other's others," so as to render a "thick" appraisal of any given subject. We call the fluid, heterogeneous horizons adjacent to the Sinosphere the Xenophone, and regard any Sinophone studies as underscored by a Sinophone/Xenophone entanglement. Thus, to play on the conventional phrase of *huayi zhi bian* 華夷之辨, or on the distinction between *hua* and *yi*, we propose a supplemental discourse based on the contingency/transformation of *hua* and *yi*: 華夷之變 *huayi zhi bian*, which attends to Sinophone/Xenophone studies across different historical moments.

Following this thread, we can better appreciate the sea change of *hua* and *yi* and its geopolitical underpinnings throughout modern times: from Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 (1849–1916) attempt to theoretically bind the ethnically disparate populations administered by the Qing dynasty through the creation of an ethnonationalist "Chinese nation" (*Zhonghua minzu* 中華民族) to Sun Yat-sen's 孫中山 (1866–1925) advocacy of the principle of "Five Races under One Union" (*wuzu gonghe* 五族共和) at the founding of the Republic of China (ROC) in 1911; and from the Soviet-inspired "ethnic minorities" (*shaoshu minzu* 少數民族) system, implemented after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), to the latest promotion of China as a solidarity of "Multinationalities" (*duominzu guojia* 多民族國家). Meanwhile, scholars have offered various models to review the question of borderlands from which to understand China. For instance, the late anthropologist Fei Xiaotong 費孝通 popularized the motto of *duoyuan yiti* 多元一體 (a unified body of multifarious components) while stressing the ethnic "corridors" (*minzu zoulang* 民族走廊) that facilitate cultural, economic, and political linkages. Zhao Tingyang 趙汀陽 recapitulates the ancient concept of "all under heaven" (*tianxia* 天下), projecting a spatial utopia without borderlands; by contrast, Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光 looks at China from its Sinitic peripheries (*cong zhoubian kan zhongguo* 從周邊看中國) and maps out the "history of cultural entanglements" (*jiaocuode wenhuashi* 交錯的文化史) in relation to China proper. In his recent work, Kyle Shernuk proposes the "Sinophone network" as a framework through which to analyze such Chinese/ethnoscapes.

It is under a historical and theoretical rubric that this special issue was conceived and developed. We have chosen a specific entry point—literature in the broadest sense—to engage with the topics raised above. We believe that literature, as a linguistic and medial construct, a representational and re-presentational apparatus on behalf of the modern nation/state, and, most important, a speculative art of the immemorial and unthinkable, best manifests the politics and poetics of borderland studies in the Chinese/Sinophone context. Literature serves as the venue in which encounters and entanglements—for good or ill—happen. As demonstrated by these eleven essays, this special issue takes up both the literary themes and the ethical questions that alternately inspire and challenge us, such as normalcy and precarity, subjectivity and alterity, intimacy and (in)difference, territorialization and deterritorialization, sovereignty and autonomy, hospitality and hostility. It also reflects on the possibilities of borderland and Sinophone studies as two distinct yet mutually reinforcing paradigms for investigating these issues. This possibility is made particularly productive by the various meanings of *bian*, or the border, discussed above. If borderland studies encourages us to think about nationally constructed borders and their geographically specific borderlands, then Sinophone/Xenophone studies enables us to investigate the formation

of linguistic, cultural, and ethnic borderlands, both as part of but also beyond such national projects.

This special issue is comprised of three interrelated modules: "bordering" national imaginaries, ethnic negotiations, and Sinophone and Xenophone articulations. In the first module, three studies examine how modern Chinese writers of different periods and regions come to terms with nation-building projects, regional consciousness, and indigenous culture. Miya Qiong Xie's essay reconsiders the modern Manchu-ethnic Chinese writer Duanmu Hongliang 端木蕻良 (1912–1996) and his saga *Ke'er qinqi caoyuan* 科爾沁旗草原 (The Korchin Banner Plains; 1939) from a contested borderland perspective. The novel has been hailed as a realistic portrait of the natural and social landscape of the grassland and an autobiographical account. Xie treats instead the novel as a performative form of "territory-making" that purposefully recreates a Han-centered modern nation from its geographic margins by carefully reorganizing a web of intricate and competing multiethnic and multinational relations in the grassland. Yanshuo Zhang's essay investigates the underexamined ethnic motifs of Shen Congwen's 沈從文 (1902–1988) fiction. Despite his image as forerunner of May Fourth "native soil" literature in relation to national discourse, Shen grounds his imagination in non-Han and non-Sinitic regionalism. Shen decouples ethnicity from the nation by portraying the Miao as passionate moral agents living freely in a stateless society, regulated by divine powers and authentic emotions. As such, Shen's ethnically themed works are significant for forming new scholarly understandings of both May Fourth literature and the broader discourse of ethnicity. Levi Gibbs's article examines three novels set in the border region of northern Shaanxi Province that contain different visions of the "wild other," including a lone Xiongnu soldier, a revolutionary bride, and a traditional girl from the countryside. These stories challenge Confucian and socialist assumptions that peripheral peoples gravitate toward a "civilized" center; instead, they present instances where the wild brings vibrancy to the civilized, where the center is drawn to the periphery, and where the "backward" rural and "modern" city are alternately desired and dismissed.

In the second module, three studies seek to assess how different ethnic groups engage with autochthonous cultural and ethnic identities by means of linguistic and literary experimentation. Christopher Peacock's article takes up the Tibetan writer Tsering Döndrup's 次仁頓珠 (1961–) bilingual writing and the dilemma of indigenous articulation versus a national pedagogical agenda. It examines the techniques and implications of Tsering Döndrup's use of Chinese in his Tibetan-language texts, with his "Baba Baoma" 爸爸寶馬 (2019) as a case in point. It argues that the novella pushes Tsering Döndrup's previous experiments to their logical conclusion: a condition of forced bilingualism, in which the author demands of his readers fluency in Chinese in order to access his Tibetan-language fiction. The article concludes by proposing that Tsering Döndrup's story represents not

only a critique of the diminished role of the Tibetan language in "China's Tibet," but a provocative suggestion that the Tibetan literary text itself is in the process of being fundamentally redefined by its unequal encounter with the Chinese language. E. K. Tan's article looks into the Uyghur writer Padi Guli's 帕蒂古麗 (1965–) literary journey to retrieve her familial lineage and ethical identity—in the Han language. It reads Padi Guli's family saga *Bainian xuemai* 百年血脈 (A Hundred Years of Bloodline; 2014) against the PRC's ethnic minority policy to examine the implications of the protagonist's cultural, linguistic, and geopolitical border crossing as she comes to terms with ethnic amalgamation as a necessary mode of survival. The novel concludes with a positive message calling for ethnic integration into the state. Tan calls this embrace of a state-sanctioned concept "conciliatory amalgamation." Mark Bender's article examines the acoustic and remediated communications of ethnic poets in the "vertical landscapes" of Zomia, or the borderlands of southwest China and northeast India. Minority poetic voices throughout the region often respond to the radical environmental and cultural shifts with imagery delivered in very personal terms. Mutual awareness of these cross-border poetries is slowly emerging, revealing that themes of poems from within these border areas often share common concerns, while retaining their local characteristics.

The third module comprises three articles on individual Chinese/Sinophone writers' adventures into Xenophonic territories across modern times (1930s, 1940s–1950s, 1980s), their unlikely encounters, their transborder and translingual practices, and their cosmopolitan reflections on identity politics. Brian Bernards deals with the leftist writer Ai Wu's 艾蕪 (1904–1992) "passage to Myanmar" in the early 1930s. He argues that it is from this Sinophone positioning on the margins of and outside China that Ai Wu develops a transborder poetics that he contributes to China's left-wing literary politics upon his repatriation, and which serves to substantiate the fight for his and his nation's existence against the forces of imperial aggression. Moreover, the troubled encounters of Ai Wu's narrative alter ego with Tai and Burman women catalyze a gender dialectic between male and Han-centric literary subjectivity and the women from the other side of the border. Jessica Li Wen Tan's article studies the Chinese Malayan writer Wei Beihua's 威北華 (1923–1961) modernist works in relation to Indonesian poet Chairil Anwar (1922–1949), in order to excavate a neglected route of transculturation at the height of Southeast Asia's nationalist movements during the 1950s. Tan argues that Wei Beihua's works offer a productive perspective to reconsider the modernist artist's role during revolution and "the limits of realism" of revolutionary works when art was deemed integral to nation-building in postwar Southeast Asia. Kyle Shernuk's article explores the other side of Chinese/Sinophone studies, Xenophone literature. Shernuk notes that prevailing frameworks in Sinophone literary studies range from an implicit aversion to non-Sinitic-language texts

to their explicit exclusion. He argues that such an approach, however modified to accommodate the model of heteroglossia, is premised on linguistic ontology and thus recuperates the monolithic implication of Chinese national literature. Through Xenophone expressions of Sinophone experience, Shernuk points to the new borderland of Chinese/Sinophone articulation. He analyzes the Spanish-language Chinese literature of Chinese Peruvian American writer Siu Kam Wen (1951–), and contends that Siu's work represents a needed intervention in Chinese/Sinophone literary studies that would otherwise be excluded owing to its language of composition.

Finally, this issue features two essays as a forum discussion. Both take up the Sinophone/Xenophone polemics by considering non-Chinese-language literature produced within China. Jerôme de Wit examines Korean-Chinese literature after the founding of the PRC. Although the Korean-Chinese texts in discussion are in line with themes that one finds in contemporary Chinese literature of the period, de Wit shows that the distinction lies in that Korean-Chinese authors do not shy away from depicting their shared historical experiences under Japanese colonial rule in Manchukuo (1932–1945). Jianing Tuo's study focuses on the literary contestation between colonialism and despotism within the puppet regime of Mengjiang 蒙疆 during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Through the analysis of Sinophone Hui literature written in both Mongolian and Chinese during the Mengjiang administration, Tuo analyzes the differences in expressions of literature and politics and contemplates the tortuous paths through which a minority ethnic group attempts to recuperate its ethnic identity under the double burden of Han despotism and Japanese colonialism.

The essays in this special issue pay particular attention to the relationship between national impacts and local responses, and between state imposition and indigenous articulation. The most important medium under discussion is language in its crystallized form, literature. These essays project a kaleidoscopic vista in which borderlands are instituted and imagined, delimited and deleted, traversed and trans-formed. In doing so, they instantiate the dynamics of bordering China in the present as it was in the *longue durée* of the past.

The special issue represents a collaborative effort of Kyle Shernuk, Miya Xie, and David Wang. We would like to express our gratitude to *Prism: Theory and Modern Chinese Literature*, especially Professor Zong-qi Cai and Dr. Chris Song, for a precious opportunity to undertake this project. Of course, our most heartfelt thanks are for the contributors from Europe, North America, and Asia, who have crossed national, methodological, and linguistic borders to make the special issue possible.