

# Wang Shouren's Cross-cultural Vision and Technology-Enhanced Teaching of Foreign Literature in the Chinese Context

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**Abstract:** In contemporary China, Wang Shouren has been widely acclaimed not only as a leading scholar in the field of foreign literature studies, but also a national outstanding professor of English and foreign literature. His pedagogical ideas of teaching foreign literature in the Chinese context are all-encompassing and up-to-date, reflecting an open-minded call for diversity, strong local awareness, and broad comparative vision. Furthermore, his teaching practice exhibits wholehearted embrace of cutting-edge information technology, resulting in significantly enhanced effectiveness. This paper contends that Wang Shouren has consistently adhered to his pedagogical ideas and teaching methods: understanding both our own culture and the world at large; disseminating Chinese and foreign cultures; cultivating well-rounded individuals with cross-cultural awareness through literary exploration. Wang Shouren's such teaching ideas have been widely recognized and resonated in the field of foreign literature teaching. His teaching practices have also achieved remarkable results, worthy of learning and reference by future educators.

**Keywords:** Wang Shouren; teaching of foreign literature; cross-cultural vision; technology empowerment; Chinese context

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**标题:** 王守仁中国语境下外国文学教学中的跨文化视野与技术赋能实践

**内容摘要:** 王守仁是外国文学研究领域的著名学者、国家级教学名师。他在中国语境下的外国文学教学思想兼容并蓄、与时俱进，体现出开放的多元诉求、强烈的本土意识和宽广的比较视野；他的教学实践则充分利用信息技术，大大提高了教学效果。王守仁的教学思想和实践一以贯之，即通过文学认识世界、了解自己、传播中外文化，培养具有跨文化意识的复合型人才。他的教学思想在外国文学教学领域得到广泛认可和共鸣，教学实践成绩斐然，值得后来者学习和借鉴。

**关键词：**王守仁；外国文学教学；跨文化视野；技术赋能；中国语境

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As a well-known professor, scholar and literary critic, Wang Shouren has dedicated his life to the teaching of foreign literature for over 35 years. His unique pedagogical ideas, critical insight and teaching practice are worthy of scrutiny. During his many years of teaching and research, he has not only published several monographs and numerous papers on literary works, but also compiled many textbooks, including *British and American Fiction* (1994)—which was later revised into *British and American Short Stories* (2012), *History of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century English Literature* (2006), *Selected Readings of British and American Literature and Culture* (2017) and *Selected Readings in British Literature* (2001; 2023). These textbooks, with their acclaimed high-quality and authority, have won the favor of teachers and students all over China. In addition, Wang Shouren has also played a significant role in the compilation of such authoritative literary history books as *A History of Twentieth-Century Foreign Literature* (2004) and *History of Foreign Literature* (2015; 2018), providing prefaces, overviews, or relevant chapters to them. Based on these textbooks and his teaching practice, this paper is devoted to the demonstration and analysis of Wang Shouren's contribution to the teaching of foreign literature in the Chinese context, with highlights on his call for diversity in introducing and teaching foreign literature in China, his comparative and cross-cultural vision in curriculum design, and his embrace of digital technology in teaching foreign literature.

### **Championing Diversity in the Introduction and Teaching of Foreign Literature**

One of the primary objectives of university education is to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in society and navigate the global landscape. Foreign literature is one of the subjects provided by most universities in China to achieve this. Wang Shouren, a distinguished university professor and literary scholar, has formulated his own guiding principles for introducing and teaching foreign literature, which can be succinctly summarized as follows: Firstly, a multifaceted and all-encompassing approach is necessary for the introduction and instruction of foreign literature to effectively present its diverse spectrum. Secondly, heightened attention should be directed towards the meticulous analysis of complete texts to facilitate students' holistic comprehension. Thirdly, the integration of

contemporary materials within literature textbooks and pedagogical strategies is indispensable to ensure students remain abreast of the latest developments in foreign literary discourse.

The first principle is demonstrated by Wang Shouren's call for diversity on selecting materials for study and teaching. In his opinion, literature is not only about language learning and appreciation of beauty, but also about knowledge and culture. To put it in other words, literature performs an epistemological function: to know the world, which is always in flux. The changes of the world, the collision and interactions between nations, peoples and cultures have always been one of the hot topics in the field of foreign literature creation, study, and teaching. In the "Overview" at the beginning of Chapter 10 in *History of Foreign Literature* (Vol. 2), he puts his ideas into such words:

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, world politics, economy and culture underwent tremendous and profound changes, mankind's knowledge and understanding of natural and social laws reached an unprecedented depth and breadth, and scientific and technological achievements and material wealth created exceeded any previous era. With the development of economic globalization and frequent exchanges between various regions and nationalities, the literature of the East and the West has strengthened their collision, exchange, and integration, and mutual penetration/absorption have become increasingly obvious. During this period, all kinds of literature from different corners of the world are blooming like flowers, competing for color and fragrance, and no literary genre could dominate the literary scene of a certain period, country, or region as before, and world literature showed vigorous vitality for diversified development. (Nie 158)

These comments from a commanding height reveals the tenet for Wang Shouren's wide-ranging selection of works from different countries in his study and teaching of foreign literature for one thing, and for another, airs his ideas about one of the goals for Foreign Literature courses: to know the world.

Nobel laureate Toni Morrison expresses similar ideas in one of her articles, saying that "the practice of great art is the practice of knowledge unseparated by its own beauty. We should understand it as rational because whatever its origin, masque, or style, it is memory, it is perception, it is imagination, and it is knowledge" (717). As a Toni Morrison expert, Wang Shouren agrees with this idea of seeing art/literature as a source of knowing the world. Literature from different

nations bears with it specific history, individual imagination, collective perception, and particular culture. Therefore, in his career of studying and teaching foreign literature, Wang Shouren is careful not to limit the materials to the West, but instead incorporate literatures from the non-Western countries.

This concern with comprehensiveness and diversity in selecting teaching materials has manifested itself quite early in Wang Shouren's career. He has served as president of "The National Association for the Study of Literature in English," which is a branch of China Association of Foreign Literature, between 2011 and 2015. During this period, Wang pointed out that in China, scholars paid too much attention to Anglo-American literature while literature from other countries had been relatively neglected. He called on scholars and teachers to spend more time and energy on the introduction and teaching of literature from such countries as Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India and South Africa. He argued: "Within the framework of today's English-language literature, the literature of major English-speaking countries other than the United Kingdom and the United States has a relationship of inheritance and transcendence with English and American literature, and has become a national literature with distinctive characteristics, maturity and strength" ("Calling for Attention to English-Language Literature Outside the UK and the USA" 5). In the "Overview" in *History of Foreign Literature*, Wang Shouren puts this idea into practice by introducing not only literature from the UK and the USA, but also that from France, Russia, Germany, Latin-America and many other Eastern and Northern European countries, as well as literature from Canada, Australia, India, Arab and Africa. He believes that literature from all these countries "blends in parallel development, learns from each other, promotes each other, is intertwined with each other, and develops together" (Nie 161). The study of literature from various countries can contribute to the advancement and scholarly exploration of Chinese literature.

This emphasis on diversity in introducing foreign literature can also be seen in the books compiled by Wang Shouren and his colleagues. For instance, as one of the chief editors of *A History of Twentieth-Century Foreign Literature Vol. 2: Foreign Literature from 1914 to 1929*, when introducing literature in the modernist period, Wang tries to cover literature not only from such often-mentioned countries like Russia, Britain, America, France and Germany, but also from central and eastern European countries, Latin America, Japan, Indian and Arabian countries. In the overview of this book, he also draws the readers' attention to the diverse development of literature in different countries in the modernist period and provides brief introduction to modernist literature in countries that have been neglected in

previous books of literary history of foreign literature.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in *Post-WWII World History and the Development of Foreign Literature*, Wang Shouren invited experts on literature of various countries to contribute to this four-volume study, which features in inclusiveness and diversity in its coverage of foreign literature.

Taking diversity as the guiding principle in introducing foreign literature, Wang Shouren also encourages students to probe into different cultures behind the literary works in his teaching practice. This idea is also shared by his students and colleagues. In the “Preface” to *Selected Readings of British and American Literature and Culture*, his co-editor He Ning says, “In today’s ever-changing society, the demands placed on higher education extend beyond imparting specialized knowledge and encompass fostering a robust cultural foundation for university students, thereby nurturing future leaders who will contribute significantly to their nations” (He and Wang 1). Therefore, in this book, there are not only selected passages from classic and contemporary literary texts, but also such information as the cultural background and critical comment on cultural elements embodied in these texts. For instance, in Chapter 15 titled “Multiculture: Toni Morrison,” an introduction to the “cultural background” is provided prior to the selected passages from *Beloved*. This introduction elucidates the concept of “multiculturalism” and its impact on American society, as evidenced by the increasing attention given to Afro-American literature. Moreover, the questions for discussion at the end of this chapter are strategically designed to stimulate readers’ contemplation regarding both the extent of multiculturalism’s contribution to minority self-expression and its influence on mainstream culture. Such thought-provoking inquiries effectively prompt readers to delve into the cultural implications inherent in literature.

While exploring culture and knowing the world through literature is undoubtedly valuable, it should be noted that this is not the sole purpose or ultimate objective of studying literature. In an article discussing the essential components of English and American literature courses, Wang Shouren also underscores the ethical dimension, the connection to China, and the pursuit of artistic/aesthetic elements in conducting such courses.<sup>2</sup> Such concern with the ethical and aesthetic function of literature is consistent with many classic ideas about university education. For example, the ethical dimension is emphasized in the Chinese classic *The Great Learning (Daxue)*: “What the Great Learning teaches us, is—to illustrate illustrious

1 See Wu Yuanmai et al., *A History of Twentieth-Century Foreign Literature Volume II: Foreign Literature from 1914 to 1929*. Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2004, 5-8.

2 See Wang Shouren, “What Kind of British and American Literature Courses Do We Need,” *2012 Symposium on the Teaching of Literature to Undergraduate English Majors*, edited by Guo Yingjian, Beijing: China Minzu University Press, 2014, 3-7.

virtue; to renovate the people; and to rest in the highest excellence” (Legge 356). Wang Shouren innovatively uses the idea “to illustrate illustrious virtue” in one of his articles about English teaching and divided the “virtue” into three dimensions: great virtue, public virtue, and private virtue<sup>1</sup>, which shows that he strongly supports the idea that one of the essential goals of university education is to cultivate one’s virtue. In terms of the aesthetic dimension, while he concurs with Toni Morrison regarding the significance of literature’s epistemological aspect, he firmly asserts that beauty is an indispensable nature of art. He once remarked on Toni Morrison and her works by stating, “Fiction, like all art, embodies ideological content and beauty at the same time” (Wang, “Toni Morrison” 215). This means, knowledge, ideology, ethical concern, and aesthetic quality are important elements of great literature and the criteria for the selection of works in teaching and research.

While striving for diversity in the introduction of foreign literature, Wang Shouren asserts that greater emphasis should be placed on analyzing complete literary texts rather than solely focusing on their chronological development within history. In an article addressing literature courses in higher education, he expresses dissatisfaction with the conventional approach of outlining the historical progression of foreign literature without providing students with any complete works. He believes that encouraging students to read and appreciate original literary pieces and directly engage with the text is an effective means to foster logical reasoning skills and independent thinking abilities.<sup>2</sup> The emphasis on the organic unity of literary works is evident in numerous textbooks compiled by him. In the preface to *British and American Fiction*, Wang Shouren and co-editor Zhao Yu stated that they deviated from the traditional approach of selecting fragmented passages for students to read, opting instead for complete works (primarily short stories) by renowned British and American novelists, “the objective of which was to enhance the teaching quality of English and American literature courses while fostering students’ ability to analyze and comprehend texts as cohesive entities” (Wang and Zhao “Preface”). Such a stress on the organic whole of literary texts is evident not only in the textbooks he compiles, but also in his own teaching practice. While it may not come as a surprise for him to select complete stories in *British and American Short Stories* (2012), it is this consideration of providing students with a comprehensive understanding of specific literary texts that has motivated him to include as many

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1 See Wang Shouren, “On ‘Illuminating Bright Virtue’ to Foreign Language Courses: With Views on Compiling *New Era Mingde College English*,” *Foreign Languages in China* 2 (2021): 4-9.

2 See Wang Shouren, “From Literary History to Literary Works: On the Design of Literature Courses for Senior Students of English Majors,” *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching* 2 (1991): 18.

complete poems and short stories as possible in his *Selected Readings in British Literature* (2001; 2023), which, as reviewed by Chen Yong, features in “wholeness, typicality, comparativeness, and contemporariness” (Chen 100).

The final point in Wang Shouren's introduction of foreign literature to China is the emphasis on updated materials, which is manifested in his choice of materials for literature courses and in his research. Wang Shouren is a professor and researcher who has been keeping current in the field of literary studies. Alongside his profound appreciation for classical literature, he has conducted extensive research on numerous contemporary writers and their works. This inclination is showcased in his study of Toni Morrison. Furthermore, when selecting teaching materials, he meticulously chooses updated texts from contemporary authors, exemplified by *Selected Readings in British Literature*. Notably, this textbook has undergone five editions to date, with each edition being refined based on feedback from educators and students who have utilized it; certain texts have been replaced or supplemented with newly published ones accordingly. In its fifth edition, the final chapter of this textbook now features an excerpt from *The Buried Giant* (2015), authored by Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro.

Wang Shouren has gone to great lengths to provide the best materials and up-to-date foreign literature for Chinese students to learn and study. The three points mentioned here—the call for diversity in selecting materials, the emphasis on the organic whole of the works and the timely update of selected texts—might not be able to illustrate all his ideas about learning and teaching foreign literature, but they are valuable advice for teachers and students of foreign literature in China.

### **Taking a Comparative and Cross-cultural Perspective in Curriculum Design**

Wang Shouren puts a lot of emphasis on knowing the world and learning about different cultures through literature. At the same time, he stresses the necessity for Chinese educators and researchers to cultivate a sense of local consciousness, gain self-awareness, and effectively communicate stories of China to the global community. This is evident in his comparative and cross-cultural perspective in curriculum design.

To emphasize the significance of cultural communication between different nations, he takes a comparative and cross-cultural perspective when selecting teaching/study materials. This is in line with his initial plans of introducing and teaching foreign literature. The comparative and cross-cultural perspective is shown in the following aspects: while being committed to diversity in introducing and teaching foreign literature, he tries to make a connection between different

nations and their literary works; while introducing and teaching foreign literature, he stresses the Chinese perspective, which is unique among the study and teaching of foreign literature in the global context; while illustrating the influence of foreign literature on Chinese literature and culture, he also gives prominence to how Chinese literature and culture have influenced and enriched foreign literature creation and appreciation.

While striving for diversity in selecting teaching materials, Wang Shouren also tries to make connections between different nations in the development of their literature. For instance, in the “Overview” to the second volume of *A History of Twentieth-Century Foreign Literature*, he compares a variety of literary works from different nations in the modernist period. Through his research, he reveals that while modernist literature in Russia, America, Britain, Germany, and Austria flourished, literature in Italy, due to World War II and the Fascist despotism, did not reach such a high level of development and had to catch up later.<sup>1</sup> Also, while modernist movement overwhelms the European countries and America, it “had little gain in the Indian subcontinent, where poetry was influenced by Tagore and Romanticism still dominated” (Wu 7). Through this comparative analysis of literature from different nations, Wang Shouren and his colleagues offer a panoramic overview of global literary works, thereby providing Chinese students with an invaluable opportunity to broaden their horizon.

The comparison and contrast between foreign literature from different countries is only part of the story in Wang Shouren’s study and teaching of foreign literature. His aspiration lies in narrating the Chinese perspective on foreign literature, thereby amplifying the voice of China within the realm of global literary discourse. He has been airing such opinions for many years. In a paper published in *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, he says, “The core of the localization of China’s English teaching reform and research is based on China’s national conditions, that is, it is necessary to fully consider China’s cultural and historical traditions, economic development, social structure and natural environment” (“Individualized English Language Teaching (ELT) in the Context of Contemporary China: Notions and Practices” 1). In another paper published in 2019, he also provides some suggestions for the educators on how to cultivate Chinese students’ intercultural competences, like integrating Chinese and foreign cultures and help students to enhance their awareness of cultural identity, learning to tell our own stories, promoting research-based teaching, and making use of information technology to

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<sup>1</sup> See Wu Yuanmai et al., *A History of Twentieth-Century Foreign Literature Volume II: Foreign Literature from 1914 to 1929*, Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2004, 5.

facilitate international collaboration, etc.<sup>1</sup>

With these persistent ideas and efforts, he emphasizes the localization of the study/teaching of foreign literature and the unique contributions Chinese students and scholars can make in this field, which has always been his major concern. The questions he puts forward are: how can Chinese scholars contribute to the study and teaching of foreign literature? What is unique in the Chinese perspective while reading, teaching, and studying foreign literature?

This keen concern about localization of the study and teaching of foreign literature can be seen through various books and academic papers by Wang Shouren. However, it is most evident in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of *Selected Reading in British Literature*, wherein there's a newly added "Comparative Perspective" in each chapter. As to the purpose of this design, Wang Shouren explains:

Through providing such teaching steps as "comparative perspective" and instructing students to learn Marx and Engels' expositions on English literature, this design guides students to adhere to the correct political position, interpret literature from within the culture, so that they will deeply understand the British people and British historical society that created British literature, and to observe the similarities and differences between British literature, Chinese literature and other European literature from the perspective of world literature, to think about and analyze the correlation and influence between them, and to read the text critically. This reflects the value of professional teaching materials in the process of education. ("Preface" xviii-xix)

For this purpose, questions for discussion have been provided at the end of each chapter, instructing students to make a comparison and contrast between British literature and Chinese literature of the same historical period. For instance, while introducing Shakespeare and his works, a question is designed to ask students to compare Shakespeare with Tang Xianzu, the well-known Chinese playwright in Ming Dynasty; while providing selected passages from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, a questions is given to compare and contrast between this play and *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, one of the four great love stories in China, which urges students to "reflect on the humanistic spirit and tragic views shaped by different cultural traditions contained in these two tragic stories" (25). These well-designed questions will no doubt simulate students to think about similarities and differences

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<sup>1</sup> See Wang Shouren, "On Cultivating Foreign Language Students' Intercultural Competencies," *Journal of Northwestern Polytechnical University (Social Science Edition)* 4 (2019): 48.

between literature across culture and to make a connection between different literary works or cultures.

This comparative analysis can encompass temporal and spatial dimensions, exemplified by the selected excerpt from Thomas Hardy's *Tess of D'Urbervilles* and accompanying discussion questions, followed by an essay question that explores a comparative perspective:

Hardy's novels are mostly set in the Wessex countryside, portraying the lives of peasants amidst the encroachment of capitalism while conveying a sense of pessimistic fatalism. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* serves as an exemplary work that encapsulates this notion. Shen Congwen's *Biancheng (The Border Town)* is set against the rustic backdrop of Xiangxi's countryside and, while depicting a simple existence, it unveils the idea that individuals there are bereft of agency over their own destinies. Please compare the view of fate expressed in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Biancheng* and the regional color of the novels. (203)

This essay question is designed to prompt students to establish a cultural connection between 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain and early 20<sup>th</sup> century China, highlighting the multidimensional nature of literature encompassing stories, history, culture, humanity, and fate. To address this inquiry effectively, students are required not only to engage with *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Biancheng* but also conduct thorough research on their respective historical and cultural contexts in order to discern Hardy's and Shen's perspectives on human destiny as influenced by local culture.

Furthermore, this comparative analysis extends beyond the comparison between British and Chinese literature/culture to encompass various national literatures/cultures. For instance, in Unit 9, after introducing Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and her novel *Frankenstein*, students are prompted with an essay question that instructs them to compare *Frankenstein* with Kazuo Ishiguro's science fiction works, particularly *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun*. These three novels all explore the interplay between science and ethics. The essay question urges students to critically examine "the manifold impacts of scientific advancements on human existence and the ethical principles governing their application" (134). This thought-provoking question is highly relevant to contemporary life.

Wang Shouren's such meticulous attention to culture and thorough comparison and contrast across different periods and regions greatly facilitates students in establishing connections between literary works, a crucial attribute for an English major. In his research, Wang Shouren also underscores the significance of situating

literary works within their historical and cultural contexts:

Post-war foreign literature exhibits distinct artistic characteristics and era-specific styles compared to previous historical periods, and the most effective approach to elucidate the fundamental trends and features of post-war foreign literature is by situating it within its historical and cultural context for thorough investigation and analysis, thereby comprehending the literary development in the backdrop of post-war history. (*Realist, Postmodernist Literature in the Course of Postwar History 2*)

This culture-oriented teaching and research of foreign literature has gained widespread recognition for its benefits to students and scholars, as evidenced by numerous publications in reputable Chinese journals.

Wang Shouren's article, titled "American Literature Teaching and Research in Nanjing," provides valuable insights into his local perspective and deep pride for the profound influence of Chinese literature and culture. As a distinguished scholar and educator primarily based in Nanjing, he effectively establishes the intricate connection between Nanjing and American literature by presenting compelling examples that highlight the vibrant cultural exchange between scholars from Nanjing and prominent figures in American literary circles. For instance, he emphasizes how early translations of renowned American writers such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Washington Irving, and Harriet Beecher Stowe demonstrate China's longstanding openness to embracing American literature. Furthermore, Wang Shouren highlights the warm reception, commemoration, and scholarly exploration of Pearl S. Buck, a Nobel Prize-winning American writer, in Nanjing. These instances underscore the existence of dedicated institutions and communities comprising scholars, teachers, and students who eagerly engage with the study of American literature. In this process, the Chinese elements in American literature have garnered significant attention from researchers. Wang Shouren enumerates several esteemed writers, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, who have been profoundly influenced by Chinese literature and culture. Additionally, he cites Allen Ginsberg as a contemporary exemplar of Chinese influence on American literature. Notably, Ginsberg's visit to China in 1984 played a pivotal role in inspiring his creation of a series of poems centered around China. His "Reading Bai Juyi" series are charming and unique, which "provide a way for American readers to learn about China" ("Teaching and Study of American Literature in Nanjing" 271).

As a Chinese scholar and teacher, Wang Shouren consciously stresses his Chinese position in studying and teaching foreign literature, which features in the comparative and intercultural vision he has formulated in his years of research and teaching. This vision not only benefits Chinese students, but also provides a good reference for international students of foreign literature. The students are asked to consider who they are and what unique ideas they can offer as citizens of their nation.

### **Embracing Digital Technology in Teaching Practice**

In addition to his call for diversity and his comparative/intercultural perspective in introducing/teaching foreign literature, Wang Shouren has consistently embraced the use of technology, including computers, the internet, digital devices, to achieve desired effects. Well before the widespread adoption of digital resources, he incorporated online information into the textbooks he compiled as evidenced by the inclusion of links and websites at the end of each unit in *British and American Short Stories* published in 2012. Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 and subsequent surge in popularity of online courses, Wang Shouren developed an online course titled “British Fiction” which was successfully launched on China University MOOC platform. Taken together, his proactive involvement in technology-enhanced teaching practices is characterized by foresight, quality implementation, positive impacts, and ongoing improvement.

As is widely recognized, the Covid-19 pandemic expedited the adoption of digital technology on a global scale. In the realm of education, it posed significant challenges for teachers in terms of instruction delivery, yet it also presented crucial opportunities that urged them to swiftly adapt to online teaching. As Tenhunen says, “Online-teaching opened up as a smart solution for future education. In the field of education, a digital leap had been made in a short notice which has encouraged universities in the development of creative and innovative solutions” (85). According to Kuswardi and Sanny, “the development of the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) from year to year in the world is increasing so that it is true that the need for learning is real, followed by increasingly rapid technological developments” (Kuswardi and Sanny 2451) as displayed in a figure (nearly zero in 2021 and about 20 thousand online courses in 2022) on Class Central, a website providing the latest news and trends in online education. Fischer and his team members, quoting from previous studies, also lists several benefits of online courses: online courses present opportunities for “differentiated instruction” so that the students are able to go at their own pace; they are more flexible and allow universities “greater capacity to accommodate non-

traditional students” who might need “additional preparatory work” or flexibility of the schedule; they are cost-effective and time-saving for both universities and students (Fischer et al. 2). Jiang Chengyong also points out the various advantages of online courses, believing that their outstanding characteristics are “concentration, high quality, mobility, convenience, openness and popularity” (267). These studies all show that online courses have gained great popularity in recent years.

Wang Shouren's foresight is evident in his early recognition of the educational opportunities brought by digital technology, as demonstrated by his launch of the online course “British Fiction” in 2018, even before the outbreak of the pandemic and the surge in popularity of online courses in education. This indicates that Wang Shouren's preparation for this course predates the European Committee's plan for digitizing education, which “prioritized the aim of making better use of digital technology for teaching and learning to improve education” (Beardsley et al. 1456).

Therefore, when the Covid-19 outbreak occurred in China in 2019, he encouraged educators to embrace the challenge and seize the opportunities with courage, passion, and innovation. Consequently, online courses began to thrive in China from that year onwards. According to his perspective, these high-quality online educational resources “can effectively supplement the existing curriculum by offering students additional options for enrolling in courses with good content taught by competent instructors” (“Individualized English Language Teaching (ELT) in the Context of Contemporary China: Notions and Practices” 4). He has successfully implemented this concept throughout his teaching career.

As a pioneer in China's development and implementation of the MOOC “British Fiction,” Wang Shouren demonstrates meticulousness in restructuring the content and designing online learning, ensuring the course's exceptional quality. With extensive experience, and renown as a professor, Wang Shouren is joined by two outstanding researchers and educators, He Ning and Xu Lei. The design concept of “British Fiction” revolves around learner-centeredness, aiming to popularize English literature knowledge among the public while enhancing their overall educational attainment. Social learners often lack supervision, possess limited understanding of English literature, and engage in unstructured learning approaches. “British Fiction” strives to integrate fragmented knowledge into a cohesive framework, systematically reconstructing it to emphasize its linear system within fragments. This approach constitutes the fundamental elements for reading and appreciating fiction while serving as an exemplary model for both English majors and non-professional readers. Also, the course is designed “not only to help students understand the characteristics of British fiction and its development, but also to cultivate their skills

in analyzing and appreciating English literature, while deepening their understanding of British history, culture, and language” (“British Fiction” at [course163.org](http://course163.org)). This implies that the course goes beyond mere introduction of British fiction writers and stories, instead emphasizing the importance of delving deeper into the relevant texts and gaining a comprehensive understanding of their historical and cultural context. Furthermore, in comparison to similar MOOCs led by foreign instructors, “British Fiction” possesses a notable advantage: it actively promotes local and cross-cultural awareness by providing materials or posing questions that encourage students to compare British literature/culture with its Chinese counterpart. In doing so, it guides students towards exploring Chinese literary/cultural treasures more closely while fostering a sense of national self-confidence.

There are numerous instances in the online course “British Fiction” that serve as illustrations for this point. For example, in section 1.4 titled “The Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe and China,” Wang Shouren contextualizes Defoe’s work within the realm of intercultural communication and offers insightful commentary on Defoe’s derogatory portrayal of China. According to Wang Shouren, Defoe demonizes China in *The Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* due to several reasons: firstly, as a puritan, Defoe expresses his apprehension towards China as an unfamiliar entity by considering Chinese people as “barbarous pagans”; secondly, during that period, China was not as developed as England and thus depicted as a place lacking wealth, orderliness, and grandeur; thirdly, Defoe’s satirical depictions of China and its people reflect his belief in racial superiority. Overall, being an author who never visited China himself, Defoe’s disparaging portrayals can be seen merely as imaginative representations of “The Other” with orientalist undertones. Such interpretations shed light on Defoe’s motivations of demonizing China and its people and help students to read the popular adventure story in a critical way.

A further enlightening example of the depth and breadth of this online course can be found in section 4.4 titled “*Mrs. Dalloway* as a Stream-of-consciousness Novel” in the course “British Fiction.” In this section, there is a discussion question that prompts students to compare the use of stream-of-consciousness in Mrs. Dalloway and Chinese novelist Wang Meng’s “The Sound of Spring.” Students are encouraged to express their thoughts on the similarities and differences in the utilization of this modernist writing technique. According to some students, while both authors employ stream-of-consciousness in their works, Wang Meng’s usage appears more logical compared to Woolf’s tendency for random transitions between different characters’ perspectives. This undoubtedly fosters Chinese students’ interest in our national literature and culture. These discussions serve as evidence

that cross-cultural comparison and contrast within foreign literature education have proven effective and fruitful.

The MOOC course “British Fiction” has garnered high praise from both educators and students alike. The positive impact of this online course can be observed through the students’ feedback on the website. To date (May 2024), over 85,000 students have enrolled in this course and given it a rating of 4.9 out of 5 points. Analysis of the comments (totaling over 600 by May 2024) reveals that many participants consider this opportunity to learn from esteemed instructors as rare and invaluable. Multiple participants express amazement at its profound “depth and breadth,” noting that the teachers’ concise explanations are remarkably insightful and exceptional. One student provides a comprehensive comment highlighting the strengths and effectiveness of this course, emphasizing its provision of expert knowledge on British novels, particularly information typically inaccessible or overlooked by ordinary readers such as historical contexts, psychological perspectives of protagonists, and authors’ intentions behind specific works. “At the same time, this course recommends numerous renowned and representative British novels which saves us valuable time otherwise spent searching for truly meaningful literary pieces” (“British Fiction” at [icourse163.org](https://icourse163.org)).

These positive effects are also ensured by the innovative teaching and assessment methods employed in this online course, as well as the continuous updating of materials and improvement in all possible aspects. The course ensures students’ active engagement through extracurricular reading, video watching, supplementary readings, online discussions, and assessments. When evaluating students’ learning outcomes, a variety of formats such as multiple-choice questions, true or false questions, and discussion questions are provided. Moreover, more than 70% of the content is assessed using automated systems. The assessment and evaluation methods are diverse and include student evaluations, peer reviews, teacher comments to foster interaction between teachers and students as well as among students from different universities.

Compared to conventional classroom teaching methods, online courses offer a significant advantage in terms of their ease of iterative updates. Over the course of five years since its inception, the “British Fiction” course has undergone several adjustments based on student needs and learner suggestions. Notably, a dedicated unit exploring science fiction and fantasy was introduced during the summer of 2023, earning enthusiastic reception from students and avid readers alike, particularly those with an affinity for science fiction.

Wang Shouren’s technology-enhanced teaching practice has reaped fruits and rewards. He is the recipient of the first prize for national teaching achievement,

recognized as a National Outstanding Teacher in the first term of the contest, and honoured with the prestigious Grand Prize of Baogang Education Fund for Excellent Teachers. These accomplishments serve as compelling evidence of his esteemed reputation and prominent position within the field of foreign literature in China.

### Conclusion

Foreign literature provides Chinese students with a window into the diverse peoples and cultures of different nations. Since embarking on his journey of studying and teaching foreign literature, Wang Shouren has continuously contemplated the contributions he can make to this field as a Chinese scholar and educator. Rooted in China, he aims to examine the social and cultural context surrounding the production and consumption of foreign literary works from a cross-cultural perspective. He pays particular attention to comparing foreign literature with Chinese literary works, offering insightful commentary on their connections or differences. Additionally, he embraces recent advancements in information technology and excels at translating theory into practice, benefiting an increasing number of students across China through high-quality online courses. With his unwavering dedication and remarkable accomplishments, Wang Shouren undeniably merits the esteemed title of National Outstanding Teacher, serving as an exemplary role model for educators in the realm of foreign literature.

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