

Comparative Literature in Chinese

Xiaolu Wang  
*Sichuan University*

Yan Liu  
*Guangdong University of Foreign Studies*

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**Abstract:** In their article "Comparative Literature in Chinese" Xiaolu Wang and Yan Liu describe the development of comparative poetics in Chinese by sketching major publications and the general institutional situation of the discipline. Wang and Liu suggest that comparative work remains impulsive while at the same time dynamic. Like other fields in the humanities, the study of poetics — comparative or other — in Chinese is no longer traditional in terms of discursive form but copied from the West. Although the scholarly achievements in the field within the past thirty years are considerable, problems remain including the issue of translation of Western theories and the approaching of foreign scholarship with narrow minded nationalism. Wang's and Liu's postulate that the role scholars working in Chinese ought to play in the humanities in general and in comparative poetics in particular would be to bring about knowledge from the ways of how the issues and questions studied would cross cultural boundaries.

**Xiaolu WANG and Yan LIU**

### **Comparative Literature in Chinese**

Poetics (*shixue*), like most of the frequently used literary terms with a long history, does not necessarily carry a strict definition. In both China and the West, poetics has long been used as a technical term referring to different approaches to composition, interpretation, and the exegesis of poetry. According to *Webster's New World Dictionary of American Language*, poetics is "the theory or structure of poetry" (1100) whereas in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* it is defined as "theory of literature, i.e. theory of literary discourse; theory of poetry" (930). As poetry was the major literary genre in ancient China, several other terms were used with similar connotations but with slight differences such as *shifa* (rules of poetry) and *shige* (manner and structure of poetry). Other similar terms include *shiwei* (poetic flavor), *shiyán* (highlights of poetic diction), and *shiqu* (liveliness in poetry) (see Peng). As observed by Richard John Lynn, "The earliest remarks that have bearing on poetics are found in the philosophical writings of pre-Confucian, Confucian, and other early thinkers — notably Daoist (Taoist) — from the 6th C.B.C. to the 2nd C.A.D." ("Chinese Poetics" 187). Therefore, poetry writing in ancient China "enjoyed a unique prestige" and "every cultivated person was expected to be able to compose poetry" (Van Zoeren 146). Huarong Xiao writes that "Poetics in my book does not refer to the 'poetics' Aristotle held to cover all the literary and art theory in general, but to the theory concerning poetry in the narrow sense... because the pure theory involving literature and art throughout ancient China is one on poetry only" (1; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are ours). At the same time, Xingpei Yuan believes that Aristotle's idea on ambiguity in his *Poetics* is still of use for the discussion of the art of poetry (3).

Since the late nineteenth century, however, Chinese scholarship has been impacted by Western ideas with the result that scholarship in China was fashioned on a large scale in the Western way. Consequently, in Chinese poetics the above referred to notions and terms are no longer used; instead the translated term *shixue* (although the word *shixue* appeared several times in the poems in the Tang (618-907), Song (960-1179), and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties. Since the late twentieth century *shixue* has been frequently used to indicate literary theory and the composition of literary works in a more general sense. Therefore, "poetics" in contemporary China always stands for "the learning to evaluate and examine literature" (Yue 468). In fact, this new notion of "poetics" is not new at all but could be traced back to that of Aristotle: "Aristotle's example enables us to define the word as an account of the nature and practice of (in his case dramatic) literature considered as an autonomous subject" (Miner 12). Such a review enables us to differentiate the true meanings of the word in Chinese academia and thus paves the way for further analysis in order to find out the changes of its connotations as a result of Western influences. The research conducted by Chinese scholars in the field of comparative poetics in the past reflects these changes in more ways than one.

The history of the Chinese usage of "poetics" in literary studies, as well as in comparative studies since the twentieth century is carried out in accordance with the changes of taxonomy as mentioned above. From the early twentieth century to the 1930s, Chinese scholars in this field include Guowei Wang, Xun Lu, Honglie Yang, Zhongfan Chen, Xiaoyue Fang, Genze Luo, and Mi Wu, to name a few, among whom Guowei Wang is the most representative. Wang is one of the earliest scholars who consciously employed Western conceptions of philosophy and concepts from aesthetics in the study of literature and in his studies on the novel *Story of the Stone* (other translations of the title include *Dream of the Red Chamber*; *Dream of Red Towers*) and on early Chinese drama and song lyrics he adopted the comparative approach. In a way he regulated the standards for literary criticism in China. In turn, "Lu Xun desires a 'demonic,' aggressive role for poetry. He laments the absence in China of poets who, in 'singing of themselves,' disturb a national psyche that wants nothing more than the peace and solace of spiritual slumber" (Denton 27). Lu's essay "Moluo Shi Li Shuo" ("On the Power of Mara Poetry," 1907) set a fine example of literary criticism by appealing for new perspectives from the West (see Tang 58). Honglie Yang, who used "Chinese poetics" almost for the first time in Chinese history, states in the preface of his 1928 book that European and US-American principles in poetics should be used in doing literary criticism on Chinese poetry. His *Zhongguo Shixue Dagang* (Chinese Poetics: An Outline) offers a detailed definition of Chinese poetry, its classification, structures, compo-

sition, and functions and evolvement in history. Wu's essay "Hongloumeng Xin Tan" ("Reread *Dream of the Red Chamber*," 1920) refers to Western concepts, especially those by Aristotle, in treating traditional Chinese literary subjects (see Xu 54), thus standing as one of the earliest attempts at comparative studies in the Chinese academia.

During the 1930s to mid-1960s, the leading scholars in the field of comparative poetics in China included Zhongshu Qian, Guangqian Zhu, and Cunzhong Fan. Zhongshu Qian adopts comparative approaches in *Tan Yi Lu* (Discourse on the Literary Art) in an attempt to find out the common effects behind the different Chinese and Western conceptions (see, e.g., Longxi Zhang, "Qian Zhongshu as Comparatist"). His ways of making comparison across different cultures and disciplines in order to observe the general principles of literary creation mark him a unique figure in Chinese literary history whose academic achievement remains insurmountable by scholars of later generations. His *Guan Zhui Bian* (The Tube and Awl Chapters) published in 1979 made an immediate impact upon the academia. It is culturally interesting, too, that Qian, as he did in his previous book on art and literature, wrote the book in the very form of traditional written Chinese. Guangqian Zhu in his *Shi Lun* (On Poetry), first published in 1943, traces the origins of Chinese poetry, especially focusing on how Chinese poetry has taken on rigid rhyming schemes and tonal patterns. His perspectives combine history, archeology and psychology, and he compares poetry with music, prose, and painting in order to find out poetry's unique features. Cunzhong Fan published articles on the relationship between English literature and Chinese culture, especially his essays on Chinese thought in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, some of which were collected later in his *Zhongguo Wenhua zai Qimeng Shiqi de Yingguo* (*Chinese Culture in the England of the Enlightenment Age* 1931 as his Ph.D. dissertation at Harvard and published in Chinese in 1991). The book closely observes how Chinese culture went into English literary genres such as poetry, prose, and drama, and one chapter of the book is devoted to the discussion of the influence of Chinese gardening and indoor decorative art in English literature.

The studies in comparative poetics in the following decade or so almost became suspended because of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Thus, during this period most scholarship in the field was published by Chinese US-American scholars but this turned out to be influential in Mainland China starting from 1976. One of the many achievements made by overseas Chinese was by James J.Y. Liu, whose *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (1962) and *Chinese Theories of Literature* (1975) carry some of Liu's own theories of poetic criticism. In the former, by analyzing how Chinese language works as a medium of poetic expression, Liu further summarizes the four kinds of Chinese views of poetry, namely, the didactic view, the individualist view, the technical view and the intuitionist view. And he finally attempts to describe how poetry and some of the poetic elements are able to bridge gaps across cultures. In the latter book, Liu looks closely at the seemingly chaotic threads of literary theories in China, makes comparisons between these theories and similar theories from the West, and then attempts to draw up some universal literary theory through such a dialogue. As Lynn said, Liu's thought was always upon "the nature of Chinese poetic expression, how to induce systems of literary theory from the often unsystematic and fragmentary modes of critical discourse in China, how to build on the comparative study of Western and Chinese theories of literature to develop fruitful methods of practical criticism and interpretation — to name but some of them" ("Editor's Foreword" x).

In 1981 the journal *Guowai Wenxue* (Foreign Literatures), which later turned into one of the leading academic journals for the study of foreign literatures, began to be published by Peking University Press. Starting in the 1980s foreign scholars in the field of comparative literature were invited to Peking University and their lectures raised interest. Visiting professors who were invited included John Deeney (The Chinese University of Hong Kong), Eugene Chen Eoyang (Indiana University), Douwe Fokkema (Utrecht University), Claudio Guillén (Harvard University), J. Hillis Miller (University of California Irvine), and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek (University of Alberta), to name a few. At the same time, Xianlin Ji initiated a group for the study of comparative literature with members including Xianlin Ji, Funing Li, Zhouhan Yang, Daiyun Yue, and Longxi Zhang. Soon after, the Peking University Academic Lectures Series was launched and the books published impacted scholarship in China. Further, the founding of CCLA: Chinese Comparative Literature Association in 1981 marks the arrival of comparative literature in Mainland China. Especially Daiyun Yue (Peking University) has made both with her scholarship and her administrative institutional work an impact (see, e.g., Zhang and Yue

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss4/2>>). Since the founding of the Association, scholars have enjoyed a relatively peaceful period to pursue comparative poetics (it is interesting and different from the West that the discipline of comparative literature — if not a full-fledged department — is housed mostly in departments of Chinese rather than in departments of foreign languages; further, it is in China where the discipline achieved the highest percent per capita, similar to the situation in the West, where the discipline until recently is most wide spread in the U.S. (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, "The Study of Literature in China"). Most recently, in 2011, Peking University and Harvard University co-organized a Summer Institute for World Literature (with an international advisory board, the Institute for World Literature is based at Harvard University and its program includes guest lectures and summer programs: after Beijing in 2011, summer programs are in 2012 at Bilgi University, in 2013 at Harvard University, and in 2014 at the University of Lisboa; in addition to the cost of travel, participation in the summer program is US\$ 1800.00).

In the meantime, access to Western publications has increased and as a result, scholarship in comparative poetics began to appear in a substantial measure starting from the 1980s. Examples of scholarship in this period in comparative poetics included *Bijiao Wenxue Yiwen Ji* (Essays in Comparative Literature, 1982), edited by Longxi Zhang, and *Bijiao Wenxue Yanjiu Yiwen Ji* (A Study in Comparative Literature: A Collection of Translations, 1985), edited by Yongchang Yu, Junliao Hong, and Ruiqin Ni. Both collections of essays provide Chinese scholars with new sources in comparative poetics from abroad. Further, Kemu Jin, a scholar in Indian studies, published in 1984 *Bijiao Wenhua Lun Ji* (A Collection of Comparative Cultures). Scholars in English studies also published important works in comparative poetics, for example, Zuoliang Wang whose *Lun Qihe: Bijiao Wenxue Yanjiu Ji* (Degrees of Affinity: Studies in Comparative Literature, 1985) and his essay collection *Zhongwai Wenxue Zhijian* (Between Chinese and Foreign Literatures, 1984) cover Chinese and English poetry and translation studies in which the differences and similarities in both Chinese and Western literatures are discussed from a cross-cultural perspective. Also translations of seminal texts in comparative literature appeared, for example, Ulrich Weisstein's *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory: Survey and Introduction* (1973), translated by Xiangyu Liu and published in 1987. Yuanhua Wang focuses in his *Wenxin Diaolong Chuangzuo Lun* (On Creation of *Wenxin Diaolong*, 1984) on traditional Chinese literary theory based on Xie Liu's principles drawing on Western philosophy. Although not published until 1981, Baihua Zong's *Meixue Sanbu* (Strolling in Aesthetics) covers a wide variety of aesthetics where ideas are compared from ancient Greek aesthetics to Kant in the West and a number of poets and artists in China. Some of his ideas were already published in the 1940s and 1950s.

Starting with the 1990s, the publication of works in comparative poetics increased. For example, Zhouhan Yang, in *Jingzi yu Qiqiaoban* (The Mirror and the Seven-Piece Puzzle, 1990), a collection of essays on comparative literature, provides his readers with ways to understand the nature of literature with multi-dimensional angles. Zhaojun Di, in *Zhongying Bijiao Shixue* (A Comparative Study of Chinese and English Poetics, 1992) discusses more specifically the different aspects of poetry and poetics between the two regions. In 1993, *Shijie Shixue Da Cidian* (Dictionary of Poetics) edited by Daiyun Yue, Lang Ye, and Peigeng Ni was published. This is the first comprehensive reference book on poetics in China with 2,497 entries including Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Arabic, continental European, and Anglophone concepts, schools, critics, works, and terms. By juxtaposing major concepts, terms, critics, scholars, and books from different regions of culture, the *Dictionary* is an effort by Chinese scholars to comprehend poetics with and through an overall perspective. And Hui Zhu compares in his *Zhongying Bijiao Shiyi* (Comparative Studies on the Art of Chinese and English Poetry, 1996) the techniques in both composition and the appreciation of poetry. An influential overseas scholar in this period was Wai-lim Yip whose publications include *Chinese Poetics* and *Diffusion of Distances Dialogues between Chinese and Western Poetics* (1993). Other books relevant here, although strictly on Chinese poetics, include Xiaoming Hu's *Zhongguo Shixue zhi Jingshen* (The Spirit of Chinese Poetics, 1993) and Siqu Li's *Zhongguo Shixue Huayu* (Discourse of Chinese Poetics, 1999). These two books are based on traditional Chinese culture and deal with the inner style of Chinese ways behind the discursive forms. Other translations to Chinese published by Peking University Press include Earl Miner's *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature* (1998) and Douwe Fokkema's and Elrud Ibsch's collected volume *The Study of Literature and Cultural Participation* (1996). Also since the 1980s, some scholars have attempted to carry out the study of literature with systemic and

contextual approaches and thus beyond one-dimensional comparison, for example Shunqing Cao's *Zhongxi Bijiao Shixue* (Comparative Poetics: China and West, 1988) and his *Zhongwai Bijiao Wenlu Shi* (A History of Chinese Foreign Literary Theory, 1998), books which initiated extensive discussion including the criticism by Xian Zhou who points out that Cao's 1998 book exaggerates the role of Western critical terms in Chinese comparative studies. Two other examples are *Zhongxi Bijiao Shixue Tixi* (A System in Chinese-Western Comparative Poetics, 1991) edited by Yaomian Huang and Qingbing Tong and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's *Wen hsüe yen chiu ti ho fa hua* (Legitimizing the Study of Literature) (1997).

Some scholarship since the 1980s, however, shows that comparative poetics is understood as "straight" comparison between texts either of the original or the translated with focus on the comparison between certain categories but without tracing historical contexts. Hong Yu observes in *Zhongguo Wenlu yu Xifang Shixue* (Chinese Literary Theory and Western Poetics, 1999) that "'Chinese and Western comparative poetics' has deleted the fundamental difference in cultural thought between the Chinese literary theory and the Western poetics. And in the context of modern Chinese there has been a giant semantic gap between the ancient Chinese and the translated modern Chinese terms, for the Chinese literary theory and the Western poetics have been arbitrarily taken for granted as exactly equivalent categories" (3). Yu compares the origins and uses of "poetics" in China and the West and warns scholars of the danger of forced comparisons without taking into consideration the true meanings of the word in different contexts. Like James J.Y. Liu and Zhongshu Qian, Yu attempts to look for something common beyond cultural differences.

Since the 2000s, studies have kept an overall approach regarding poetics as literary theory in general in both China and the West (see also Wang, Ning, *Comparative Literature*, "Confronting Globalization"). Pengzi Rao's collection of articles in *Bijiao Shixue* (Comparative Poetics, 2000) are not only about poetic tradition, but also some other related fields such as drama, fiction, as well as the general situation of Chinese literature in Southeastern Asia. Ganjian Lai focuses in *Ershi Shiji Zhongxi Bijiao Shixue* (Chinese-Western Comparative Poetics in the Twentieth Century, 2003) on modern literary theories. Jiemin Liu's *Zhongguo Bijiao Shixue* (Chinese Comparative Poetics, 2004) is an attempt to establish an overall perspective by taking the West as an integrated whole and Naiqiao Yang's *Beili yu Zhenghe: Dongfang Rudao Shixue yu Xifang Shixue de Benti Lun Yuyan Lun Bijiao* (Comparative Poetics: East and West, Paradoxes and Integration, 1998) covers some of the basic categories of language and ontology in order to find a way for effective communication. Hanwen Fang, in his *Shijie Bijiao Shixue Shi* (History of World Comparative Poetics, 2007), attempts to cover phenomena in almost every major region of culture based on scholarship in national literatures and literary theories. Shunqing Cao, in his *Zhongxi Bijiao Shixue Shi* (History of Chinese-Western Comparative Poetics, 2008), deals with modern Chinese and Western poetics. However, both books contain unnecessary repetitions. Ying Fu, in *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Lilun Fasheng Shi* (History of Modern Chinese Literary Theory, 2008), traces the origin and development of such a theory by indicating how modern Chinese literary theory is influenced by that of the West.

Interesting examples of case studies in Chinese comparative poetics include the translation of Monika Motsch's *Mit Bambusrohr und Ahle. Von Qian Zhongshus Guanzhuibian zu einer Neubetrachtung Du Fus* (With Tube and Awl: From Zhongshu's *Guanzhuibian* to a New View of Du Fu) as *Guanzhuibian Yu Du Fu Xin Jie* (1998), translated by Shude Ma, in which Motsch discusses Qian's ideas in his *Chapters* and cultural significance in the poems by Du Fu (Tang Dynasty). Motsch foregrounds relevant issues in comparative literature in China, as well as some fundamental concepts in the study of literature. Xiaolu Wang's *Zhongxi Shixue Duihua: Yingyu Shijie de Zhongguo Gudai Wenlu Yanjiu* (Dialogue between Chinese and Western Poetics: Traditional Chinese Literary Theory in the English Speaking World, 2000) is a case study of how traditional Chinese literary theory is studied by Sinologists in different cultural contexts. Wensheng Wang's *Lun Qingjing: Zhongguo Shuqing Wenxue Jiegou Zhuyi* (Structuralism in Chinese Lyric Literature, 2001) is an attempt to interpret Chinese lyrics by adopting the analytical framework of structuralism. Xiaolu Wang's collected volume *Xifang Hanxue Jie de Zhongguo Wenlu Yanjiu* (Chinese Literary Theory in the West, 2003) is a supplement to his 2000 single-authored book with articles on the studies by German and French Sinologists. Meng Hua's collection of essays *Bijiao Wenxue Xingxiang Xue* (Imagology in Comparative Literature, 2001) and Yanqiu Zhao's *Xingxiang Shixue* (Poetics of Literary Images, 2004) are relevant in

both comparative literature and with regard to one of its subfields, image studies. Similar is Xinlin Zhao's *Image yu Xiang: Zhongxi Shixue Xiang Lun Suyuan* (Image and xiang: A Study of Image in Chinese and Western Poetics, 2005) in which he traces the origins of both the Chinese *xiang* and Western "image" with their cultural traditions and how some Sinologists study *xiang* as a referent (see also Owen 587). And the collected volume *Zhongguo Yindu Wenhua Bijiao: Dongfang Wenhua jicheng* (Chinese and Indian Poetics: A Comparative Study) by Longyu Yu and others contains studies from the perspective of the East within both Chinese and Indian traditions.

Apart from work discussed above, the study of poetics and literary criticism with comparative perspectives in general have become an integral part of curriculum design in higher institutions in Mainland China. The first university course in comparative literature was offered by I.A. Richards at Tsinghua University between 1929 and 1931 and, based on Richards's lecture notes, P.D. Jameson compiled teaching materials *Comparative Literature* (unpublished). However, comparative literature was not offered on a large scale in Mainland China until after the 1990s. By 1994 comparative literature in both undergraduate and graduate education has become a presence at universities and colleges and this trend continues. Even the official category of the discipline of "Foreign Literatures" was changed to "Comparative Literature and World Literature" (on comparative literature in Chinese, see also Zhou and Tong). Some of the books mentioned above have served as textbooks for such courses as well. Among the textbooks, Yuehong Chen's *Bijiao Shixue Daolun* (Comparative Poetics: An Introduction, 2005) is now in the "21st-century Textbook Series in Comparative Literature." Such series are issued, more often than not, by the Chinese Ministry of Education and thus have an impact on the teaching of comparative literature nationwide. The most recent textbook is Longxi Zhang's *Bijiao Wenxue Yanjiu Rumen* (Comparative Literature: A Guide for Study, 2008). Like Zhang's other books, it is not intended to cover all phenomena in the discipline, but as a practical guide for students to engage in further study and in addition to theoretical and methodological issues Zhang's book includes cases studies.

The above mentioned scholarly books (published both in Chinese and in Chinese translations) can be categorized into the following groups with regard to their contents: in poetics and literary theory 29 articles; in area studies and specific topics 10 articles; in the history of comparative poetics 5 articles; in the art of poetry 4 articles; about textbooks 2 articles; and about reference books 1 article. Apart from scholarly books on poetics, a great number of critical articles have also appeared in the same period, thus adding another dimension to scholarship in the Mainland. An overview of the CCLA quarterly journal *Zhongguo Bijiao Wenxue* (Comparative Literature in China) 1984-2008 the following were published: in poetics and literary theory 28 articles; in area studies and specific topics 17 articles; in genre studies 15 articles; in general culture 10 articles; in Western and Chinese literary theory 9 articles; in translation studies 6 articles; in methodology 2 articles; in gender studies 1 article; and book reviews and interviews 2 articles. Based on these numbers, we can see that more scholars are interested in discussing poetics by taking it as literary theory in general and we have the same situation with regard to books. Chinese scholars pay more attention to the comparison of categories of genre, as well as to the comparison between different areas and literary works. Since the 1990s, other foci of attention include translation studies and gender issues although the latter field is represented by only one article and no article has yet appeared on issues of race in literature.

Statistics of articles on comparative poetics published in other leading journals are of course relevant and we present our findings with regard to the following journals: *Wenxue Pinglun* (Literary Review), *Wenyi Yanjiu* (Literature & Art Studies), *Wenyi Pinglun* (Literature and Art Criticism), *Waiguo Wenxue Pinglun* (Foreign Literature Review), *Waiguo Wenxue Yanjiu* (Foreign Literature Studies), *Wenyi Zhengming* (Forum in Literature and Art), *Wenyi Lilun Yanjiu* (Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art), and *Wenyi Lilun Yu Piping* (Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art). All these journals are key journals in China on literature and art criticism and articles published in these journals are indexed by the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index. The articles are published in Chinese in most cases with abstracts in English. Topics on comparative poetics carried in these journals from 1980-2008 can be grouped as follows: in aesthetics and poetics 23 articles; in area studies and specific topics 18 articles; in Western and Chinese literary theory 14 articles; in genre studies 5 articles; in drama and theater studies 4 articles; in general culture 3 articles; and book reviews and interviews 2 articles. What these statistics indicate is that the range and number of articles are roughly the same as that in *Zhongguo Bijiao Wenxue*. Another common feature is that studies conducted on specific topics/themes

occupy only a small proportion: 20% for scholarly books and articles in *Comparative Literature in China* and 30% for articles in the other journals. In comparison, however, more books (nearly 80%) and articles (nearly 70%) have been written on the theoretical level in *Comparative Literature in China*. This reflects the tendency on the part of Chinese scholars to approach an issue from a broad perspective rooted in Chinese cultural tradition but is also greatly influenced by the importation of Western literary theories. Overall, almost 40% of Chinese scholars engage in comparative poetics by taking poetics as literary theory in general whereas 10% of them deal with poetic techniques.

A further way in which we can gauge the situation of comparative poetics in China is with the themes of CCLA conferences 1985-2008. The first national conference of the Association was convened in October 1985, two months after René Etiemble delivered his lecture on the revival of comparative literature in China at the triannual congress of the International Comparative Literature Association / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée in Paris (ICLA/AILC). Etiemble's prediction that the third phase in the development of comparative literature could possibly happen in China inspired the expansion of comparative poetics. The themes of CCLA conferences were as follows: 1) *The Revival of Comparative Literature in China* (Shenzhen, 1985), 2) *The Space and Boundary of Literature* (Xi'an, 1987), 3) *Passion and Illusion: Chinese Literature in World Literatures* (Guiyang, 1990), 4) *Literature in the Context of Multiculturalism* (Zhang Jiajie, 1993), 5) *Cultural Dialogue and Cultural Memory* (Changchun, 1996), 6) *Comparative Literature in an Age of Multiplicity* (Chengdu, 1999), 7) *Comparative Literature in Cross-Cultural Context in the New Millennium* (Nanjing, 2002), 8) *Review and Prospect: Comparative Literature in China in the Past Two Decades* (Shenzhen, 2005), 9) *Literary Dialogue in Multicultural Interactions* (Beijing, 2008), and 10) *Comparative Literature Today and Research Methodology* (Shanghai, 2011).

In the conferences participants have focused on the different attributes Chinese poetics possesses in comparison with Western poetics and this interest have lasted for more than ten years as more and more Chinese scholars have begun to engage in the reconfiguration of Chinese poetics in an attempt to carry dialogue with Western critical discourse. From the above presented gauge of scholarly books, journals, and CCLA conferences the following can be deduced with regard to the development of comparative poetics in Mainland China: the phase of translation and introduction of the parameters of comparative poetics, the phase of adoption to adaptation of European and Anglophone forms of comparative literature to the study of Chinese literature, and the phase of adaptation with stress on cross-cultural interaction.

While there is ample evidence that comparative poetics have become a major field in the humanities in Chinese, we view this imbued with a problem of what remains a major drawback of comparative literature, namely the discipline's nation-based orientation or even narrow-minded nationalism. This occurs in Chinese scholarship in the following version. Owing to the fact that most of the concepts and notions in use are translated from Western languages, an anxiety is seen among scholars about the theoretical discourse as they insist that there is a lack of such discourse in Chinese scholarship. Therefore, it seems necessary for them to establish a Chinese school of comparative literature with its own Chinese based theoretical and methodological frameworks and taxonomy (see, e.g., Chen, *From Thematics*; Cao, "How the Chinese School"). However, such so-called "Chineseness" in comparative poetics makes no sense because, in our view, the importance and relevance of the humanities — and especially of comparative poetics — is to study and explore different cultures and literatures, thus maintaining and transferring knowledge. With the attempt to make the Chinese noticeable in humanities scholarship, most books mentioned in this essay attempt to cover almost every aspect of poetics, but some books, especially in the 1990s by the mainland scholars mentioned above, provide the reader with insight in terms of new scholarship and many include repetitions of already discussed matters. While comparative poetics as a field and comparative literature as a discipline are well established within the humanities in China, too many texts are based on translated Chinese versions of the original. To make matters worse, not many Chinese scholars are able to read Western theories in the original language. As translation is often regarded as a form of re-creation, research based on translation will naturally lead to misunderstandings and the misuse of Western theories in the Chinese context. Of course, this problem is no different from the situation, for example in the U.S., where in the last several decades there is an ongoing debate about the lack of knowledge of foreign languages (see, e.g., Apter).



Different from Mainland China, in Taiwan and in Hong Kong comparative literature is practiced in departments of foreign languages and the few books in comparative literature from a global perspective and/or with regard to theory appeared also in English (see, e.g., Chen, *From Thematics*). With regard to institutional presence, there exists a Graduate Institute of Comparative Literature at Fu Jen Catholic University and a Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong. With regard to the international presence of comparative literature in Asia, although Mainland China proposed to hold the 1997 congress of the ICLA/AILC in Beijing, the bid that was rejected by the executive of the Association with the reasoning that the Chinese organization was not sufficiently developed and without the required resources to held a successful congress. Thus, since the inception of the Association in 1955 in Venice ICLA/AILC congress held outside of Europe and the Americas were held only four times: in Tokyo (1991), Pretoria (2000), Hong Kong (2004), Seoul (2010), and none in India or in the Middle East. This distribution of congresses with regard to language and culture disadvantages Asia by the most prominent international association of the discipline.

In conclusion, we postulate that in the field of comparative poetics many issues can be studied best and with relevant results within the relevant context and through an understanding and knowledge of both primary texts and theory. In comparative poetics the issues and questions themselves are not "what" is relevant; rather, it is "how" these issues and questions become the subject of study as suggested in the framework of comparative literature and comparative cultural studies (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, "From Comparative"). The role scholars in China ought to play in the humanities in general and in comparative poetics in particular is to bring about knowledge from the ways of how the issues and questions studied would cross cultural boundaries. Scholars working in Chinese are able to contribute to the study of poetics worldwide as they have done, but as to how to improve the field of comparative humanities remains fundamental and depends on a cross-cultural perspective.

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Author's Profile: Xiaolu Wang teaches cultural studies and world literature at Sichuan University. His fields of interests in research include comparative literature, literary theory, and cultural criticism. In addition to numerous articles, Wang's book publications include *Beimei Hanxuejie de Zhongguo Wenxue Sixiang Yanjiu* (A Study of Chinese Literary Thought in North America) (2008), *Wenhua Piping Guanjianci Yanjiu* (A Study of Key Concepts in Cultural Criticism) (2007), and the edited volumes *Dangdai Xifang Wenhua Piping Duben* (Contemporary Western Cultural Criticism: A Reader. Ed. Xiaolu Wang, Jian Shi, and Wei Xiao) (2004), *Xifang Hanxue Jie de Zhongguo Wenlun Yanjiu* (Chinese Literary Theory in the West) (2003), and *Wenxue Lilun yu Wenhua Yanjiu* (Selected Essays on Literary Theory and Cultural Studies) (2003). E-mail: <[xlwangscu@yahoo.com.cn](mailto:xlwangscu@yahoo.com.cn)>

Author's profile: Yan Liu teaches cultural studies and Sino-American literary and cultural relations at the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. Her fields of interests in research include Sino-foreign literary and cultural relations, cultural criticism, and gender studies. In addition to numerous articles, Liu's book publications include *Chayi zhi Mei: Yilijialei de Nvxing Zhuyi Lilun Yanjiu* (Sexual Difference: The Philosophical Vision of Luce Irigaray) (2010), *Xifang Xiandai Xijie Zhong de Muqin Shenfen Yanjiu* (The Representation of Motherhood in Modern Western Plays) (2004), and *Zhongguo Wenhua dui Meiguo Wenxue de Yingxiang* (The Influence of Chinese Culture in American Literature) (1999). E-mail: <[liuyan@mail.gdufs.edu.cn](mailto:liuyan@mail.gdufs.edu.cn)>