

Comparative Literature in China

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"Comparative Literature in China"

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Abstract: In their co-authored article, "Comparative Literature in China," Xiaoyi Zhou and Q.S. Tong present a brief intellectual and institutional history of the discipline. According to Zhou and Tong, main features of the history of comparative literature in China include the fact that as an academic discipline and a mode of intellectual inquiry imported to China from the West in the early twentieth century, the discipline has always been a priori strategically political and the proposition that the development of comparative literature in China is closely related to the formation of China's literary modernity includes the parallel issue of national identity. Further, Zhou and Tong argue that built upon the politics of national identity construction and the development of modernity, Chinese comparatists tended to remain traditional and adhered up to recent times to scholarly practices of traditional comparative literature. Thus, the said ideological background indeed determines some of the concerns Chinese scholars in their analysis of Chinese-foreign cultural relationships inquire into and the authors present the argument that this situation produced scholarship of lesser rigour. Ultimately, Zhou and Tong argue for a redirection of Chinese comparative literature into a more culture-oriented and less traditional comparative literature in China, similar to the situation of the discipline in the West.

Xiaoyi ZHOU and Q.S. TONG**Comparative Literature in China**

On the landscape of modern Chinese literary scholarship, comparative literature is perhaps one of the most versatile and active fields of study. As an academic discipline and a mode of intellectual inquiry and scholarly production, comparative literature was imported to China from the West, via Japan, in the early twentieth century. At a time of major intellectual and social shifts of the country and when many Chinese writers, artists, as well as scholars took upon themselves to reform traditional values and practices, radical intellectuals such as Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu, Lu Xun, and Zhou Zuoren, among others, advocated the importation and acceptance of Western thought. Parallel to this and as a natural result of the said interest, the translation of Western works became a national enterprise and the domains of literature experienced an unprecedented influx of new concepts, formulations, approaches, and practices. In the scholarship of literature new areas of study were established and comparative literature was one of them.

The term comparative literature was first used by the poet and critic Huang Ren (1866-1913), professor of literature at Suzhou University, in his lecture notes where he refers to Posnett's 1886 *Comparative Literature* (see Xu 109). Next, Lu Xun (1881-1936), father of modern Chinese literature, encountered Western writings on comparative literature while he was a student in Japan: In a letter he wrote in 1911 to Xu Shoushang, Lu mentions the Japanese translation of Frédéric Loliée's 1906 *Histoire des littératures comparées des origines au XXe siècle* (see Lu Vol. 11, 331) and he has used the comparative method in his work as early as 1907 (see Lu Vol. 1, 63-115). In the early twentieth century, when in China Western culture and thought gained much currency, in literary scholarship a discipline that explores Chinese and Western literatures would have its natural appeal. Thus, the general interest in the subject and approach resulted in a series of translations of Western works. For example, Fu Donghua, a translator of considerable repute, translated and published in 1930 Loliée's *Histoire des littératures comparées* and Paul Van Tieghem's *La Littérature comparée* was brought out in Chinese in 1936 by the poet Dai Wangshu (1905-1950), only five years after its publication in Paris in 1931. Further, poets Zhang Xishen and Wang Fuquan, respectively, translated from Japanese and French works on comparative literature: Zhang's translations appeared in the journal *New China* in the 1920s, later reprinted by the Commercial Press and Wang's translations were published as a series in *Awakening: The Supplement of Republican Daily* (1924). These texts not only popularized comparative literature but also made it possible to formally institute it as an academic subject in university education. The establishing of comparative literature as a field of study at National Tsinghua University (Beijing) in the 1920s is probably one of the most important events in the early history of comparative literature in China. At Tsinghua, courses on or closely related to comparative literature included Wu Mi's "Zhongxishi zhi bijiao" ("Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Poetics") in 1926 and Chen Yinke's "Xiren zhi dongfangxue muluxue" ("Bibliography of Sinology") in 1927. And I.A. Richards, who was a visiting professor at Tsinghua University from 1929 to 1931, also taught comparative literature while at Tsinghua (see Xu 111). By the mid-1930s, comparative literature as an academic subject and a mode of cross-cultural inquiry was firmly established and was to further develop into a prominent discipline in the history of modern Chinese literary scholarship. The period from the 1930s to the 1950s is the most formative time for the discipline in China. Then, after a period of twenty years of silence, came another active period, from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. In these two main periods, series of books in the field appeared, either authored by Chinese scholars or translated into Chinese from various Western languages. In our brief survey it is not possible to record in detail all the major developments of comparative literature in China. However, here we sketch some significant moments. Our purpose is to consider the intellectual and historical conditions under which comparative literature has obtained such remarkable popularity and prominence in Chinese scholarship and to show that the development and currency of comparative literature is closely related to the formation of China's literary modernity.

Comparative Literature in China, 1920s to the 1950s

In the early decades of the twentieth century, comparative literature in China was preoccupied with literary and cultural encounters between China and three major cultural sites: India, Russia, and Europe. As is well-known, Indian religious culture has had enormous influence on Chinese culture and literature since Buddhism entered China. For instance Buddhist fables were quickly appropriated and transformed into some of the most famous Chinese narratives in fiction. Later, Buddhist thought constituted an important source of inspiration for Tang poetry, manifested often in the poet's epiphanic understanding of the essence of nature and life in seemingly detached descriptions of landscapes or natural objects. Wang Wei, for example, typically in some of his best-known poems, fuses Zen Buddhist understanding with natural surroundings, in such an empathetic mode that the poetic self and the natural other become a totality. Although Buddhism has been a very significant source of inspiration for Chinese literary production, it is not until the first half of the twentieth century that Chinese scholars, by then equipped with Western concepts and methodologies from comparative literary studies, begin to examine the influence of Buddhism on Chinese literature and for that matter on Chinese culture as a whole. In literary studies, work by Hu Shi, Chen Yinke, and Ji Xianlin represent outstanding achievements in the field.

Hu Shi (1819-1962) studied with John Dewey and after his return to China became, together with Chen Duxiu and Lu Xun, a prominent leader of the new cultural movement. He advocated the importance of textual exegesis and achieved a great deal himself in his own practice of textual criticism. In his seminal article, "Xi you ji kaozheng" ("Studies of *Journey to the West*"), he identifies Indian sources in this classic Chinese novel. As a leader of the new cultural movement and an admirer of Western scholarship and knowledge, Hu Shi, in directing his readers' attention to the influence of Buddhism on Chinese culture, suggests an underlying political agenda. For him, it is of vital importance for China to look beyond its boundaries and to adopt modern Western knowledge in order to reinvigorate Chinese literature and Chinese culture as a whole. Similar to Hu Shi, Ji Xianlin (1911-), who spent about ten years in Germany between 1925 and 1945, has an abiding interest in Indian culture and has devoted almost all his life to the study of its influences on Chinese tradition. Although he has been much less involved politically, his research methodology manifests an understanding of modern scholarship that is not totally ideologically innocent. Modern Chinese literature is to a great extent influenced by Russian and Soviet literature, respectively. Since the publication of Lu Xun's "Kuangren riji" ("The Diary of a Madman"), the first text of Chinese modernity, Russian and Soviet literature have been instrumental in the development of modern Chinese literature. A whole generation of Chinese writers such as Mao Dun, Jiang Guangci, Guo Moruo, Shen Congwen, Ai Wu, Xia Yan, Ba Jin, and Sha Ting at some stage showed great interest in Russian and Soviet literature and all were influenced by them to various degrees. Thus, given this importance of Russian and Soviet literature in modern Chinese literature, the study of their reception in China has been a prominent theme of Chinese comparative literary studies. An early example is Zhou Zuoren's "Wenxue shang de erguo yu zhongguo" ("Russia and China in Literature") (1920), in which Zhou, although offering no case studies comparing Russian and Chinese writers, suggests that the two literary traditions share some similarities in terms of their analogous social and political conditions (see Zhou 5-8). Zhou's analysis in fact suggests the immediate relevance of Russian literature to Chinese literary production and anticipates the centrality of Russian-Soviet literary influence in modern Chinese literature.

Admittedly, the discourse of Chinese revolutionary literature after the 1930s is pervasively tinted with a Russo-Soviet literary ethos. In responding to this unique aspect of modern Chinese literature, critical studies of Chinese reception of Russian-Soviet literature became a major strand of comparative literary studies in China between the 1940s and 1950s. For example, Ge Baoquan has published between 1956 and 1962 a series of essays on Russian writers and their influence on Chinese authors and their texts, Han Changjing and Feng Xuefeng published on Lu Xun and Russian literature, and others such as Ye Shuifu, Feng Zhi, and Ge Yihong wrote on Russian-Soviet literature in China. Of course, that Russian-Soviet literature acquired such high visibility in modern Chinese literature and, consequently, received a large amount of critical

attention is by no means extraordinary considering the close political ties between China and the Soviet Union in the 1950s (see, e.g., Xu 241-48).

In Chinese comparative literature concerning Indian and Chinese literature and Russian and Chinese literature, it is noticeable that much of the scholarly attention is focused on how Chinese literature and Chinese culture have been influenced by inspirations drawn from India and Russia, respectively, and comparatively. In contrast, critical inquires into the encounters between Chinese literature and European literature have been largely centered on China's influence on Europe, in particular on English-language literature. In the case of the latter, scholars such as Chen Shouyi, Fang Zhong, and Fan Cunzhong contributed significantly to our historical knowledge of early cultural encounters between England and China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Chen Shouyi was probably the first one who systematically studied the reception of Chinese literature in Europe. As early as in the 1920s he published a number of studies on the circulation of Chinese literary works in Europe. Among his other studies, Chen studied the process in which the Chinese play "Zhaoshi Guer" ("The Orphan of the Zhaos") was translated into English, French, German, and Russian, and examined how it was received and parodied in the West. This play is arguably the single most influential Chinese literary work before the nineteenth century in Europe, and a whole group of European authors including Voltaire and Goethe on the continent and Richard Hurd, William Hatchett, and Arthur Murphy in England showed intensive interest in this "exotic" story. Fang Zhong (1902-1991), who studied in Britain and the United States, continued to research in this extraordinarily rich field: In his essay "Shiba shiji yingguo wenxue yu zhong guo" ("Eighteenth-Century English Literature and China") (1931), discusses English imagination and exoticism as revealed in its discursive formulations about the remote and mysterious "Cathay." Fang divides the English reception of China in the eighteenth century into three stages: From the early eighteenth century to 1740, from 1740 to 1770, and the remaining decades after 1770. According to Fang, in the first stage, China begins to increase its visibility in British consciousness as seen in Addison and Steele's writings. In the second stage, a number of writers such as Oliver Goldsmith and Horace Walpole use extensively cultural resources from China. In the last phase, interest in China generally wanes in England, although John Scott, for example, employs Chinese materials in his poetry. Fang argues that in the eighteenth century China is considered a fascinating culture in a positive context while it is only in the nineteenth century that this image of China changes. Like many Chinese scholars of comparative literature, Fang Zhong attempts to present a narrative of the formation of English literary knowledge about China and explains the formations of rationalized historical processes in which changes in the English idea or image of China maybe fully explained. However, history is far richer than our theoretical imagination. While China is viewed as a model of human civilization in the eighteenth century, China is at the same time regarded as an example of corruption and degeneration. For instance Robinson Crusoe's account of China from a negative point of view or James Beattie's views on the Chinese language are other representations of matters Chinese in the late eighteenth century. Fan Cunzhong's studies of Chinese literature in England are built on a massive amount of primary sources and the scope of the topics covered in these articles shows that Fan, in a systematic way, attempts to examine the formation of the English idea of China by offering detailed case studies. Fan Cunzhong's and Fang Zhong's studies represent major steps in the study of English literary knowledge of China in the eighteenth century. At the same time, we note that so far no major studies exist of Chinese literature in nineteenth-century England although we know that English knowledge of China in the nineteenth century continued to expand. Even after the Opium War (1840-1842), for instance, there were several exhibitions of Chinese culture organized in England and some nineteenth-century English authors including Thomas de Quincey produced a substantial amount of writing on China. This gap in comparative literary scholarship is significant. For one, scholars in Chinese comparative literature appear to be curiously selective in the choice of their topics. In the eighteenth century when China as a country and a cultural phenomenon was generally held or imagined as an alternative model of civilization for the West, the European reception of the Chinese political system, the Chinese way of life, and Chinese attitudes and ideas would seem to be more gratifying topics for Chinese scholars. Although Western discursive

formations of the idea and image of China are mostly manifestations of the Western fancy for the exotic Other, China, presented as such, would help build a sense of national pride (see Fan 1982).

In the 1950s, although scholars in comparative literature such as Ji Xianlin and Fan Cunzhong continue to be productive in their areas, it is generally agreed that their research was largely a continuation of their earlier work without being able to offer new insights or present new materials. From the 1960s to the 1970s, comparative literature is silent: One obvious explanation for this is that the political situation in China during the time permitted no studies of Western literature, and comparative literature, by definition, is concerned with foreign literature, and thus the interregnum. Obviously, the political exclusion of comparative literature was a consequence of Mao's cultural policy and an extension of the establishment of political uniformity in the domain of literary studies.

Comparative Literature in China, 1970s to the 1990s

In the West, with the adoption of literary and culture theory beginning with the late 1960s by English and other single-language studies, comparative literature -- the discipline where literary and culture theory occupied a prominent position since its inception -- has been attracting increasingly less interest and more and more students of literature have turned away from it for a number of reasons. As an academic discipline, comparative literature increasingly has lost its vigor and radicalism seen in the 1950s and the 1960s and now it appears a discipline waiting to be replaced by cultural studies or translation studies not necessarily taught and worked on in departments of comparative literature. Intellectually, the options to redirect comparative literature into cultural studies and/or translation studies has been suggested, for example by Susan Bassnett in her widely quoted *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (1993) and she suggests that comparative literature as a discipline is "dead" (47). While all this may indeed be the situation of the discipline, to various degrees, in the West, in the non-Western world including China, comparative literature has enjoyed an amazing and sustained popularity. Specifically in China, since the late 1970s comparative literature has been one of the most prominent areas of research, attracting a large number of scholars and students. This extraordinary popularity of comparative literature after the 1970s has been construed as a continuity of its establishment in the 1930s and 1940s and Chinese scholars in comparative literature tend to disagree with Bassnett's pronouncements. Instead, they prefer, in general, to turn to the classics of Western comparative literature such as Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* for a theoretical defense and legitimization of the practice of comparative literature, one that is built on the assumption of the existence of commonalities of cultures.

Indeed, one of the main concerns of Chinese comparative literature in the new period is to legitimize itself as a discipline and to reestablish its centrality in the Chinese system of literary scholarship. Again, one useful way to reinforce the discipline's importance is to make available Western works on comparative literature in Chinese. Thus, in the period in question most seminal texts in English, French, and German have been translated into Chinese. In addition, a number of anthologies of critical essays on comparative literature have been published. Following this intellectual revival, the Chinese renaissance of comparative literature is now solidified in its institutionalization as well to the point that after 1987 even public interest in comparative literature is manifest in the media. A spate of articles, essays, reviews, etc., appeared in Chinese newspapers thus forming a public forum on comparative literature. Scholars from the older generation such as Ji Xianlin, Ge Baoquan, Fang Zhong, Yang Zhouhan, Li Funing, Fan Cunzhong, Qian Zhongshu, and Jia Zhifang all participated in this extraordinary public discussion of the uses of comparative literature in China. Soon comparative literature found its way into the university classroom on a massive scale. Since Shi Zhecun offered in 1987 his course of comparative literature, the first of its kind after 1949, more than sixty institutions in China have established comparative literature as an academic subject before the end of the 1990s (see Liu and Wang 107-10).

In retrospect, admittedly, translations of Western works on literary theory revitalized and perhaps reinvented comparative literature as one of the most liberal areas of study and research in China. During the period to the 1990s, the remarkable nation-wide enthusiasm for comparative

literature brought out a large number of publications in the field, most of which are visibly concerned with either new critical methodologies in the discipline or the historiography of comparative literature. Arguably, Chinese scholars of comparative literature are generally well informed of the latest critical developments in the West and have an unflinching interest in quickly turning more influential theoretical publications into Chinese. Translation in China has been a national enterprise and has played an instrumental part in the making of China's literary modernity. However, the choice of Western texts for translation often reveals the needs of China's self-fashioning rather than recognition of their inherent values. In the field of comparative literature, René Wellek and Austin Warren and Henry H.H. Remak (e.g., 1961) are the most translated Western scholars because some of their formulations can be readily appropriated for legitimating and strengthening comparative literature, not just as an academic discipline but as an agency enabling a dialogical relationship between Chinese and Western literary traditions and thereby allowing Chinese literature to be integrated into a world system of literature. Embedded in this desire to have a direct and equal dialogue with other literary traditions is the conviction of the existence of a common system of valuation in culture akin to Goethe's much debated notion of *Weltliteratur*.

In the 1980s, a central theme of comparative literature in China has been constructed on the belief in an innate aesthetic value of literary production that was not determined by time and space but is universally shared. The notion of literariness in American New Criticism was understood as a textual quality that defines what literature is and this was rapidly transformed into a principle of critical practice. This focus on literariness in the 1980s represents a major shift from the practice of comparative literature in the 1930s, which, as suggested above, was primarily concerned with archeological discoveries of major foreign cultural sources that found their way into Chinese literature.

The Function of Comparative Literature in China

The renaissance and rise of comparative literature in China in the period up to the 1990s are both a result and a source of energy for China's literary modernity. As a discursive literary and critical practice, as a mode and a subject of literary studies, its development mirrors China's social developments in the twentieth century. Although imported and adapted from the West, Chinese comparative literature has gone through a different passage of evolution. In the 1930s and 1940s what attracted most scholarly attention in the field was the intellectual excitement derived from discoveries of early histories of China's encounters with the West and India, for example, similar to the French school of comparative literature. However, in the 1980s Chinese comparative literature, inspired by formulations of American New Criticism, found its own path of progress and process. The large number of Western critical works translated into Chinese during this period were either works by the New Critics or by those associated with them. The resurrection of New Criticism in Chinese comparative literature, both methodological and theoretical, and its notion of literariness have been appropriated into a critical dogma that refuses to consider literature as a social, historical, and political discourse. This approach in Chinese comparative literature in practice refuses the discipline to be incorporated into cultural studies. Thus, generally speaking, Chinese comparative literature in the 1980s has been exclusively interested in its own self-fashioning and showed a visible indifference to the rise of critical discourse with regard to postmodernism in the Euro-American world, a discourse and critical practice that challenges forms of essentialism including the essentialist notion of literariness.

Ganesh Devy argues that the rise of comparative literature in India is closely tied to the rise of Indian nationalism and that as such has much to do with the politics of identity. In turn, Bassnett considers Devy's view applicable to the rise of comparative literature in the West: The term comparative literature in "Europe [...] first appeared in an age of national struggles, when new boundaries were being erected and the whole question of national culture and national identity was under discussion throughout Europe and the expanding United States of America" (Bassnett 8-9). To consider the historical origin of comparative literature as a discipline is at the same time to specify its political and ideological provenance. Not just in India and the Euro-American world, but

also in China, the advent of comparative literature is, historically speaking, interwoven with the narration of nation as a strategy of forming national identity.

In the 1930s and 1940s, a large amount of comparative literary studies were primarily concerned with the possibilities of comparison between Chinese literary productions and those elsewhere, interested in searching for common themes and motifs among them or similarities among writers. Arbitrary comparisons were widely practiced and imposed upon authors or texts that have no relationships whatsoever. For example, Zhao Jingshen, in his study of Chinese Yuan drama, compares Shakespeare with Tang Xianzhu, simply on the basis of the closeness of the dates of birth of the two. And his comparison of Li Yu and Molière is triggered by his observation that "they both wrote comedies" (Zhao 278-83). Zhao Jingshen was a playwright and might be excused for the crudeness of his studies, but comparisons of this kind have been a very popular approach among prominent scholars in Chinese comparative literature. Comparative studies of Li Po and Goethe by Liang Zongdai, Chinese and Western dramaturgy by Bin Xin, and Chinese and Western poetics by Zhu Guangqian tend to be conducted on the basis of observed similarities and are generally devoid of genuine insights and interesting observations (see *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue yanjiu ziliao* [*Research Materials on Chinese Comparative Literature*] 1989, 226-31, 244-65, 240-43, 208-19).

The lack of intellectual rigour of the comparative studies of this kind is attributable to a misinformed notion of comparative literature as nothing but "comparison" that, in practice, encourages comparative studies for the sake of comparison. However, the great amount of enthusiasm for this approach among scholars of comparative literature, however, is indicative of a hidden agenda of Chinese comparative literature. In Zhu Guangqian's study, for example, Western and Chinese views on love and nature are compared. And some of the differences between them, according to Zhu, can be only fully appreciated with recognition of the differences between Chinese national characteristics and their Western counterparts. National are indeed often understood as the causes of differences or similarities between cultural traditions. What is manifest in this type of comparative studies is then an attempt to foreground, by comparing China and the West in terms of their generalized national traits, the uniqueness of Chinese national temperament as if it were a real category that could be grasped and comprehended.

Chinese comparative literature therefore is heavily self-referential, and other literary traditions brought in for comparison serve as a Lacanian mirror image in which the self might be understood and constructed, as it were. It is precisely through such comparisons that Fan Cunzhong, for example, has experienced the feeling of national pride in Goldsmith's or Johnson's encomia of China, and it is also through comparisons of this kind that the value and worth of Chinese culture are reconfirmed. It is, then, obvious that the advocacy of the importance of "literariness" as a theme of comparative literary studies in China has an underlying ideological agenda, for the very notion of "literariness" legitimates comparisons between authors, texts, and literary practices regardless of their historical and social specificities and encompasses them in a world system of literature. It is then no surprise that the American New Criticism and Russian Formalism constituted the most important sources of theoretical authority for the practice of comparative literature in China, and some of the most distinguished practitioners of comparative literature in China have either translated works by the New Critics and Formalists or written about them. The influence of New Criticism is still visible today, as manifested in the scholarly tenacity of holding the text as the only legitimate object of study and regarding culture as only providing a context in which "literariness" of the text can be grasped.

In relation to this notion of comparative literature is the desire to build a Chinese school of comparative literature. John Deeney argues, for example, that it is necessary to look seriously into the possibility of a "Third World" comparative literature by employing the mode of Chinese thinking in comparative studies. The Chinese school of comparative literature, according to him, must start with the firm establishment of the sense of China's cultural identity, which will evolve gradually into the stage of self-consciousness (see Deeney 266).

The call for a Chinese school of comparative literature met with enthusiastic responses on the Mainland. In our opinion, however, a careful examination of this proposal for a Chinese school of

comparative literature shows a lack of substance as well as impracticality. What underscores this proposal is a politics of recognition that aims to establish Chinese comparative literature as an equal partner on the international stage of comparative literature.

In this sense, this movement toward a Chinese school of comparative literature is a strategic one than one that is motivated by serious theoretical considerations. The rise and development of Chinese comparative literature in the twentieth century are closely bound up with China's national project of modernization, inspired and supported by Western Enlightenment values. Its renaissance in the late 1970s after the Cultural Revolution further testifies to its close intellectual relation to Enlightenment values and humanism. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the idea or ideal of modernity has been haunting Chinese consciousness. Faced with the real danger of China being dismembered by Western powers and Japan in the early twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals embraced Enlightenment values and practices and were convinced that rationalism, equality, and technological improvement were solutions to what Bertrand Russell once called "the problem of China." But this total acceptance of Enlightenment values and practices has been very costly, as it inevitably means a total acceptance, as a starting point, of such binaries as the traditional and the modern and China and the West as reality. It is known that binarism of this kind has been used as a familiar strategy to configure global economy, centralizing and marginalizing at the same time cultures in an imagined map of world civilizations. Those cultures placed marginally in this global configuration are thus caught in the crisis generated from their own uncertainty about their sense of identity. This is, for example, why Hu Shi, in his comparative studies of Chinese and Indian literature, came to the conclusion that China should learn from the West. The desire to dislocate China from its marginal position and to reposition it in relation to the centrality of Western culture has been a cause of the developments of comparative literature in China. Some of the most frequently asked questions include: Why is there no epic in Chinese literature and why is there no tragedy in China? (e.g., Zhu 220-25). But why should there be such genres in Chinese literature?

Looking back at some of the concerns of Chinese scholars of comparative literature, one is necessarily struck by the lack of sophistication and naivete with which their critical inquiries have been conducted. But those imagined issues, those perceived differences between Chinese and Western literature have unfortunately trapped some of the most distinguished Chinese scholars owing to the said binary mode of thinking. To identify gaps, incongruities, and differences between Chinese and Western literary traditions and practices, in the ultimate analysis, is to reconfirm the existence of the universality of certain literary qualities, values and practices, by which those very gaps, incongruities and differences might be examined. This belief of the universal applicability of literary values is nowhere more manifest than in the pursuit of textual "literariness" and in the call for the establishing of a Chinese school of comparative literature. The former is to extend the New Critics' Critical practice into the study of Chinese literary production and the latter is largely for the purpose of popularizing indigenous literary practices and presenting them as indispensable not only for the Chinese but for all cultures.

Chinese comparative literature as a critical practice may thus be considered a product of China's pursuit of modernity in the twentieth century. The crisis of comparative literature that has been a cause of concern for scholars in China in recent years registers, in fact, a deeper level of crisis that is also the crisis of the ideological and political foundation of comparative literature -- its conviction in the existence of the universality of literary values. In recent years, the Enlightenment project with all its paradoxes has been brought under close critical scrutiny in the West; and the deconstruction of Eurocentrism has serious ramifications. Under this new intellectual condition, the ideology of comparative literature has been accordingly questioned, and it is no longer possible, intellectually at least, to conduct comparative studies on the basis of binarism without serious and careful modifications. The crisis of comparative literature is the crisis of the ideological understanding of the function of comparative literature, but it may constitute an opportunity to reinvent comparative studies in response to the challenges of recent critical developments.

There is now increasing awareness in China of the invalidity of structuring comparative studies on the principle of binarism. For example, Lydia Liu's *Translingual Practice: Literature, National*

Culture, and Translated Modernity -- China, 1900-1937 (1995) represents much needed new development in cross-cultural studies and thus comparative literature. What is particularly relevant in terms of Liu's work in its critical methodology is her careful discussion of how power relationships are embodied in some of the concepts and keywords that have traveled to China and how these power relationships generate(d) social realities through translingual practice. Liu's study reaches far beyond the scope of orthodox comparative literary studies concerned only with cross-cultural influence and reception or with questions like why and how cross-cultural influence is exercised and what determines cross-cultural reception. If comparative literature wishes to overcome its own perpetual crisis, it has to get rid of the rigidity of its self-definition, it has to reach beyond the level of literature and must direct its attention to other forms of cultural production, including literature. And in this sense, it perhaps matters very little how it should be called: Comparative literature or (cross-) cultural studies. And we propose that this notion is applicable to both Chinese comparative literature and comparative literature in the West and elsewhere.

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