

Comparative Literature in Chinese: A Survey of Books Published 2000-2013

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## Miaomiao WANG

### Comparative Literature in Chinese: A Survey of Books Published 2000-2013

Comparative literature in Chinese is today — and has been for several decades — one of the most incisive and institutionalized disciplines in Mainland China's humanities and social sciences. While Chinese scholars have published books in comparative literature in other languages, in the following I review single-authored books and collected volumes published in Chinese only (on comparative literature in Chinese see Chen and Sheng

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss6/14>>; Shang

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss6/19>>; Wang, Ning

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss6/18>>; Wang and Liu; Zhang

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss6/20>>; Zhang and Yue

<<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1881>>; Zhou and Tong <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1092>>; see also Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Multilingual"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/comparativeliteraturebooks>> where many single-authored and collected volumes published in Chinese are listed). Comparative literature and comparative poetics emerged early in China. For example, Guowei Wang (王國維) published *红楼梦评论* (Review of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*) in 1904 in which he applied Schopenhauer's aesthetic ideology to analyze classical Chinese works and Wang's book is regarded as the starting point of East-West comparative studies of literature. Following the Cultural Revolution a good number of scholars — e.g., Yuanpei Cai's *哲学论著* (On Philosophy), Xun Lu's *坟·摩罗诗力说* (The Grave: Forces of Romantic Poetry), Zongdai Liang's *诗与真* (Poetry and Truth), Baihua Zong's *美学散步* (Walking Aesthetic), Guangqian Zhu's *诗论* (Poetics), Zhongshu Qian's *管锥编* (Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters), Yuanhua Wang's *文心雕龙创作论* (On the Creation of The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragon), etc. — have contributed to the development of modern poetics which can be considered comparative. These scholars had a good knowledge of both Western and Chinese cultures and transferred Western literary theory to Chinese scholarship. They also developed Chinese poetic theory. For example, in *坟·摩罗诗力说* (The Grave: Forces of Romantic Poetry) Xun Lu analyzed classical Chinese poetics and culture, Baihua Zong compared in his *美学散步* (Walking Aesthetic) Chinese and Western aesthetics, and Guangqian Zhu Sinicized Western aesthetic philosophy in his *诗论* (Poetics). Shunqing Cao's 1988 *中西比较诗学* (Eastern and Western Comparative Poetics) signified an important step towards the institutional presence of the field of East-West comparative studies of literature and the republication of the book in 2010 suggests its enduring impact in Chinese comparative literature.

I begin my review with Ning Wang's 2000 *比较文学与当代文化批评* (Comparative Literature and Contemporary Cultural Criticism). Wang presented a review of the historical evolution of comparative literature against the discipline's international background and probed into theoretical issues in both Western and Chinese-language comparative literature. Wang discussed cultural phenomena in the processes of the transformation in the new period of Chinese literature and analyzed the emergence of postmodernism in contemporary Western and Chinese literature. Wang concluded that Eastern and Western literary phenomena can be best analyzed in cross-cultural and interdisciplinary research and took the initiative of calling for interdisciplinary studies of comparative literature in the late 1980s, which gained expression in his 2002 book *文学与精神分析学* (Literature and Psychoanalysis). Wang not only traced the origin and development of psychoanalysis in modern China and Chinese writers and intellectuals' response to this "translated" theory, but tried to revise and reconstruct critical theory by reading Chinese literary works.

In his 2000 *中西诗学对话* (Dialogue between Chinese and Western Poetics) Xiaolu Wang attempted to break the unequal relationship between East-West poetics in communication and to launch an equal dialogue with Western poetics. Wang discusses research on ancient Chinese literary works in English-language scholarship in two aspects: the historical track of ancient Chinese literary works imported to English and their reception. Wang holds that "terminologies of ancient Chinese literary works should be reorganized and translated continuously and systematically, so that the Western world will gradually get familiar with it" (unless indicated otherwise, all

translations are mine) ("将中国古代文论中富有生命力的术语加以整理和翻译, 不断地, 有系统地推出, 使西方世界对此有所了解并逐步熟悉" [226]). Dun Chen's and Xiangyu Liu's 2000 *比较文学概论* (Introduction to Comparative Literature) is a history and present situation of comparative literature including its definition, theory, and method, and including interdisciplinary studies. However, it is not a simple introduction, but establishes a dialogue with readers in terms of discussion.

Pengzi Rao's 2000 *比较诗学* (Comparative Poetics) is a collection of twenty-five studies and they are not only theoretical explorations, but also studies on Chinese and Western drama, overseas Chinese literature, etc. Rao presents a combination of the development of Chinese poetics, the creation, transformation, and mutation of modern Chinese literary works, and the reception of Western literary works. Further, Rao's book is more on the impact of Western poetics in Chinese poetics and she contends that the establishment and growth of modern Chinese poetics are inseparable from the transmission and reception of Western literary works in China. However, my contention is that Rao's view is misguided because Chinese literature in the period she analyses has come under too much influence both with regard to innovative writing and a certain level of aphasia. It is against the so-called 失语症 (aphasia) — first conceptualized by Cao in his above mentioned 1988 *中西比较诗学* (Eastern and Western Comparative Poetics) — that Jiemin Liu argued in his 2003 *中国比较诗学* (Comparative Poetics in China) that Chinese "comparative poetics is in need of rebuilding" ("重建中国比较诗学" [1]) and that the fundamental drive" ought to be a "contemporary Chinese literary theory with its own characteristics" ("当代中国文学理论的自身要求" [1]). Liu suggested that Chinese scholars need to get rid of the impact and use of Western literary theory in order to launch an East-West dialogue on equal footing. Liu summarized major views from important poets and theoretical works and described the development of Chinese comparative poetics. A major achievement of Liu is that he outlined fifty theoretical terminological concepts.

Ganjian Lai's 2003 *二十世纪中西比较诗学* (Chinese and Western Comparative Poetics of the Twentieth Century) is to show how "the fusion of Chinese and Western poetics promotes the modernization of Chinese poetics and reveals the evolution of artistic ideas and theories" ("中西诗学的融汇如何推动中国诗学的现代化进程, 同时揭示某些文艺思潮和理论流派的渊源流变" [1]). Huiling Xi's 2003 *西方女性主义与中国女作家批评* (Western Feminism and Criticism on Chinese Women Writers) is a good example of feminist scholarship in Chinese comparative literature. Xi's book is valuable because it is an attempt to use comparative literature to solve practical issues. With the literary production and practical criticism, feminism in China has changed gradually and thus Xi posits that research and criticism of Chinese feminism — as a part of world's feminism — must embark on a communication with Western feminism.

In 2004 the publication of *比较文学的理论与实践* (Theory and Practice of Comparative Literature) Hong Zhang's book represents an important event in that Zhang attempted to combine theory and practice in comparative literature. Zhang presented a general depiction of the morphology of comparative literature and argued that "fundamentally speaking, comparative literature is a transnational, cross-language, cross-culture, and interdisciplinary subject" ("从根本上说, 比较文学是一门跨民族、跨语言、跨文化、跨学科的知识学科" [25]). Further, with regard to the practice of comparative literature Zhang argued for empirical research and he presented his argumentation in case studies with perspectives of imagology, thematology, typology, etc. However, while I accept his basic argumentation with regard to the discipline's theoretical and practical aspects, I disagree with his position that the "selection and interpretation of the processes of reception" ("接受过程中的选择和阐释" [105]) is explained by medio-translatology as an important approach that influences the whole research process (see also Xie). In contrast to Zhang's view, Cao argues in his 2006 *比较文学教程* (Course in Comparative Literature) (see below) that while traditional comparative literature focused on empirical relations in the process of literary transmission and communication, this view has ignored subjectivities and psychological and cultural factors (on the contextual [empirical and systemic] study of literature and culture see Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's 1997 *文学研究的合法化: 一种新实用主义、整体化和经验主义文学与文化研究方法* [Legitimizing the Study of Literature: A New Pragmatism and the Systemic Approach to Literature and Culture]).

Gefei Wu's 2005 *当代文化视域下的中西比较文学研究* (Research on Comparative Literature from the Perspective of Contemporary Culture) is about the study of comparative literature from the

perspective of Chinese and Western cultures and he presents case studies on foreign literatures, literary translation, the scope of Chinese literature, and discusses aspects of comparative literature. In this way, both theory and method are included. Further, Wu discusses the transmission, reception, and impact of Western writers and theorists in China and by doing this, a depiction of Chinese comparative literature under the perspective of contemporary culture is presented. Wu argues that cross-cultural studies are in need of bilateral communication and equal dialogue based on heterogeneity. Otherwise, the superficial "X +Y" research model can never be discarded. Zuoliang Wang's 2005 *文学间的契合: 王佐良比较文学论集* (Resonance in Literature: An Anthology of Zuoliang Wang's Essays on Comparative Literature). The book is a collection of Wang's fifteen studies about comparative literature divided into two parts. The first part is about Chinese and Western literature in the twentieth century, especially China's modernism in poetry and part two is on translation including the comparison and evaluation of translators, the review and analysis of contemporary translation theories, and the analysis on the relationship between language and culture in translating. Wang portrays the relationship between Chinese and Western culture and the impact the predecessors have towards later generations with regard to Jacobean drama, James Wright's work about the poet Juyi Bai (白居易), Fu Yan's (严复), and Shu Lin's (林纾) practice of translation, etc. Wang argues that "faithfulness" means an accurate conveying of original content, "expressiveness" means a usage of commonly seen expression, and "elegance" means a reproduction of art and a strengthening of original style to fascinate readers. To achieve "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" Wang proposes two suggestions: one is using sequential translation as much as possible and using literal translation if necessary. His second suggestion is to abide by the original work in style, depth, tone, etc. As a translator, Wang utilizes his own translation practice and thoughts to foresee the interactive development of translation studies and practice.

In their edited 2006 volume *比较文学研究* (Comparative Literature Studies) Daiyun Yue and Xiangyuan Wang posit that "Chinese comparative literature is not a branch of Western comparative literature nor is it a discipline that emerged from lectures at universities. It is an inherent requirement of the development of Chinese literature and an inevitable result of China's economic, political, social, and cultural development" ("中国的比较文学并非欧美比较文学的分支。也不像欧美比较文学发端于大学讲坛。它是中国文学发展本身的要求, 是中国经济、政治、社会、文化发展的必然结果" [1]). This statement distinguishes two concepts, namely that of comparative literature as a practice and that of the discipline of comparative literature as a scholarship whereby comparative literature as practice refers to features of Chinese-language literature per se and the discipline as built under the influence of Western comparative literature. An important element in Yue's and Wang's books is the tying of literature per se and the study of literature in the mode of the comparative to China's emerging status as an economic and industrial power which would be followed by the recognition of its cultural impact (on Yue see also Zhang and Yue <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1881>>).

Cao's 2006 *比较文学教程* (Course in Comparative Literature) was an event in Chinese comparative literature in that he presented a new theoretical paradigm he termed "variation theory" Cao put forward a basic paradigm and four major theoretical notions: his basic paradigm is "cross-cutting" meaning cross-national, interdisciplinary, and cross-cultural study and the four notions are empirical influence study, parallel study, variation study, and general literary study: "Variation study takes the variation and literariness as its fulcrum. By studying the status of variation in the process of literary communication among diverse nations and cultures, variation study tends to explore the internal law of literary variation" ("比较文学的变异学将变异性和文学性作为自己的学科支点, 通过研究不同国家不同文明之间文学交流的变异状态, 来探索文学变异的内在规律" [97]). Cao argues that in comparative literature it is advantageous to apply the notions of "cross-cutting" and "literariness" because in the process of cross-cutting influenced and restricted by cultural and psychological factors, variation will happen to some extent. Literary variation contains five aspects: language level variation study, transnational and cross-cultural image variation study, literary text variation study, cultural variation study, and literary domestication study. Cao also explores further notions such as cultural filtering, literary misreading, medio-translatology, imagology, and reception study (see also Cao, *比较文学概论* [Introduction to Comparative Literature]). Beijing:

Renmin UP, 2011. Wang, Ning <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss6/17>>. As I mention above, Cao locates medio-translatology in variation study. Similar to Yue and Zhang, he also argues that Chinese comparative literature — as a discipline — needs to break away from Western comparative literature and argues for the development of a specific "Chinese School" of comparative literature with its own theoretical and methodological frameworks.

In his 2006 *东西方比较诗学：悖立与整合* (Chinese and Western Comparative Poetics: Contrast and Integration) Naiqiao Yang starts with the investigation of the "body" which he regards as "classical centrism" in Chinese poetics — i.e., the inner spirit in Confucian criticism — and thus locates Confucianism at the core of Chinese poetics. Yang utilizes constructionism and deconstructionism to explain the Confucianism and Taoism in Chinese culture. Inspired by Derrida, Yang defines Chinese poetics as *书写中心主义* ("writing-centrism"). Yang takes a perspective of ontology based on traditional Chinese culture and breaks with traditional research methods for Chinese and Western comparative poetics although in my view some his definitions and conclusions are subjective and with an unduly complicated structure. Faxiang Zhou's and Chongxin Wei's 2006 volume *碰撞与融：比较文学与中国古典文学* (Collision and Integration: Comparative Literature and Chinese Classical Literature) is a collection of studies about the research on comparative literature and Chinese classic literature of the last century and thus a welcome addition for the strengthening and developing of the relevance of classical Chinese literature in comparative literature. The studies are grouped in five categories: "convergence of literary works," "special reflection," "standing out," and "Chinese applications of Western Literature. Ning Wang's 2006 *文化翻译与经典阐释* (Cultural Translation and the Interpretation of Canonical Works) is an attempt to re-interpret selected canonical literary works by questioning Fu Yan's "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" approach. What Wang calls for is a sort of cultural translation which equals to cultural transformation. The 2007 volume *跨文化研究：什么是比较文学* (Cross-cultural Study: What Comparative Literature Is) edited by Shaodang Yan and Sihe Chen is a collection of studies aimed at both research and the pedagogy of comparative literature. The first theme is about the understanding of category, concept, and methodology of the discipline and the second is on disciplinary boundaries and identities of comparative literature including the conceptualization and differentiation between comparative literature and world literature. The reflections and suggestions presented towards the disciplinization of comparative literature is enlightening especially the discussion towards student development, teaching methods, and the development of the dissertation, etc.

In 2008 Cao co-edited with Xingming Wu *中西比较诗学史* (History of Chinese and Western Comparative Poetics) and in 2010 he published the collected volume *比较文学学科史* (History of Comparative Literature). His 2008 History of Chinese and Western Comparative Poetics is about the development of the notion of the comparative in all Chinese-speaking areas including Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and elsewhere. Further, Cao discusses the above-mentioned *aphasia* of Chinese literature, collisions between Chinese and Western cultural exchange and communication, globalization, etc. Cao argues that the real way out for Chinese and Western comparative poetics is to rebuild Chinese literary discourse in order to achieve an equal dialogue between Chinese and Western literary and that to do cross-cultural research (*中西比较诗学史*) would be an appropriate approach. Cao also argues that facing the problematics of communication brought about by globalization, Chinese and Western comparative literature should clarify the heterogeneity among different cultures and to seek exchange with Western cultures, but so in the context of local cultures while Chinese culture needs to locate itself in the global context by cross-cultural research. Cao's 2010 collected volume History of Comparative Literature contains articles about the development of the disciplinization of comparative literature worldwide. In chapter one the French, British, German, North European, Italian, South European, Russian, and Central and East European schools of the discipline are presented. In this chapter the basic theory, histories, and historical positions of European comparative literature are discussed. In chapter two the US-American and Canadian schools of comparative literature are discussed and in chapter three the "Oriental" schools of the discipline including Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, India, Japan, Korea, Arabia, and South Africa are discussed.

In his 2008 *当东方与西方相遇: 比较文学专题研究* (When East Meets West: Topical Studies in Comparative Literature) Zhiqin Jiang takes literary theory as the guiding principle with regard to disciplinary boundaries, the interpretation of classics, cultural filtering, literary misreading, etc. In Jiang's view empirical research involves two aspects: 1) the acceptance and impact of Western writers' works in China and he discusses the work of Franz Kafka and his works' influence on contemporary Chinese writers and 2) research on China's image with regard to its writers abroad. He argues that the study of Chinese writers' image is to seek "for the underlying causes of conflicts at the cultural level ... and help to grasp a better understanding of other nations' characteristics, social development, and psychological structure" ("有助于从文化层面上寻找中外表面冲突的深层原因 ... 其次, 可以更好地了解 and 认识其他国家的民族性格、社会发展及其文化潜意识中的某种心理结构" [274]). Further, Jiang posits that cross-cultural dialogue is an interactive process of "importing" and "exporting" and thus research on the transmission of Chinese writers' works represents a relevant field for Chinese comparative literature. The collision and blending of Chinese and Western literature is not only shown in such literary works, but also in literary theory. It is with a cross-cultural perspective that Jiang discusses comparative literature and I believe his book will prove to be a classic in the research of cross-cultural comparative literature. Fan Lan's 2008 *中西戏剧比较论* (On Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Drama) an important book because it is about a specific genre of literature. In Lan's view Chinese drama looks for individuality in community and seeks for the law of change in unity while Western drama tends to locate the community of different individuals who pursue unity in changes. Lan employs aesthetic and philosophical dimensions to present comparative research of the stage, performance, directing style, linguistic features, etc. A further book of import is Hong Wang's 2008 *中日比较文学研究* (Chinese and Japanese Comparative Literature Studies) in which he presents aspects of pedagogy. Sino-Japanese comparative literature has had a leading position and this is inseparable from the historical connection between Chinese and Japanese culture and literature as the book suggests. Wang's book is important because it can be used for the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language and for Chinese students who are studying Japanese.

Ning Wang's 2009 *后理论时代"的文学与文化研究* (Literary and Cultural Studies in the Post-theoretic Era) is a response to Terry Eagleton's controversial book *After Theory* (2003) and postulated that that ours is a "post-theoretic era" in which there is no such thing as the dominant theoretical trend in the current West, but that it certainly paved the way for Chinese literary theorists to have dialogues with their international counterparts on theoretical issues. Jin Du's 2009 *跨文化视野中的比较文学* (Comparative Literature in a Cross-cultural Perspective) is rooted in theoretical research with focus on translation studies, cross-cultural imagology and genology, and comparison between Chinese and Western narration. Du — similar to Cao and Xiaolu Wang — uses the cross-cultural perspective to break away from Western comparative literature and suggests that one way to do so would be wider comparative work thus including not only Western and Chinese literatures, but also others. Further, in his 2009 *比较文学系谱学* (Genealogy of Comparative Literature) Xiangyuan Wang presents his thoughts about innovations in the discipline of comparative literature in its formations of theory and methodology worldwide. Wang discusses the traditional "centers" of the discipline, i.e., the French, US-American, and Soviet schools and concludes that different from these schools in Chinese comparative literature it is the approach of "cross-cultural poetics" that is characteristic.

Longxi Zhang's 2009 *比较文学研究入门* (Introduction to Comparative Literature) is an examination of Chinese comparative literature with an international perspective. Zhang depicts the challenges both Chinese and Western comparative literature are facing such as the confrontation between the East and West caused by nationalism, the politicization of research and literature itself, etc. Zhang affirms the relevance and importance of East-West comparison and that this is "an unquestionable part of international comparative literature" ("国际比较文学一个无可置疑的重要部分" [33]) as long as the above challenges are met and overcome. Zhang posits that "focusing on language and literary interpretation" ("重视语言和文学阐释" [33]) we can see how the Eastern and Western literary scholars and critics discuss and understand language, expression, understanding, expression, etc. and that by focusing on interpretation, such study will effectively avoid the

overpowering of Chinese literary texts and scholarship by Western theory. Chongxin Wei's 2009 *比较文学视阈中的中国古典文学* (Classical Chinese Literature with a Comparative View) is with four chapters of "prototype and motif," "gender studies," "narrative research," and "comparison and learning." In the first three chapters Wei applies theories of comparative literature such as thematology, imagology, narratology, etc., in analyses of classical Chinese novels while in chapter four Wei presents comparisons between Chinese and Western texts. The most compelling part of the book is "gender studies" in which Wei analyses the "silence" of women's roles in classical novels characterized by the dominance of discourse by men. However, although the book's title is Classical Chinese Literature with a Comparative View, Wei omits any discussion of Chinese poetry, the mainstream of classical Chinese literature. Further, Wei uses Western theories only.

In 2011, Shunqing Cao published *迈向比较文学第三阶段* (Towards the Third Stage of Comparative Literature). Cao argues for a Chinese school of comparative theory and methodology and proposes — similar to his 2006 *比较文学教程* (Course in Comparative Literature) — the theoretical framework of "variation theory" in the context of cross-cultural study (the book is also published in English translation as *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature*). Also in 2011, Ning Wang's *比较文学：理论思考与文学阐释* (Comparative Literature: Theoretical Thinking and Literary Interpretation) was published in which he reconsiders the significance of discipline of comparative literature from the perspective of interdisciplinary theory and outlines a global strategy of Chinese comparative literature and literary theory. Wang also discusses the function of translation and its significance on the construction of world literature(s) and tracks the transformation and reception of modern and contemporary Chinese literature in the West (see also Zhang, Tian <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss6/20>>). Qingben Li's 2011 *跨文化美学：超越中西二元论模式* (Cross-cultural Aesthetics: Beyond the Model of Sino-Western Dualism) is a book in which Li revisits Chinese and Western dualism with particular attention to aesthetics. Li emphasizes that cross-cultural research is different from the three-dimensional patterns of influence study and parallel study. Further, Li discusses the cultural industry as a venue through which intercultural communication can and should be performed. And Longxi Zhang's 2012 *从比较文学到世界文学* (From Comparative Literature to World Literature) is a study about almost all fields in the humanities including literature, philosophy, history, religion, etc. Zhang also discusses the principal issues of the comparative study of Chinese and Western literature. And in his 2013 *中国比较文学百年史* (History of a Hundred Years' Development of Chinese Comparative Literature) Xiangyuan Wang presents a detailed comparison of the literary relationships between European cultures and China. Wang argues that Chinese comparative literature is based on local culture and that it absorbs foreign cultures in order to dialogue with the rest of the world.

In conclusion, in the last two or so decades Chinese comparative literature evolved and continues to do so affirming Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's and Louise O. Vasvári's argument that "What is remarkable — and this is paid scant attention to in Anglophone comparative literature or world literatures scholarship — is that both the concept of the discipline, as well as its institutional presence are advancing in so-called 'peripheral' languages and cultures including Iberian Spanish and Portuguese, Greek, etc., and this is the case also in Latin American languages, Chinese, Indian languages, in Arabic or Farsi" (4). In Chinese comparative literature in particular the cross-cultural study of the "Chinese School" is prominent (although the interdisciplinary approach remains neglected ([see, e.g., Moore <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss6/6>>]). Of note is that most if not all Chinese comparatists argue that there is a need to break away from the dominance of Western theoretical frameworks by developing Chinese frameworks while still dialogue with the West and its rich history of the discipline of comparative literature and the study of literature and culture altogether.

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