

Review Article about Chinese Comparative Humanities Journals Published in 2013

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Review Article about Chinese Comparative Humanities Journals Published in 2013

In the review article at hand I review the following world literature and comparative literature journals published in the P.R. of China in 2013: 外国文学评论/*Foreign Literature Review* (Chinese Academy of Social Science), 外国文学研究/*Foreign Literature Studies* (Central China Normal University), 外国文学/*Foreign Literature* (Beijing Foreign Studies University), 国外文学/*Foreign Literatures* (Peking University), 中国比较文学 / *Comparative Literature in China* (Shanghai International Studies University), 当代外国文学/*Contemporary Foreign Literature* (Nanjing University). All journals reviewed are indexed, among others, in the China's Social Sciences Citation Index, and *Foreign Literature Studies* is the only one that has been indexed in the Thomson Reuters Arts and Humanities Citation Index.

First and foremost, the above journals and their published articles are oriented towards a global vision in literary studies. Decades ago, Chinese scholarship concentrated attention to European and US-American literature and thus scholars working in Asian and African studies have been largely neglected. But this situation has been changed since 2000 (on this, see, e.g., He <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol16/iss6/12>>). In 2013, *Foreign Literature Review*, *Foreign Literature Studies*, and *Contemporary Foreign Literature* published a number of articles on Asian, African, and Caribbean writers. Thus the notion of "foreign literature" is no longer equivalent to "Western" literature in a narrow sense. Instead, it has been expanded to a much broader concept of "world literatures." This move is marked by *Foreign Literature Studies* which published articles on not only Western literature, but also on African, Arabian, and Asian countries such as Japan, India, and Malaysia. These studies are now considered as important referential works for doing studies of literature in those countries and regions. Similarly, *Foreign Literature Review* also published a few papers on non-Western literature about Indian mythology, Hebrew poetry, Vietnamese poetry, and Nigerian fiction. Viewed in this light, Chinese scholars have taken foreign literature as a whole to examine, which entails both Eastern and Western literatures. Particular attention should be paid to *Comparative Literature in China*, which published a number of studies on the interconnections between comparative literature and world literature in 2013 and this demonstrates the fact that Chinese scholars not only consider comparative literature and world literature important, but also take on a global perspective. Among others, these studies include "The Emergence of World Consciousness and World Literature in the Late Qing" (Zhang 11-21), "Disciplinary Boundary of 'World Literature' in the Perspective of Cultural Studies" (Chen 16-25), "The Development of World Literature Research in the Perspective of Comparative Literature" (Zha 1-9).

Equally important is Chinese scholars' emphasis on canonical literature and contemporary literature and all Chinese journals lay much stress upon re-reading canonical literature from a new perspective. For instance, *Foreign Literature Review* published a number of articles on Shakespeare in 2013 including "Mapping the Queen's Body: Literary Map in Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*" (Guo 5-17), "The Politics of Kingship in Shakespeare's *King Lear*" (Feng 32-42), "Spatial Politics: Cartography and National Identity in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Henry IV*" (Guo 5-19), "The Tragedy of Damnation: Sin, Grace, and Free Will in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*" (Ni 34-47), "Politicizing Hamlet: Early Modern England's Political and Gender Crisis" (Lu 65-75), "The Golden Age and the Invisible kingship: An Approach to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*" (Chen 40-56), and "Kingship and Performance: The Anxiety of Monarchy in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*" (Liu, Siyuan 57-71). Collectively, this group of studies suggests an attempt to reveal how Shakespearean plays are intertwined with political, ideological, social, and gender issues, which help audiences to deepen their understanding of Shakespeare.

So far as contemporary literature is concerned, we can take Alice Munro as a typical example. *Foreign Literature Studies* published an interview titled "Alice Munro and Canadian Literature: An Interview with Professor Robert Thacker" in which Thacker provides an analysis of Munro's narrative techniques, her motifs of place, and aesthetics. Based on the discussion of Munro's writing, Thacker also elaborates on the Ontario tradition of Canadian literature and its sense of history (Zhou 1-7). Immediately after the publication of this interview, Munro was announced as the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013. Meanwhile, *Contemporary Foreign Literature* published an essay titled "Marital Violence and Female Consciousness in Alice Munro's Short Stories" (Huang 98-104). Both au-

thors of these two studies are young scholars who have been working on Canadian literature and Munro's writings in particular for years. More significantly, by publishing studies on Munro's texts, *Foreign Literature Studies* and *Contemporary Foreign Literature* are sensitive to current trends and hot issues of world literature studies.

It needs to be mentioned that, as an only Chinese journal that is included in Thomson Reuters's Arts and Humanities Citation Index, *Foreign Literature Studies* has taken a good use of its international influence and published considerable number of interviews with Chinese and foreign scholars and this activity bridges the gap between literature studies in the East and those in the West. In 2013, the journal published the following interviews: "The Intellectual Mode of Thinking in American Contemporary Innovative Poetry : An Interview with Hank Lazer" (Liu, Fuli 1-11), "Chains and Freedom of Biography: An Interview with Professor Ira B. Nadel" (Li, Feng 1-7), "Masculinities and Social Structure of Gender: Conversation with Raewyn Connell" (Liu, Yan 1-8), and "Poetry, Poetics and the Sense: An Interview with Prof. Susan Stewart" (Shi 1-7). Similarly, *Contemporary Foreign Literature* also highlights its special column on interviews with internationally recognized scholars, although the interviews published in this journal are translated into Chinese and are aimed at a Chinese readership. Anneleen Masschelein, Christophe Meurée, David Martens, and Stéphanie Vanas claim that "Both as a historical object and as a present-day, culture-specific practice, the literary interview is an interesting case of the dynamic interaction between the media and literature in contemporary cultures" (2) and they observe that "it is hard to imagine any journalistic medium—print, audiovisual, digital, or multimedia—that does not feature interviews" (2).

At the beginning of the new millennium, there have been scattered rumors about the death of theory in the field of literary studies, which, to a large extent, was spurred by Terry Eagleton. In his notorious *After Theory*, Eagleton observes that "The golden age of cultural theory is long past" (1). The evidence lies in the fact that, in Eagleton's opinion, the "pioneering works of Jacques Lacan, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault are several decades behind us" and gone are "the path-breaking early writings of Raymond Williams, Luce Irigaray, Pierre Bourdieu, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said" (1). With these observations Eagleton concludes that "those to whom the title of this book suggests that 'theory' is now over, and that we can all relievedly return to an age of pre-theoretical innocence, are in for a disappointment" (1). In my opinion, Eagleton's hypothesis is partially correct. It is true that those Western critics who are doing theory purely for the sake of theory instead of trying to uncover the deep meanings of literary texts are doomed to be disappointed owing to the waning tide of critical theories. Equally disappointed are those non-Western scholars, including Chinese critics and scholars, who are enthusiastic for introducing and importing Western critical theories since the source of their academic capital is no longer sufficient. Yet, turning our eyes to China, we find a different but exciting picture that counterpoints the fate of literary theory in the West, which, to a large extent, is due to the rise of ethical literary criticism founded by Nie Zhenzhao (for Nie's ethical literary criticism, see Nie, "Ethical Approach"; Nie, "Ethical Literary"; Nie, *Introduction*; Shang, "The Rise"; Shang, "Ethical Criticism" <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2372>>). Ethical literary criticism is defined as "a critical theory that reads, analyzes and interprets literature from the perspective of ethics so as to identify its ethical nature and moral teaching function" (Nie, *Introduction* 13). Nie's ethical literary criticism has been warmly accepted and is widely practiced in Chinese scholarship. It is no exaggeration to claim that it has become one of the most important innovations in contemporary China's literary studies.

In 2013, *Foreign Literature Studies* and *Contemporary Foreign Literature* feature dozens of studies employing ethical literary criticism. Specifically, in his article "Ethical Literary Criticism: Oral Literature and Brain Text," Nie argues that text appears in three basic forms, namely brain text, material text, and electronic (digital) text. Specifically, Brain text, in its biological form, preserves human beings' experience of perception and cognition through memory. Before the invention of written symbols, there appeared a wide array of brain texts with literary characteristics including myth, heroic epics, folk tales, and historical narratives. Brain text is the prototype of the text of oral literature, yet it is not hereditary and can only be passed down orally from one generation to another. In such a case, most of the brain texts with literary characteristics are lost to the world with the death of their owners and only a few are preserved in the form of material text. In "An Ethical Literary Analysis of *Brother to*

Dragons" Ling Bo analyzes the poem from the perspective of ethical literary criticism aiming to prove that Southern Whites' understanding of their identity in the institution of slavery was the main reason behind Lilburne's savage crime. She argues that facing an identity crisis brought by the defiance of slaves, Lilburne chooses to mutilate John as a demonstration of his authority as a White slave owner. In Bo's opinion, the moral judgment passed on Lilburne by president Jefferson and kin to Lilburne, presents Jefferson's definition of human nature, his understanding of the sphinx factor, and also the ethical standard whereby he criticizes the immorality in Southern Whites' definition of identity. In "Children's Sphinx Factor and Growth in Heidi," Gang Li approaches Spyri's *Heidi* from the perspective of ethical literary criticism and argues that Heidi's close relation with nature and her inability to adapt to city life are determined by the process of her ethical choice. Heidi's ethical choice tells us that children must undergo a process which includes ethical choices. If adults ignore the process, a child may get hurt because of ethical dislocation. Children's sphinx factor, which is the combination of human factor and animal factor, determines the characteristics of their growth. Thus, when helping children to arrive at an ethical choice, adults must understand and respect children's choice and give them correct guidance. Similarly, in his "An Ethical Reading of Ian McEwan's *Sweet Tooth*," Biwu Shang tries to unpack elements of ethics and emotions implied by the oft-used word "forgiveness" in the novel. Apart from analyzing the ethical identities of such characters as Serena Frome, Tony Canning, and Tom Haley, Shang attempts to disclose the factors leading these characters to make their respective ethical choices. He argues that the characters are stranded in an ethical dilemma due to their emotions, which in turn are constrained and governed by their ethical consciousness. Owing to their reasoning power, the characters eventually make proper ethical choices in the name of "betrayal." The ethical values are typically manifested in both Tony's and Tom's letters pleading for forgiveness and in Serena's consequential act of offering forgiveness. Given all these studies, we can see the interest in theory by Chinese scholars which in turn help them to have an in-depth exploration of literary works.

So far as research methodology is concerned, *Comparative Literature in China* is noted for its column on "Chinese Writers and Cross-Cultural Resources." In 2013, a number of contemporary Chinese writers contributed to this journal by elaborating how their writings are affected by the issues involved with intercultural communications including "Inversion as a Relation" (Fang 109-112), "René Char: Verbal Torrent's Effect on Us" (Wang, Jiaxin 138-44), "The Moon of Foreign Literature" (Ye 132-39), and "Utopia and Dystopia in Time Travel" (Han 133-41).

A survey of the studies published in Chinese journals in 2013 shows that Chinese journals are closely associated with international academic organizations and engaged in organizing academic events, which adds much momentum to the progress of Chinese scholarship in the humanities. For example, in 2013 *Foreign Literature Studies* organized *The Second Convention of Chinese/American Association for Poetry and Poetics* and *The Third International Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism*. Both of these conferences have proven influential and promoted literary studies. Last but not least, it needs to be mentioned *Foreign Literature Studies* is marked by its emphasis upon internationalization. More than 50% scholars serving on its editorial board are from outside China including such eminent scholars as Marjorie Perloff, Charles Bernstein, Stefan Collini, J. Hillis Miller, Harold Bloom, Theo D'Haen, and others. It is the first Chinese journal that adopted style of the Modern Language Association of America which has later been followed by *Contemporary Foreign Literature*. Similarly, *Comparative Literature in China* also has eminent scholars such as Jonathan Culler, David Damrosch, and Daniel-Henri Pageaux on its international advisory board. Among all Chinese journals, *Foreign Literature Studies* is highlighted by its column on Criticism and Studies of Criticism. In 2013, it published several review articles including Michelle Balaev's *The Nature of Trauma in American Novel* (2012), Susan Stewart's *The Poet's Freedom: A Notebook on Making* (2011), Susan Hancock's *The Child that Haunts Us* (2009), Thadious M. Davis's *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region, & Literature* (2011), Rachel Hollander's *Narrative Hospitality in Late Victorian Fiction: Novel Ethics* (2012), David Parker's *Ethics, Theory and the Novel* (1994), and Marjorie Perloff's *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (1991) thus presenting information to a Chinese readership. Noteworthy is the last issue of *Foreign Literature Studies* of 2013 which published two review articles on Perloff's *Poetics in a New Key: Interviews and Essays*: Biwu Shang's "'The Rise of a Critic': On Marjorie Perloff's Way of Doing Poetics," and Songlin Wang's "Sound, Value and Poetry Performance: Marjorie Perloff and Her New

Poetic View." These two review articles are particularly significant in introducing Perloff's poetics to Chinese scholars.

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