

## The Theoretical Basis and Framework of Variation Theory

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## Recommended Citation

Cao, Shunqing; and Han, Zhoukun. "The Theoretical Basis and Framework of Variation Theory." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 19.5 (2017): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3108>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

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**CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture**ISSN 1481-4374 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>>  
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**Volume 19 Issue 5 (December 2017) Article 2**  
**Shunqing Cao and Zhoukun Han,**  
**"The Theoretical Basis and Framework of Variation Theory"**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol19/iss5/2>>

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Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 19.5 (2017)**  
Special Issue **Against the "Death" of the Discipline of Comparative Literature**  
Ed. Shunqing Cao  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol19/iss5/>>

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**Abstract:** In their article "The Theoretical Basis and Framework of Variation Theory" Shunqing Cao and Zhoukun Han re-examine the conclusions on variation theory drawn from Cao's *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature*. Drawing on the past three decades of Chinese comparatist practice, the proposal of variation theory in that book is a scientific endeavor from China. China's comparative literature has sustained a focus on comparison of literatures Eastern and Western. And Chinese scholars have long been aware of the heterogeneity of civilizations and the variability in literature exchanges. By demonstrating uses and potentials of variation theory, this thesis attempts to show that variation theory offers a response and potential way forward for the current disciplinary crisis in comparative literature.

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## Shunqing CAO and Zhoukun HAN

### The Theoretical Basis and Framework of Variation Theory

Comparative Literature has existed as a discipline for more than a century. French scholars proposed influence study, while American scholars brought back analogy study and paid due attention to its research and practice. These two paradigms generated two schools of Comparative Literature. In the recent thirty years, multiculturalism and globalization have been two important topics in the discipline. Through this context, we are confronted with many new issues, such as how to get access to world literature. We also ask how to do comparative studies between heterogeneous civilizations. Since Chinese literary comparatists over the past thirty years have been striving to initiate study by comparing Chinese literature and literary theory with western counterpart, they have made a lot of achievements in Chinese-West literary comparisons. But according to the framework of comparative literature in the West, there is little room for comparisons of literatures between different civilizations. That means, most of the Chinese comparatists' work look very dubious or even illegitimate. How to explain their work in a reasonable way? Can we compare literatures of different cultures or civilizations?

We posit that Western theories of Comparative Literature are not reliable today to determine the boundary of this discipline. On the basis of former theory and practice, Cao came up with a new theory of comparative literature--variation theory. This article gives a four-part explication of variation theory. The first section describes the background for this theory. The second section gives a formal introduction to variation theory. In the third section, the potential contributions of variation theory to comparative literature are illuminated before concluding in the fourth section.

The disciplinary framework of comparative literature generated by the European literary traditions had largely maintained sameness as the core of comparison, namely, the sameness between different national literatures. In more recent theoretical paradigms, heterogeneity and variation were the more emphasized key concepts.

Comparability is the basis where we find legitimacy to support the comparing work. In other words, comparability concerns what is worthy of comparing. The French school and the American school established their paradigm with comparability respectively in pursuing similar origins and similar literariness. It is apparent that the two schools, which dominated the scholarly conversations in comparative literature for nearly a hundred years, lay their theoretical foundation on pursuing sameness. However, given the gap between literature in the East and the West, so in juxtaposition there is more difference than sameness. That is why some scholars as Weisstein used to doubt the legitimacy of comparison between them (*Comparative* 27). If we don't face up to heterogeneity in different literatures, we will encounter difficulties. Just as Liu Xie said in *文心雕龙·知音* (*Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind: An Appreciate Critic*), "Each brings his own limited views to the judgment of writings, and yet writings are by nature diverse. If people look to the east, they will not see the western wall" ("各执一隅之解，欲拟万端之变，所谓东向而望，不见西墙也" [691]. All translations are ours). The time of seeking sameness within a common civilizational sphere is over. Though it is difficult to do comparison between heterogeneous civilizations, we should not hesitate at this endeavor.

Variation theory shifts the priority to differences. Differences are also regarded valuable in literary comparison, and to some extent, it should be given more attention in the contemporary world. The initial intention of comparison is to recognize heterogeneity, and the ultimate purpose of comparison is to cross heterogeneity. In other words, it is a time for the transformation of comparative literature from the sameness to variability.

The proposal of heterogeneity and variation is not a groundless point. In fact, they (heterogeneity and variation) have long been observed by many scholars. The Chinese scholar Yue Daiyun, who points out that the twenty-first century will see a new stage of East-West cultural communication which is characterized by heterogeneity and so-called heterology, suggests that cultural dialogue should be predicated on the dialectical relation between difference and identity. She observes, "actually, without 'the other', there will not be 'difference'; and without 'difference', communication will not be probable" ("事实上，没有'他者'，就不可能认知'差别'，没有'差别'，也就不可能有'互动'" [Yue, *Bridge* 3]). The French sinologist François Jullien, who claims that his academic interest is in the heterogeneity between Eastern and Western literature and culture, in his book *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece* tries to seek a detour through China to access European thoughts, that is attempting to deconstruct the latter by making use of the geographical, historical, and linguistic exteriority of a pre-Western-impact China. For him, heterogeneity is an important idea to stand against the so-called universality of Western thoughts.

All the researches on heterogeneity and variation have built a solid foundation variation theory. In 2013, variation theory was given an all-round elaboration in Cao's book *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature*.

Cao first came up with variation theory in *比较文学学* (*The Study of Comparative Literature*) in 2005, in which the third chapter is titled "文学变异学" (Literary Variation) (Cao, *The Study* 184). Through all these years Cao has been improving and perfecting this theory. The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature is a landmark achievement for Chinese comparatists, and has gained recognition from many colleagues. Although Comparative Literature studies flourished in China in the 1980s, the unremitting efforts of Chinese scholars were "virtually unknown outside China" (Fokkema, "Foreword" v). Thus in Douwe Fokkema's view, the publishing of *The Variation Theory of Comparative literature in English* is a welcome attempt to break through the linguistic barrier that keeps most comparatists in China enclosed within their own cultural domain" ("Foreword" v). Besides, this book is a dialogue with scholars abroad, and "the Variation Theory is an answer to the one-sided emphasis on influence studies by the former 'French school' as well as to the American focus on aesthetic interpretation" ("Foreword" v).

*The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature* is not only a reflection on comparatists' effort both in China and abroad, in Wang Ning's opinion, but also an original Chinese contribution to the field of comparative literature ("Variation" 2). And César Domínguez believes this book is an "important contribution in the direction of an imperative comparative literature—at least as procedure" (*Introducing* 50). In a word, variation theory, which has its comparability's theoretical base on heterogeneity and variability, advocates to pay more attention to heterogeneity, and it is a basis for a new disciplinary paradigm.

Cao also postulates that "the comparison between Chinese and Western civilizations is not to find out the specific 'sameness' or otherness, nor is it to establish comparability based on 'sameness' like the French school did, nor is it to excessively pursue heterogeneity and even head off for 'irrelevance' like Jullien did" (Cao, *Variation* 233). That is, seeking heterogeneity in comparison does not equal the shallow "X+Y" comparison. Instead it aims to find laws of variation by inspecting phenomena of literary variation. From the perspective of heterogeneity and variation, the scope of comparative literature is expanded with its field extended to searching for literary variation in different nations, disciplines, cultures and civilizations. In the new age where intercultural communication is a given, variation stands out as an important concept in literary circulation and contact. Heterogeneity create a world of diversity, while the study of variation builds a world of harmony but not sameness by seeking common ground while preserving differences.

Variation theory refers to the study of the phenomena of change in the process of literature transmission across different nations and civilizations, and in the process of interpreting literary works of different nations or civilizations. It aims at finding laws of variation in comparative literature. Unlike influence study and parallel study which hold "sameness" as their comparability, the key word of variation theory of Comparative Literature is "otherness." Variation theory builds heterogeneity and variation as its theoretical base. Roughly speaking, there are four types of variation at different level, namely cross-national variation, interlingual variation, intercultural variation, and cross-civilization variation.

One can start with Cross-national variation. National literature as an independent literary unit has its own tradition. In the course of development, a nation's literature will communicate with other national literatures. This had led to the study of international literary relations. When a literature circulates to another nation, it will certainly communicate with literature in the recipient country, and they might impact each other in the process of exchange. Recognizing that the history, culture, psychology etc. are not the same among different nations, there will surely be variations in literary relations between them. Thus, if we closely follow the empirical and positivistic approach adopted by many comparatists in the past, we may neglect or bypass the truth that in many cases the positivistic approach is not enough to make clear international literary relations.

For example, imagology, besides the perspective of positivistic relation, also includes that of variation for social collective imagery characterized by variation. Imagology in Comparative Literature mainly focuses on the creation process and principles of foreign images in a nation's literary works. Traditional studies on imagology concern more positivistic factors. For example, when compared with the history or realities of the targeting country, it is a question whether the images in literary works are faithful or not. Sometimes it may be, by and large, reliable, but not at other times. What causes the differences or variations can be attributed to some factors (such as emotional and psychological ones) which are not given to positivistic science.

The reception of China's images in the western world has been changing all the time, and they are the results of variation. In 2004, Zhou Ning published his book *China's Images in Western Legend and Doctrine*, in which Zhou borrowed as the theoretical basis the then prevailing bipolar theory (social knowledge and social imagination) proposed by Karl Mannheim and Paul Ricoeur, and combined Michel Foucault's discourse theory on the relationship between knowledge and power. Zhou's was a systematic reflection on the western gaze on "China as the other" which had formed over a millennium. In the book, China's images in the western world are chronologically divided into eight volumes: *The Legend of Khitan*, *The Great Chinese Empire*, *The Chinese Tide of the Century*, *The Empire of Opium*, *The Historical Shipwrecks*, *The Utopia of Confucianism*, *The Second Human Being*, and *The Mirage of Dragon*. This book has revealed a development of China's images within a western context, that is a western self-cultural expression of China's images. As we know, China from the perspective of westerner's eyes is "the other," and since a foreign country's image is usually a kind of "mirage," or a "social collective imagination," there must be quantities of variations between the true face and the constructions produced in other contexts. As Cao has noted elsewhere, "'Images' refer to 'something imagined,' which can also be called 'mirages' or 'collective imaginations.' These subjective mirages have already endured a series of variations, influenced by the composition of writers and the subjective factors of readers while reading them; thus, it is not easy to apply to empirical study" (Cao, *Variation* 181). In our view, it is more meaningful to seek the mechanisms of variations of images in another country in a specific time and space. Therefore, variation theory can lead the study of image to a broader domain.

German comparatist Horst Rüdiger used to point out, "a nation's literature has always been linked in its own consecutive historical tradition (in vertical direction), meanwhile it communicates and exchanges continuously with literatures from other nations (in horizontal direction)" ("The Object" 19). On the coordinate axis, the horizontal direction where a nation's literature will be put in the perspective of cross-national comparison, is the focus of variation studies. Since "this cross-national communication cannot be stopped by geographical and political boundaries unless by compulsory means" (19), variation is also unavoidable. From the examples above, we see that variation is a common phenomenon in imagology and reception study. In sum, because of the gap of cultural tradition, ideology, readers and translator's subjectivity etc., cross-national literary studies involves variation when a nation's literature circulates to another nation and variation of a nation's image in other nation's literary works. Comparative literature studies cannot leave aside this phenomenon, and we comparatists should take this into consideration.

Interlingual variation is variation at the linguistic level. It refers to the study of literary variation because of translation. The translator or the reader must be restricted, consciously or unconsciously, by the norms of the target language and the reading habits of the target readers, thus resulting in variations. Because of linguistic heterogeneity, some scholars do not think it is possible to achieve equivalence between two languages. Thus the translation, especially literary translation, is not a task easy to perform. But actually, non-translatability is an issue of meditation, and it does not mean that the communication between different languages is not available. In fact, the communication is not only available, but also worth doing, for the creative development of language will give rise to the possibility of translation or interpretation. In order to acquire roughly the same aesthetic experience, the translator has to take into consideration the reception of readers and the cultural background of the recipient country, and therefore creative treason is inevitable. Creative treason, which represents the variation in the transferring process between different languages, is one of the key issues in medio-translatology. While in Comparative Literature, the study of literary translation is, to some extent, an intercultural study. "Initially, Medio-translatology was a study on translation (particularly literary translation) and translated literature from the aspect of Mesologie, but now from the aspect of cultural comparison. Strictly speaking, Medio-translatology is a study of literature and culture instead of a study of language, because its concern is the loss, distortion, addition, and extension of the original information in language transmission instead of the transformation between foreign and native languages, and it is concerned with what is the unique value and significance of translation (literary translation) as an activity in intercultural communication" (Xie, *Medio-translatology* 1). Medio-translatological study and the traditional study of translation are different in that the former mainly concerns creative treason, and aims at finding certain relations between language variations and heterogeneous cultures or civilizations. Comparatists seldom focus on the judgment of value of translated texts as done by the traditional study of translation.

As creative treason concentrates on the issues of blockage, collision, misunderstanding, and distortion which occur in the communication between different cultures, it is closely correlated with

translingual variation. Translation is the crossing of heterogeneity at the language level. In Comparative Literature, we admit the difficulty in pursuing perfect equivalence, but refuse to say there is no room for translations of a difficult text. As with the expounding of a text, the absolutely correct meaning does not always exist, then any reasonable significance is allowed. A seemingly distorted translation also brings about an interpretation which presents itself in another language form.

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* has long been acknowledged to be a political satire by English readers, and it is close to Swift's original intention. The implicit irony is lost in the Chinese version. Instead, this novel has enjoyed popularity as children's literature. People are fascinated by the particular and fleshy plots and exotic atmosphere generated. This is a case of the loss of information in language transmission. Linguistic heterogeneity is often intertwined with cultural heterogeneity. Ideological difference works when the novel read by Chinese readers who know little about political struggle between parties in the capitalist system of Swift's time. Besides, the problem of linguistic and cultural heterogeneity is also extremely conspicuous, for example, in translating some vocabularies or ideas specific to the Chinese language. Ezra Pound translated the Chinese poem "昔为倡家女,今为荡子妇" as "she was a courtesan in the old days, and she has married a sot" (Eliot, *Selected* 106). "倡家女" is not a high-ranking prostitute, but actually "a singing girl" in China; and "荡子" more often denotes a man who travels for his livelihood, than it does a wine over-imbiber. Pound's translation does not quite correspond to the original text, but is more acceptable to the target language readers.

Susan Bassnett notes that "Translation has played a fundamental role in cultural change, and as we consider the diachronics of translation practice we can learn a great deal about the position of receiving cultures in relation to source text cultures" (*Comparative* 161). In Comparative Literature, "medio-translatology has surveyed translation study from the cultural perspective, opened a new window for translation study, and furthermore laid a solid foundation for the translingual Variation study" (Cao, *Variation* 138).

Intercultural variation transcends the linguistic level. It explores the underlying reasons and inner workings of variation. Cultural filtering and cultural misreading are the two major factors involved. Cultural filtering refers to the mechanism of selection, transformation, appropriation, and infiltration of culture-specific norms in a different cultural context or tradition. For instance, due to cultural differences, Chinese literature will definitely pass through cultural filters when entering the West, and vice versa. Due to cultural differences, when the original communication is transmitted to other cultural contexts, it will be resisted and excluded by foreign cultures. Recipients in the indigenous context tend to select, filter, and transform the original information, which leads to variation. It is apparent that in literary communication between two different cultures, cultural filtering does work, and through cultural filtering and cultural variation, the incommensurable parts and distinguished features of the two cultures are highlighted. Thus in general, the more cultural differences there are, the more cultural filtering there will be. In general, there are four elements to cultural filtering: social context, linguistic translation, traditional culture, and the recipient's individual acceptance screen.

Consider the following piece of *Ci* "I Paint My Lips Red" (点绛唇) by Li Qingzhao, a Chinese poetess in the Song Dynasty: 蹴罢秋千, 起来慵整纤纤手。露浓花瘦, 薄汗轻衣透。/ 见客入来, 袜划金钗溜。和羞走, 倚门回首, 却把青梅嗅。

In this piece of *Ci*, Li Qingzhao describes a young girl kicking on the swing. The girl was a bit tired, and sweat soaked her clothes. While she was taking a rest in the yard, a guest suddenly came in. In a hurry, she rushed away with her socks cut and her hairpin fallen. She demurely stayed behind the door and enjoyed a green plum.

Kenneth Rexroth is a well-known American translator and poet who translated the piece of *Ci* above in *Love and Turning Year: One Hundred More Poems from the Chinese*. He translated it as follows: After kicking on the swing, /Lasciviously, I get up and rouge my palms. /Thick dew on a frail flower, /Perspiration soaks my thin dress. /A new guest enters. /My stockings come down /And my hairpins fall out. /Embarrassed, I run away, /And then flirtatiously against the door, /Tasting a green plum."

Surprisingly, Rexroth assumed that under Li Qingzhao's pen was a lewd prostitute who was serving guests, "Since this poem is about a prostitute receiving one guest after another, it is almost unlikely to be by Li Qingzhao, although it is sometimes attributed to her. 'Kicking the swing' is an obvious cliché for sexual intercourse" (Rexroth, *Love* 129).

Literary misreading results from various cultural filters, especially from translating or interpreting literary works of heterogeneous cultures. More specifically, in the process of cross-cultural literary transmission and reception, there will be a resultant force of selection, recreation, transplantation and infiltration on the original text. In view that the meaning of literary text consists of four parts (the

writer, the text, the reader, and the medium), literary misreading and literary variation might be caused by a deconstruction of the irreducible intention of the author, the openness and aesthetics of literary text, the reader's subjectivity and cultural dominancy of literary reception, and the medium (the element of transmission) which shows as certain social value in a certain historical background. Literary misreading in cross-cultural communication is inevitable, and it should not be thought unilaterally as a threat to original text. In Comparative Literature, we do not measure the value of original text according to a fixed standard, instead we are more concerned to locate literary misreading and variation and the reasons hiding behind. Just as some scholars hold, "the important question is not whether we have 'misread' others' theories, but is the historical motive, specific pertinence, historical connotation (the loss, emphasis, and paraphrase of the original theories) and historical effect of 'taking in' some theories. In a word, it is important to inspect the things that are different from the 'original' ones after 'taking them in'" (Wu, "Traveling" 117).

Perhaps a compelling example is Ezra Pound. He was misled by Ernest Fenollosa's misunderstanding of the nature of Chinese. But it is the very misreading that makes Pound find his "ideogrammic method" in creating poems. Let's take one translation as an example. In *The Analects of Confucius*, there is a sentence "學而時習之，不亦樂乎" meaning "to learn with practical application on a regular basis, is it not pleasant." Pound translated it as, "to study with the white wings of time passing/ is not that our delight (Pound, *Cantos* 437). Obviously, he divided the word "習" into two words "羽"(wing) and "白"(white). With imagination, Pound's interpretation of this sentence will amaze Chinese people, while to English readers it is a good translation. His misreading is a lucky and creative one, as he established imagism, which has had an impact on Europe and even China. And its far-reaching impact on Chinese modern new poetry is a typical case.

Cultural filtering does exist in intercultural communication, and literary misreading is a universal phenomenon in literary circulation between different cultures. Cultural filtering and literary misreading have much in common, as they are both determined by the heterogeneity between cultures, and influenced by receptors' subjectivity.

From the exposition of intercultural variation, I will here transition to a discussion of cross-civilization variation. In the first place, culture and civilization have much in common: "they both involve the 'values, norms, institutions, and modes of thinking to which successive generations in a given society have attached primary importance'" (Huntington, *Clash* 41). However, cross-civilization's inherent significance lies in the expansion of comparative domains. Because "A civilization is the broadest cultural entity. Villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups, all have distinct cultures at different levels of cultural heterogeneity" (Huntington 43). Civilization is the largest "us" which is consisted of many cultures (small "us"). The world has gradually shifted to a multi-polar system, underscoring the clash between civilizations. In the age of globalization, all nations are integrated into the global market. Just as Marxism posits an economic base that determines the superstructure, the flourishing of economy of the third world will absolutely bring about their requirements for discourse power in their culture; they will demand that their voice be heard. With the integration of regional communications in a global context, the two civilizations have to face up to heterogeneity in cultural traditions. Accordingly, cross-civilization study in Comparative Literature is becoming an important issue needing attended to.

Ulrich Weisstein used to hesitate to put literature from the East and the West into comparison in that there are far more differences than similarities between them, and the boundaries of Comparative Literature should not be expanded to cross-civilization studies (*Comparative* 27). While many Chinese comparatists have proved that there are many similarities in the two civilizations. For example, Qian Zhongshu, one of the founding fathers of Chinese Comparative Literature, in his monograph *管锥编 (Limited Views: Essays on Ideas)* and *谈艺录 (Letters and Notes on Literature and Art)* has illustrated that literature and literary theory in the East and the West have much in common, thus they are comparable. It is true that finding sameness is the basis for our research, but it is not enough. The heterogeneity among civilizations, which "refers to different essential characters that demonstrates in their cultural institutions, knowledge systems, academic rules, as well as ways of discourse" (Cao, *An Introduction* 51-52.), have outweighed the commonality (sameness), and "heterogeneity and Variation are the modes of expression for Chinese Comparative Literature, as well as the core issue of cross-civilization studies [...]. Therefore, to conduct cross-culture studies under the mentality of 'seeking for sameness', there will be tremendous difficulties and barriers; and Variation should be the focal point for the subject's theories of contemporary Comparative Literature" (Cao, *An Introduction* 34-40).

The concept of cross-civilization signals the advent of the global era of comparative literature. The concept of civilization cannot be modeled on a single pattern, be it under the label of "Eurocentrism," "modernity," or anything else. There is no *Civilization*; there are *civilizations*. Each civilization's uniqueness lies in its "primary importance", and what causes variation between different civilizations lies in the heterogeneity, that is the essential difference in many aspects. To study the potential variation comprehensively, we need to make clear that the key for a cross-civilization vision is to understand the basic discourse rules of a different civilization. This could be used to explain different aesthetic standards adopted by different cultures.

For instance, one of the main discourse rules in traditional Chinese literature and culture is "Dao-discourse." If we learn this, we can understand some typical Chinese literary concepts, such as *yanbu-jinyi* (The word cannot fully convey the mind); *wuzhong sheng you* ("to have or having" arises from "not to have or nothing"), or *de yiwangyan* (to obtain the mind by forgetting the word).

The difference between civilizations is so huge that there will surely be variations in other civilizations in aspects such as language, image, reception etc. Obviously, variation exists in literary circulation in positive study. Moreover, it also exists in literary explication of theory. "Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel—from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another....It necessarily involves processes of representation and institutionalization different from those at the point of origin. This complicates any account of the transplantation, transferences, circulation, and commerce of theories and ideas" (Said, *Text* 227). Edward Said defined this phenomenon as "traveling theory." Literary theory was brooded in a certain environment; when applying theories from one country to interpret another country's literary works and theories which have no factual relationship with the former country, deflections are unavoidable. Some of the deflections might be absurd, while some can be beneficial variations that bring about new perspectives and methods. Therefore, we can see that variation is a result of heterogeneity among civilizations. The comparison between different civilizations, is a dialogue which helps to achieve mutual inspiration, and this is much more valuable to variation study. The aim of cross-civilization variation study from the previous analysis has been clear: "the comparison between Chinese and Western civilizations is not to find out the specific 'sameness' or otherness, nor is it to establish comparability based on 'sameness' like the French school did, nor is it to excessively pursue heterogeneity and even head off for 'irrelevance' of the two cultures to each other like Jullien did. The ultimate goal of Variation is to achieve harmony and even the effect of 'harmonious yet different' through 'seeking for otherness' and mutual elucidation and Variation among literatures from heterogeneous civilization" (Cao, *Variation* 233). The heterogeneity of civilization and the variability of Comparative Literature are inherently related with each other. On the one hand, the heterogeneity of civilization is an inherent core of variability; they both take a detour to the irrelevant and the other so as to obtain self-perception. On the other hand, the analysis and illustrations of irrelevance and otherness are actually a kind of comparison which is bound to lead to the variation of text and meaning.

In the variation, the recipient will transform the cultural rules and literary discourse in the original text so as to fit the rules and discourse in the recipient culture, and to accommodate the target readers' frames of reference. Discourse, as far as I am concerned, here does not refer to language or utterance in general, but specially denote the construction rules of cultural meaning which are formed in the context of certain cultural tradition, social history, and culture. Thus it has a bearing on how meaning is constructed, the way we both communicate with each other and create knowledge. Variations across different languages, cultures, and civilizations may ultimately be assimilated by the recipient country. When literary variations are assimilated by a recipient country through restructuring the original text with its own discourse, the target text will naturally be adopted by readers, and become a part of their literature. But there's another situation: the original text is introduced to the recipient country without being transformed successfully, the rules and discourse do not work on the original text, and instead, are influenced by those in the original text. In this condition, the original text mostly remain unchanged, and it fails to be transformed to be a counterpart of the recipient country's literature. We can call the process of assimilation "domestic appropriation." The opposite of the process could be called "foreignization."

Domestic appropriation is also a sort of variation at a high level. It may take place on the level of both literary works and literary theory. As for literary works' domestic appropriation, it mainly involves transformation at language level, or interlingual variation. It can be used to deal with a controversial issue, that is, how to deal with translated literature. From the perspective of domestic appropriation, translated works could become a part of a national literature. In the process of translation, the translator will insert his own ideas into the text, and creative treason is inevitable. We do not deny the

work's place in foreign literature, but some excellent translations are the translator's recreation or rewriting based on the original text; the translator tends to transform the text according to his own perspective and the reader's preference. Hence translated works might not be classified into foreign literature only; they might be honored to be national ones as well. For example, Hanshan's poems success in domestic appropriation in America should largely be attributed to Gary Snyder's creative translation. As a translator as well as a poet, he had a good understanding of the original text, and satisfactorily transformed it in free verse. Hanshan in the translation was intentionally portrayed to be a liberated hippy. Snyder knew that the young readers in the 1950s would like it, and the readers did go mad for the eastern idol. In a manner of speaking, localization of foreign literature can be achieved in appropriate translation at right time.

Domestic appropriation can also take place on the level of literary theory. However, it is pretty hard to realize. For instance, since the last century, for historical reasons, Chinese modern literary theory has been deeply transformed by the West. We cannot understand Chinese literature works without the help of Western literary perspectives, and have been alienated from ancient Chinese literature. Western literary theory, especially of the twentieth century, has been substantially introduced into China. Many scholars have made do with these theories to expound Chinese literature, while ancient Chinese literary theory has been put aside and even forgotten. This, in fact, proved not a successful case of domestic appropriation.

The only way to assimilate western literary theory is to make use of and develop them, and more importantly and basically, is mastering the discourse and cultural rules of ancient China's literary theories. Attending to foreign theories and neglecting Chinese essentials are unwise. Just as Jullien worried, "We are in an era of the standardization of the Western concepts and model. The reconstruction of everything makes it impossible for the Chinese to have cultural competence in their own culture; the same is also true with the Japanese. The ancient Chinese thoughts, which have their own logic, are gradually turned into Western concepts. In ancient Chinese writings, what promotes thinking is the correlation and symmetry between words, and the way they interact with each other. To ignore these characteristics is to throw away the essence of Chinese thoughts" (quoted in Qin, "Dialogue" 82). I used to assert that the humanities academia in China were experiencing a crisis of aphasia. Why we do not have our own theory and lose our voice in contemporary literary world is that "we are suffering serious 'aphasia.' We simply do not have a set of literary theory's discourse, and we are lacking in a set of academic rules of expression, communication and interpretation" (Cao, "Aphasia"51). Many Chinese scholars are unfamiliar with ancient China's literary theory; as I have noted elsewhere, "they are accustomed to turn to standards of western culture and literary theory to judge Chinese literature and theory, which causes deviations and distortions" (Cao, "The Aphasia"55).

To assimilate foreign theory and achieve inspiration from it is a tough task, though, it has been proven to be feasible by many successful cases. For instance, Wang Guowei's book *Poetic Remarks in the Human World*. Wang Guowei is a well-known master of Chinese culture who spares no effort in studying Chinese literature, philosophy, calligraphy, and painting, etc. He has got an international reputation in the early twentieth century, for he has good knowledge background of traditional Chinese culture and western, in particular, German aesthetic theories. Western discourse helped him to obtain a broader theoretical vision, and western aesthetic terminologies enabled him to express himself naturally and systematically. Meanwhile, he would always return to traditional Chinese poetics in terms of poetic spirit. For example, he came up with a term "world," and classified it into two types—"ideal world" and "realistic world" (Poetic 1), and further he extended "world" to "subjective world" and "objective world" (1). Actually, Wang Guowei's two classifications of "world" are influenced by western classification of romanticism and realism and the identity of object and subject. But he held the base point that the binary oppositions are inseparable, and good literary works are supposed to be the fusion of the two. Wang Guowei's digestion and assimilation of western theories, as well as their integration with Chinese poetic spirit make *Poetic Remarks in the Human World* a successful practice. From the analysis we see, the domestication of foreign theory lies in the efforts of integration of two discourses. Only by putting two heterogeneous literary theories into an equal dialogue, can activation and mutual promotion be expected. And to this extent, domestic appropriation provides a method and strategy to rebuild Chinese theoretical discourses.

From the perspective of domestic appropriation, translated literary works could be a part of national literary classics. In addition, foreign theory, if properly integrated with local theory, could also offer us a lot of new visions. Cultural innovations are more often than not informed and inspired by being heterogeneous. Beneficial elements carried by foreign literature and theory will definitely give a great push to the advance of literary studies.

People might well find more aspects of such variation, but these five aspects are enough to indicate that, to do comparative literature crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries, one should seek both homogeneity and heterogeneity. In the current era of globalization, the latter is more tempting when global cultures are developing into a pluralistic orientation. Therefore, as comparatists, we should not only compare different literatures within a similar cultural tradition or civilization circle, but also pay more attention to comparing those belonging to other heterogeneous circles.

Since Wellek's 1958 presentation of "The Crisis of Comparative Literature," comparatists have struggled with the diagnosis of crisis. However, after half a century there are still lamentations of the death of this discipline. Susan Bassnett in 1993 and GayatriChakravortySpivak in 2003 claimed that the discipline is dead, and they mainly doubted the validity of its method. Today this discipline seems to be at sea under the influence of many other discourses. Comparative literature is in trouble, but not dying. Comparatists are in anxiety, but not in desperation. Because we are clear that, comparative literature is still vibrant and energetic; it "would have as its central responsibility the study of literature, which could be approached in the most diverse ways" (Culler, "Comparative" 120). New trends and applications are emerging, and new paradigms are developing in both western and eastern academia.

In the West, more and more scholars claim that comparative literature should give way to world literature, which is an advisable comparative practice. We bring up again this concept in that world literature today is different from that in the past. If *Weltliteratur* formulated by Goethe is more a utopian fantasy than a detailed concept, then world literature most of the time in the western history is refers to literature in the west. Westerners had been focusing their attention on literatures within their own civilization circle, while literatures outside were ignored unconsciously or intentionally. Fortunately, the idea today has changed. Literatures in other parts of the world are talked about by western comparatists. Besides, some minor literatures have gained respect as well.

In China, many scholars have been making comparisons between the east and the west. We propose the variation theory of comparative literature offers a methodology for the future direction of the discipline. In our opinion, to observe and analyze the phenomena of variation is very meaningful for maintaining equal and effective literary exchanges. "The ultimate goal of variation is to achieve harmony and even the effect of 'harmonious yet different' through 'seeking for otherness' and mutual elucidation and variation among literatures from a heterogeneous civilization. It should be commonly accepted that facts should speak for themselves and comparison is an implicit inspiration (Cao, *Variation* 236). Comparative literature, as a discipline and practice, can become more open and compatible only when it pays attention to cultural heterogeneity and variations in literary exchanges, to cross-civilization literary comparison.

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