

Could World Literature be the Future of Comparative Literature?

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Volume 19 Issue 5 (December 2017) Article 5**Jing Zhou,****"Could World Literature be the Future of Comparative Literature?"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol19/iss5/5>>

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Special Issue **Against the "Death" of the Discipline of Comparative Literature**
Ed. Shunqing Cao

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Abstract: In her article "Could World Literature be the Future of Comparative Literature?" Jing Zhou reviews the disciplinary history and current situation of comparative literature, and then considers the feasibility and validity of world literature as the future of the discipline in Euro-U.S. scholarship. She addresses the pros and cons of world literature raised by David Damrosch, and concludes that world literature at present is not ready to take the responsibility as the future of comparative literature because of its persistent Euro-U.S. centrism. As an alternative to this perspective, she suggests the discipline reconsider theories from peripheral or semi-peripheral areas.

Jing ZHOU

Could World Literature be the Future of Comparative Literature?

With the rapid development of contemporary globalization, there has been a resurgence of interest in world literature in (primarily) Euro-U.S. scholarship since the 1990s (see, e.g., Damrosch; D'haen; D'haen, Damrosch, Kadir; Thomsen; Tötösy de Zepetnek and Mukherjee), which has been often regarded as the future or the third phase of comparative literature after French School and American School (see, e.g., Clements; Ferris; Domínguez; Zhang; Wang; Du). But world literature is not a new concept to the Western comparativists. It has a history of more than one hundred years since Goethe first developed the term of "world literature" in the early nineteenth century, a term which was largely restricted to European literature and usually even to the major great-power canons in Europe for a very long period of time. After such a long history of development, what is world literature today? Does it share the same contents and significations as the original concept? Has it completely shed the bondage of Euro-U.S. centrism? All these issues remain critical to the question of whether world literature can bear the responsibility as the future or the third phase of comparative literature.

Before our argumentation over the role of world literature in the future of comparative literature, it will be helpful to review some of the reasons scholars give for seeking after the future of comparative literature. Comparative literature is generally understood to have gone through two phases of development, the French School and the American School. Because of its flexible nature, comparative literature has always been a debated topic since its birth in the nineteenth century. In the first phase, the scholars of French School, influenced by Positivism, demonstrated a factual connection and regarded comparative literature as a study of the relationship of influence between different literatures. However, the pursuit for factual connections caused the scholars to neglect literariness—the essential feature of literature itself, and this eventually led the discipline into a crisis. Comparative literature scholars from the United States recognized this crisis, and in response they redefined comparative literature as "the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression" (Remak, "Comparative Literature" 3). This became the standard of the discipline and marked the transition of comparative literature into its second phase of development. For some time, the American school seemed to have remedied the situation and pulled comparative literature out of the crisis. However, rapid globalization and the accompanying multicultural environment has rendered comparative literature without boundaries. With cultural studies, post-colonial theory, feminist studies and interdisciplinary studies sprang up at the same time, literariness is no longer the only object of comparative literature, and to some extent, it is put aside again. Facing this situation, some comparativists such as Susan Bassnett and Gayatri C. Spivak have asserted that comparative literature is falling into crisis again and will eventually be "dead" to some extent. For this reason, comparativists have started to look for the next phase or the future of comparative literature.

Against this backdrop, world literature has seen a resurgence, and is becoming a main concern for many Euro-U.S. comparativists who see the future of comparative literary studies in world literature. But world literature is not a newborn topic; its history can be traced back to the early nineteenth century when Goethe coined the notion of *Weltliteratur*. Goethe used this "invention" in several essays to depict the international circulation and reception of literary works in Europe, including the works of non-Western origin such as China and India. He predicted world literature would replace national literature as the major literary mode in the near future. Although Goethe's concept of *weltliteratur* was ideal and unrealistic at that time, it has importance for comparative literature and world literature: it was Goethe who built the embryonic framework of world literature. In 1848, influenced by Goethe's fundamental understanding of world literature, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels further put forward the same concept in their great work *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, to describe the cosmopolitan character of the literary production created by bourgeois capitalism in the context of newly international economic relations, declaring that: "The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature" (35-6). Marx and Engels anticipated a new type of world literature which was to be published simultaneously in various languages and different locations. As they hoped, world literature in modern times has gained a new lease of life by the scholarship amid waves of globalization. Thus, the conclusion reached by David Damrosch in *What is World Literature?* is by no means groundless: "not

just for Goethe, but for Marx and Engels, world literature is the quintessential literature of modern times" (4).

Concern for world literature faded into oblivion with the spring tide of nationalism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and this situation remained consistent until the postwar era. After the Second World War, there began a renaissance of comparative and world literature in the United States. Since the United States was a nation constituted by immigrants with a diversified national culture and tradition, the study of comparative literature and world literature thrived in its universities. In the beginning, study of world literature in the United States mainly focused on the Greek and Roman classics and the literatures of the major powerful Western European countries such as France, England, and Germany. In 1949, a century after Marx and Engels, René Wellek proposed a distinction between three meanings of world literature in his development of the concept of comparative literature in *Theory of Literature*. The first meaning is an emergent global literature, which Anders Pettersson describes as "the Goethian sense" ("Transcultural" 469). The second meaning is "literature in its totality" (48), here "world" being an adjective to modify "literature", indicating a rejection of categorical distinctions (such as French, Western, etc.) between literatures in the world as a whole. The last meaning Wellek proposed is "'world literary masterpieces,'" "the great treasure-house of the classics, such as Homer, Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Goethe, whose reputation has spread all over the world and has lasted a considerable time" (49). It was clear to see from Wellek's interpretation of world literature that the Western literature was the only object he focused on, a very common phenomenon at that period.

But the study of world literature gained with the accelerating economic globalization and new mass waves of immigration after the end of the Cold War, which can be clearly illustrated by the several updated versions of *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* – the mostly widely used anthology in the U.S. world literature courses. The first edition of the *Norton Anthology* published in 1956, was composed of two volumes only focusing on the masterworks from Western European countries and the United States. And then, through several updates, the *Norton Anthology* demonstrated a much broader vision in its selections when its "expanded edition" came out in 1995, expanding the anthology into an extensive selection of non-Western works, and also adding many works which did not fit the so-called masterpieces model. In order to accommodate its new literary range, one edition later, the anthology changed its title on the second edition which was published in 2002, from "masterpieces" to a more common term—"Literature" (Puchner, Akbari, Denecke, Dharwadker, Fuchs, Levine, Lawall, Lewis, Wilson). With the rapid globalization and the accompanying explosive growth of cultural studies, a multicultural era has come to the discipline since the beginning of the millennium. In response, world literature has returned as a focus of concern and discussion.

A number of theoretical attempts have been made to define and delimit this resurgent world literature discourse. Pascale Casanova, in his 2004 book *The World Republic of Letters*, states that the real world literature should include the works of peripheral writers besides the masterpieces. Based on the theories of literary production and reception put forward by Pierre Bourdieu, he explores ways to bring peripheral writers' works into the mansion of world literature. But through the searching process, Casanova consciously or subconsciously reproduces the inequalities of the global literary field. Similar to Casanova, Franco Morreti describes world literature as "one, but unequal" ("Conjectures" 56). He states that "world literature was indeed a system—but a system of variations. The system was one, not uniform" ("Conjectures" 64). Here, Morreti places his understanding of world literature in contrast to the character of "coherence" which Goethe and Marx expected. He believes that world literature in the multicultural age has been constituted by a variety of works not only from Euro-U.S. but also from non-Western countries. Sandra Bermann claims that "world literature is in fact the space for studying the encounter of 'foreign' and host culture" ("Comparative literature" 434). Similarly, Haun Saussy proposes that "the discovery of the fabric of worldwide literary communication, the model of world literature as global literary history, or the history of the global circulation of literary genres, conceives of its object as an archive to be explored, rather than as an as yet nonexistent thing to be constructed" ("Comparisons" 62). Despite their similarities, however, Saussy attends to the collection of worldwide literary works while Bermann stresses the encounter between two different cultures. In his 2003 book *What Is World Literature?* David Damrosch argues that "world literature is a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike" (5). Damrosch insists that circulation, reading, and effective translation are the key elements on which to judge a work of world literature. Pheng Cheah regards world literature as a "world-making activity" ("What is a World?" 34). According to Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas, comparative literature scholars have

switched their focus to world literature as "a framework with which to explore new modes of literary circulation, production, reception and interpretation" ("Introduction" 10). Among the existing diverse views, however, Damrosch's statement on world literature—in my opinion—has been most recognized and representative at present. For this reason, I will take Damrosch's perspectives as the study object of this thesis.

Although there have been various debates and discussions on the subject of world literature, many of which are ongoing, the notion that world literature represents the future of comparative literature is commonly accepted by more and more Western comparative literature scholars. In fact, this discussion emerged as early as 1976, with Robert J. Clements's assertion, on the occasion of the golden anniversary of a well-known magazine called *Books Abroad* (Renamed as *World Literature Today* since 1977), that "World Literature is the logical third stage of Comparative Literature" after the first stage of "Western Heritage" and the second stage of "East-West Literature" ("World Literature" 23). In a similar fashion, J. Hillis Miller has argued for two alternative developing trends of Comparative Literature, of which "one choice is World Literature" ("World Literature" 56-57). Of these two trends, Miller states that it is "World Literature's time (again)," a development of which he approves (253). For David Ferris, translation "derives the imperative that Comparative Literature should now become 'World Literature' " ("Why Compare?" 35-36). César Domínguez, Haun Saussy and Darío Villanueva take world literature as a comparative practice and propose in their book *Introducing Comparative Literature: New Trends and Applications* that comparative literature as interliterary theory would advance toward world literature, as "the ultimate goal of the interliterary theory is to provide an explanation of world literature" (31). Zhang Longxi also holds the view that "the rise of world literature today has definitely a tendency" (*From Comparison* 1) toward comparative literature.

Since a great many researchers in the West believe that world literature could be the future of comparative literature, we may first agree to this standpoint, and then evaluate it based on Damrosch's interpretation. To begin with, let's review Damrosch's interpretation of "world literature". In *What is World Literature?* (2003), Damrosch puts forward a trilateral meaning of world literature which included: "World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literature; world literature is writing that gains in translation; world literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time" (281). In another sense, these three points can also be regarded as the characteristics of world literature. The first characteristic is transnational literature. "Elliptical refraction of national literature" uses the two foci of ellipse to illustrate the interrelationship and interaction between source culture and host culture. In order to become world literature, a single literary work has to leave its source culture, encounter another host culture, and at last, be accepted by the host culture after the negotiation between the two different cultures. It means that a work that has become world literature is a transnational literature with a dynamic and non-isolated process to connect the source culture and host culture within the elliptical space generated by the two foci emitted from the two different cultures. The second characteristic is translation. In Damrosch's opinion, "works become world literature when they gain on balance in translation" (289). He further states that, "in an excellent translation, the result is not the loss of an unmediated original vision but instead a heightening of the naturally creative interaction of reader and text" (292). When national literature expands itself and becomes world literature through translation, "stylistic losses offset by an expansion in depth" (289). As a result, translation is the process by which literary works become world literature; it "helps literary works to be circulated in other cultural contexts so that they will possibly be among world literature" (see, Wang "On World Literatures" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/4/>>). And lastly, world literature is a mode of reading, not relevant to the sheer number or amount of literary works created. That is to say, reading by the readers from foreign cultures can determine whether literary works could become world literature. As Damrosch says, world literature became fully effective when the literary works started resonating in the foreign readers' mind; and reading it "entered into a different kind of dialogue with the work" which "the readers encountered not at the heart of its source culture but in the field of force generated among works that may come from different cultures and eras" (*What is World Literature?* 300). Damrosch insisted close reading on world literature; he believed that world literature was not related to the number of readers, but rather that a few works with intensive reading "can be explored extensively with a large number" (299).

Frankly speaking, the characteristics of world literature do relieve the dilemma comparative literature encounters to some extent. On the one hand, world literature offset, to a certain degree, the awkward situation of the pan-comparative literature studies, and guaranteed the independence of literature. Although the American school affirmed the importance of literariness in comparative

literature study, the subsequent rise of interdisciplinary studies and cultural studies left comparative literature with no borders. As a result, some comparativists anticipate a reemergence of the old crisis. Bassnett asserts that the independence of literature had faded away in comparative literature study when it turned to interdisciplinarity and cross-cultural work in women's studies, post-colonial theory and cultural studies, which has led to her conclusion that "comparative literature in one sense is dead" (*Comparative Literature* 47). But Damrosch's conception of a world literature that "encompassed all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language" (*What is World Literature?* 4) seems to promise a way for literary works to remain the core object of inquiry. In this way, the renaissance of world literature can guarantee the independence of literature, allowing comparative literature studies to avoid revisiting this difficulty. On the other hand, world literature seems to supply a new cosmopolitan perspective to comparative literature. Neither the French School nor the American School ever succeeded in ridding themselves of the restriction to Western literatures, especially to the major European literatures. Moretti asserts that comparative literature "has been a much more modest intellectual enterprise, fundamentally limited to Western Europe, and mostly revolving around the river Rhine. Not much more" ("Conjectures" 54). Spivak likewise criticizes "the colonialism of European national language-based Comparative Literature" in her 2003 book *Death of a Discipline* (10-11). Under globalization, world literature expands its "cosmopolitanism" into a much broader and wider space where Western literatures develop alongside non-Western literatures. Although the attention to non-Western literatures hasn't been enough yet, the cosmopolitan perspective is a great improvement for comparative literature.

Although it helps comparative literature out of crisis to some extent, in fact world literature induces new problems to comparative literature due to its political implications. Literature is always inextricably linked with politics; world literature, as one branch of literature, of course has never escaped from the constraints of the political environment. Moretti discussed this issue thoroughly in several of his articles such as "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000), and "Evolution, World-systems, Weltliteratur" (2006) for example. He employed the conceptual world-system theory to indicate that world literature was a literary system under the heavy influence of international capitalism. In Moretti's point of view, although world literature is "One", due to the existence of "a core, a periphery and a semi-periphery", world literature is "profoundly unequal" ("Conjectures" 56). Mainly based on Moretti's viewpoint, the following passages discuss and analyze the deficiency of world literature which Damrosch proposed.

In the first place, world literature is an old issue; it has a very long history that can be traced back to 1827 when Goethe coined the phrase "weltliteratur" and proposed the advent of the era of world literature. The main concept of world literature today—cosmopolitanism—had already been put on the table since the very beginning. At that time, Goethe began to pay attention to the literary works outside Europe including Chinese novels, as can be seen in his conversations with Eckermann: "I have read many and various things; especially a Chinese novel, which occupies me still, and seems to me very remarkable...I am more and more convinced that poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere, and at all times, in hundreds and hundreds of men" (*Conversations* 173-174). This is the case with translation, as well. Just as Damrosch proposes that world literature is writing which gained in translation, Goethe was already aware of the benefits his own works gained from translation in the nineteenth Century. In addition, there are three categories in Goethe's idea of world literature: an established body of classics, an evolving canon of masterpieces, and multiple windows on the world. Building on these three categories, Damrosch further proposes that "world literature is multitemporal as well as multicultural. Too often, shifts in focus from classics to masterpieces to windows on the world have underwritten a concomitant shift from earlier to later periods" (*What is World Literature?* 16). Thus, it seems clear that world literature in the multicultural era is only an extension of the already existing viewpoints; there is no transformative innovation. As an old topic without substantial transformation, it can hardly resolve the crisis in comparative literature.

In the second place, there is uncertainty in the definition of "literature" in world literature. Damrosch doesn't provide any firm definition of literature in *What is World Literature?* and he merely stated that "any global perspective on literature must acknowledge the tremendous variability in what has counted as literature from one place to another and from one era to another; in this sense, literature can best be defined pragmatically as whatever texts a given community of readers takes as literature" (14). In his opinion, literature in the globalization era is multi-spatial and multi-temporal, and the definition will be changed with the readers' view on literary texts. In Pheng Cheah's word, Damrosch's argument can be summarized as "literary meaning is the act of reading," a proposal which

eventually leads to "the hypertrophy of literary meaning" ("World" 310). Simply put, literature is not precisely defined, and as a result it becomes vague according to his understanding. Because literature is the object of study, if the definition is vague, world literature will lose its own identity. The consequence of this loss would be to throw comparative literature into another dilemma. World literature is indeed a controversial issue, and there continues to be no unified, precise, and widely recognized definition. Different scholars have proposed different definitions and different research scopes. For example, Saussy takes world literature as a collection of literary works, Moretti believes that it is a system of variations, Bermann argues that it is a space, Damrosch insists that it is a mode of circulation and of reading, and the list goes on. There is as yet no discipline-wide final consensus. Even if Damrosch's perspectives are more representative among the existing various viewpoints, there are still many scholars (e.g., Casanova; Moretti; Cheah) who have doubts, and no one seems able to give an accurate and commonly accepted interpretation. Moretti points out its deficiency in methods; he says that "world literature is not an object, it's a problem, and a problem that asks for a new critical method: and no one has ever founded a method by just reading more texts. That's not how theories come into being" ("Conjectures" 55). From this, we can conclude that the major cause of this predicament is the lack of systematic methodologies. Without the guidance of systematic methodologies, it is impossible to reach a final conclusion of world literature. As a result, it seems unclear how world literature can be the future of comparative literature.

In the third place, similar to comparative literature, world literature has also neglected heterogeneity in order to focus on homogeneity, the very tendency which led to the crisis of comparative literature. As early as 1886, Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, who coined the English term comparative literature, drew attention to homogeneity as a deficiency of world literature. In fact, this deficiency still exists today. Damrosch's description of world literature as "an elliptical refraction of national literatures" (*What is World Literature?* 281), is just one example of attending more to the universal values than to the differences between home culture and host cultures. Similarly, Saussy asserts that the renaissance of world literature would lead to the similarity of literatures, of which comparisons were not important any longer. He indicates in his 2011 article of "Comparison, World Literature, and the Common Denominator" that "world literature would thus be the discovery of common denominator that was there all along" (61). While Damrosch and Saussy focus only on homogeneity, Emily Apter notices heterogeneity. However, she believes that comparison breaks down because of the "non-translation, mistranslation, incomparability and untranslatability" of world literature (*Against World Literature* 4). Because these arguments reproduce the same dilemma that has caused the crisis of comparative literature, world literature seems unqualified to serve as the future of comparative literature.

Last but not at least, world literature remains under the hegemony of Euro-U.S. culture, meaning that the realization of true equality of world literature is only dimly possible. The inequality caused by Euro-U.S. centralism embodies four aspects. First, in *What is World Literature?* Damrosch tries to explore a way to change the unfair situation of a world literature that retains its U.S.-centrism. Damrosch states that:

Works rarely cross borders on a basis of full equality; if the classics and masterpieces long dominant in world literature have typically enjoyed high prestige and authoritative weight in their new homes, the power relations are often reversed when noncanonical works come into North America today. ...All works are subject to manipulation and even deformation in their foreign reception, but established classics usually gain a degree of protection by their cultural prestige... This book is written in the belief that we can do better justice to our texts, whether perennial classics or contemporary works, if we really attend to what we are doing when we import them and introduce them into new contexts. (24-25)

As this statement demonstrates, Damrosch criticizes the inequality of world literary works in all countries except the U.S., and he assures that his book *What is World Literature?* can change the unequal situation of world literature. But the truth is, all his arguments in this book are based under the context of the U.S. superiority, which already displays the hegemony of U.S. centrism. Thus, this kind of criticism with the U.S. as an outlier clearly reveals a thorough inequality of world literature.

The second aspect contributing to inequality within world literature is cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is regarded as one of the most crucial elements of world literature. But does world literature really embody this principal factor? The answer is obviously no. Because there are countless literary works of various types in different languages from so many different countries and nations, it

is an extremely arduous—seemingly impossible—task to take all of them into consideration, especially in today's multicultural context. Even if all of these works could be taken into account, the standards determining which literary works can be taken as world literature still lie in the hands of Euro-U.S. authorities rather than the developing areas or all the regions. Magdi Youssef criticizes "the standards of world literature" that are "formulated in the West chime with those underlying the dominant and generally recognized European-U.S. literary canon. Those same standards also apply, I shall be arguing, in the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature" ("Decolonizing" 125). Youssef's arguments hold that the standards of world literature formulated by Euro-U.S. centrism are not fair, so that it is very hard for world literature to realize its cosmopolitan promise. If this is the case, world literature without cosmopolitanism is not "world" literature in any real sense. Moreover, Damrosch asserts in *What is World Literature?* that "world literature is a mode of reading that can be experienced intensively with a few works just as effectively as it can be explored extensively with a large number" (299). Damrosch means this as an argument for close reading to world literature. Close reading refers to intensive reading of just a few works. If we follow Damrosch's close reading paradigm for world literature, we must accept that not all literary works from all countries and regions can be taken into considerations. No matter which works we choose as world literature, inequality is inevitable. What's more, these standards of choosing, as Youssef states, are decided by the Euro-U.S. centric discipline. Because close reading is the basic research method of the American New Criticism, one cannot help but conclude that Damrosch's viewpoint is based on the American theories. In this context, Damrosch's standpoint on world literature is less possible to be fair and square. Without equality, cosmopolitanism is just a utopian idea, and accordingly, world literature is not capable of taking responsibility as the future of comparative literature.

Thirdly, translation is perceived as the bridge by which a national literary work enters into world literature. But looking back on all the works of world literature, are all of them dependent upon translation for their stature? The answer is absolutely no; we could find a number of literary works written in English language had already been classified as world literature works before or without translations. For instance, Shakespeare's works *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Romeo and Juliet* have already been regarded as world literature before their translations came out. Moreover, there's little space for non-Western literary works in the ranks of world literature even in the multicultural era, because European and other Western literary works have occupied a vast majority of this space for a very long time. Many of high-quality non-Western national literary works never had a chance to be translated into English and other European languages to get the tickets to world literature. This conclusion is substantiated by Lawrence Venuti's argument in *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*. He states that Brazilian publishers import more than fifteen-hundred translations of the books written in English language, but there are only fourteen translations of Brazilian literature issued in England or the United States. The situation is similar in China. There are countless Chinese translations of European and U.S. works in China. In comparison, though, there are few Chinese literary works channeled into the Western countries. This pattern is why very few non-Western works are regarded as works of world literature. How to explain this drastically imbalanced situation? Venuti interprets: "Quite simply, a lot of money is made from translating English, but little is invested into translating into it" (160-161). In addition, Damrosch suggests that "a single work of world literature is the locus of a negotiation between two different cultures" (*What is World Literature?* 283). How to negotiate? According to Damrosch's interpretation, this negotiation can be carried out with the literary works of the home culture abiding by "the host culture's national tradition and the present needs of its own writers" (283). This seems equal on the surface, but it remains difficult to achieve in practice because of the Western-centric literary culture which we discussed above. The reality of globalization is that the negotiation itself is intrinsically unequal between two different cultures. In a word, this unequal situation reflects and exposes the impact of Euro-U.S. cultural hegemony, which makes world literature less qualified to serve as the future of comparative literature.

Furthermore, Damrosch claims that "world literature is a mode of reading that is a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time" (281). This claim highlights the important role of reading in determining which literary works count as world literature. In this sense, it would seem that people who do the reading play the decisive role in world literature. However, in reality, this is hardly the case. Looking back on the history of world literature, the decisive power and the selecting criteria have always been in the hand of the Euro-U.S. academia since the first day world literature came into being. The readers from China, India, Brazil and other non-Western countries have never had the chance to decide which literary works can be regarded as world literature. This imbalance has always existed, not just because the notion of world literature is originated in Europe,

but also because the non-Western readers have no voice under the oppression by the economic, political and even cultural hegemonies of European countries and the U.S. This can be reflected in various international literary awards, especially in the Nobel Prize in Literature awarded by the Swedish Academy, which is commonly considered as the most notable and credible international literature award in the world. Since its launch in 1895, from the first Nobel laureate Sully Prudhomme to the latest one, Bob Dylan, most of the laureates are Western writers. Although there have been several non-Western laureates in recent years such as Gao Xingjian, Mario Vargas Llosa and Mo Yan, the selection criteria are still decided solely by the Western values. The Academy always selects the translations of non-Western works, and those without translations or with translations not well-received in the West are easily ignored, which is an obvious lack of fairness. And moreover, the editors of Norwegian Book Clubs, with the Norwegian Nobel Institute, polled a panel of the top 100 works in world literature in 2002. Except for very few works from non-Western writers like Lu Xun, Chinua Achebe and Jorge Luis Borges, all others were Western works (see, "100 Top 100 Works in World Literature" <<http://www.infoplease.com/ipea/A0934958.html>>). This list attests to Western centrism as well.

From the argument above, it can be clearly concluded that although world literature today bears some merits compared to comparative literature, it is still an extension of its original concept without transformative innovations. The uncertainty that continues to surround the concept of a world literature, and the disciplinary ignorance of heterogeneity are deficiencies, and place limits on its ability to serve as the future of comparative literature. And most importantly, although the multicultural era has come for years, we are still under the existing influence of Euro-U.S. centralism. The study of world literature has been stranded in a world which the West commands, and the Oriental voices, such as those of China, India and other developing countries, have been controlled or even oppressed by Western discourse. With this inevitable imbalance, world literature is not sufficient to serve as the future of comparative literature at this point.

In this case, is there ever any way to break through the predicament presently faced by comparative literature? Western comparativists have tried different ways to avoid Euro-U.S. centrism, but it almost seems to no effect. Because no matter how determined they are, as long as they stay at the center of the "core" culture, they will be more or less fettered by this hegemonic power. If comparativists want to thoroughly break away from this dilemma, they must take a real foothold in a peripheral culture or a semi-peripheral culture such as that of China or India. Only in this way will comparativists find alternative solutions to the future of comparative literature. In this case, why don't we change our thinking pattern and turn to the peripheral or semi-peripheral areas? In fact, local comparativists there have already made significant contributions to the development of comparative literature. For example, China Comparative Literature Association (CCLA) has made various attempts since its establishment in 1985. The Variation Theory proposed by the local comparativist Shunqing Cao can be considered as an optimal choice to the future of comparative literature. According to Cao, Variation Theory concerns itself with crossing and literariness, and offers "the study on variations of the literary phenomena of different countries with or without factual contact as well as the comparative study on the heterogeneity and variability of different literary expressions in the same subject area so as to achieve the goal of exploring the patterns of intrinsic differences and variability" (*The Variation Theory xxxii*). Several advantages of Variation Theory can be recognized from this description, which also delineate the reasons why I take this proposal. Firstly, it takes a stand on the periphery or semi-periphery, and escapes from the control of Euro-U.S. cultural hegemony. Secondly, it accounts for the existing dilemma of boundary-less literary study and pulls comparative literature back toward literariness. And thirdly, it observes the heterogeneity among different languages, cultures and civilizations, and allows for variabilities that solve the issue of incomparability which cross-civilization studies may encounter. As a result of these strengths, instead of world literature, Variation Theory may play a better role in the future of comparative literature.

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