


Resistance to Neocolonialism in Contemporary Chinese Literary Theory

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**Jun Zeng,**

**"Resistance to Neocolonialism in Contemporary Chinese Literary Theory"**

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**Abstract:** In his article "Resistance to Neocolonialism in Contemporary Chinese Literary Theory" Jun ZENG claims that the introduction of Western Literary Theory in the past forty years of China's reform and opening up was carried out under the background of neo-colonialism. "Western imagination" in the discourse of contemporary Chinese literary theory was an important aspect of the strategy of cultural resistance under the overwhelming influence of Western neocolonialism. Contemporary Chinese literary theory no longer simply regards Western literary theory in the twentieth century as a bourgeois literary ideology; instead, it adopts a "de-ideological" attitude to return to the issues of literature, art and aesthetics. However, with political upheavals in the 1980s, the introduction of and reflection on Western literary theories were criticized as "bourgeois liberalization." In the 1990s, despite the fact that Chinese scholars ceased politically opposing the introduction of Western literary theory, there remains an "anti-Western" tendency. Contemporary Chinese literary theory in the new century continues the ideology of "de-Western-centralism" since the 1990s, but it goes further by completely reversing the "teacher-student" relationship between the West and China. If we shall no longer reject western discourse and strengthen the purity of Chinese discourse out of unwillingness to being "colonized," we would fall into another extreme but to construct a new system of discourse of Chinese literary theory with its global influence.

**Jun ZENG**  
**Resistance to Neocolonialism in Contemporary Chinese Literary Theory**

"Contemporary China" refers to two different periods: one is since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (New China); another is after the Great Cultural Revolution when China entered in a period of reform and opening. Both of these two periods are considered as a "neocolonialist" period after the disintegration of the old colonial system. But it was in the period of reform and opening that Western literary theories in the twentieth century have been translated and introduced by Chinese scholars themselves legally and largely. This period has three crucial characteristics. First, Western imperialist countries abandoned old-colonialism featuring military occupation, resource plundering, economic exploitation and cultural erosion. Instead, they implemented an indirect control by the means of globalization, transnational capital, cultural agents, and value influences. Second, among Western mainstream intellectual circles appears "post-colonialism" which was put forward by third-world intellectuals to criticize, question, and reflect on themselves. Third, partly learning from the ideological approach of "post-colonialism" and considering the self-consciousness of their culture's subjectivity, the third-world intellectuals have developed a cultural strategy to resist neocolonialism. This article aims to discuss the issue of "Western imagination" in the discourse of contemporary Chinese literary theory as an important aspect of the strategy of cultural resistance under the overwhelming influence of Western neocolonialism.

"Western imagination in the discourse of contemporary literary theory" refers to the understandings of Western literary theory from the view of contemporary Chinese literary theory. It is worth noting that an explicit issue has been neglected when we talk about Western literary theory. On the one hand, "the West" is a concept as "the Other" viewed from "the East." "Western literary theory" could be understood as "theories about the West" from the "Oriental" perspective. Western scholars today call themselves "we the West," which shows a self-identification. Therefore, strictly speaking, there is no original Western literary theory in the twentieth century. It is simply a concept continuously constructed by Chinese scholars in different historical stages. On the other hand, since "the West" is formed in the context of "the East," from a pragmatic view, it will be important to determine in which context Chinese scholars would use "Western literary theory." In Chinese context, "Western literary theory" has both broad and narrow senses. In a broad sense, "Western literary theory" mainly refers to European and American literary theories from ancient to modern times from the perspective of epistemology, which emphasizes a studied object of literary knowledge including literary theory, literary criticism, and creation experience, as well as philosophy, aesthetics, and art criticism. It is presented by its time, genre, the writer and nationality (Wu, *Selected Collection* III). In a narrow sense, it refers to the theoretical trend of literature and art of developed capitalist countries, which has transformed the discourse of contemporary Chinese literary theory since the twentieth century, such as "the Sinicization of Western literary theory," "the introduction of Western literary theory in the new era and the interpretation of literary classics in China," "discussion on the issue of western literary history" and so forth. The full name of "Western literary theory" is used to specify the theory of Western criticism since

the twentieth century. Sometimes it is referred to as "contemporary Western literary theory" or "Western literary theory in the twentieth century."

The most typical example is Wu's textbook *Works of Western Literary Theory*, which was published in two volumes by the People's Literature Publishing House in 1964. "Volume 1 is from the ancient times to the eighteenth century, and volume 2 involves the nineteenth century" (Wu, *Selected Collection III*). When republished in 1979, it spanned the same time, which means the twentieth century was excluded. It was not until 1983 and 1984 when Wu edited *Selected Collection of Western Modern Literary Theory* (1983) and *Selected Collection of Western Literary Theory Classics* (1984) that Western literary theories in the twentieth century were officially included, owing to the fact that the critical theories of developed capitalist countries as a main body of Western literary theories had been criticized and refused by the East for a long time, serving as "counter-examples" mostly. Therefore, it is not hard to explain why Western literary theories took up a large proportion within Western ideological trends in the era of reform and opening up. Since the end of the 1970s, the discourse of Chinese literary theory has experienced "Sartre mania," "manuscript mania," "Freud mania," "Heidegger mania," "structuralism mania," "modernism mania," "post-modernism mania" and other processes to accept Western ideology, among which Western literary theory has been translated and introduced to China in the largest amount. Whenever "theoretical fatigue" occurred, "Western literary theory" would be the first to be criticized. Since Western literary theory in a narrow sense has important influence to the transformation of contemporary Chinese literary theory, we prefer to re-understand the Western literary theory as "theoretical otherness." Only from this perspective, will we be able to penetrate into the potential of Sino-Western literary theory's exchange, integration and innovation, and to reconsider the value of "Western literary theory in the twentieth century."

Therefore, starting from the discourse of contemporary Chinese literary theory, "Western literary theory in the twentieth century" presents a complex form with divergence, multi-levels, and multi-orientations. It is not only an objective knowledge requiring further understandings, but also a creatively transformed "concept of Western literary theory in the twentieth century in the spectrum of Chinese literary theory."

In genetic meanings, "Western literary theory in the twentieth century" has a clear starting point in the spectrum of Chinese literary theory. Simultaneously, discourse on contemporary Chinese literary theory is being transformed and constructed. Since reform and opening up, it is inevitable to introduce Western ideological trends in a large scale for China's modernization. The large-scale introduction of aesthetics, methodology and various modernist literary concepts became prominent in this period. Contemporary Chinese literary theory no longer simply regards Western literary theory in the twentieth century as a bourgeois literary ideology. Instead, it adopts a "de-ideological" attitude to return to the issues of literature, art and aesthetics. However, with political upheavals in the 1980s, the introduction of and reflection on Western literary theories were criticized as "bourgeois liberalization."

Wu's textbook constructs the earliest knowledge form of "Western literary theory in twentieth century" in China. One of his most representative works is *Selected Works of Western Modern Literary Theory* (1983). This book includes empathy theory (Lipps), aestheticism (Pater), symbolism (Valery),

mysticism (Maeterlinck, Yeats), Futurism (Marinetti, Boccioni and Mayakovsky), intuitionism (Bergson), stream-of-consciousness novels (James, Woolf and Proust), Psychoanalysis (Freud), expressionism (Edschiemid, Brecht and Rilke), surrealism (Breton), New Thomasism (Maritain), existentialism (Sartre), pragmatism (Dewey), new humanism (Babbitt), imagism (Pound), new criticism (Eliot), semantic school (Richards), new novel school (Robbe-Grillet), structuralism (Frye) and absurd theater (Eugene Ionesco and Esslin). among which empathy theory, intuitionism, new Thomasism, pragmatism, new humanism stem from modern Western ideology of philosophy, while aesthetics, psychoanalysis, new criticism, semantic school and structuralism stem from typical critical theories. Other theories are all modernist and post-modernist ideological trends of literature and art. In this textbook, there are eleven ideological trends of creation, five aesthetic ideological trends and four critical theories. As for critical theory, new criticism and semantic school have since then been merged into "Anglo-American new criticism." Therefore, strictly speaking, only three are critical theories. At the same time, some articles in Wu's *Selected Works of Western Literary Theory Classics* are related to Western literary theories in the twentieth century, including Freud, Lipps, Mayakovsky, Pound, Richards, Dewey, Eliot, Jung, Croce and Romain Rolland. Among ten ideological trends, there are five philosophical or aesthetic ideological trends, three creation theories and two critical theories. It is worth noting that Wu describes "Western literary theory in the twentieth century" as "schools and critical theories of Western literature in modern times or the twentieth century." The "modern times" or "the twentieth century" distinguishes this era from "traditional times" or "before the twentieth century." Although it is not clear whether "Western" refers to a geographic region or it is an opposite concept from "the Oriental" in international relations, it shows that Wu intends to dilute the ideological antithesis between the "developed capitalist countries" and the "third world" or "socialist countries." As for the definition of "Literature Theory," Wu uses the expression "schools and critical theories of literature," which shows his choices of "Literature Theory" is based on the ideological trends and related critical theories of Western modernist literature and art. As for the dominant ideological tendency, Wu also believes that "its ideology mainly stems from idealist philosophy," and that "formalism and irrationalism will remain the basic factors of modern Western literary theory." (Wu, "A Discussion" III) Even though Wu did not directly use the name of "bourgeois literary ideas" in his description, its connotation still carries on the ideological tradition since the founding of New China.

At the same time, the consciousness of "critical theories" also emerged. All kinds of Western literary theory in the twentieth century are considered as critical theory be introduced in China. In the name of "critical theory," Chinese scholars try to de-ideology the Western literary theory. That is to say, Chinese scholars no longer simply distinguish between "surnamed bourgeois ideology" and "surname Marxism thought," but treat them as all kinds of schools of literary thought. There are two representative events: First, Zhang Longxi and Zhao Yifan start a column on *Reading*, respectively in 1983 and 1986 to introduce the ideological trends and genres of Western literary theory. Among them, Zhang's *A Review on Western Literary Theory* (1986) mainly deals with schools of critical theories including psychoanalysis, Anglo-American new criticism, mythology and archetype criticism, Russian formalism and Czech structuralism, interpretivism, and receptional aesthetics. Until 1995, Zhao had been writing

columns, which were compiled into a book titled *Appreciation of New Ideologies in Europe and America* (1996). In this book, he introduces Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Bakhtin, discourse theory, Althusser, Foucault, Lacan, Barthes, Liotta, Benjamin and Western Marxism, Baudrillard, Jameson, Guo Tingdun, Said, and Orientalism. In the new century, Zhao re-edits this book, publishing the *Essays on Western Literary Theory: From Husserl to Derrida* (2007) and *Essays on Western Literary Theory: From Lukács to Said* (2009). Second, the translated works introducing Western literary theory are published. Wilbur Scott's *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism* (Trans. by Lan Renzhe, 1983) divide literary criticism into moral criticism, psychological criticism, social criticism, formalist criticism and archetype criticism (Scott, Orwell, Eliot, *Five Approaches*). Published in 1963, this book mainly discusses approaches of literary criticism in the United Kingdom and the United States. Therefore, it does not fully meet the requirements of "Western literary criticism." The book's introduction is published in *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art*, Vol 2(1), entitled "Five Modes of Contemporary British and American Literary Criticism." Similarly, earlier published but later translated by Wimsatt and Brooks, 'The History of Western Literary Criticism' (1987), is originally published in 1957, entitled *Literary Criticism: A Short History*, in which Croce, symbolism, Richards, semantics, Elliott and Pound, myth and primitive types are related to Western literary theory in the twentieth century. *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction* by Ann Jefferson (1986) exerts a great influence on Western literary theory in China. This book is related to Russian formalism, modern linguistics and literary language, Anglo-American new criticism, structuralism and post-structuralism, modern psychoanalytic criticism, and schools of Marxist literary theory. Rory Ryan et al., *An Introduction to Contemporary Western Literary Theory* (1986) deals with Russian Formalism, New Criticism, Linguistics and Literature, Structuralism, Semiotics, Poststructuralism, Speech Act Theory, Marxist literary theory, literary hermeneutics, literature and phenomenology, Geneva school, psychology and literature, feminist literary criticism, etc. David Lodge's *Twentieth Century Literature Criticism* (1987) includes a wide range of representative figures of creation theory, critical theory, and philosophy and aesthetics, such as Yeats, Freud, James, Pound, Eliot, Woolf, Hume, Richards, Lawrence, Foster, William Empson, Knight, Jung, Caldwell, Lan Sam, Wilson, Valery, Hardin, Trilling, Brooks, Winters, Auerbach, Wimsart, Sartre, Shawler, Ferguson, Frye, Lewis, Federer Rob-Grillet, Lukacs, Hogart, Ian Watt, Levi Strauss, René Wellek, Wayne Boone, Cran, McLuhan, Steiner, Oden Bart, Sontag, Harry Levine, Alan Rodeway, Derrida, Unge, demonstrating his insight into the ideological trends of literature and art in the twentieth century as a theorist and writer. Among all these works, the most translated and cited one should be Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. There are several different versions of the book being published in Chinese, including the ones translated by Wu Xiaoming (1986 and 2007), Wang Fengzhen (1988), and Liu Feng (1987). The original English text was also republished in China by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in the name of *Literary Theory Introduction* (2004). Eagleton adopts Marxist critiques to comment on the literary trends in the twentieth century and advocates Marxist political criticism, providing a reference for the revival and development of Chinese Marxist literary theories. In this sense, despite the lack of a comprehensive picture of Western literary theory in the twentieth century, it has exerted a significant influence on the construction of knowledge system of Western literary theory in the twentieth century.

From the perspective of a textbook, another representative textbook on Western literary theory in the 1980s is *A Guide to the Masterpieces of Western Literary Theory, Volume 2* (1987). This book is related to Dilthey, Nietzsche, Dewey, Freud, Jung, Woolf, Sartre, Shklovsky, Jacobson, Ingleton, Dufrenne, Maritain, Heidegger, Gadamer, Jauss, Luacs, Bloch, Adorno, Marcuse and Walter Benjamin. Compared with the former two textbooks, creation theories are totally removed from Western literary theories except Woolf and Sartre due to their contribution to creation theory, philosophy, aesthetics and critical theories. In the introduction, the editors make an overall evaluation of Western literary theory in the twentieth century, which mainly involves four aspects. First of all, it focuses on the author's psychological performance research, including expressionism, symbolism, literary psychology, and archetype criticism. Secondly, it focuses on researches on the *noumenon* of the works, mainly Russian formalism, Anglo-American new criticism, structuralism, ontological researches on phenomenological works. In addition, it concentrates on readers' interpretation and acceptance, mainly including reading phenomenology, literary hermeneutics, receptional aesthetics, and reader reaction criticism. Lastly, it focuses on socio-cultural criticism of literature and art to study Western Marxist literary theories and new historical poetics" (Wu, Hu, *A Guide* 4). The salient point of this evaluation is to construct a framework of knowledge from the perspective of literary studies, especially literary criticism. *The History of Western Literary Theory in the twentieth Century* edited by Hu Jingzhi and Zhang Shouying (1988) classifies Western literary theories in the twentieth century into four categories: Part one, Author System (expressionism, symbolism, psychology of literature and art, archetype criticism); Part two, Works System (formalism, Anglo-American new criticism, Structuralism, Literary Semiotics); Part three, Reader System (reading phenomenology, literary hermeneutics, receptional aesthetics); Part four, Social-cultural system (cultural analysis, neo-Marxism, Frankfurt school). When republished in 1999, the textbook was independently edited by Zhang. Apart from revision of the names of certain schools, there are two major changes. First, the conclusions were rewritten, from the relatively traditional structure of "basic trend, characteristics and values of social culture" in the 1988 edition to the focus on "the trend of Western literary theory in the twentieth century." He summarizes six features: "from modern to postmodern, from knowledge discourse to ideological text, from poetic differentiation to cultural poetics, from analysis to synthesis, from diversity to the periphery, from absorption to dialogue and development," showing Chinese editors' overall understanding. Second, on the basis of the four types of the 1988 edition, "Five: postmodern system (deconstructivism, postmodernism, feminism, and new historicism)" was added, which demonstrates the expansion of Chinese scholars' knowledge on Western literary theory in the 1990s. Therefore, these two textbooks mark the "self-awareness of critical theory" during the construction of Western literary knowledge in the twentieth century. However, the effect of this "self-awareness of critical theory" is twofold: on the one hand, Chinese scholars have "open its eyes to the world" again, accepting Western literary thoughts with a positive and open mind; on the other hand, as a result, they relax their vigilance against the "neocolonialism" of Western culture. The latter aspect has also become an important issue for Chinese scholars to reflect on its limitation after the 1990s.



In the 1990s, Chinese scholars ceased politically opposing the introduction of Western literary theory, but there still remains an "anti-Western" tendency. That is to say, they emphasize the insufficiency of domestic academic discourse and the nationality of contemporary Chinese literary theory to counter Western discourse which is believed as an academic invasion of a "powerful discourse." Logically, it is necessary to return to Chinese traditional culture and literary theory to resist the West and rebuild discourse on contemporary Chinese literary theory. Cao Shunqing's idea of "Cultural Aphasia" is the most representative in this period, spurring heated academic discussions.

For example, Shi Pu's *The Outline of Western Literary Theory History* (1991) and Luo Zhiye's *A History of Western Literary Criticism* (1991) still constitute the 1980s' understanding of the Western literary theory in the twentieth century. Specifically, Shi Pu's *The Outline of Western Literary Theory History* carries on Wu's perspective to focus on creation theory. The eighth chapter "Western literary theory in the twentieth century" involves post-symbolism, Dadaism, surrealism, expressionism, futurism, stream-of-consciousness, existentialism, new fiction (or anti-fiction), absurd theater, black humor literature, etc. And the fourth chapter "Modernist literary criticism" focuses on critical theory of Luo's *A History of Western Literary Criticism*. He introduces psychoanalytic criticism, new criticism, interpretation theory and structuralism, among which new criticism is the most detailed. After entering the new century, Chinese scholars compiled a large number of textbooks on Western literary theory, such as Zhu Gang's *Western Literary Theory in the twentieth Century* (2006, 2015), Meng Qingshu & Yang Shousen's *Western Literary Theory* (2007) Zhu Zhirong's *A History of Western Literary Theory* (2007), Qiao Guoqiang's *Selected Works of Western Literary Theory in the twentieth Century* (2006), Wang Yuechuan's *The Latest Course on Western Literary Theory* (2008), Wang Yichuan's *A Course on the History of Western Literary Theory* (2009), Zuo Jinmei & Shen Fuying's *Contemporary Western Literary Theory* (2011), Chen Taisheng & Tong Qingbing's, *New Edition of Western Literary Theory in the twentieth Century* (2011), Yang Shousen's *New Course in Western Literary Theory* (2012), Liu Jie & Qiu Meihuan's *Western Literary Theory in the twentieth Century* (2009), Yang Huilin & Geng Youzhuang's, *An Overview of Western Literary Theory* (2013), Duan Jifang's *Western Literary Theory in the twentieth Century* (2014) and other works with distinctive styles. These books have four aspects in common:

1. A relatively stable knowledge framework of Western Literary theory in the twentieth century with ideological trends of critical theory as its main body has been established, though different textbooks have their own focuses.

2. As time goes by, most textbooks were revised and republished by adding, compressing or deleting ideological trends, but there are no obvious overall changes.

3. An important reason of the recent emergence of textbooks in the new century is the differentiation of textbook markets along with the expansion of colleges and universities. Therefore, new textbooks failed to keep up with the updating of knowledge, which leads to similarities in constructing knowledge system in different styles.

The following textbooks represent the Chinese achievements of constructing knowledge of "Western literary theory in the twentieth century" since the 1990s. Ma Xinguo's *A History of Western Literary* was first published in 1994 and revised twice in 2002 and 2008. The most noticeable change was the content



of "Western literary theory in the twentieth century." In the 1994 edition, the book was divided into three parts of classical literary criticism, modern literary criticism, and modern literary criticism. In the 2002 edition, "Postmodern Literary Theory" was added as the fourth part. In the third edition in 2008, the chapter of "Critical Theories on Cultural Studies" was added. Besides, the section of "Studies on Gender and Criticism on Homosexuality" was added in the chapter of "Feminist Criticism." Moreover, chapters concerning Croce, Heidegger, Sartre, Lacan, Habermas and Anglo-American new Criticism were partly rewritten (Ma, *History*). Zhu Liyuan's *Contemporary Western Literary Theory* was published in 1997, 2005, 2009, and 2012. In the first edition, four of the twenty-four ideological trends could be defined as philosophical aesthetics, seven as creation theory, and thirteen as critical theory. Among them, two chapters of "Cultural Studies" and "Spatial Theory" were added in the revised version in 2005. Apparently, with Chinese scholars' continuous focus on translation and selection of Western literary theories, the recent studies of Western literary theories have become major aspects of knowledge update. However, the impetus of pursuing the simultaneous progress of Chinese and Western literary theories has probably brought forth the tendency of "giving priority to the present rather than the past." In *The Latest Course on Western Literary Theory* (2008), Wang Yuechuan expounds many scholars and theories including psychoanalysis and its literary modes, phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics and receptional aesthetics, structuralism and post-structuralism, Western Marxism, postmodernism, post-colonialism, feminism, neo-historical literary theory, cultural studies, ecological literature and ecocriticism. It is interesting that the author just roughly sketches Russian formalism and Anglo-American new Criticism which are regarded as the beginning of Western literary theory in the twentieth century, and he attaches greater importance to the literary theories in the latter half of the twentieth century. *Ten Lectures on Western Literary Theory* (2005) by Tong Qingbing and Cao Weidong attempt to connect the ancient and the modern times, and to refine ten topics including "imitation," "the debate between ancient and modern," "genius," "performance," "enlightenment," "symbol," "acceptance," "discourse," "association/ public domain" and "cultural industry" through theoretical ideological trends in different historical periods.

In this period, contemporary Chinese literary scholars continued to track the new trends of Western literary theory, but their process of introducing new Western literary theory into textbooks compiled by Chinese scholars was slowed down. For example, *The Pioneering Literary Theory* edited by Wang Ning has been published for 15 series since 2004. His *After Post-modernism* (1998), *Beyond Post-modernism* (2002), *See the Eastern Again: Post-colonialist Theory and Ideological Trend* (2011) and other works introduced and studied the progress of Western literary theory in the recent two decades. Besides, in 1991, *Recent Western Literary Theory* (1991) by Wang Fengzhen et. al. attempted to transcend the limitation of previous textbooks and selected works. First of all, this is the first selected works which explicitly translated Western literary theories in the twentieth century based on "Critical Theory." Secondly, it focuses on the translation and introduction of classical literary classics in the latter half of the twentieth century and classifies them into schools, such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, receptional aesthetics or reader response criticism, structuralism, poststructuralism-deconstructionism, psychoanalytic criticism, feminist criticism, postmodernism, dialectical criticism, Western Marxism, new

historicism and cultural criticism. Finally, categorization is not clear, and figures selected are not typical in the selection of various representative scholars and articles. For example, under the title of "Western Marxism," there are mainly Anglo-American neo-Marxists. And under the title of "cultural criticism," Said and John Carlos Rowe belong to post-colonialism. What attracts the most attention should be his introduction of "cultural criticism." Wang selected and translated two articles by Said and John Carlos Rowe. The former is recognized as the representative figure of post-colonialism, while the latter, despite his well-known "new studies on America," he has not been accepted into the textbooks compiled by Chinese scholars. Since the beginning of the 1990s and up to the new century, Wang was devoted to translating and introducing the latest Western literary theories, such as *New Translated Western Literary Theory in 2000* (2001), *New Translated Western Literary Theory in 2001* (2002), *New Translated Western Literary Theory in 2002* (2003), *New Translated Western Literary Theory in 2003* (2004), *Translation of Western Literary Theories in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A New Perspective of Criticism* (2010), *Translation of Western Literary Theories in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Theory and Methods* (2012). In spite of this, these Western literary theories in the process of being updated are still under accumulation and waiting to be totally introduced into textbooks of Western literary theory edited by Chinese scholars. In 2014, Zhu Guohua undertook a major project of the National Social Science Foundation named "Research on Pioneering Western Literary Theory," which contributes to illustrating and updating Western literary theory in the recent two decades. In a few years, Chinese scholars are expected to complete constructing new knowledge of Western literary theory in the twentieth century.

From a wider perspective, textbooks on Western literary theory constitute a miniature of the knowledgeable process of Western literary theory, aiming to introduce Western theories to Chinese learners and promote knowledge production in China. In this sense, compiling textbooks is not only an approach to presenting Chinese scholars' overall grasp and general judgments of Western literary theory, but also a mirror reflecting the inadequacies of academic achievements in this field. It even may offer a possibility for "resisting neo-colonialism" and revising misunderstood issues and conclusions of Western literary theories. Compared with textbooks on Western literary theory (including "literary theory history"), textbooks on Western literary theory compiled by Chinese scholars have the following characteristics (1). They are consistent with the literary textbooks compiled by Western scholars, among whom René Wellek, Austin Warren, Jefferson, Eagleton, and Jonathan Culler have a great influence on Chinese scholars (2). The history of Western literary theory is generally dominated by critical theory, while Chinese literary textbooks are composed of three parts: philosophical aesthetics, creation theory, and critical theory, which are more comprehensive in the spectrum of knowledge (3). Generally speaking, these textbooks adopt an inclusive and open academic attitude and narrate in a compassionate approach, which is different from the distinct position in the European and American works on the history of literary theory. For example, Eagleton's political criticism stems from his Marxist status, and Culler's *Theory of Literature* is filled with deconstruction.

However, there are hitherto issues in China's textbooks on Western literary theory (1). Knowledge update is limited to the 1980s, and the overall understanding of contemporary Western literary theories in recent decades lags behind. Moreover, what is the knowledge form of Western literary theory after

"the golden times of literary theories" depicted in Eagleton's *After Theory*? In a strict sense, Chinese scholars have not made it clear (2). The history of Western literary theory still requires further studies. The current approach is to summarize the development of this ideological trend and introduce a few representative scholars, but there is a lack of a more detailed system of academic history (3). Chinese scholars haven't demonstrated their research achievements and critical positions. More than 30 years ago, when translating ideological trends of Western capitalist theories, Chinese scholars had once formed a critical mode of "our Marxism believes that [...]" Though such mode is simple, there still remains room for criticism and scrutiny. But nowadays, Chinese textbooks on Western literary theory lack reflections on their own culture, which may hinder Chinese scholars' innovation on literary theory.

From this perspective, the "Western imagination" in the discourse of contemporary Chinese literary theory is essentially based on the dualism of Chinese and Western ideology which considers Western literary theory powerful and aggressive. Difference lies in our attitude and strategy. While encountering Western literary theory, shall we "emphasize ideology" or "reject ideology?" Shall we "critically refuse" or "critically accept?" Shall the construction of contemporary Chinese literary theory return to the tradition or focus on the present? These differences show our various imaginations toward Western literary theories.

Once introduced and translated in a Chinese context, literary theories have been misinterpreted to some extent. Therefore, when reflecting on the Western literary theory, we should not simply equal them to that in the Western context but regard it as a Western discourse which has been understood and interpreted by Chinese scholars. Although these western literary theories, whether translated or not, remain western theories instead of Chinese literary theories by nature, when translated into Chinese context, words like "instinct" "tension" "structure" "discourse power" and "colony" have their existence in Chinese language since ancient times. Thus, it is worthy of note that those theoretical connotations related to discourse of literary theory are created, defined and elucidated by western countries in the first place. That is why we will think of Bakhtin, Rabelais, Dionysia, "two life styles" and "dualism" when it comes to carnival, thus overstressing the significance and value of carnival elements in Chinese experience. It is in this sense that discourse of contemporary Chinese literary theory has been "colonized" by the western counterpart.

In terms of cross-cultural communication, heterogeneous cultural are bound to penetrate and influence local cultural as long as there are communication and dialogues between different cultures and civilizations. However, since the Opium War in 1840, the relation between China and the West has become a principal contradiction under the Western capitalist invasion, which even becomes an ideological background for the reinterpretation of the relation between the past and the present. The "West" here refers to the compulsory influence of the developed capitalist countries in Europe and the United States on China for more than 100 years. Therefore, there are always two emotional structures in academic research in the discussion of the transformation of discourse of contemporary Chinese literary theory influenced by western literary theory. The first is an objective and neutral standpoint based on cross-cultural comparison and the other is a subjective standpoint based upon the mode of "stimulation-reaction." The former regards variants in the process of exchanges between Chinese and

western countries communication as "normal state" and launches research from an outsider perspective, while the latter pays close attention to the westernization of China in the process and then considers the problem from the perspective of China. The research on the influence exerted by western literary theory over the discourse of contemporary Chinese literary theory from the perspective of comparative literature and comparative poetry would definitely involve the relations between "sender-media-receiver" by using research methods of Doxologie, Crenologie and Mesologie, in which the transformation requires most attention. For instance, Bakhtin's theory has exerted a huge influence over the discourse of contemporary Chinese literary theory. But interestingly, Bakhtin's polyphonic theory was acquired by Qian Zhongwen by reading his Russian works, while the spread of his carnival theory in China should be owed to the Chinese scholars influenced by European and American academic training, such as Liu Kang's "the clamour of dialogue: Bakhtin's theory of cultural transition." The diffusion of polyphonic theory in China managed to rectify the understanding of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novels and promote the conceptual transformation of Chinese realistic theory of the early 1980s, while the carnival theory has become an important theoretical resource of the turning of cultural research after 1990s as it has been used by post-modernization theory and mass cultural theory in Europe and America. Besides, these two theories have different fates in China. The polyphonic theory has been faithfully translated, but it encounters constant doubt among Chinese scholars as to its possibility and vast confrontation with realistic literary ideals. However, the carnival theory has been widely used by Chinese scholars even without consideration of contexts and limitations though it was transformed to a large extent when introduced to China. In comparison, polyphonic theory is loyal to the intention of its "sender" and more orthodox in terms of cross-cultural comparison and Mesologie respectively, while carnival theory is less authentic as it has stepped on a detour. However, both theories have promoted the transformation of the discourse of contemporary Chinese literary theory in different historical periods from the perspective of the mode of "stimulation- reaction" in that the former comes from the impetus of Chinese scholars in recovering the literary spirit of realism while the latter the enormous influence of post-ism on Chinese literary theory. Cross-cultural comparison is a basic attitude and method of academic study while the intervention of the mode of "stimulation-reaction" constitutes the inner power and problematic awareness of Chinese scholars' academic thinking, both of which are correct.

It is complicated that Chinese scholars interpret Chinese experience by using western literary theory. Western literary theory is an ideological field full of heterogeneous conflicts, so different theoretical perspectives can be obtained according to different western literary theories. In the meanwhile, the complexity of Chinese experience makes it possible that its existence can be illuminated and discovered by various theoretical perspectives. As a result, totally different conclusions can be arrived at when one piece of Chinese experience is interpreted by different western literary theories. Take the study on Lu Xun for example. Realistic literature concepts constitute the basic perspective of the interpretation of Lu Xun's works at the end of 1970s and the beginning of 1980s (Liu, *Collected works*, 1981). Modernism theory has become a new perspective of the interpretation of Lu Xun's works since 1985. Later, it has been interpreted from a postmodern perspective since the 21st century. Lu Xun's image has changed from a realistic fighter who aimed at transforming nationality into a modernist scholar filled with inner

depression and anxiety, and then into a post-modernist maniac dedicated to ironically teasing deconstruction. Apparently, different perspectives will yield distinct images of Lu Xun. There is no correspondence between western literary theory and Chinese experience. Instead, it is a process filled with sophisticated exchanges and collisions. Some aspects of Chinese experience have been interpreted probably by western literary theory while some have been exaggerated or even twisted and deformed deliberately.

Specifically speaking, Chinese scholars' interpretation of Chinese experience by using western literary theory can be summarized as follows. First, similarities and differences between Chinese culture and western culture can be discovered by cross-cultural comparison. For example, *The Tao and The Logos* written by Zhang Longxi studied the nature of language and its complex connotation in literature creation and comprehension from the perspective of comparative poetry between the East and West. Zhang paid special attention to culturally heterogeneous and historically irrelevant works in his research and emphasized that different cultural traditions should be placed in equal position. He also maintained that comparative poetry should inspect and consider theoretical problems by blending eastern and western critical thoughts rather than being confined to applying western concepts and methods to non-western texts, thus finding out common points of some shared subjects (which appear in China and western countries during different phases). Second, western theories are verified by Chinese experience. It is quite common that Chinese scholars try to find similar or same examples to verify research methods and existent conclusions offered by western literary theory in Chinese literary and culture in their research on western literary theory. For instance, many terms such as "from a perspective of Russian formalism," "psychoanalysis field," "structuralism analysis," and "from a perspective of post-colonialism" in our papers indicate a typical attitude of learners, which means that learners would study local literary and cultural works by imitating research methods offered by western literary theory in their study of western literary theory. It is a practice of western literary criticism. It is typical that many learners apply Greimas semantic rectangle to the analysis and interpretation of Chinese literature and TV products. (Many of them apply the method which is used to analyse "The Story of a Myna of Strange Tales from a Lonely Studio" in Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism and Theories of Culture*, which is a misinterpretation and revision of Greimas semantic rectangle). There are more examples where Chinese experience is interpreted by existent western literary theory. For example, when it comes to the perspective of psychoanalysis, Oedipus complex, living instinct, death instinct, desire and sex have become key ideas in the illustration of literature works and writers' unconsciousness. When it comes to the criticism of cultural industry, Horkheimer and Adorno's deception, standardization and stylization have become the weapon against the development of contemporary Chinese culture. When it comes to the study on youth subculture, resistance/collection has become a basic form. Third, western theory is amended by Chinese experience. Chinese experience would not be necessarily remolded to fit in the shape of western culture when western literary theory encounters Chinese experience. Chinese scholars with theoretical wisdom and matter-of-fact spirit would discover that research methods, viewpoints and conclusions of western literary theory may fail to explain. They can put forward their own ideas and understanding out of the limitation of those theories, which is, however, a great effort to promote theoretical innovation by means

of Chinese experience in the vigorous dialogue between Chinese scholars and western literary theory. For example, Zhao Yiheng has been dedicated to his research on semiology during recent years and published series books named *Chinese Semiology*, among which *A General Narratology* has caught the greatest attention. Zhao creatively puts forward ideas like text intentionality, demonstrative narration and personal padding by re-completing the explanation of narration from the perspective of semiology starting from the turning point, which was triggered by his sense of theoretical dissatisfaction after being immersed in western criticism theory for a long time. Zhao attempts to establish a world criticism theory and believes that the cultural legacy of an oriental nation has entered a general system of critical theory. What is needed is not the presupposition of the feasibility of any theory, but the test of the validity of certain theory in critical practice. It is required to develop theory because any theory is far from perfect in the globalized world. Development of theory does not prove the non-universality of theory, but the inadequacy of universality of theory. Despite the fact that Zhao's general narratology has aroused some disputes in academic circle; an incomplete world critical theory is far more valuable than a "correct" one full of nonsense.

We would fall into another extreme if we reject western discourse and strengthen the purity of Chinese discourse out of unwillingness to be "colonized." On the one hand, the simple and crude interpretation of Chinese experience by existing conclusions of western literary theory should be opposed firmly. On the other hand, Chinese scholars manage to give out their voice in the discussion of common problems when get involved in the issue of the discourse of western literary theory by using Chinese experience. Reverse thinking should be adopted in the interpretation of Chinese experience by means of western literary theory. What peculiarities have been offered by Chinese experience? What problems cannot be covered by this theory and discourse? Such being the case, how can we amend this discourse and theory? This is one of the ways to "Borrow Water to Sail a Boat" and "join in production international academic discourse." Increasing common experience of western and Chinese culture offers possibilities for exchanges and dialogues. The following questions should be pondered over. How can we interpret this from the perspective of Chinese literary theory? How can we interpret this from the perspective of western literary theory? What gives rise to such differences? Can we put forward another new set of theory different from western literary theory?

Contemporary Chinese literary theory in the new century continues the ideology of "de-Western-centralism" since the 1990s, but it goes further to completely reverse the "teacher-student" relationship between the West and China. It not only attempts to rebuild the subjectivity of discourse of Chinese literary theory, but also has exerted a greater influence on the academic circle in the West. Therefore it is because that, the discourse construction of contemporary literary theory in the new century is not to continue the modern transformation of ancient literary theory in the 1990s, but to rediscover the resources of Chinese literary theory by analyzing the limitations of western literary theory. On the one hand, contemporary Chinese literary theory makes an emphasis on keeping a foothold on Chinese experience. On the other hand, it is not limited to explaining Chinese issues. It also focuses on the universality of concepts emerging with contemporary literary discourse. In other words, it focuses on interpreting the effectiveness of global issues of literature and art. Chinese literary theory in a new era



should focus on not only issues of "Chinese characteristics" but also issues of "community with a shared future of mankind." That is to say, it should focus on the universal meaning and value of Chinese discourse against the background of community with a shared future of mankind. In this sense, scholars on contemporary literary theory are gradually overcoming cultural anxiety of "resistance to neocolonialism" when confronted with the powerful impact of Western literary theory in the 1980s, thus ushering in a new era of "constructing a new system of discourse of Chinese literary theory with its global influence."

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