

Comparative Literature in Chinese and an Interview with Yue

Hui Zhang  
*Peking University*

Daiyun Yue  
*Peking University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

---

### Recommended Citation

Zhang, Hui; and Yue, Daiyun. "Comparative Literature in Chinese and an Interview with Yue." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.4 (2011): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1881>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1881)

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

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <[clcweb@purdue.edu](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)>

---

**Volume 13 Issue 4 (December 2011) Article 2**  
**Hui Zhang and Daiyun Yue,**  
**"Comparative Literature Chinese and an Interview with Yue"**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss4/2>>

---

**Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.4 (2011)**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss4/>>

---

**Abstract:** In their article "Comparative Literature in Chinese and an Interview with Yue" Hui Zhang and Daiyun Yue present a review of the discipline of comparative literature based on an interview with Yue (2010). Because Yue's work with comparative literature is intertwined with her personal journey, the interview sheds light on other Chinese scholars and their works that would not be known for audiences outside China. The interview also touches on the academic and political reasons why the joint dualisms of "ancient/modern" and "Chinese/foreign" continue to be major structuring principles of the discipline in China, as well as how the development of the discipline in China was influenced by engagements with Anglophone U.S. and Canadian scholars and institutions.

## Hui ZHANG and Daiyun YUE

Translated from the Chinese by Wenjuan Xie and Daniel Fried

### Comparative Literature in Chinese and an Interview with Yue

Daiyun Yue was the central figure in the establishing of comparative literature in the P.R. of China as a discipline with institutional presence. Modern literary scholarship in Chinese was in fact deeply comparative since the late nineteenth century, especially in the wake of the modernizing May Fourth movement of 1919 (on the history of comparative literature in Chinese, see, e.g., Wang and Liu; Zhou and Tong). Since the intelligentsia of the period were intensely concerned with China's national weakness in the face of imperialist encroachment, comparisons of Chinese with foreign cultural and literary traditions were at the center of cultural analysis. However, perhaps because comparative approaches had suddenly become so mainstream, no supportive disciplinary institutions were established and after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the diversity of earlier approaches was stifled and comparison was generally undertaken from the flattened universalist perspective of "vulgar Marxism." Following the death of Mao in 1976, increasing openness in the academy allowed for the re-establishment and re-configuration of many scholarly disciplines in line with global norms.

Born in 1931 in southwestern China, Yue graduated from the Department of Chinese at Peking University in 1952. Upon graduation she began teaching classes as a lecturer in the same department and soon afterwards married philosophy professor Yijie Tang, the son of the renowned scholar Yongtong Tang. Although a devoted Communist Party member who had actually done underground organizing on campus prior to the liberation of Beijing, Yue ran into serious political trouble in the wake of the 1957 anti-rightist campaign and was sent to do manual labor in the countryside. Although she returned to the university a few years later, she was again forced to do rural labor during the Cultural Revolution. Following the rise of Xiaoping Deng to power in 1978, her political label as a rightist was expunged and she was allowed to become a full professor. Her subsequent research fellowships at Harvard University and at the University of California Berkeley during the 1980s influenced her attempts to establish comparative literature as a recognized academic discipline in China are described in the following interview.

The interview below was conducted on 20 November 2010 at Yue's campus office during the celebrations of the thirtieth anniversary of the university's Center for Comparative Literature and Culture (CCLC) which she founded. The interview is, of course, personal reminiscence shaped by its context, the public honoring of a senior scholar. However, its interest is not limited to the subjective insight it provides into the foundation of the discipline in China. It also touches on the academic and political reasons why the joint dualisms of "ancient/modern" and "Chinese/foreign" continue to be major structuring principles in the discipline in China, as well as how the development of the discipline was influenced by an engagement with U.S. and Canadian scholars and institutions. Yue's interlocutor during the interview is Hui Zhang, one of Yue's former doctoral students who specializes in the influence of German aesthetics on modern Chinese literature. Zhang teaches in the Department of Chinese at Peking University. In addition, he is a general secretary of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association, the national academic association founded by Yue, and of which she remains president.

Zhang: Professor Yue, you will be entering your eighties this year and Peking University's CCLC has just celebrated its 30th anniversary. In the words of Professor Shaodang Yan [on names and terms mentioned in this article, see the Appendix Glossary of Names below], you are considered the founding director of our Center. I'd like to ask you to talk about your personal experience during the founding of the CCLC, recall the past thirty years of comparative literature in Chinese, and speak of its future directions. This can be our "academic entertainment" for your birthday party.

Yue: Thank you. But it's best we keep this as a dialogue and not as my own personal monologue. In speaking of it, the time seems to have sped by and yet, in the contingency of events there have actually been contained some great necessities. The renaissance of comparative literature at PKU, as well as the founding of the CCLC, seem to be independent events; yet, there is an important relationship with the progress of China's "reform and opening" these past thirty years, as well as a great relationship to the profound humanistic tradition of PKU. As an individual in the midst of all of this, I have just put forth what small efforts have been in my power.

Zhang: This reminds of when I first read your *Comparative Literature and Modern Chinese Literature* (Bijiao Wenxue yu Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue) of something that you said. Your main point was that in the 1980s when Xianlin Ji, Zhouhan Yang, and Funing Li first proposed to (re)construct Chinese comparative literature, you joined the vanguard without any hesitation and that you wanted to have the job of clearing the way and opening this new path. Thinking back on it now, it must have been much easier to speak of than to actually to carry out.

Yue: I was indeed in the vanguard in that sense. The reason I joined this adventure has to do with my personality and with my personal experience as well. I have always been drawn to "strange" and "unknown" fields and love instinctively anything new. Of course, teaching at PKU after my graduation in 1952 was largely because of studying modern Chinese literature with professor Yao Wang. Although specializing in modern Chinese literature, professor Wang was also profoundly knowledgeable in both traditional Chinese literature and foreign literatures. His influence on me was extremely important, and this formed the foundation for my entrance into comparative literary research.

Zhang: I remember, you've also mentioned — more than once — that Lu Xun wrote that unless one knows the "theories of Tolstoy and Nietzsche, with the letters of the Wei-Jin dynasties," that is, if one didn't understand both Tolstoy and Nietzsche, and also Ji Kang and Ruan Ji, it would be impossible to research Lu Xun. That is to say, without concrete knowledge of both foreign literatures and classical Chinese literature, one cannot truly comprehend modern Chinese literature.

Yue: Actually, this is true not only of Lu Xun. I later felt this same inadequacy of knowledge in my study of Mao Dun, Guo Moruo, Ba Jin, Lao She, Cao Yu, Xu Zhimo, and Ai Qing, and in studying the Literary Research Association and the Creation Society. Yet, it was precisely this insufficiency that drove me on to break through existing research frameworks and to try a few new experiments. As it happened, comparative literature is exactly such a discipline that breaks open disciplinary boundaries, and transcends cultural and linguistic borders — I was like a fish in water and everything suddenly spread out before me.

Zhang: It seems you had already turned your primary attention to comparative literature by the beginning of the 1980s — for instance, your article "Nietzsche and Modern Chinese Literature" (Nicai yu Zhongdai Xiandai Wenxue) came out in 1980 and in 1981 you edited the volume, *Foreign Lu Xun Studies* (Guowai Lunxun Yanjiu Lunji).

Yue: *Foreign Lu Xun Studies* was a collection of twenty essays from the United States, Japan, the Soviet Union, Canada, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, and Australia. This was really an eye-opening project for me as well, one which also propelled my own research, and it was through this project that I also sensed the tremendous possibilities in studying literatures from ethnic groups without direct connections — in other words, so-called "parallel research." My own 1987 essay, "Two Debates on Realism: Lukács Against Brecht and Hu Feng Against Zhou Yang" ("Guanyu Xianshizhuyi de Liangchang Lunzhan: Lukaqi dui Bulaixite yu Hu Feng dui Zhou Yang") was inspired by this approach.

Zhang: "Nietzsche and Modern Chinese Literature" and "Two Debates on Realism" were later both published and "Nietzsche" was published even earlier, and even more of a signal work, as I understand it. I've recently read professor Zicheng Hong's "Scholarship with Living Warmth: On Daiyun Yue and 'My Reading History' ("You Shengming Redu de Xueshu: 'Wo de Yuedushi' zhi Yue Daiyun"), which discussed that essay, as well as another of yours, "On the Thought and Art of 'Regret for the Past'" (Lun Shangshi de Sixiang he Yishu). He especially recalled the impetus it gave then, both to himself and to academia in general. He spoke of "deep impressions," and that this was primarily expressed in three aspects: first, it changed the way how Nietzsche was recognized in China who was viewed no longer as the "precursor of fascism," but as an "extraordinary" and spiritually healthy "superman." Second, it acknowledged the positive influence he had on Lu Xun. Third, it is significant both in "reconstructing" comparative literature as a discipline in China and in exploring new methods in the comparative study of Chinese and Western cultures. I think this is both correct and well-said on professor Hong's part. From the perspective of thirty years later, your essay remains one of the signal works in the development of Chinese comparative literature. With regards to your own development of scholarship, besides these essays did your experience at Harvard and Berkeley in the early 1980s have any particularly special meaning?

Yue: In the summer of 1980, I had a completely unexpected chance to study in Harvard, sponsored by Harvard's Yenching Institute. This was quite accidental for me. Since I'd already turned to-

ward comparative literature by that time, I naturally gravitated toward Harvard's Department of Comparative Literature. One reason was because professor Irving Babbitt, one of the founders of comparative literature at Harvard, had been so committed to the idea of East-West cultural integration that this made me identify with that department. The other reason was because of the idea of "letting shine the national essence, while absorbing new knowledge" as advocated by Yinke Cheng, Yongtong Tang, Mi Wu, and others who returned from Harvard in the early 1920s, suggested to me an new academic space for East-West engagement. At the time I was there, professor Claudio Guillén was then chair of the Department and he often pointed out that "only when the world understands and thinks through the great Chinese and Euro-American literatures in tandem will we be able to fully face the important theoretical problems of literature." Many times he emphasized that "only when the world can understand and think the two great literatures — Chinese literature, and European and American literature — always side by side, can we confront important theoretical issues in literature." This viewpoint of his deeply affected me.

Zhang: Another detail I clearly remember from your autobiography *Wo Jiu Shi Wo* (I Am Just I): you were saying on your first day at Harvard, when you've finished the registration around four in the afternoon and the first thing you did was to head to the Widener Library. You used the word "cannot wait." You wrote you could not wait to go to Harvard's main library, but then immediately felt "lost" — because you hadn't read the directory, you couldn't find your way out of the stacks.

Yue: This could be a symptom of the culture shock I experienced, especially after being isolated from the outside world for so long. But on another level, it also points to the necessity, even urgency, in East-West interaction and dialogue of undertaking comparative literary research. In the development of Chinese comparative literature, if we were to start from the generation of Wang Guowei — perhaps we can call this the "prehistory" of Chinese comparative literature — there was clearly a very important characteristic. This was not merely a product of academia, of the ivory tower, it was related to the clashes and contacts, the dialogues and interactions between China and the West since the late Qing, even the late Ming. It was inseparable from "the great change unprecedented in three thousand years."

Zhang: Observing the development of Chinese comparative literature from a historical perspective has been a constant stance of yours. In a certain sense, the development of Chinese comparative literature first happened at PKU and this should be closely related to PKU's tradition of taking the nation as one's own concern.

Yue: In 1980s, especially the early 1980s, in Chinese people's renewed understanding of the West, there was a process of moving from quantitative to qualitative assessments. We ourselves were also experiencing profound adjustments and inner transformations. The year at Harvard was critical in my life in the sense that it was in that year I decided to commit myself to Chinese comparative literature. Everything I did later in my life was somehow related to that decision.

Zhang: And it was also due to this determination that you chose to stay in U.S., during which time you've finished both your English autobiography *To the Storm: The Odyssey of a Revolutionary Chinese Woman* and your monograph *Intellectuals in Chinese Fiction* instead of returning to China right away.

Yue: In 1982 and 1983, I had the good fortune of being invited by UC Berkeley to be a research fellow in residence and thus I was able to stay in U.S. for two more years. There, my friend Carolyn Wakeman told me that US-American banks had this service where you could rent a safety deposit box and lock your secrets in there. It was with her encouragement and help that I started to write *To the Storm*. Before I began writing, I hadn't meant to publish it, because at that time no one knew what the situation would be in China in the years following. I simply had the impulse to record what had happened during those unusual twenty years in my life and to let later generations know that there was this period in history and that Chinese people had had that sort of life, those sorts of thoughts, those sorts of feelings! I had no other intention than to preserve a page of truth.

Zhang: It seems that you never expected how influential the book would suddenly become. Not only did it get published in English, it also was translated into Japanese and German later. Actually, when I was in U.S. in 2000, the book was still mentioned during class discussions.

Yue: It indeed became quite provocative, but I think what was most valuable in it was simply its honesty and emotional truth. I truly did bare my heart without the least ornamentation. John Davies, who had worked in China in the thirties, wrote a long introduction for me....

Zhang: He wrote that the reason why the book is great is not because of the horrible facts it recorded but because of the author's frank and sensitive narration. Your "horrible experience," as he wrote, has exemplified the unyielding soul of humankind.

Yue: That autobiography perhaps could be discussed together with that scholarly book, *Intellectuals in Chinese Fiction*. The former is personal and thus on a micro level; while the latter represents my thought on the fate of Chinese intellectuals on a macro level. It was also a project commissioned by professor Cyril Birch and was published in Berkeley's East Asian Studies series.

Zhang: Those two years at UC Berkeley were very productive!

Yue: For me personally, the US-American West, especially a place like Berkeley, suited my nature better. Of course there was nothing wrong with Harvard — from start to finish I have fond memories of my days there. Everything in New England is so elegant and refined, rich in tradition, and I steeped myself in those humanistic surroundings. But when I arrived at Berkeley, it was like a great spiritual liberation. It was a display, and a conflict, between these two kinds of different spiritual forms in the same country. In that free and open environment of Berkeley, unconcerned with trivialities, I learned a great deal, especially from professor Cyril Birch, who also introduced me to professor James J.Y. Liu at Stanford. Professor Liu attempted to interpret Chinese literary theory in the light of Western literary theory and to understand and investigate the former in a global context. This was also an important reason for my later research in comparative poetics.

Zhang: So the idea of publishing your *Shijie Shixue Dacidian* (Dictionary of World Poetics) had already germinated while you were at Berkeley? Only when Chinese poetics is set against a larger domain of reference can its characteristics and values be fully recognized — professor Liu's work was truly indispensable.

Yue: This is why I believe James Liu's *The Art of Chinese Poetry* and *Chinese Theories of Literature* remain worthwhile and deserve to be read closely.

Zhang: Indeed. But let's continue talking about the situation on your return to China in 1984. At the time, you could have remained in the U.S., yet you chose to return. Yuehong Chen wrote an essay in which he said that your choice to come back should not merely be considered as average patriotism, but that it had a strong relationship to your own academic ideals. To you, China was the true field of action upon which you could realize these academic ideals.

Yue: At the time, I never gave it so much thought. When I came back in 1984, Chinese comparative literature wasn't as acknowledged as today; it wasn't even an established discipline yet. There was too much to be done. They'd been at it for seven or eight decades already and we were just beginning, or, rather, were just finishing our period of stagnation and trying to reconnect to the spiritual and academic traditions of Guowei Wang's generation. It was at that point in particular that Chinese comparative literature needed to learn from the West, to have dialogues with the outside world. To be able to have dialogues, we could not simply rely on "borrowing" specialists from other disciplines, or on "part-time" efforts spent on research, but really needed to build a team of our own. We should have our own organization, our own education programs of masters and doctoral students, and post-docs, so as to have some influence on Chinese academia, and world academia, to really give rise to something. This was the direction of our efforts. It was precisely from this way of thinking that the PKU Comparative Literature Association was founded and the journal *Beijing Daxue Bijiao Wenxue Tongxun* (Peking University Bulletin of Comparative Literature) was published, and after the establishment of the nation's first Comparative Literature Research Center in 1982, on this foundation everyone pooled their efforts to accomplish two extremely important things. First was the founding of the PKU Institute of Comparative Literature in 1985, later renamed the Institute of Comparative Literature and Culture. Administratively, the establishment of this institute was a little special, as the establishment of any university research center has to be directly approved by the Ministry of Education. That was the first thing. The second was the founding of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association (CCLA) in the same year and the holding of our first annual conference in Shenzhen. At the time, those in attendance all jokingly called it our "Whampoa Period," with the participation of 120 individu-

als and 32 universities and research institutions, along with an associated instructional workshop for 200 scholars.

Zhang: Xianlin Ji was then the honorary President, Zhouhan Yang the president, and yourself were the secretary.

Yue: That's right. Xianlin Ji, Zhouhan Yang, Funing Li, and a lot more have contributed to the renaissance of Chinese comparative literature. Also people outside PKU, such as Zhifang Jia from Fudan University and Zhongshu Qian. The list can go on and on. In my recently published *Siyuan, Shatan, Weiminghu* (Fourth Hall, Strand, Nameless Lake) I chose to write about Ji, Yang, and Li. Perhaps you've read it?

Zhang: Assiduously. In particular, your essay about Yang — "Xueguan Zhongxi de Boya Mingjia" ("A Learned Scholar of East and West") — really added to my respect for that generation of scholars.

Yue: However, my great regret is that a lot of Yang's works still remain unpublished and this should be our job. We don't have enough scholarship on Yang — although many of his important viewpoints have had a guiding influence on the development of Chinese comparative literature. When Yang passed away in 1989, many international scholars, including past presidents of the International Comparative Literature Association / Association de Littérature Comparée such as Earl Miner, Douwe Fokkema, Gerald Gillespie, and many others sent telegrams of condolence. Miner wrote, "I will always remember Mr. Yang with respect and love." Gillespie even remembered his "pure Oxford English." Yang was an English literature specialist, but his knowledge was not limited to a national literature. Although well-known for his research on seventeenth-century English literature and Shakespeare, he particularly emphasized that "studying foreign literatures as a Chinese, one needs the soul of a Chinese."

Zhang: "Needing the soul of a Chinese" is really the spirit of comparative literature as it was embodied in Mr. Yang! I read in your essay commemorating him, where you especially mentioned a lecture he gave in Japan while serving as the first president of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association. He argued for the viewpoint you just mentioned, that as Chinese comparative literature was born from Chinese soil, it had something in its origin different from its Western counterparts. An important feature was that, it did not only come from academia, but also from the contacts of Chinese and Western cultures and from the dialogues which occurred on the political, economic, social, and cultural levels. The development of Chinese comparative literature is inseparable from the awakening of national hopes and the renewal and development of the ambitions of our own ethnic literature.

Yue: Other ideas of Yang, for instance his thoughts on the "Chinese School" and "Illustrative Study," and his critique of the "crisis of comparative literature" all deserve further examination.

Zhang: For the development of a discipline, thirty years do not seem to be a very long period. Nevertheless, since the 1980s our nation has been in a very special era of transition from old to new. In addition, scholars from different generations have used this discipline to amass their considerable energies, and even their frustrations. These thirty years have not been average ones. In your calling on us to value Yang's contributions and hold up his line of thought, I understand you as meaning that we need to continue the spirit of the older generation, model ourselves upon them, and blaze our own Chinese trail for comparative literature. Recently, the president of Shandong University, Fanren Zeng wrote a long essay on your contributions to Chinese comparative literature; he spoke of three aspects, which I think he broke down very neatly. First, he spoke of your leadership in this new, disciplinary age of comparative literature and your contributions toward the establishment of the discipline. Through your difficult labors, in this disciplinary sense you were able to move China from lacking to possessing comparative literature and to form it into an actual disciplinary system. From a few scattered sparks at that time, you raised the raging wildfire of today. Second, through your initiative the perspectives and methodologies of comparative literature irradiated and catalyzed not only all of literary study, but the humanities generally. This is really something for us to be proud of as scholars of comparative literature — breaking up old frameworks and so-called "models," posing real questions, breaking the self-segregation of the disciplines — these were all things that you practiced and initiated at the time, and which even today have an important practical influence. Third, he spoke of your spirit of contribution and innovation, especially your spirit of contribution.

Yue: I really never made any great contribution, just what someone clearing the way ought to do.

Zhang: Another topic you've written about that has always intrigued me is your attention to the Critical Review School.

Yue: Yes, I was one of the first people to propose a re-evaluation of the Critical Review School. The first article was also presented at a conference hosted by the International Academy for Chinese Culture in 1989. In fact, I was still discussing this issue from a cross-cultural perspective. Modern conservatism, liberalism, and extremism constitute an interesting spectrum in the history of Chinese and foreign thought. My intention in that kind of essay was not merely a simple re-evaluation. I'd noticed that in modern China, while both discontented with the status quo and engaging in same pursuit of truth from the West, these groups took distinctly different paths. Extremists converted to Marxism, liberals turned to John Dewey and Bertrand Russell, while conservative intellectuals found their guru in Babbitt. Was it that the Western masters shaped their followers, or that the Chinese intellectuals had already converted, and merely chose their own guides? This is an interesting issue to look into. Nonetheless, one thing is clear and that is that from the May Fourth movement on reforms in China were no longer simply national agendas, but were inevitably interlocked with movements worldwide. The debates, including the arguments between Babbitt and Dewey, the widespread doubt about scientism and sentimentalism, and Spengler's prediction of "the Decline of the West," cannot but have considerably influenced the thought of Chinese intellectuals, who also joined the global order of debates. Representative figures from the Critical Review School, including Mi Wu, Yizheng Liu, Guangdi Mei, Xiansu Hu, Yongtong Tang, and many others all had strong backgrounds in both Western and Chinese culture. They were at the forefront of world academic trends, yet maintained "sympathetic understanding" of Chinese traditions. Therefore, they wanted neither to be held back by the tradition, nor to be completely Westernized. They disagreed with the liberal view to "discard the old and pursue the new," while they were also opposed to the extremist "destroy the old and build the new." What they better identified with were those ideas of "preserve the old and build the new," "find new elements in the old," and "gradually progress from the old to the new." Although they were considered as conservative, they were not conservative in the sense of being orthodox political conservatives but were true cultural conservatives. They intended neither to maintain the status quo nor to reform through discarding tradition, but thought of cultural enlightenment as the correct path for reforming society. Yet, as clear thinkers or even as traditional Chinese literati, they were willing to keep their "intellectuals' distance" from the ever changing political movements. They took on their own the task of "the pursuit of truth," didn't "ride the currents of history" and refused to "go along with the age." Rather, for them, true intellectuals should "swim against the current."

Zhang: Allow me to re-interpret the "intellectuals' distance" and "swimming against the current" you mention. I understand your constructivist attitude toward cultural and scholarly efforts. But in a cultural sense, what you've emphasized is not simply "to discard" but more importantly "to rebuild." Instead of leaving debris, the "discarding" is always with the aim of "rebuilding," to create space for future development, to look towards the positive sprouts of the future. In the past, we were used to being "surfers of the age," and "following the flow of the age," but you particularly reminded us that in the interchange of old and new, East and West, that intellectuals need to find our own independent voices.

Yue: When we are preoccupied with the discussion of cultural breakage, complete Westernization or adherence to traditions, or the "essence-function" complex, we should also listen to or at least consult the voices of the Critical Review School. Perhaps they are not the most harmonious, but they are unique voices.

Zhang: "Let national sources shine forth, absorb new knowledge": this is a sort of intellectual stance, a research approach, but more significantly, it's an attitude, a belief in one's own culture and the future of the culture of humanity as a whole. Besides the Critical Review School, I also noticed your call for attention to an accurate and comprehensive understanding of Yinke Chen. My Sanlian edition of *Chen Yinke de Zuihou Sanshinian* (Chen Yinke's Last Twenty Years) was a gift I got from you while writing my dissertation. But to be honest, at the time, I didn't really understand his meaning. It's only after I reread some of his works, especially some relevant essays in his *Jinmingguan Conggao* (Collections from Jinming Hall), volumes one and two, that I began to better understand his view on understanding foreign cultures based on Chinese traditions and attempts to integrate the two sides —



the East and West, tradition and modernity, and that in attempting to fuse these there is a bit of the feeling of "stern when first espied, gentle when approached."

Yue: You might have also read my thought on that in *I Am Just I*.

Zhang: Yes. You've really touched on his "true spirit" in that book. Here is a quote you had from Chen that I memorized: "the reason why the Li-Tang Dynasty was a great time in Chinese history is because they infused the blood of foreign nations in the South and the West into the decaying body of the central plains. They poured out the old dyes, renovated the machine, and expanded the factory, and thus were able to bring forth a dynasty with unprecedented vitality and prosperity."

Yue: That was well written by Chen! This quote was directed at the "national-studies fad" in a postcolonial context. I don't think Chen should be simply seen as a transmitter, a defender, or a compiler of historical materials, as he is usually believed to be — in my opinion, this doesn't get at the "true spirit" he embodied. To me, his "true spirit," the starting point of his research, has always been a quest for a way out of the decayed ruts of ethnic culture. The greatness of Chen's work consists precisely in that he was sincerely concerned about how to regenerate the old body with new blood, how to restart the machine with fresh oil. He was not a conservator; he was an explorer of cultural renewal. Chen was a historian, but the path he chose should also be the one that comparative literature, as a discipline in humanities, should seek to follow.

Zhang: His notion of the "robust blood of savage tribes" is a fascinating metaphor for me. Chen was not merely an extremely learned encyclopedia of a man, though in this he was already extraordinary. But even more extraordinary is that, although he was from Yining in Jiangxi province, it seemed that he had that "robust blood of savage tribes" running through his own cultural veins. And it seems to me that you also have this sort of constitution. It's not just a passion, not even an ability that can be acquired late in life, but more like a natural endowment. It is the sort of nobility described by Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*.

Yue: Also a status of mind which I can't exactly have but forever desire. It's a certain sort of agreement in the mind, in which the distinctions between disciplines take leave of their accustomed order.

Zhang: From recalling the past and the situation during the period of our situation turned to metaphysical questions such as the spirit of comparative literature. Without realizing it, we've jumped over thirty years. But it is just this sort of spirit that has led Chinese comparative literature through its extraordinary journey of the last three decades from stagnation to renaissance. It will continue to be our source of energy for future progress.

Zhang: The articles you've recently published touch upon many ongoing issues in contemporary debates. For instance, issues regarding universal values, cultural relativism, as well as the "Chinese dream" as compared to the "European dream" and the "American dream." In your keynote for this CCLC anniversary, as well as the inaugural Lu Xun Lecture for the Department of Chinese, you've also highlighted the significant role that new media plays in the study of comparative literature and of humanities as a whole. So, besides writing your forthcoming book on the past hundred years of comparative literature in China, what are the other projects you are currently working on?

Yue: The first thing for me is, along with your assistance, organizing the 10th CCLA meeting that'll be happening August 2010 in Shanghai. Another project is the editing of the series *Dangdai Hanxuejia Yanjiu Congshu* (Contemporary Sinologist Series) whose first volumes will include John King Fairbank, Benjamin I. Schwartz, Joseph Needham, Stephen Owen, François Jullien, and Roger Ames. Also, *Dialogue Transcultural*, a journal we have collaboratively published with the French Fondation pour le Progrès de l'Homme, has published nearly thirty issues and will from now on be published by Sanlian Publishing in Beijing. Forthcoming issues will be even more spectacular. I'm also working on the series entitled *Case Studies of Chinese Cultural Transmission* which focuses on the transmission of Chinese philosophies and Chinese classics in the West, but it won't be the kind of thing that just introduces the transmission history of Chinese thought abroad. Instead, we hope from case studies to devote more attention to the interaction of Chinese and Western cultures and to look at the dialogic relationship between Chinese thought and mainstream Western culture. Echoing this series, we also published some volumes in the series of *Reception of Chinese Culture in the West*. The difference between this series and the former one is that the latter takes individual Western thinkers as its units of analysis and examines their reception, interpretation, and creative transformations of the Chinese tradition.

Capital Normal University Press has already put out seven volumes and others will be forthcoming soon on Voltaire, Jung, and Hesse. In addition to those three series, I'm also working on another series called Cross-Cultural Case Studies with Wenjin Publishing. There will be fifteen volumes on scholars of cross-cultural studies, including Guowei Wang, Zhongshu Qian, and Baihua Zong, among others — you also contributed the volume on Zhi Feng. So all these four together make for one huge cross-cultural series.

Zhang: Hearing you describe this massive project, I had a thought. If we can say that the early 1980s, in 1981 when at the age of fifty you went to Harvard and Berkeley, that this was for you the start of a second academic life after twenty years' isolation, then this year of 2011, when you have reached your eighties, will be your third embarkation on an academic life. This third journey of yours is just beginning.

Yue: A line like that is a great birthday present, I really like it.

Zhang: I'm glad you like it. In your speech at the inaugural Lun Xun Lecture in the Humanities, you quoted Jeremy Rifkin, the author of *The European Dream*, that there are two important trends which humanity will be facing in the future. The first is the desire to seek higher individual aspirations in an increasingly materialized world and the second is the need to search for a sense of "collectivity" in an ever-more isolated and indifferent society. You commented that in order to live together in this increasingly interconnected world, humanity constantly needs to develop new ideals. If I understand it correctly, this is exactly what you are doing — looking backward at history and constantly revisiting the old so as to develop new ideas and new things for the future.

Note: The above article is a translated and revised version of Daiyun Yue and Hui Zhang, "第三次再出发—乐黛云教授 80 华诞访谈录" ("The Third Start: An Interview with Yue Daiyun on Her Eightieth Birthday"), 乐在其中:乐黛云教授 80 华诞弟子贺寿文集 (Happiness Amongst Us: A Festschrift for Daiyun Yue on Her Eightieth Birthday). Beijing: Peking UP, 2011. 377-88. Copyright release to the authors.

#### Works Cited

- Chen, Yinke (陈寅恪). 金明馆丛稿初编 (Collections from Jinming Hall). Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 1980. 2 Vols.
- Hong, Zicheng (洪子诚). "有生命热度的学术—'我的阅读史'之乐黛云" (Scholarship with Living Warmth: Daiyun Yue and 'My Reading History'). *Wenyi Zhengming* 10 (2008): 106-11.
- Liu, James J.Y. *Chinese Theories of Literature*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1975.
- Liu, James J.Y. *The Art of Chinese Poetry*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1962.
- Lu, Jiandong (陆键东). 陈寅恪的最后二十年 (*Chen Yinke's Last Twenty Years*). Taipei: Sanlian, 1995.
- Rifkin, Jeremy. *The European Dream*. Cambridge: Polity P, 2004.
- Wang, Xiaolu, and Yan Liu. "Comparative Literature in Chinese." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.4 (2011): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss4/1>>.
- Yue, Daiyun (乐黛云). 比较文学与中国现代文学 (Comparative Literature and Modern Chinese Literature). Beijing: Beijing UP, 1987.
- Yue, Daiyun (乐黛云). "尼采与中国现代文学" ("Nietzsche and Modern Chinese Literature"). *Beijing Daxue Xuebao* 3 (1980): 3-14.
- Yue, Daiyun (乐黛云). "论<伤逝>的思想和艺术" ("On the Thought and Art of Regret for the Past"). *Xin Wenxue Luncong* (1980): 4-18.
- Yue, Daiyun (乐黛云). "关于现实主义的两场论战—卢卡奇对布莱希特与胡风对周扬" ("Two Debates on Realism: Lukács against Brecht and Hu Feng against Zhou Yang"). *Wenyi Bao* 10 (1988): 12-24.
- Yue, Daiyun (乐黛云). "学贯中西的博雅名家" ("A Learned Scholar of East and West"). *Beijing Daxue Xuebao* 1 (2007): 97-103.
- Yue, Daiyun. 四院. 沙滩. 无名湖 (Fourth Hall, Strand, Nameless Lake). Beijing: Peking UP, 2008.
- Yue, Daiyun (乐黛云). 我就是我 (I Am I). Taipei: Zhengzhong, 1996.
- Yue, Daiyun. *Intellectuals in Chinese Fiction*. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, U of California, 1988.
- Yue, Daiyun (乐黛云), ed. 国外鲁迅研究论集 (Foreign Lu Xun Studies). Beijing: Beijing UP, 1981.
- Yue, Daiyun, and Carol Wakeman. *To the Storm: the Odyssey of a Revolutionary Chinese Woman*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1987.
- Yue, Daiyun (乐黛云), Lang Ye (叶朗), and Peigeng Ni (倪培耕), eds. 世界诗学大辞典 (Dictionary of World Poetics). Shenyang: Chunfeng Wenyi, 1993.
- Zhou, Xiaoyi, and Q.S. Tong. "Comparative Literature in China." *Comparative Literature and Comparative Cultural Studies*. Ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2003. 268-83.

## Appendix: Glossary of Names and Terms in "Comparative Literature in Chinese and an Interview with Yue"

- Ai, Qing (艾青 1910-1996): modernist Chinese poet. A communist partisan jailed by the Nationalist government and later jailed for suspected rightist sympathies after 1957, he was the father of the dissident artist Ai Weiwei (1957-).
- Ba, Jin (巴金 1904-2005): writer of family saga novels allied with the Communist Party until falling from favor during the Cultural Revolution.
- Cao, Yu (曹禺 1910-1996): playwright best known for 雷雨 (Thunderstorm), a play indebted to *Oedipus Tyrannus*.
- Chen, Yuehong (陈跃红 1954- ): professor of Chinese literature and comparative literature at Peking University.
- Cheng, Yinke (陈寅恪 1890-1969): professor of Chinese and history at Tsinghua University. Known as a "professor's professor, Chen knew fourteen languages and erudite in history, classical literature, linguistics, religion, and anthropology.
- "Chinese School" (中国学派) and "Illustrative Study" (阐发研究): concepts developed by Taiwan comparatists Tianhong Gu and Pengxiang Chen in order to employ Western theories and methods for the study of Chinese literature; the approach has been criticized in Mainland Chinese scholarship.
- Creation Society (创造社): established in 1921 and led in part by Moruo Guo, a movement influenced by European Romanticism with focus aesthetics, personal liberation, and defiance of traditional social norms.
- Critical Review School (学衡派): a literary movement active in the 1920s whose name was adopted from the journal 学衡 (Critical Review) in 1922. Members of the movement believed that vernacular Chinese was detrimental to and incompatible with classical Chinese literary traditions in the writing of literature.
- "Essence-Function" (体用): a phrase expressing duality as a Nativist concept of modernization in the late nineteenth century, when it was proposed that China could adopt the functional (i.e., technological) accomplishments of Western civilization, while maintaining a core essence of traditional Chinese culture.
- Feng, Zhi (冯至 1905-1993): poet, educational theorist, translator, and scholar of German literature. Known for introducing the sonnet form into Chinese following Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*.
- Guo, Moruo (郭沫若 1892-1978): poet of the high modern period in China and scholar of classical Chinese literature.
- Hong, Zicheng (洪子诚 1939-): professor of modern Chinese literature at Peking University.
- Hu, Xiansu (胡先骕 1894-1968): educational theorist and cultural historian, in addition to being an important botanist one of the founding fathers of modern biological sciences in China.
- Ji, Kang (嵇康 223-262) and Ruan Ji (阮籍 210-163): literati of the late Wei (220-265) and early Jin (265-420) dynasties and influential in the development of the medieval Chinese poetic style.
- Ji, Xianlin (季羨林 1911-2009): scholar of contemporary China. An Indologist, linguist, paleographer, historian, writer, and translator, he knew twelve languages including Sanskrit, Pali, Tochari, and other ancient languages.
- Jia, Zhifang (贾植芳 1915-2008): professor of modern Chinese literature and comparative literature at Fudan University, also a translator and writer.
- Lao, She (老舍 1899-1966): novelist and playwright known for his use of playful Beijing verbal style and colloquialisms. Along with Lu Xun, he was one of the two greatest ironists of the high modern period.
- Li, Funing (李赋宁 1917-2004): philologist specializing in European traditions, as well as an important translator and theorist of education.
- Literary Research Society (文学研究会): established in 1921 and one of the earliest literary groups in the post-May Fourth period and important in promoting leftist political writing.
- Liu, Yizheng (柳诒征 1880-1956): scholar of Chinese classical literature, history (especially modern and contemporary Chinese history), library science, cultural history, and calligraphy.
- Lu, Xun (鲁迅 1881-1936): considered the founding father of modern Chinese fiction.
- Mao, Dun (茅盾 1896-1981): novelist in the post-May Fourth period and important as a leading leftist writer.
- Mei, Guangdi (梅光迪 1890-1945): one of the earliest generation of scholars trained in U.S., at Northwestern University and Harvard, and later professor of English language and literature and Chinese literature at Nankai University, Nanjing University, and Zhejiang University.
- Qian, Zhongshu (钱钟书 1910-1998): writer and scholar of modern Chinese history and Western traditions. Known for his satirical novel 围城 (Fortress Besieged).
- "Reform and opening" (改革开放): term for China's post-Mao socio-economic liberalization.
- "Stern when first espied, gentle when approached" (望之俨然，即之也温): reference to the *Analects* 19.9 describing the proper character of the gentleman.
- Tang, Yongtong (汤用彤 1893-1964): professor of Chinese history, philosophy, and Buddhism at Peking University.
- "The great change unprecedented in three thousand years" (当前之势，已属三千来从未有之变局，大清变则强，不变则殆): comment by Hongzhang Li (李鸿章 1823-1901) on imperialism impacting the Qing empire. A leading statesman, Li was controversial for his role in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895); the phrase was also used to refer to the overthrow of feudalism in the early twentieth century.
- Wang, Guowei (王国维 1877-1927): historian, philologist, and early comparatist by relating Schopenhauer to traditional Chinese critical methods.
- Wang, Yao (王瑶 1914-1989): Sinologist and scholar of modern literature noted for his knowledge of the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties periods.
- "Whampoa" (黄埔): a district of Canton Province and a center of foreign trade from the mid-eighteenth century onward, a site of a major battle with British naval forces during the First Opium War.
- Wu, Mi (吴宓 1894-1978): professor of Western literatures, Chinese literature, and comparative literature at Tsinghua University.
- Xu, Zhimo (徐志摩 1897-1931): modernist Chinese poet remembered for a post-Romantic style which he acquired while a student at Cambridge University.

Yan, Shaodang (严绍盪 1940-): scholar of classical Chinese and Japanese literatures and involved in the development of comparative literature at Peking University.

Yang, Zhouhan (杨周翰 1915-1989): historian and literary critic of Shakespeare and English literature.

Zong, Baihua (宗白华 1897-1986): philosopher and poet, a pioneer of modern Chinese aesthetics and proponent of a comprehensive aesthetic system in the study of literature.

Author's profile: Hui Zhang teaches Chinese and comparative literature at Peking University. His areas of research include comparative poetics and aesthetics, literary and political philosophy, and hermeneutics. In addition to numerous articles, Zhang's book publications include 冯至:未完成的自我 (Feng Zhi: Unfinished Self, 2005) and the edited volumes 文化传递与文学形象 (Cultural Transmission and Literary Image) (Ed. Daiyun Yue and Hui Zhang, 1998) and 20世纪外国美学文艺学名著精义 (Companion to Twentieth-century Foreign Aesthetics and Literary Theory) (Ed. Hui Zhang, Xianzhang Zhao, and Zhenglong Wang, 2008). E-mail: <[zhui@pku.edu.cn](mailto:zhui@pku.edu.cn)>

Author's profile: Daiyun Yue taught Chinese and comparative literature at Peking University and she is founding president of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association. Trained as a scholar of modernist Chinese fiction during the post-May Fourth period, Yue has published several hundred articles in Chinese and English, as well as dozens of single-authored and edited volumes on various topics in comparative literature. E-mail: <[tyjydy@pku.edu.cn](mailto:tyjydy@pku.edu.cn)>

Translator's profile: Wenjuan Xie is working towards her Ph.D. in comparative literature at the University of Alberta. Xie's publications include "Encountering Ghost Princesses in *Sou Shen Ji*: Re-Reading Classical Chinese Ghost-Wife Zhiguai Tales," *Unsettling Assumptions: Tradition, Gender, Drag* (Ed. Pauline Greenhill and Diane Tye, 2012) and "The Story of Dingxiang," *World on a Maple Leaf: A Treasury of Canadian Multicultural Folktales* (Ed. Asma Sayed and Nayanika Kumar, 2011). E-mail: <[wenjuan@ualberta.ca](mailto:wenjuan@ualberta.ca)>

Translator's profile: Daniel Fried teaches East Asian studies and comparative literature at the University of Alberta. His interests in research include the political contexts of the history of literary criticism in China and Europe. His recent publications include "What's in a *Dao*?: Ontology and Semiotics in Laozi and Zhuangzi," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* (2012) and "A Never-Stable Word: Zhuangzi's *Zhiyan* and Tipping-Vessel Irrigation," *Early China* 31 (2009). E-mail: <[dfried@ualberta.ca](mailto:dfried@ualberta.ca)>