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# Comparative Literature & World Literature

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In the form of print as well as online with open-access, Comparative Literature & World Literature (CLWL) is a peer-reviewed, full-text, quarterly academic journal in the field of comparative literature and world literature, whose purpose is to make available in a timely fashion the multi-faceted aspects of the discipline. It publishes articles and book reviews, featuring those that explore disciplinary theories, comparative poetics, world literature and translation studies with particular emphasis on the dialogues of poetics and literatures in the context of globalization.

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## Editorial Office

Address: Comparative Literature & World Literature editorial office, Room B709, Old Main Building, Beijing Normal University, No. 19 Xijiekouwai Street, Beijing, 100875, P. R. China.

Email: [cwliterature@bnu.edu.cn](mailto:cwliterature@bnu.edu.cn)

[cwliterature@email.arizona.edu](mailto:cwliterature@email.arizona.edu)

# Comparative Literature & World Literature

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# Editorial Foreword

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It is with great pleasure that we now present you the inaugural issue of *Comparative Literature & World Literature (CLWL)*. *CLWL* is a peer-reviewed academic journal which publishes articles and reviews in the field of literary studies in general and comparative and world literature in particular. It is co-sponsored by Beijing Normal University and the University of Arizona. *CLWL* aims at bringing Chinese comparatists into conversations with their peers in the rest of the world. While the editorial office is located in Beijing, our authors and reviewers are experts and scholars from around the globe. We welcome all submissions but published articles must undergo a rigorous double-blind peer review process to ensure the quality of our journal. We are especially interested in East-West literary communications, i.e., literary contacts that cross the boundaries of nations, cultures and civilizations. We like articles that discuss recent trends and movements in research, and at the same time, we value studies of the historical development of the disciplines of comparative literature and world literature. While we look forward to receiving contributions from established scholars, we also encourage early-career scholars to submit their works.

The articles and review in the current issue explicate our missions well. Haun Saussy's article probes the often overlooked aspect of world literature—world poetry. By studying a series of inter-linguistic contact and appropriation of poetic models across languages, he proposes a model for the circulation of poetry in international space. Drawing on case studies from Germany, the United States, China and Mongolia, Saussy's work demonstrates a truly global horizon, and a profound understanding of poetry as cross-cultural communications. Flair Donglai Shi's article on post-Mao Chinese literature enters a substantive dialogue with Saussy's article in ways more than their references to the same article by Franco Moretti. Shi considers post-Mao Chinese literature as world literature, making the point that the struggle between international mobility and intranational accessibility is ultimately the result of an ideological construction, to wit, the reinforcement of the expected. While these two articles present new perspectives on theoretical issues, Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta's overview of the development of comparative literature in India is a timely contribution to the history of the discipline. As the homeland of so many great works of literature, India is at a remarkable position to contribute to the field of comparative literature. Dasgupta's article illuminates both the past and present trends of the significant research undertaken in this vast nation.

Two articles collected in this issue are dialogues between Chinese and Anglo-American scholars. Yue Daiyun and Roger T. Ames's dialogue on multiculturalism begins with deep concerns over the clash of civilizations brought forth by the *Charlie's Weekly* Incident in Paris. In order to find a way to cope with the current crisis in cross-cultural communications, Yue and Ames discuss topics ranging from the concept of pluralism, individuality and objectivity, David Hall, to Kant and *Zhouyi*. It is both the hope of these two scholars and of our new journal to facilitate effective and fruitful cross-cultural dialogues to make our world a better place to live in. In a similar vein but with a disciplinary concern, Zhang Cha's interview with Susan Bassnett covers major changes in the history of comparative litera-

ture and predicts the future direction of development in the discipline. This issue also includes a review by Cao Shunqing on *Introducing Comparative Literature: New Trends and Applications*, edited by César Domínguez, Haun Saussy and Darío Villanueva. This book is without a doubt a significant work in recent times and the review introduces and analyzes it at length. It is our hope that more reviews of this kind can be published in future issues, bringing to the fore the latest and outstanding researches on comparative literature and world literature.

Liu Hongtao and Cao Shunqing

## Poetry – Universal? Progressively So? On World Poetry

Haun Saussy, The University of Chicago

**Abstract:**

The difficulty of translating poetry from one language into another is well known. But current discussions of “world literature” have their roots in a German Romantic ideal of “progressive universal poetry” that acknowledged, not sidestepped, those difficulties. Through a series of examples of interlinguistic contact and appropriation of poetic models across languages—a process sometimes akin to historical reproduction, sometimes akin to sampling—a model for the circulation of poetry in international space is proposed.

**Keywords:** world poetry, translation, Goethe, global English, prosody

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The conversation about “world literature,” as framed by Franco Moretti’s 2000 essay, David Damrosch’s 2003 book, and the increasingly convenient consultation of vast text databases, has been centered on the novel, not poetry—and perhaps this is understandable, given the much larger readership today for fiction (even highbrow fiction) than for poetry.<sup>1</sup> But no such gap was implicit in the initial formulation of the “world literature” idea.

Goethe’s observations on world literature are well known.

I am more and more convinced, Goethe continued, that poetry is a common possession of mankind [*daß die Poesie ein Gemeingut der Menschheit ist*], revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men. ... [W]e Germans are very likely to fall too easily into this pedantic conceit, when we do not look beyond the narrow circle that surrounds us. I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise everyone to do the same. National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature

<sup>1</sup> See also Jockers, Matthew. *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary History*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013.



is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach (Damrosch, Melas, and Mbon-giseni Buthelezi 22-23).

Forty years before Goethe's reported remarks on *Weltliteratur* launched a scholarly industry sometimes treated as identical with comparative literature, Friedrich Schlegel defined the scope of a "progressive universal poetry" in the *Athenaeum*, a little journal full of manifesto-like fragments that he published together with his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel. Goethe's "Gemeingut der Menschheit" (common property of humankind) must have alluded to Schlegel's ideal:

Romantic poetry is a progressive universal poetry [*Die romantische Poesie ist eine progressive Universalpoesie*]. Its aim isn't merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical; poeticize wit and fill and saturate the forms of art with every kind of good, solid matter for instruction, and animate them with the pulsations of humor. It embraces everything that is purely poetic, from the greatest systems of art, containing within themselves still further systems, to the sigh, the kiss that the poetizing child breathes forth in artless song. ... It alone can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole world around it, an image of the age. ... The romantic kind of poetry is the only one that is more than a genre, the only one that is, as it were, poetry itself [*Die romantische Dichtart ist die einzige, die mehr als Art, und gleichsam die Dichtkunst selbst ist*]: for in a certain sense all poetry is or should be romantic.<sup>2</sup>

From the two kinds of universality in play here, one can derive two ways of talking about "world poetry." Goethe is saying "world" in the sense of admitting the literary traditions of all countries and languages to a vast library or conversation. Geography is a precondition for that conversation (indeed the trigger for his talk with Eckermann on January 31, 1827 was a translated Chinese novel). Schlegel is describing a potential future state of romantic poetry, in which it has achieved, or is progressively on the way to achieving, "universality" in the sense of combining or connecting all possible expressive forms, from prose to verse, rhetoric to philosophy, sighs to epics, into one aesthetic commodious and flexible enough to give them all sense. Helpfully, Schlegel also comments that "a definition of poetry can only specify what it should be, not what it actually was or is."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps then Goethe's cosmopolitan ideal of multinational reading only tends toward the recognition of the "common possession of humanity" that is poetry on the worldwide scale, yet will eventually result in something like Schlegel's "progressive universal poetry." On condition, that is, that we learn to "look beyond the narrow circle that surrounds us."

Such was the state of the art in 1798 and 1827. To speak of the ambitions of the present time, let me start from a book I like and appreciate unfeignedly, though not without limit: Jahan Ramazani's *A Transnational Poetics*. If you have read this book, you will know that its actual scope is examples of "transnational poetry" in English: poems by American, Canadian, Irish, Nigerian, Kashmiri, Jamaican, Australian, etc., poets, some of whom have immigrated to an English-speaking country from elsewhere, some of whom are familiar with languages other than English, but all of whom write their poems in English. Ramazani notes this fact but waves it away for the purposes of his discussion: "in an English department in a predominantly English-speaking country, the teacher devising a poetry syllabus cannot usually presume student competence in multiple languages." The next best thing for

2 (Schlegel 114-15). My understanding of the passage is framed and influenced by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'absolu littéraire: Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), where it appears on p. 112.

3 *Athenäums-Fragmente* 114; *Kritische Schriften und Fragmente*, p. 114.

Ramazani (19-20) is to show how “the English language... is a world language for poets”. The meaning of “transnational” here thus depends on the narrow meaning of a “nation” as an entity that has borders and issues passports to individuals. I submit that the demonstration reveals rather how little that kind of “nation” matters in the perspective of a literary history longer and broader than the two centuries of the British Empire. We need to think about getting over the English-language watershed, and mapping it in reference to other transnational watersheds, as the first step to doing anything that merits the title “global.”

First, we need a better theory, and better examples, of what transits between poetic “nations.” This means mapping not geographical or passport nations but linguistic ones. We can consider most of the British Isles, North America, the Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand, a large part of Africa, some bits of Asia, etc., to be one nation because poets read one another across this vast zone without major obstacles; similarly there’s the zone of Spanish-language poetry, almost as vast; French, too; and so on. This is so obvious it’s almost painful to say it in public. Once we redefine the poetic “nation” as existing within the boundary of a *language*, then Ramazani’s case studies, valuable though they be for indicating the variety of dialect and experience within the English verbal nation, do not show much attention to inputs from other verbal nations, not even those so close to ours as the French and Spanish ones. (Quotations from Asian languages are the exception; but these figure in Ramazani’s account as sources of thematic material alone.)

There’s a reason for this, the vaunted and wanted “provinciality” of poetry, its language-specificity. We could go a step further here by considering an observation by Roman Jakobson, that the rules of verse production in any language are rooted in the phonemics and prosody of that language, without being identical to them. They may, indeed, suspend certain rules and categories, but not all or just any of them:

Any analysis of poetic sound texture must consistently take into account the phonological structure of the given language and, beside the overall code, the hierarchy of phonological distinctions in the given poetic convention as well. Thus the approximate rhymes used by Slavic peoples in oral and in some stages of written tradition admit unlike consonants in the rhyming members... but, as Nitch noticed, no mutual correspondence between voiced and voiceless consonants is allowed.... In the songs of some American Indian peoples... the phonemic distinction between voiced and voiceless plosives and between them and nasals is replaced by a free variation, whereas the distinction between labials, dentals, velars, and palatals is rigorously maintained (Jakobson 88-89).

Thus, the features that most distinguish one language from the other languages around it tend to become the basis of codified poetic convention in the poetry of that language, a convention that works as a language of its own and, through this selection and emphasis of particular features, distinguishes the poetic variant of a certain language perhaps even more acutely from other languages than its prose variant.

Is this providence of some kind, or the song of a national soul, that poetry in English exaggerates the Englishness of English in the same way that poetry in Russian exaggerates the Russianness of Russian? No, it’s because the features exploited for poetic purposes have become salient and available for artistic use through contact and contrast with other languages. Chinese classical prosody was transformed by contact with the languages of India from the fifth century onwards. Basic rules and effects of Chinese verse, features of the poems widely thought to be quintessentially and irreplaceably Chinese, could not have been formulated before Chinese-speakers had heard Sanskrit, an unrelated and strongly different language (Mair and Mei 375-470).

Similarly, English prosody was transformed by contact with Latin and French, and so on. How did

this happen? It's not at all the case that English prosody became identical to French prosody after the Norman Conquest. Rather, certain features of English that distinguish it from French, such as stress accent and the role of unstressed syllables, having been secondary in the conventions of alliterative verse, now took on a new set of functions in their new-found relationship to the syllabic French verse system.

To understand this sort of thing, one needs to understand, at a minimum, how French prosody works; how English prosody at the time of contact or importation worked; then how French prosody seemed to work to English-speakers (which may not be the same thing as how French prosody works for French-speakers); then how the effects of one registered on the other. Contact between languages in verse form is a contact not between objects seen in the positivist style, but between forms of reflexivity.

There has been laudable attention paid in recent years to prosody, rhythm, meter, whatever you want to call it, in English. But the discussion has too often been provincial. This is exceptionally unfortunate. Ezra Pound ("The Approach to Paris", 1:154) with his customary abruptness stated in 1913 that "The history of English poetic glory is a history of successful steals from the French." And this is a general truth—substitute what national labels you like. "The history of X poetic glory is a history of successful steals from the Y."

What makes a successful steal? What makes an unsuccessful one? Now it gets more interesting as we have to compare multiple international poetic relationships over a long period of time—a task for another occasion. But let me indicate a couple of directions to follow.

Although poetry is so language-specific, so wedded to the materiality of the phonemes, syllables, syntax and vocabulary in which it is molded, the *shapes* of poetry do transfer from language to language. We find eighth-century Chinese, for example, trying to emulate the melodies of songs sung by horse-riding nomads on the plains of Mongolia or Central Asia, melodies originally crafted, it seems, to vehicle words in a Turkic language and now given a function, within Chinese, of representing an alternative, off-balance, non-native sensibility, thematically tilting towards absence, regret, desire, non-transparent disclosure. This is the glorious heritage of the *ci*, a major part of the Chinese poetic tradition for twelve hundred years, and it was achieved by a steal from the Xiongnu, accomplished by people who probably did not know any Xiongnu but were drawn to its rhythm and prosody.

I've just enumerated two transformations in Chinese poetic tradition that originated outside China. This is actually, I would hold, the normal case, and the "native" meters and poetic forms in any language are probably just forms the origins of which have been lost to history. Thus one narration about "world poetry" can be disqualified. This is the account that says, "We had some kind of local essence and it's been taken away by imitation of world poetry." This is simply not the way either local tradition or outside contact works.

How do poets learn from poets in other languages?

All poets learn from their predecessors in the craft. You read Emily Dickinson, Emily Dickinson inhabits you, something happens to your own writing, just as something had already happened to Emily Dickinson from reading Shakespeare, Milton, Gray, the Bay State Hymnal, and so on. I can recognize from your rhythm or word-choice the effects that Dickinson has had on you and on me, and that's what makes poetry an argument across the ages, with all the anxiety and elation of influence. But what exactly happens when the Dickinson in my example has been reading poets in Hebrew or Sanskrit? What of their language can get into hers?

Here the models of imitation and of the transmission of thematic material are necessarily going to be more complicated than we see it in the work of the "world literature" theorists, who for good reasons have concentrated on the novel, an inherently easier form to imitate across languages. Poetic form is really form: it can potentially dictate what is going to be done with every

word of the text that has not yet been written. And this form is irreducible to theme; it's not inherently semantic, except insofar as form shapes and organizes semantic material. (This is the "form of the content," to talk like Hjelmslev (78).) Ezra Pound ("A Retrospect", 255) is forthright in his advice to young poets: "Let the candidate fill his mind with the finest cadences he can discover, preferably in a foreign language, so that the meaning of the words may be less likely to divert his attention from the movement." So when metrical or stanzaic forms, or models of argument, are adopted from outside one's own language, there's a lot of artifactuality to deal with. Before someone can write sonnets in Azeri, for example, there has to be an understanding of what constitutes a poetic line, what makes a rhyme, at the very least. (I do not know anything about Azeri poetry, which is why I take that as a random example; I do not know, for example, whether it uses a syllabic or stress meter, whether lines are of definite length, whether it recognizes rhyme and regular rhyme-pattern; in other words, I cannot be sure that it is possible under current conditions to write a sonnet in Azeri.)

Thematics is easier. The example of other poets serves as a license. If Omar Khayyam or Whitman wrote about wine or skinny-dipping, then so can I! But for a translinguistic poetic appropriation to succeed, it is not enough to imitate thematically. You have to be able and motivated to imitate something formal in order to make the thematic innovation stick as *something new*. I was once invited to evaluate a Chinese translation of Yeats. The thoughts that came to me in that process I will convey through a more familiar example, the case of Baudelaire in English. Swinburne and Symons, among others in the world of Victorian Decadence, were of course aware of Baudelaire. But take a look at the translations produced by that movement—they are unrecognizable.

Baudelaire became translatable into English with the arrival of Eliot's poetics, a combination of classicizing stiffness in the expression and low or random observation in the content. To take it step by step, is after Eliot had written Laforgue into English with the help of eighteenth-century ironists like Pope that Baudelaire could find a voice. Only then did poets such as Tate, Crane, Lowell, Wilbur—formed on Eliot's example—have the power to make Baudelaire translations that were no longer Victorian and soppy. Without the intellectuality of the famous "irony and paradox" poetics, the tension between theme and expression so lamentably absent from Swinburne and Symons, you do not have the means to make Baudelaire in English.

With a nod to pharmacology, I want to call this phenomenon "selective uptake."<sup>4</sup>

Translation is citational, retrospective. It does not connect two presents, but two accumulations of precedent. Had Eliot not happened, Baudelaire would still be waiting for an English expression. Many poets in other languages are still waiting for the person in English who will show the way for them to be translated. This leads to a sobering thought for the proponents of "global poetry": Not all foreign poetry is available to English, or to whatever language, at any time. A preparation in the idiom of arrival has to have occurred. To ask about this preparation, about *what we're ready for* in English or French or Chinese, opens up a broad and comparative historical interrogation.

I am talking about Eliot and Pound just because they are so familiar and canonical to speakers of English, and because their steals from abroad are so well-known, yet have not been integrated into accounts of how poetry is and always was transnational. I have mentioned some of the reasons for the difficulty of a cross-linguistic account of poetic circulation. Poetry is a specific medium and the thematics of poetry in language Y are not in themselves going to transform the poetry of language X. The form of poetry in language Y may do so; a nexus of the form and the thematics of a particular poet in Y, as for example Baudelaire, can do so. But it is all about a very technical and non-obvious

4 The earliest instance of this phrase I could find in the National Institutes of Health's PubMed database dates from 1955: Gunn SA, Gould TC, Ginori SS and Morse JG, "Selective uptake of Zn65 by dorsolateral prostate of rat," *Proceedings of the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine* 88 (1955): 556-8.

kind of emulation.

Technical and non-obvious connections are, however, more than thematic resemblances, the threads that bind together the corpus of world poetry. It is a corpus made of interchanges, imitations and “steals”—steals still fresh from the stalls, with the thieves forever red-handed. Readers who notice these connections—readers for whom these connections have value—are urgently needed, lest thematic universality (a low common denominator) and world English come to define the body of work read across the globe as “world poetry.”

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### Note:

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This paper was originally written on the invitation of Yopie Prins and Virginia Jackson for a panel on “Global Poetry” at the Modern Language Association’s 2016 annual meeting, Austin, Texas.

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**Author profile:**

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Haun Saussy is University Professor in Comparative Literature, East Asian Languages, and Social Thought at the University of Chicago, where he is also active in the Stefanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge and the Pozen Center for Human Rights. He has a Ph.D. from Yale University in comparative literature. His research interests include classical Chinese poetry, literary theory, and translation studies. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a past president (2009-2011) of the American Comparative Literature Association.

# Comparative Literature in India: An Overview of its History

Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta, Jadavpur University

## **Abstract:**

The essay gives an overview of the trajectory of Comparative Literature in India, focusing primarily on the department at Jadavpur University, where it began, and to some extent the department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies in the University of Delhi, where it later had a new beginning in its engagement with Indian literatures. The department at Jadavpur began with the legacy of Rabindranath Tagore's speech on World Literature and with a modern poet-translator as its founder. While British legacies in the study of literature were evident in the early years, there were also subtle efforts towards a decolonizing process and an overall attempt to enhance and nurture creativity. Gradually Indian literature began to receive prominence along with literatures from the Southern part of the globe. Paradigms of approaches in comparative literary studies also shifted from influence and analogy studies to cross-cultural literary relations, to the focus on reception and transformation. In the last few years Comparative Literature has taken on new perspectives, engaging with different areas of culture and knowledge, particularly those related to marginalized spaces, along with the focus on recovering new areas of non-hierarchical literary relations.

**Keywords:** decolonizing process, creativity, cross-cultural literary relations, interdisciplinarity

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## **The beginnings**

Long before the establishment of Comparative Literature as a discipline, there were texts focusing on comparative aspects of literature in India, both from the point of view of its relation with literatures from other parts of the world—particularly Persian, Arabic and English—and from the perspective of inter-Indian literary studies, the multilingual context facilitating a seamless journey from and between literatures written in different languages. The idea of world literature gained ground towards the end of the nineteenth century when in Bengal, for instance, translation activities began to be taken up on a large scale and poets talked of establishing relations with literatures of the world to promote, as the eminent poet-translator Satyendranath Dutta in 1904 stated, "relationships of joy" (Dutta 1984: 124). The talk by Rabindranath Tagore entitled "Visvasahitya" (meaning "world literature"), given at the National Council of Education in 1907, served as a pre-text to the establishment of the department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University in 1956, the same year in which the university started functioning. The National Council of Education was the parent body of the University and the Council was established by a group of intellectuals in order to bring about a system of education that would be indigenous, catering to the needs of the people and therefore different from the British system of education prevalent at the time. Tagore used the word "visvasahitya" (world literature), and stated

that the word was generally termed “comparative literature” (Tagore 1987: 639). His idea of “visvasahitya” was complex, marked by a sense of a community of artists as workers building together an edifice, that of world literature. The notion of literature again was deeply embedded on human relationships, and hence the aesthetic sense was linked with the sense of the human. Buddhadeva Bose, one of the prime architects of modern Bangla poetry, did not fully subscribe to the idealist visions of Tagore, for he believed it was necessary to break away from Tagore to be a part of the times, of modernity, but he too directly quoted from Rabindranath’s talk on “visvasahitya” while writing about the discipline, interpreting it more in the context of establishing connections, of ‘knowing’ literatures of the world. Bose, also well-known for his translations of Baudelaire, Hoelderlin and Kalidasa, wrote in his preface to the translation of *Les Fleurs du Mal* that his intention in turning to French poetry was to move away from the literature of the British, the colonial masters, while in his introduction to the translation of Kalidasa’s *Meghdutam*, he wrote that it was essential to bring to life the literature of ancient times in a particular tradition in order to make it a part of the contemporary. Without reading too much into these statements, one cannot but mark the beginnings of a decolonizing process that would then also remain somewhere at the heart of comparative literature pedagogy in the country. Buddhadeva Bose brought in a very significant modern poet, Sudhindranath Dutta, also well-known for his translation of Mallarmé and his erudition both in the Indian and the Western context, to teach in the department of Comparative Literature. Of the first five students in the department, three became well-known poets and the fourth a fine critic of Bengali poetry. The person who took charge from Buddhadeva Bose was again a poet, Naresh Guha, who remained as Chairperson of the department for two decades. In an interview given to us in his last years he emphasized the role of the department in fostering an intensely creative environment. That was one of the major goals envisioned by the early architects of comparative literature in the country – a unique one perhaps in its history.<sup>1</sup> Despite certain impulses towards a decolonising process, the colonial framework was also evident in the pedagogic structure, in the large space given to English literature and the organization of the courses around the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Romantic and the Modern period. Of course, there were several other courses devoted to Sanskrit and Bengali literature. The epistemology of comparison emerged within this framework.

Although it is impossible to speak of the epistemology of comparison with reference to a diverse group of individuals, the emerging contours of the discipline did reveal certain prerogatives. In the early stages it was a matter of recognizing new aesthetic systems, new visions of the sublime and new ethical imperatives – the Greek drama and the Indian *nataka* - and then it was a question of linking social and historical structures with aesthetics in order to reveal the dialectic between them. The first syllabus offered by the department in 1956 was quite challenging. There was a considerable section of Sanskrit literature along with Greek and Latin literature and then Bengali, its relation with Sanskrit literature and its general trajectory, and then a large section of European literature from the ancient to the modern period. Greek and Sanskrit scholars were a part of the faculty and the ancient period did receive a lot of importance, as it still does today, for it is there that a field is offered to work out comparisons on quite a large scale, outside the domain of contact or relation. Comparisons between the *Iliad* and the *Ramayana*, and between Sanskrit and Greek drama taking both Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Bharata’s *Natyasastra* into consideration formed the core of a section of the syllabus. While similarities were highlighted, differences led to the comprehension of core areas of cultural components. The project did not “bring into existence a new object/subject of knowledge” (Radhakrishnan 2009: 458 ) as such, but by laying out the terms of comparison it did start a chain of reflections that would constitute the materiality of comparison, an ongoing series of engagements with the multi-dimensional reality of

1 Eugene Eoyang. *The Promise and Premise of Creativity: Why Comparative Literature Matters*, 2012 (London and New York: Continuum) focuses on creativity as constituting the most relevant aspect of comparative literature.



questions related to the self and the other, to arrive at networks of relationships on various levels. The *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature*, which went on to become an important journal in literary studies in the country, came out in 1961.<sup>2</sup>

## Indian Literature as Comparative Literature

It was actually in the seventies that new perspectives related to pedagogy began to enter the field of Comparative Literature in Jadavpur. Indian literature entered the syllabus in a fairly substantial manner but not from the point of view of asserting national identity. It was rather an inevitable move – if comparative literature meant studying a text within a network of relations, where else could these relations be but in contiguous spaces where one also encountered shared histories with differences? In fact the rallying point of Comparative Literature studies in the country was around this nodal component of Indian literary themes and forms, a focal point of engagement of the Modern Indian Languages department established in 1962 in Delhi University. In 1974, the department of Modern Indian Languages started a post-MA course entitled “Comparative Indian Literature”. A national seminar on Comparative Literature was held in Delhi University organized by Nagendra, a writer-critic who taught in the Hindi department of Delhi University and a volume entitled *Comparative Literature* was published in 1977. However, it was only in 1994 that an MA course in Comparative Indian Literature began in the department. As stated earlier the juxtaposition of different canons had led to the questioning of universalist canons right from the beginning of comparative studies in India and now with the focus shifting to Indian literature, and in some instances to literatures from the Southern part of the globe, one moved further away from subscribing to *a priori* questions related to canon-formation.

The focus on Indian Literature within the discipline of Comparative Literature led to the opening up of many areas of engagement. Older definitions of Indian literature often with only Sanskrit at the centre, with the focus on a few canonical texts to the neglect of others, particularly oral and performative traditions, had to be abandoned. One also had to take a more inclusive look at histories of literature in different languages of India which were discrete histories based on language and did not do justice to the overlap between social formations, histories and languages, and to the multilingualism that formed the very core of Indian literature. The task, comparatists realized was, as so aptly voiced by Aijaz Ahmad, to trace “the dialectic of unity and difference – through systematic periodization of multiple linguistic overlaps, and by grounding that dialectic in the history of material productions, ideological struggles, competing conceptions of class and community and gender, elite offensives and popular resistances, overlaps of cultural vocabularies and performative genres, and histories of orality and writing and print” (Ahmad 1992: 265). Comparatists dealing with Indian literature also necessarily had to look at the interplay between the mainstream and the popular, the elite and the marginalised and also to some extent foreground intermedial perspectives as different forms existed together in a composite manner, particularly in earlier periods in which textual and performative traditions existed simultaneously. Dealing with Indian literature from a comparative perspective also meant looking at the interactions taking place with literatures in regions beyond the geo-political boundaries of the nation state. All this would necessarily take up a long period of time. The beginning of the process was seen in the comprehensive and integrative three-volume histories of Indian literature, where Indian literatures were studied not as discrete units but in dialogue with one another, brought out by Sisir Ku-

2 The first issue had the following articles: “The Political Failure of German Late Romanticism” by Werner P. Friedrich, “The Necessity of Poetry” by Sudhindranath Datta, “Rossetti’s Poetry and Painting : A Correlated Study” by Satyendranath Roy, “Twins in Suffering: Dostoevsky and Baudelaire” by Buddhadeva Bose, “Franz Kafka : The Judgement” by Werner Rehfeld, “Fate in Drama” by Narendranath Bhattacharya, “Creation and Contrivance: Dryden’s Adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra* set against the background of his Age” by David McCutcheon, “Rabindranath in the West” by Naresh Guha and “Rabindranath and World Romanticism” by Werner P. Friedrich, “The Necessity of Poetry” by Sudhindranath Datta, “Rossetti’s Poetry and Painting: A Correlated Study” by Satyendranath Roy, and “Rabindranath and World Literature” by Pierre Falon, S.J. From the next issue onwards the journal became bilingual; although there were just a few articles in Bengali, most others continued to be written in English.

mar Das, a faculty member at the department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, with support from other members of the department and the Sahitya Akademi. The department continues to develop teaching material on various aspects of Indian literature from a comparative perspective, beginning from language origins, manuscript cultures, performative traditions along with painting, sculpture and architecture, the history of print culture and questions related to modernity. That Comparative Literature studies necessarily had to be interdisciplinary was highlighted by the pedagogy practiced in the department. T.S. Satyanath developed the theory of a scripto-centric, body-centric and phono-centric study of texts in the medieval period leading a number of researchers in the department to look for continuities and interventions in the tradition that would again lead to pluralist epistemologies in the study of Indian literature and culture. It must be mentioned that situated in Delhi, the department has students from different parts of India including a large section from the North-east of India, that allow multiple points of entry into Indian literary systems along with diverse intercultural relations that communities in different parts of India have with different communities outside the borders of the nation state.

### **Centres of Comparative Literature Studies**

During the seventies and the eighties Comparative Literature was also practiced at a number of centres and departments in the South of India such as in Trivandrum, Madurai Kamaraj University, Bharatidasam University, Kottayam and Pondicherry. Although often Comparative Literature courses were held along with English literature, a full-fledged Comparative Literary Studies department was established in the School of Tamil Studies in Madurai Kamaraj University. A reputed poet, author and critic, K. Ayappa Paniker, from Kerala, must also be mentioned while talking about the south for his work in the area, particularly that related to comparisons of literary theory, and for his book on the narrative traditions of India.<sup>3</sup> In Tamil, apart from studies related to the comparison of texts from two different cultures, Classical Tamil texts were compared with texts from the Greek, Latin and Japanese counterpart traditions. Later in the eighties and the nineties other Centres were established in different parts of the country, either as independent bodies or within a single language department as in Punjabi University, Patiala, Dibrugarh University, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Sambalpur University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and SNDT Women's University, Mumbai. In 1986 a new full-fledged department of Comparative Literature was established at Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat, where focus was on Indian literatures in Western India. Also in 1999 a department of Dravidian Comparative Literature and Philosophy was established in Dravidian University, Kuppam. It must also be mentioned that comparative poetics, a core area of comparative literature studies and dissertations, particularly in the South, was taken up as a central area of research by the Visvanatha Kaviraja Institute of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics in Orissa. During this period two national associations of Comparative Literature came into being, one at Jadavpur called Indian Comparative Literature Association and the other in Delhi named Comparative Indian Literature Association. The two merged in 1992 and the Comparative Literature Association of India was formed, which today has more than a thousand members. In the early years of the Association, a large number of creative writers participated in its conferences along with academics and researchers, each enriching the horizon of vision of the other.

### **Reconfiguration of areas of comparison**

The eighties again saw changes and reconfigurations of areas of comparison at Jadavpur University. In the last years of the seventies, along with Indian literatures, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One*

3 See K Ayappa Paniker, *Indian Narratology*, New Delhi: IGNC, 2003.

*Hundred Years of Solitude* became a part of the syllabus with a few other texts from Latin American Literatures and then Literatures from African countries were included. Questions of solidarity and a desire to understand resistance to oppression along with larger questions of epistemological shifts and strategies to bridge gaps in history resulting from colonial interventions were often the structuring components of these areas in the syllabus. Later during the nineties, Area Studies papers on African, Latin American, Canadian literatures and literature of Bangladesh were introduced. The introduction of Canadian Studies was linked with a grant in the area, but gradually a field of studies focusing on oral traditions emerged within the space of comparison. Area studies components in Chinese and Japanese literatures were also framed, but it was not possible to offer the courses in the absence of specialized faculty members. Today, it must be mentioned there are two research scholars in the department pursuing Chinese and Japanese studies with relation to Indian literature. An Area Studies component to study the literatures of Pakistan has also been designed. As for the other Area Studies components, the department today hosts Centres for African, Latin American and Canadian studies where some research work and annual seminars are organized. A few, like the present author, are of the opinion that given the relatively small number of faculty in the department, the Area Studies programmes led to a division of the scarce resources and also diverted attention from some of the key challenges in comparative literature studies in India, namely, the systematic amalgamation of data related to the Indian context and its analysis from comparative perspectives, and also perhaps the mapping of intercultural relations with and among India's neighbouring countries. Components from the diverse Area Studies could possibly have been included as integrated parts of the main curriculum.

Right from the beginning of the discipline in India, cross-cultural relations between Indian literatures and European and American literatures had been in focus. There was again a shift during this period as the term "influence" began to be questioned by several scholars and particularly so in colonised countries where there was a tendency to look for influences even when they were non-existent. The focus therefore shifted to reception in books like the one by the present author entitled *Bibliography of Reception of World Literature in Bengali Periodicals (1890 – 1990)*. In several articles as well, one on the reception of the novel in Bengal for instance, the receiver and not the emitter was in focus. This also implied that the receiver was taking elements from another culture in accordance with her own needs or the needs of the system, while the foreign elements underwent a transformation in accordance with forms, elements and ideologies in operation in the system at any given moment. So it was not a question of a dominating culture imposing its literature on another. Reception studies also pointed to historical realities determining conditions of acceptability and hence to complex configurations between literature and history. To give an instance, it seemed that romanticism of a particular kind had an easy access into the realm of Bengali literature, but it was a romanticism that did not accept many of the European elements. Burns and Wordsworth were very popular and it was felt that their romanticism was marked by an inner strength and serenity. The much talked about 'angst' of the romantic poet was viewed negatively. The love for serenity and 'health' went back to the classical period and seemed an important value in the tradition. Again while Shelley and Byron were often critiqued, the former for having introduced softness and sentimentality to Bengali poetry, they were also often praised for upholding human rights and liberty in contrast to the imperialist poetry of Kipling. Contemporary political needs then were linked with literary values and this explained the contradictory tensions often found in the reception of romanticism in Bengal. It must be mentioned that Shelley, the poet of revolt, began to have a very positive reception when the independence movement began to gather momentum. In another context, a particular question that gained prominence was whether Shakespeare was imposed on Indian literature, and comparatists showed, as did Sisir Kumar Das, that there were different Shakespeares.<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare's texts might have been imposed in the classroom,

4 See Sisir Kumar Das's *Indian Ode to the West Wind: Studies in Literary Encounters*, 2002 (New Delhi: Pencraft International.)

but the playwright had a rich and varied reception in the world of theatre. Parsi theatre was rejuvenated by the enactment of the comedies of Shakespeare, political theatre groups appropriated his plays, while critics in different periods interpreted Shakespeare in accordance with the needs of the time. From reception studies the focus gradually turned to cross-cultural reception where reciprocity and exchange among cultures were studied. For example, one tried to study the Romantic Movement from a larger perspective, to unravel its many layers as it travelled between countries, particularly between Europe and India. The translation of several texts from Sanskrit into German played a role in the emergence of the Romantic movement and then in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Romanticism came back to India, though in different shades.

In the late eighties, with Comparative Literature moving out in different directions, it was felt that a more structured approach to the subject was necessary. At Jadavpur, under the guidance of Amiya Dev, who was instrumental in the spread of Comparative Literature in different parts of India in the early years and for giving a direction to the discipline, a Master's syllabus was designed that had genres, themes and literary historiography as its core area and this model was more or less followed in many new departments of comparative literature that would come up later. Reception studies both along vertical and horizontal lines formed the next major area of focus – one studied for instance, elements of ancient and medieval literature in modern texts and also inter and intraliterary relations foregrounding impact and responses. While one studied Vedic, Upanishadic, Buddhist and Jaina elements in modern texts, one also looked at clusters of sermons by Buddha, Mahavira and Nanak, at qissas and katha ballads across the country, the early novels in different Indian literatures, and then the impact of Eastern literature and thought on Western literature and vice versa. Two groups of papers were offered, one with components from Indian literature at the centre and the other with Western literature. The division was not a happy one as students wanted to engage with both in order to have nuanced understandings of the interplay between local, national and transnational forces. With the introduction of the semester system the division was abandoned and certain other courses of a more general nature such as Cross-cultural Literary Transactions, where Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* and Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora*, were taken up, or sometimes in courses entitled Literary Transactions one looked more precisely at the tradition of Reason and Rationalism in European and Indian literatures of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

### **Research directions**

The late nineties and the early twenties were a period of great expansion for Comparative Literature research in different parts of the country with the University Grants Commission opening its Special Assistance Programme for research in university departments. Many single literature departments were given grants under the programme to pursue studies in a comparative perspective. The English department of Calcutta University for instance, received assistance to pursue research on literary relations between Europe and India in the nineteenth century. Several books and translations emerged out of the project. The department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at Saurashtra University, Rajkot, took up the theme of Indian Renaissance and translated several Indian authors into English, studied early travelogues from Western India to England and in general published collections of theoretical discourse from the nineteenth century. The Department of Assamese in Dibrugarh University received the grant and published a number of books related to translations, collections of rare texts and documentation of folk forms. The department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University also received assistance to pursue research in four major areas, East-West Literary Relations, Indian Literature, Translation Studies and Third World Literature. Incidentally, the department had in Manabendra Bandyopadhyay, an avid translator who translated texts from many so-called "third-world countries". Conferences were held and research material published in all four areas. In the next

phase support was given for publishing text-books in the area and for preparing an infrastructure for the study of Indian literatures. This led to the publication of three texts on genres, themes and literary historiography in the Indian context. Projects related to annotated bibliographies of periodization in histories of literature also resulted in two texts. The different ways of conceiving of periods opened up perspectives on how some of the popular concepts could be revisited. The notion of derived categories for instance, was quite often charged with a host of other significations, as for example, in the case of Romanticism as a term for periodization. Romanticism had very different dimensions in the Indian context and necessitated a different reading within a continuum that situated it often at the source of modernity. Hemanta Kumar Sarma, for instance in his history of Assamese literature divided the modern age into the pre-Romantic (1830-1889), Romantic (1889 to World War II) and post Romantic or contemporary that he also called post Swaraj (World War II to the contemporary, that is before 1961). Post Romantic simultaneously termed post Swaraj erased simple equations between terms used in European and Indian literatures.

Under the Special Assistance programme the department also conducted eight inter-literary translation workshops translating texts from one Indian language to another without the mediation of English, a process not very common in the field of translation at the time. Preparatory work was held for a few weeks before some of the workshops focusing on arriving at a reading skill in the target language when the language was from a neighbouring region as in the case of Assamese and Odiya in the context of Bengali, or Punjabi in the context of Hindi and so forth, and the workshops were quite a success with several publications. What emerged from an overview of many of the Special Assistance programmes was that there was a concerted effort in different parts of the country to gradually build an archive of material related to the study of Indian literature in its different manifestations including its interactions with other cultures and literatures. The task is immense and yet to be taken up in a consistent manner for longer periods of time.

The department at Jadavpur University was upgraded under the programme to the status of Centre of Advanced Studies in 2005, and research in Comparative Literature took a completely new turn. The need to foreground the relevance of studying literature was becoming more and more urgent in the face of a society that was all in favour of technology and the sciences and with decision makers in the realm of funding for higher education turning away from the humanities in general. The task for departments of humanities and literature was to demonstrate that they were looking into and working with a knowledge system just as any other discipline, only literature's ways of knowing were different. Literature as knowledge system, therefore, became a thrust area for again it was felt that comparative literature with its interdisciplinary formation would be the right place to demonstrate the same. A series of workshops were conducted with scholars from philosophy, history, science and the social sciences to look into areas of creativity and knowledge, to gain greater understanding of ways of knowing. From a very different perspective it was felt that stories, poems, songs and performances from oral traditions that were found in most parts of the country had their own knowledge systems that could provide valuable and sustainable alternatives to contemporary urban modes of life and living and in several cases also reveal certain cultural dynamics and value systems that were constantly replenishing mainstream expressive traditions. A large focus, therefore, in this area was on oral texts and research on methods of engaging with such texts. The project led to documentation and compilation of notes related to experiences of such studies and the collaboration with grassroots artists from rural areas. It must be mentioned at this point that in the late nineties and in the early following decade there was a constant demand for engaging with literatures of marginalized communities in different platforms of comparative literature studies in India, often from such communities. The national association held two major conferences on the subject during the period. A particular project in this area taken up by the department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur was called Vanishing Seeds of Culture based on a study in Bankura district of West Bengal. The objective of this project was to iden-

tify the folk cultural forms associated with folk varieties of rice found in Bankura District, document such forms and analyze them to show how they were related to folk varieties of rice and make policy recommendations for the preservation of such varieties and the associated cultural forms. A checklist of different folk varieties of rice still extant in Bankura was prepared, local respondents interviewed and several cultural forms documented. It must be mentioned that Dalit literature was also taken up in courses in some parts of the country, but a lot remains to be done in the area as far as pedagogical practices are concerned. A particularly important question for Comparative Literature in this area could be linked with questions of Dalit literature's relationship with mainstream writing, subverting, questioning and at the same time also inflecting other discourses while continuing to maintain its unique identity based to a large degree on performativity to draw the reader in as an ethical witness to the extreme limits of human suffering on which it is poised.

The second area in the Centre for Advanced Studies was the interface between literatures of India and its neighbouring countries. This happened to be a completely untouched area as far as literature was concerned, apart from the study of certain well-known points of contact. The first preliminary research in this area led to links that suggested continuity and a constant series of interactions between and among Asian cultures and communities since ancient times and the urgent need for work in this area in order to enter into meaningful dialogue with one another in the Asian context and to uncover different pathways of creative communications. Efforts towards this end led to an International Conference on South-South dialogues with a large number of participants from Asian and European countries. An anthology of critical essays on tracing socio-cultural and literary transactions between India and Southeast Asia was published.

Among the projects planned under the inter-Asian series was one on travelogues from Bengal to Asian countries and here an annotated bibliography that could provide an initial foundation for the study of interliterary relations was published. A second project involved working on the image of Burma in Bengali and Oriya literature in late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Travel narratives and diaries, newspaper articles from old periodicals, excerpts from literature and pictorial images of Burmese people in the Indian press were compiled. A project on the interface between Perso-Arabic and South Asian literatures was also planned and a number of lectures delivered in the area. Earlier, under a different grant, the tradition of Bhakti and Sufi were studied together and a volume was published. Visiting Professors were invited to give several lectures on Japanese and South Korean literatures. A one-day colloquium on Kolkata's Chinese connections was held in collaboration with the H.P. Biswas India-China Cultural Studies Centre of Jadavpur University and a seminar on framing intercultural studies between India and China was held with the Centre and the department of International Relations, Jadavpur University.

### **Interface with Translation Studies and Cultural Studies**

It must be mentioned at this point that Comparative Literature in the country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century engaged with two other related fields of study, one was Translation Studies and the other Cultural Studies. Comparative Literature's relationship with Translation Studies was not a new phenomenon for one or two departments or centres, such as the one in Hyderabad University, was involved in doing translation studies for a considerable period. Today the university has a full-fledged Centre for Comparative Literature offering courses, and research in Translation Studies is an important area. Almost all departments or centres of Comparative Literature today have courses on Translation or Translation Studies. Both are seen as integral to the study of Comparative Literature. Translation Studies cover different areas of interliterary studies. Histories of translation may be used to map literary relations while analysis of acts of translation leads to the understanding of important characteristics of both the source and the target literary and cultural systems. Other dimensions of literary studies are opened

up when one sees translation as rewriting. Translation practices also bring students to engage deeply with other languages and other cultures, leading to insights into the nature of the comparatist's preoccupations. The department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University today has a Centre for the Translation of Indian Literatures.

As for Cultural Studies, Comparative Literature had always engaged with different aspects of Cultural Studies, the most prominent being literature and its relation with the different arts. Today studies in intermediality in Comparative Literature are common. But beyond such studies courses in Comparative Literature also offer modules on Comparative Cultural Studies where key texts in the global field are juxtaposed with related texts from the Indian context. The M Phil course on the subject at Jadavpur University highlights changing marginalities, 'sub-cultures' and movements in relation to contemporary nationalisms and globalization, and also sexualities, gender and the politics of identity. Cultural Studies may also be a key component in different kinds of interdisciplinary courses within the discipline. For instance, a course in Delhi University takes up the theme of city and village in Indian literature and goes into representations of human habitat systems and ecology in literature, looks for concepts and terms for such settlements, goes into archaeological evidences and the accounts of travellers from Greece, China, Persia and Portugal to demonstrate the differences that exist at levels of perception and ideological positions. Again in a course on performance taught at Jadavpur University the purpose, it is stated, is to look at performance not as an art form, but as a means to study social behavior patterns to understand social processes. It proposes to look into conceptual categories inherent in ritual and theatre and extend them to the reading of behavioural patterns. Ritual and theatre and everyday performativity are then viewed in terms of both separation and integration. In some of the new centres of Comparative Literature that came up in the new universities established in the last Five Year Plan, diaspora studies were taken up as an important area of engagement. It must be mentioned though that despite tendencies towards greater interdisciplinary approaches, literature continues to occupy the central space in Comparative Literature and it is believed that intermedial studies may be integrated into the literary space

### **Non-hierarchical connectivity**

It is evident that Comparative Literature in the country today has multifaceted goals and visions in accordance with historical needs, both local and planetary. Several University departments today offer Comparative Literature separately at the M Phil level, while many others have courses in the discipline along with single literatures. As in the case of humanities and literary studies, the discipline too is engaged with issues that would lead to the enhancement of civilizational gestures, against forces that are divisive and that constantly reduce the potentials of human beings. In doing so it is engaged in discovering new links and lines of non-hierarchical connectivity, of what Kumkum Sangari in a recent article called "co-construction", a process anchored in "subtle and complex histories of translation, circulation and extraction" (Sangari, 2013-14: 50). And comparatists work with the knowledge that a lot remains to be done and that the task of the construction of literary histories, in terms of literary relations among neighbouring regions, and of larger wholes, one of the primary tasks of Comparative Literature today has perhaps yet to begin. In all its endeavours, however, the primary aim of some of the early architects of the discipline to nurture and foster creativity continues as a subterranean force.

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### **Author's profile:**

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Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta. Visiting Professor in the Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, University of Delhi. Previously Professor at the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University and Co-ordinator of the Special Assistance Programme of the department for several years where she undertook many projects in Comparative Literature and Translation. Was also editor of *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature* from 2007–2012. She also taught at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. She was Secretary of Comparative Literature Association of India for two terms and also part of a Research Team on Mapping Multilingualism in World Literature of the International Comparative Literature Association. Has published in many journals. Books include *A Bibliography of Reception: World Literature in Bengali Periodicals (1890-1900)* and many edited volumes such as *Literary Studies in India: Genology* and *Of Asian Lands: an Annotated Bibliography of Travelogues to Asian Countries in Bangla*.

Email: subha.cd@gmail.com



# Post-Mao Chinese Literature as World Literature: Struggling with the Systematic and the Allegorical

Flair Donglai Shi

## Abstract:

This paper presents the main critics and their arguments in the study of post-Mao Chinese literature as world literature. By applying Franco Moretti's methodology of "distant reading" and combing Shu-mei Shih, Jing Tsu and many other relevant theorists' points, it points out the limitation of concepts like "circulation" and "boundary" in the discussion of world literature. It argues that in the specific case of post-Mao Chinese literature vis-à-vis world literature, the dialectic struggle between international mobility and intranational accessibility is an inevitable difficulty. Both in China and abroad, this difficulty is the result of a single ideological construction—the reinforcement of the expected.

**Keywords:** China, Chinese Literature, World Literature, Post-Mao, Allegorical

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## Introduction

World literature, as an academic field of literary studies, has been flourishing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—an era that promises an unprecedented intensification of globalisation. Yet the concept of "world literature" itself has a history that long precedes the contemporary mode of globalisation propelled by multinational capitalism and information technologies. Two of the field-defining anthologies of world literature theories in Anglophone academia, *World Literature: A Reader* and *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, trace the idea of "world literature" back to the German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In China, the most influential theoretical anthology on world literature, *Theories of World Literature: A Reader*, edited by Yin Xing et al., also cites Goethe as the starting point of world literature theories.<sup>1</sup> Despite its theoretical self-contradictions and historical constraints, Goethe's "communicational" conceptualisation of *Weltliteratur* as literary works that circulate beyond national boundaries and have universalistic values for the whole of humanity has maintained its appeal (Wang, "Weltliteratur" 298).<sup>2</sup>

With such conceptual mobility across time and space, *Weltliteratur* is Edward Said's "travelling

1 As the scope of the paper is focused on post-Mao mainland China and its politics of recognition in the international literary space, China in such a context always refers to the PRC (People's Republic of China, excluding Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau). Some overseas Chinese writers are also discussed but most of them were born and based in mainland China before they moved abroad.

2 Many of these shortcomings, including the Eurocentrism and inconsistency of Goethe's examples, have been discussed by John Pizer (18-25), Jing Tsu ("World Literature" 163) and Zhang Longxi ("The Relevance" 242).

theory" par excellence ("The World" 226). However, apart from the glocalising cross-pollination of ideas that such travelling theories can produce, many academics have also pointed to the heterogeneous elements of inspiration behind them. According to Jing Tsu, Goethe's *Weltliteratur* was inspired by his reading of a Chinese book called *Hao Qiu Zhuan*, a simple and popular romantic story that was "considered to be a lesser literary text". As she speculates, Goethe's reading of this novel was based more on his ethnographical and historical interest in China than its "literary value", which indicates that, right from the birth of the quasi-utopian idea of world literature, "the Chinese novel...is more Chinese than it is a novel" (Tsu, "World Literature" 164). Ironically, less than a decade after Goethe's proposition inspired by Chinese literature, China was defeated by Britain in the Opium War, with many more European invasions to follow. Since then, the meaning of world literature for Chinese writers/intellectuals has predominantly been a one-way struggle of adaptation and recognition. On one hand, ideas from the (outside/Western) world kept flowing into China as intellectuals from the late-Qing and early Republican era, such as Hu Shi, Lu Xun and Yan Fu, were heavily influenced by European notions of science, politics and aesthetics and sought to introduce them to (strengthen) China. On the other hand, many diplomats and writers in this era, most notably Chen Jitong and Zheng Zhenduo, were frustrated by how Chinese literature remained "the farthest in distance from the literature of the world" while also lamenting "the lack of proper recognition of Chinese literature by Western readers" (Zheng qtd. in Tsu, "Getting Ideas" 300; Tsu, "World Literature" 165).

The recent economic/political rise of China has revived the discussion of the role these intellectuals played in the formation of modern Chinese literature as world literature.<sup>3</sup> However, in a world where English now serves as the lingua franca, the "cultural deficit" between China and the Anglophone world still characterises the relationship between Chinese literature and world literature (Richardson 28).<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the situation now is not so different from that of a century ago. Leading intellectuals in China such as Wang Ning are still rigorously calling for more translations of Chinese literature into English as they regard it as an essential means for China to enter the sphere of world literature ("On World Literatures" 7; "Diasporic Writing" 121; "Word Literature and China" 20). As Paul Richardson and Bonnie McDougall point out by citing market statistics,<sup>5</sup> for China, as a populous country that is on its way to becoming the biggest economy in the world, there is a "baffling" discrepancy between its possession of hard power and its exercise of soft power, especially in the sphere of literary influence (Richardson 29; McDougall, "World Literature" 56). Wang also admits that "we cannot say that China is a cultural and intellectual power...Chinese literature and culture are still little known to the outside world." ("Diasporic Writing" 120)

Faced with this disappointing situation, one is propelled to ask: *why is it so difficult for modern Chinese literature to become world literature?* Apart from the lack of translations, many sinologists in the West tend to explain this discrepancy by criticising the quality of modern Chinese literature itself. One of the most prominent examples is Bonnie McDougall herself, who, in her systematic introduction to modern Chinese literature, calls it "depressingly mediocre" and links it to a form of "plagiarism" driven by "impulses to imitation." ("Fictional Authors" 228) Similarly, Stephen Owen, in his discussion

3 Two of the most popular candidates for world literature from this era are Lu Xun and Qian Zhongshu. See Dooghan (226-263), Zhang ("Qian Zhongshu" 198-202) and Hutters (210-27) for details.

4 Compared to the circulations of literature between different Anglophone countries or even different European languages, the issue of translation has a considerable amount of influence on this cultural deficit between post-Mao Chinese literature and the sphere of Anglophone literatures. Such dialectics between cultural deficits and the politics of translation can be situated within the larger debate on the "system theories" of translations studies, which posits very important power relationships between different literary systems but is beyond the scope of this paper. See Pym (200) and Venuti (132) for more details on these theoretical formulations.

5 For example, Richardson states that "in 2010, the UK sold nearly 1,800 copyrights into China and bought 170." (30) Similarly, McDougall, writing in 2014, states that for the Chinese authority and publishing industries, "any book that goes beyond 10,000 copies is considered a great success...only the Chinese classics enjoy such sales; translations into English of modern literature does [sic] not reach even these low figures." (McDougall, "World Literature" 56)

on the topic of world poetry, laments that post-Mao Chinese poets are incapable of producing “good poetry” because their intention to “sell oneself abroad by what an international audience, hungry for political virtue...finds touching,” and thus he states that such “self-victimisation” only results in their poetry resembling “poor Third World imitations of poor translations of Western poetry.” (29) In response, some Chinese critics, such as Liu Hongtao and Gu Mingdong, have pointed out that such harsh criticisms are driven by a kind of “Sinologism” that seeks to prioritize traditional Chinese literature over modern Chinese literature (Liu, “Chinese Literature” 4; Gu 42).

Indeed, as advocated by Zhang Longxi, Zhang Yingjin and Liu Hongtao, a much more productive approach to investigating this discrepancy is to focus on the working mechanisms of world literature and explore its structural constraints on Chinese literature that seek to enter or have already entered this space (Zhang Longxi, “The Relevance” 247; Zhang Yingjin 7-8; Liu, “Transmutation” 19). Following this approach, this paper discusses the position of post-Mao Chinese literature in world literature. It aims to expose how the Western/Anglophone literary authority and market wield different “technologies of recognition”, especially “the systematic” and “the allegorical” that Shu-Mei Shih has highlighted, to confine post-Mao Chinese literature to a constant struggle between domestic authoritarian “literary governance” and “predetermined” interpretations and expectations from the West (Shih 18-9; Tsu, “Sound” 1).<sup>6</sup> Part One introduces the most significant recent definitions of world literature and their relevance to the post-Mao Chinese context, and in such discussions it seeks to broaden Shih’s theorisation of “the systematic” through the two key concepts of “international mobility” and “intranational accessibility”. Part Two then specifically focuses on the highly controversial idea about the third-world national allegory, and by participating in this debate it attempts to not only make clear the allegory’s restrictive power but also its potential for appropriation and subversion that Chinese writers can actively exploit to simultaneously move into and move against the space of world literature. As a practice of what Franco Moretti calls “distant reading” that focuses on patterns, trends and literary “waves”, this paper discusses a range of translated Chinese writers that have been active and influential in the post-Mao era (“Conjectures” 56). Some diasporic Chinese writers are also referred to as examples of how cross-cultural writers may employ various strategies to secure their influence in the sphere of world literature. Through these analyses and discussions, this paper argues that though Chinese writers face the intersecting oppression from different forces of expectations, awareness about the mechanisms of these politics may help them come up with strategies of resistance in their world-constructing creative processes. As this paper shows, in this regard, Chinese writers still have much to learn from diasporic writers in the West.

## **Part One: Textual Movements between Systems—International Mobility and Intranational Accessibility**

In order to explore the reasons behind Chinese literature’s difficulties on its “route to world literature”, it is crucial to examine recent theoretical definitions of world literature (Liu, “Chinese Literature” 1). In his most influential work *What is World Literature?*, David Damrosch defines world literature as “all literary works that circulate beyond their culture or origin, either in translation or in their original language” and urges readers to rethink world literature as “less a set of works than a network” of associations, circulations and reception (8, 3). However, this generic focus on “circulation” and vague definitions of “origin” have left Damrosch’s theory open to many challenges. For example, both So-

6 The term “Western” or “the West” in this paper refers to cultures of Europe and North America, especially the UK and the US as these two English-speaking countries are the major markets for modern Chinese literature in translation. Similarly, when “Anglophone” and “the West” are used interchangeably in this paper, it is not to ignore the many other European languages and conflate these two terms but rather to emphasize the significance of the English language as the primary target language of translation for Chinese literature to enter the sphere of world literature.

won Park and Karen Laura Thornber have used the example of East Asian literature to argue for a kind of “regional world literature” that can circulate widely without the necessary engagements with the Anglophone world (Park 8; Thornber 460-2). Damrosch himself also alludes to the problematics of positionality and conflicts within the sphere of world literature when he states that “the worlds of world literature are often worlds in collision.” (14) With regards to such possibilities of “collision”, conflicts or hierarchy in the seemingly cosmopolitan space of world literature, Franco Moretti’s conjectures on world literature offer a much more straightforward explanation. In his “distant reading” of the patterns of the unequal flows of world literature, Moretti borrows the concepts related to centres and peripheries from Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-system theory and states that, in the case of the modern novel, European literature has always served as a centre of influence, while other peripheral cultures always have to “compromise” between European literary forms and local materials as they struggle to move towards the modern novel according to “a law of literary evolution.” (“Conjectures” 56, 58, 60)<sup>7</sup> He even goes as far as claiming that “movement from one periphery to another (without passing through the centre) is almost unheard of,” and thus he would probably treat Park and Thornber’s inter-Asian paradigm as a literary “sub-system” that does not operate at the level of global (therefore real) world literature (“More Conjectures” 75).

In Moretti’s conjectures, China expectedly belongs to the periphery of world literature, and he cites Henry Zhao’s study of late-Qing fiction as the proof that its peripheral status is categorised by “the encounter of Western plots and Chinese narrative” (63). To counter such a singular and reductive reading, Shu-Mei Shih is quite right to point out that Moretti’s theory is “astoundingly neat” and that he cannot take “one scholar’s work in English as the authoritative last word on the Chinese novel”. She then lists many Qing-dynasty classic *xiaoshuo* (fiction) as counter-examples (Shih 19). However, the problem with both of these arguments is that they are discussing the positionality of Chinese literature vis-à-vis world literature by using only nineteenth century texts, many of which were written before the Opium War and the Xinhai revolution. In Moretti’s model, though “a limited discrepancy between material and literary hegemony” can exist, it is still the former that more or less determines the latter, and this corresponds, to a large extent, to Marx and Engels’ consideration of world literature as a result of the expansion of bourgeois capital (Moretti, “More Conjectures” 78; Marx and Engels 16). Such materialist considerations are particularly useful in explaining modern Chinese literature’s peripheral status and requires the contextualisation of this status in concrete socio-political terms.

According to Xie Ming, China’s modernisation has at least three phases: the New Culture movement in the early twentieth century, the Marxist universalism in the communist era, and the post-Mao reform era with “the current process of global capitalism facilitating China’s integration with the advanced West.” (16) As briefly mentioned in the introduction, China in the first phase of its modernisation was more or less a passive recipient of Western ideas, and this inferior literary and intellectual position in the world has not fundamentally changed in the third phase after the economic reform. Devastated by the Cultural Revolution, China’s “(re-)integration with the advanced West” in the 1980s was inevitably accompanied by frustrating realisations and confrontations with its economic and intellectual poverty. For Chinese writers, such frustrations had led to deep reflections on the communist era and reignited a “cultural fever” for Western literature and theories, which then formed the two fundamental elements of the “scar literature” and “root-seeking” movements in this era (Li,

7 Yet it is worth noting that Moretti’s borrowing is not a straightforward one as he does not subscribe to a consistent correspondence between politico-economic power and literary influence. For example, he treats Japan, which is categorised as a core country in Wallerstein’s world system, as a peripheral country in the sphere of world literature because the modern Japanese novel is also a product of the combination of “raw materials of Japanese social experience and the abstract formal patterns of Western novel construction” (“Conjectures”, 58). The contemporary discrepancy between China’s hard power and literary influence (as a form of soft power) as mentioned before presents a similar case.

110). Most of the translated Chinese writers that receive international attention now, including Mo Yan, Gao Xingjian, Ma Jian, Yan Lianke, Su Tong, Yu Hua, Jia Pingwa, Han Shaogong, Li Rui, Wang Anyi, Wang Shuo, Feng Jikai, Can Xue and etc., were or started to become active in this period. The continuing dominance of these writers over other Chinese writers in the sphere of translated world literature is a very indicative of this phenomenon, compelling one to ask: China's socioeconomic situation has drastically changed since the 1980s, why is it still this generation of writers that dominates the space of post-Mao Chinese literature in the sphere of world literature?

Indeed, in a sense, the current international reception of Chinese literature as world literature seems to be haunted by a force of belatedness that has failed to catch up with China's growing consumerism and diversity.<sup>8</sup> For example, except for some flash-in-the-pan sensationalist writers like Zhou Weihui and Chen Xiwo, younger generations of Chinese writers, who started writing in the 1990s and 2000s and have managed to achieve domestic successes, such as Zhang Yueran, Xu Duoyu, Li Shasha, Guo Jingming, Jiang Fangzhou, Yang Zhi etc., do not seem to receive the same level of popularity and acclaim even when their works are translated into English (e.g. Han Han, Feng Tang, Jiang Rong etc.). In addition, compared to the former group of old generation writers, whose works are often full of countryside landscapes and regional cultural references wrapped in unique, localised (often rustic) styles of the Chinese language, the language of these young urbanites is generally more congenial to translation into English. If world literature is indeed literature, as Damrosch has imagined, which "gains in translation", aren't these young writers supposed to gain more than those old writers can lose in such translations? (281) Or, in a theoretical sense, as Damrosch does not necessarily associate this "gain" with ease or translational fidelity, how might this loss of contexts and linguistic specificities be compensated by the politics of difference, which essentially constitutes the force of this translational "gain"?

What this belatedness suggests is that though most of the definitions of world literature in Anglophone academia link it to textual movements that "cross borders" to form some kind of "collectivity", or in Spivak's term "planetarity," this simple focus on movements is not enough to explain the working mechanisms of world literature as a governed space that is close to the centre and has precise thresholds for selection, especially for translated literature from the periphery (71). To help solve this problem, Shu-Mei Shih has called for a shift of attention to what she calls "technologies of recognition", which "refer to the mechanisms in the discursive (un)conscious...that produce 'the West' as the agent of recognition and 'the rest' as the object of recognition, in representation." She states that both academic discourses and the literary market participate in these "technologies of recognition", which include "the systematic," "the allegorical," "global multiculturalism" and "the exceptional particular" (Shih 17). In the case of post-Mao Chinese literature vis-à-vis world literature, her theorisation of "the systematic" is of particular relevance. Frustrated by some "poststructuralist-inflected Marxist" scholars' double standards towards non-Western literature, she cites Said's *Orientalism* and states that "antisystematic analysis is reserved for the West but 'omnipotent definitions', broad generalisations, and the imposition of systems and structures are reserved for the non-West." (18) In a way, Shih's idea of "the systematic," as a "technology of recognition" controlled by the West, is Said's Orientalist writ large: "the Orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else: he does this for himself, for the sake of his culture." ("*Orientalism*" 67) Following this associative line of arguments, one may infer that the Chinese writers of Mo Yan's generation gain recognition in the West because their writings, as (albeit problematically) being placed in the categories

8 Even though it can be argued that this force of belatedness is always present in the circulation of cultural products, especially when it involves translations and international publishing industries, what I focus on here is the exacerbation of this problem for post-Mao Chinese literature, caused by the working mechanisms or "technologies of recognition" of world literature as a hierarchical space of international literary governance. This point is discussed in detail in Part Two.

of “scar” or “root-seeking” literatures, tend to be more collaborative with the reductive mechanisms of “the systematic.” Just as Goethe read *Hao Qiu Zhuan* as first and foremost a CHINESE novel, these writers’ (perceived) participation in these literary movements, which may just be organic intellectual responses to China’s domestic political changes, nonetheless serves to not only make Chinese literature (and China) “manageable” and “decipherable” for the West, but also provide certain resistant and reflective political virtues that cater to “Western sensibilities and expectations” (Shih, 21).

In other words, the working mechanisms of “the systematic” that post-Mao Chinese literature encounter on its route to world literature tend to involve a demand for Chinese writers’ literary resistance to domestic politics, especially with regards to the Cultural Revolution and the 1989 Tiananmen incident.<sup>9</sup> What such a demand often leads to is exactly the paradoxical “collision” between Chinese literature and world literature that Damrosch has hinted: many of the Chinese writers that are recognised in the sphere of world literature in the Anglophone world are banned or have works that are or used to be banned in China (14). Examples include all works by Gao Xingjian, all works by Ma Jian, most of Ha Jin’s works, most of Anchee Min’s works, Mo Yan’s *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* and *The Garlic Ballads*, Zhou Weihui’s *Shanghai Baby*, Mian Mian’s *Candy*, Chen Xiwo’s *I Love You Mum*, Jia Pingwa’s *Ruined City*, Xinran’s *Sky Burial*, Yan Lianke’s *Serve the People!*, Wang Shuo’s *Please Don’t Call me Human* and many more.<sup>10</sup> Some of these translated books, such as *Shanghai Baby*, *Candy* and *I Love My Mum*, are even explicit in their collaboration/complicity with “the systematic” as they flaunt “banned in China” on their covers or back pages, seemingly a marketing strategy.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, some of these writers, such as Gao Xingjian, Ma Jian and Guo Xiaolu, are often, despite their own will or the accessibility of their works in China, labelled “dissent writers” by Western media.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, considering that Chinese domestic politics is such an influential, or even integral, part of the working mechanisms of “the systematic”, Shih’s notion of “the systematic” should also be broadened to consider not only Western technologies of recognition but also domestic “literary governance” in China (Tsu, “Sound” 1).<sup>13</sup> That is to say, for a better understanding of the tension between post-Mao Chinese literature and world literature, the notion of world literature as only the circulation of literature is inadequate, and should be shifted to focus, instead, on the dialectics between international mobility and intranational accessibility embedded in the processes of such periphery-to-centre movements. On one hand, as mentioned before, simply translating intranationally accessible or popular Chinese literature into English rarely results in international success as most of these works would not (be allowed to) address the politics that the Western “systematic” demands. On the other hand, not only are many internationally mobile and successful Chinese works not accessible in China, but

9 Indeed, apart from the scar literature related to the Cultural Revolution, reflective and critical works written by Chinese writers in exile (in the West) that deal with the Tiananmen incident have also created its own “genre”, which Belinda Kong calls “Tiananmen fictions outside the square” (1). Expectedly, almost all the works of this “genre” are banned in China and therefore it can be said that in China, the Tiananmen incident is also part of the systematic, but rather than its affirmation, it is its negation.

10 Some writers’ paradoxical “collision” took a slightly convoluted route as their works rose to fame both in China and the West after they were adapted into films that were banned in China. Examples include Yu Hua’s *To Live* (turned into a banned film of the same name by Zhang Yimou), Yan Geling’s short story “Xiu Xiu: The Sent-down Girl” (turned into a banned film of the same name by Joan Chen), and Su Tong’s *Wives and Concubines* (turned into another of Zhang Yimou’s banned films called *Raise the Red Lantern*). For a detailed discussion about banned films that propelled their source fiction works to success in China and abroad, see Lu (1-23).

11 However, it has to be noted that this “banned” label that co-opts censorship into a marketing strategy is in no way exclusive to the circulation of post-Mao Chinese literature in the West. One of the most influential examples of such co-optation is the “banned in Boston” label that was employed in the US from the late 19th century through the mid-20th century, effectively boosting the sales of the books, including those by Ernest Hemingway, Aldous Huxley, William Faulkner, D.H. Lawrence and many more, that carried the label. See Boyer (20) for a detailed account.

12 Such labelling can be easily found online, often contradictory to the writer’s own position or simple facts. For example, Gao Xingjian consistently subscribes to a quasi-nihilist ideology that does not view literature as engagements with politics, and Guo Xiaolu has never been banned in China in any strict sense.

13 Jing Tsu’s concept of “literary governance” is primarily about how the nation employs certain ideological tools and linguistic policies to regulate Chinese-language literatures in countries such as Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore, but this well-constructed term is borrowed here because such ideological/linguistic control of literature at the national level also applies to mainland China and its authoritarian system of literary censorship (“Sound” 1).

many authors of such works have completely moved their locations of writing and publishing to the West, which easily leads to comments like “Chinese authors write more efficiently for a world audience from outside their homeland than from within” being made (Richardson, 33).

The most prominent example is the Nobel laureate Gao Xingjian, who was the first Chinese-language writer to win the prize. After his plays were banned by the Chinese government, Gao fled to France in 1987 and became a political refugee, publishing his works in Chinese in Taiwan, and when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2000 he was already a French citizen and had started writing in French. As Julia Lovell has observed, many of his literary philosophies, such as the non-conformist ideas of “no-ism” and “cold literature,” held great appeal to the Nobel committee, who praised Gao for his “universal validity.” (8) Yet she also points out that the Swedish academy’s press release concerning Gao’s prize disproportionately focuses on his two novels, *Soul Mountain* and *One’s Man’s Bible*, and a drama called “Fugitives,” which are arguably the most political works of Gao in that they touch upon the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen incident (20). What Lovell alludes to is that a type of “the systematic” is at work here, and yet the reaction from the Chinese government was no less drastic: Xinhua News, which is often regarded as the mouthpiece of the Chinese government, reported that “it seems the Nobel committee has its political criterion for giving the prize for literature, instead of doing so from the angle of literature...this shows that the Nobel prize for literature has virtually been used for political purposes and thus has lost its authority.” (Xinhua News, qtd. in Lovell 27) An immediate ban on publishing or discussing Gao followed, which has remained till this day. Gao himself, however, often categorizes his post-Nobel period as “the third phase of his life”—the phase of him as a cosmopolite, “a citizen of the world” (Gentz 138). Despite this outlook, he is still constantly facing questions about China, to which he responds that his life in China is finished and that he has no wish to return to a place that bans his books (Lee and Dutrait, 747). It seems that both the Chinese government and many of Gao’s readers outside of China have completely ignored his works in French. Therefore, Gao’s high status in world literature is full of irony: though his Nobel Prize cannot be completely separated from “the systematic” interpretations of China’s politics, his “world” is one that completely excludes China. In a similar way, many other exiled writers, such as Ha Jin and Li Yiyun, have even rejected the Chinese language and express a sense of freedom in writing in a world language like English (Ha 117; Link, “China” 57).

These examples demonstrate that post-Mao Chinese literature often faces the double oppression of both domestic authoritarian “literary governance” and the demanding forces of “the systematic” for peripheral literatures in the West, and more importantly, they reveal to us that these two forces of oppression are not really the results of two different ideological constructions, but one. Despite the different social structures and agendas behind these forces, both the “literary governance” in China and “the systematic” of the West are about the reinforcement of the expected, cultural and political. But there are still some Chinese writers who, by reconciling international mobility and intranational accessibility, can successfully transform their works into world literature. The most successful writer in this regard is of course the other Chinese Nobel laureate Mo Yan, the majority of whose works are nonetheless foundationally involved in the “generalisable” and “decipherable” movements of scar and “root-seeking” literature. Indeed, as much as Mo advocates that “good literature is larger than politics”, the intellectual debates about his collaboration with the Chinese censorship system and government have continued since his award in 2012 (Mo, “A Writer” 24; Link, “Does” 3; Liu, “The Reception” 1-3). Hence, even the occasional achievement realised in both modes would not completely erase the problematic dialectic between international mobility and intranational accessibility; Yet apart from gaining greater awareness about this dialectic, there are literary means and strategies that Chinese writers may employ to facilitate their mobility without compromising their critical power, as the

following section about the Third World national allegory attempts to suggest.

## **Part Two: Oppression or Opportunity?—the Spectre of the Third World National Allegory**

In her article, Shu-Mei Shih has also emphasised “the allegorical” as another Western technology of recognition that is of significant relevance for Chinese literature (21). As a response to Frederic Jameson’s statement that “all Third World narratives are...necessarily...national allegories” (69), Shih views “the allegorical” as a mode of literary interpretation and/or production that relies on “a predetermined signified” prone to the First World’s “stereotyped knowledge” about Third World nations.<sup>14</sup> She uses the example of “the sensational trauma narratives about China’s Cultural Revolution written in English by first-generation immigrants” to make the point that though Jameson’s theory was intended to be a nostalgic critique of the loss of collective consciousness in the First World, his “omnipotent definition” of Third World writers has become “its own prophecy” as Third World writers now actively produce such national allegories “to sell in the global marketplaces.” Such collaborative/complicit practices would, supposedly, negatively affect the literary quality of their works and confine Third World writing to quasi-Cold War stereotypes (Shih 20-1). The popularity of Cultural Revolution literature in the West, whether it is translated scar literature from China or Anglophone works written by Chinese immigrants, thus seems to be a powerful testament to the working mechanisms of both “the systematic” and “the allegorical” and their constraints on post-Mao Chinese literature as world literature.

Some postcolonial critics, such as Imre Szeman and Neil Lazarus, have defended the importance of the national allegory because they see it as a kind of “cultural revolution” that exposes the “First-Worldist” imperialism that has compelled the expressions of colonised “subalternity” to manifest in collective/national terms in the first place (Szeman 195-7; Lazarus, 103). By contextualising the rise of the national(ist) allegory in (anti-)colonial histories, they attempt to shift the theoretical focus from the First World’s stereotypical readings of Third World texts towards the agency of the Third World writers in their resistant narratives. However, this contextual approach is perhaps more suitable for national allegories of Lu Xun’s time, namely the first half of the twentieth century when imperialism and nationalism were still in an intensified struggle, than the post-Mao context, where the flows of global capitalism have more or less already ossified “the allegorical” into a commodified cultural delivery of (Third) world literature to the literary centre. In other words, even though “the allegorical” was born out of anti-colonial nationalist resistances that deserve to be acknowledged, its critical power has been considerably reduced as the literary centre appropriates it into collaboration with its technologies of recognition. For example, one may observe that possibly due to the (need to understand/manage) the rise of China, the force of the national allegory for Chinese literature in the West is now so strong that many non-PRC-background Chinese writers like Tash Aw are prone to write about China for their markets in the Anglophone world. But if “the allegorical” has inevitably been co-opted into the dominance of the literary centre over China and “Chineseness”, are there still any ways in which Chinese writers may reclaim the critical power and resistant spirit embedded in the birth of the national allegory? Or rather, if the Western literary market is indeed so insistent on its attraction to national allegories, is there no way for Chinese writers to counter this confining technology of recognition without sacrificing either their critical integrity or their international appeal?

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that “First World” and “Third World” were terminological inventions of the Cold War period and thus their ideological suitability for describing post-Mao Chinese literature and the contemporary Anglophone world might be questionable, but these terms are still used in this paper not only because they have been consistently used in academic discussions about the national allegory since Jameson’s article (65), but also because the uneven economic and cultural development these terms focus on is still very relevant to the unequal centre-periphery relations in Moretti’s conjectures on world literature.



In dealing with the Western demand for Third World national allegories, diasporic writers writing about China while living in the West seem to be much more experienced at finding philosophies and literary practices that can help them retain their creative agency. Gao Xingjian's comments may again offer some unexpected insights here. His stance on the nation is clear and consistent when he says "I dislike this whole business of patriotism and nationalism" and "I am not prepared to assume the role of spokesperson for the Chinese, nor for the Chinese people." (Lee and Dutrait 746-7) Indeed, if "the allegorical" as tied to the nation is what Shih calls a "burden of collective representation," Gao's whole idea of "cold literature," a philosophy of "fleeing...to survive...for spiritual salvation", is about escaping such a burden to reach an affirmation for the individual self (Shih 23; Gao, "The Case" 8). However, constantly bothered with questions about his national identity after the Nobel Prize, he sometimes uses rather succinct but innovatively satirical ways to respond. For example, during a lecture he gave at Harvard University in 2001, he was again asked whether he "misses" China, and his response was "I am China. China is inside me, and *that* China has nothing to do with me." (Gao qtd. in Shen 4 original italics) The sentence "I am China" is, both literally and metaphorically, the ultimate national allegory. In such a context Gao uses it to affirm both the national and the individual, and yet by shifting "China," the grand socio-political construct, to the "inside," he not only acknowledges the constraining and imposing nature of (the constant evocations of) such an allegorical construct, but also teases and subverts this nature at the same time. In a way, the subversive strategy in such a satirical response resembles that of the postcolonial palimpsest, which, by appropriating imposed stereotypes and (re)writing (counter-)narratives about the self, also simultaneously reinforces and refutes certain established identity categories and the (false) expectations they have created (Ashcroft et al. 144).

To demonstrate how this affirmative/subversive strategy of (anti-)allegorical identification works in literary practices, Xiaolu Guo's *I Am China* is perhaps the best example. As a mainland Chinese writer who has been writing and publishing in English after moving to London in the early 2000s, the title of Guo's latest novel might be viewed as a desperate invocation against the oppressive forces of "the allegorical" in Western literary markets. Such an interpretation is only half correct, because while the title "I Am China," like a postcolonial palimpsest, inevitably evokes and reinforces established literary mechanisms/expectations in the West, its excessiveness in doing so forms a satirical possibility that appropriates the commercial appeal of "the allegorical" without succumbing to its restrictive influence on the textual level. Contrary to a straightforward personified allegory, *I Am China* is a polyphonic novel that tells multiple intersecting stories of cross-cultural characters. The novel essentially revolves around the dislocated relationship between two Chinese lovers, Kublai Jian the underground Beijing punk and Deng Mu the artistic poet. But what complicates the story is that their relationship is presented to the reader through another central character Iona Kirkpatrick, a Scottish translator who, in her mysterious task in a London publishing house, discovers, translates and retells the lovers' ill-fated story from their letters. As the translated letters reveal, Jian became a political exile due to his participation in the Tiananmen incident. He suffered from his unfulfilled rebellious spirit as he wandered across Europe seeking for asylum, and in this process his relationship with Mu also became more and more dislocated and adrift. In her letters, Mu questions Jian about the political ideology of his punk music and regrets that his commitment costed them their happy mundane life. As a Scottish islander adrift in a disorienting London, Iona was deeply moved by Mu's love for Jian, but she was instructed by her editor to focus instead on Jian's Tiananmen story in the publication of the letters. This left Iona feeling even more disoriented in her troubled positionality between the publishing centre and the published periphery.

Hence, *I Am China* is not only Guo's literary attempt to shift between different modalities of the drifting subject and different possibilities for cross-cultural understanding but also her satirical reflec-

tion on the mechanisms of “the systematic” (with regards to the Tiananmen incident) in the English publishing industry. As for the title sentence “I am China”, all three characters have uttered it in different ways on different occasions: Jian left behind a manifesto of the 1989 movement which includes a democratic slogan; Iona recited the slogan in an absentminded trance after she finished the final translation; and Mu read out the sentence when she performed an appropriated version of Allen Ginsberg’s poem “America”, where the word “America” has been consistently changed to “China” (Guo, “I Am China” 363-6). All of them can be interpreted as allegories for China, but none of them functions as a “predetermined signified” that “the allegorical” demands (Shih, 21). Instead, this seemingly allegorical sentence is an indeterminate signifier that connects a wide range of socio-political experiences, including Chinese authoritarianism, the conflicts between the national and the individual, and cross-cultural (mis)understanding and (mis)appropriations. Through her awareness about “the systematic” and “the allegorical” and her satirical manipulation of literary characters and events, Guo is able to appropriate and subvert their oppressive forces and turn them into opportunities for securing her creative agency. Therefore, what *I Am China* shows is that in world literature, a text is not only one among many in the circulation of texts that is troubled by existing technologies of recognition, but also, the text itself can be a “world-making activity” that challenges these oppressive forces and turns “the world” into “an ongoing, dynamic processes of becoming” instead (Cheah, 30).<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, both Guo and Gao have stated that writing is their “world” and that literary expressions, rather than political/cultural/national identities, constitute the primary mode of their “worldly existence.” (Guo, “The Key” 1; Gao, “No-ism” 10) Therefore, it is likely that, similar to Judith Butler’s formulations about performative political speeches, the Chinese identities that are manifest in their works are more strategic performances than passive fixed categories (1). As post-Mao Chinese presences in world literature, they perhaps are more familiar with “world literature” as Christopher Prendergast’s site of “negotiation” than any Chinese writers in China (111). As cross-cultural writers, what their pragmatic performances in such “negotiations” often (aim to) produce is the flexible “double agency” that Tina Chen has deemed common in Asian American literature (9). For *I Am China*, this performative double agency manifests in the book’s Chinese title *Zui Weilan de Hai*, which translates into “The Bluest Sea”<sup>16</sup>: the allegorical “I Am China” does not work for Chinese readers, so she uses the image of love, the sea, from her characters’ letters to strike affective responses instead. Similarly, Gao Xingjian’s double agency may be found in his passive participation in the anti-PRC sphere of “the Sinophone,” which, despite its contested political ideologies, provides him a space of acceptance and solidarity (Shih 26).<sup>17</sup> That these writers have limited intranational accessibility in China is a pity, as the domestic side of “the systematic” can sometimes be more difficult to negotiate with than Western technologies of recognition.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, if the national allegory in the Western/Anglophone literary market does still haunt

15 This optimistic view, however, can be challenged by Sarah Brouillette’s point regarding the postcolonial commercialisation of “consciousness”. Using Salman Rushdie and J. M. Coetzee as examples, she argues that though postcolonial writers may demonstrate their consciousness and resistance against forces of “the systematic” or “the allegorical” in the global marketplace dominated by the West, especially by using self-reflexive writer characters as metafictional commentary on these forces, a materialist critique can reveal that this very “consciousness” itself has become a marketing tool that offers the cosmopolitan-oriented metropolitan readers in the West a degree of condolence that helps ease their (neo-)colonial guilt. From this perspective, Guo’s novel, though against “the systematic” and “the allegorical” as it might appear to be, is not really “unsystematic”. A full discussion of Brouillette’s point needs to be situated in the dialectics between poststructuralism and Marxism, which is beyond the scope of this paper. See Brouillette (chapter 1 and 4) for details.

16 Though Guo’s book is written in English and there is not a Chinese version yet, the Chinese title does appear alongside the English title in the 2014 editions of *I Am China*.

17 The Sinophone is Shih’s theoretical formation about Chinese-language writings that are located in the literary margins of Chineseness, such as Chinese Malaysian literature, Singaporean literature in Chinese and Taiwanese literatures (23). Though Gao himself rarely mentions the Sinophone, many of the English translations of his latest works are subsumed under such categories. For example, his *Gao Xingjian: Aesthetics and Creation* was published in 2012 in Cambria Press’s series “Sinophone World.”

18 As mentioned before, all of Gao’s works are banned in China, and though Guo’s books are not banned, her later novels written in English enjoy only a limited reception in China.

Third World literatures like Marx's spectre of capital(ism), the experiences of diasporic writers like Gao and Guo and their performative strategies to gain double agency can offer insightful lessons for post-Mao Chinese writers on their "route to world literature" (Liu, "Chinese Literature" 1).

## Conclusion and Limitations

At the opening ceremony of the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2009, Mo Yan gave a speech entitled "A Writer Has a Nationality, but Literature Has no Boundary." Near the end of the speech, Mo expressed his hope for Chinese literature: "my next dream will be that one day, some young Western writers will say that their work is inspired and influenced by certain Chinese writers." ("A Writer" 24) Embedded in this dream is the century-old Chinese desire for more out-influence in the global literary sphere, which, as far as the current "cultural deficit" between China and the Anglophone/Western world is concerned, remains unsatisfied and thus still shrouded in the future tense. As this paper has attempted to point out, rather than simple textual movements/circulations that have "no boundary," the space of world literature, which is still located close to the Anglophone/Western literary centre, has placed many structural constraints on translated literatures from the peripheries. In the specific case of post-Mao Chinese literature vis-à-vis world literature, the dialectic struggle between international mobility and intranational accessibility is an inevitable difficulty caused by the intersecting oppressions from Western technologies of recognition and China's domestic authoritarian literary governance, which are different manifestations of a single ideological construction—the reinforcement of the expected. It has also been suggested that faced with such pressure, more world-oriented Chinese writers may focus on literature as a world-making activity and employ certain appropriative/subversive strategies to navigate their negotiations with world literature. But ultimately, for world literature to truly live up to its "conceptual openness," all parties in the textual movements, including nation states, literary institutions, writers, critics, publishers, readers etc., have to "expand our horizon and...change our views of the world and its richness in literature and culture." (Zhang, "The Relevance" 247)

As a practice of Moretti's "distant reading," this paper also has some notable methodological and theoretical limitations that future analyses and research may seek to reflect and improve upon. Firstly, the focus on generalisable literary patterns and trends has required the coverage of a wide range of Chinese writers and literatures at the expense of detailed investigations into the texts themselves, which might produce a variety of contradictory interpretations. For example, it can be argued that some of the writers mentioned as (perceived) representatives of the "scar" or "root-seeking" literatures, such as Mo Yan and Can Xue, have rather diverse literary techniques, themes and concerns especially in their later works. In such situations, rather than the issue of whether these different writers can be interpreted as representing a whole literary movement, the more pertinent question might be whose intention it is to generalise and categorise them and why. The tendency to (over-)generalise is one of the shortcomings of distant reading as a method, and it remains questionable to what extent writers and literatures can be reduced to neat categories or simple adjectives without close reading. Secondly, the suggestions with regards to the strategic performances of collaboration/appropriation/subversion that writers can consciously make may be criticised as a positivistic treatment of literature and creativity. Indeed, whether the author of world literature needs to have the world readership in mind when he/she writes is still a matter of debate, and many world literature writers, such as Gao Xingjian, would readily oppose the interference of any awareness about any reader or exterior structures in their creative processes.

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## Author Information

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Flair Donglai Shi is a graduate student currently based at the English Faculty, University of Oxford. His research focuses on the “Yellow Peril” as a travelling discourse in world literature. His other research areas include comparative approaches to Modern East Asian literature, queer postcolonial literature and theories of world literature. His academic articles have been accepted by *English Studies*, *Chinese Literature*, *Subaltern-speak* and other international journals. Email: donglai.shi@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk

## On Multiculturalism: The Dialogue between Yue Daiyun and Roger T. Ames

Yue Daiyun and Roger T. Ames

Translated by Zheng Che

### **Abstract:**

Starting off by discussing terrorists' attacks in Europe such as the *Charlie's Weekly* Incident in France and the 2011 attacks in Norway which reflect the crisis of the concept of pluralism, Yue Daiyun and Roger T. Ames discuss problems concerning multiculturalism in this dialogue. Proposing the idea of "harmony without uniformity", Yue emphasizes the importance of the education of the youth to be aware of the coexistence of ideological pluralism. Both scholars are optimistic and confident in building constructive dialogues between Chinese and Western philosophy.

**Keywords:** multiculturalism, education of the youth, ideological pluralism, dialogue

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**Yue:** With the increasing number of problems that have come along with the rapid changes of the world, I have been hoping to have a discussion with you for a long time about questions regarding our common interests and focus.

### **1. The Charlie's Weekly Incident in Paris**

**Yue:** The Charlie's Weekly Incident was a great shock that triggered me into worrying about what might happen in the future. With Samuel Huntington's warning concerning the clash of civilizations, the situation seems to be getting worse without any sign of improvement.

**Ames:** I met Huntington at Colorado College some years ago. I had a chance to have a discus-



sion with him face-to-face together with Du Weiming and Li Zehou. In the conversation, his lack of cultural awareness made it obvious that his thesis is informed only by his politics, having nothing to do with cultural studies. He had no idea about what Confucianism is and what Islam is, so the popularity of his theories has resulted from his political influence rather than his academic insights. Many scholars in cultural studies do not agree with him. However, the problem he highlighted is a truly serious phenomenon.

**Yue:** Yes, I agree. His discussion of the problem is very important, but his conclusion that the final cultural clashes in the world would be between Confucianism and Islam is not only wrong but also unlikely.

**Ames:** A few years ago I wrote a book, *Confucian Role Ethics*. My purpose was to locate and interpret the Confucian tradition on its own terms. I have been engaged in the introduction of classical Chinese philosophical thought to the West. What has been done so far is the first phase: Using Western languages to translate Chinese thought. What I am doing now belongs to the second phase: Allowing Chinese ethics to speak on its own terms. My next discussion is focused on a dialogue between Confucian ethics and West ethical theory on the concept of "justice." There are two problems with "justice" as a term in Western philosophy that are captured in the Chinese translation: *zhengyi*: The first problem is individualism. From the perspective of Confucianism, in fact, there is no real "individual." *Yi* has to do with what is most appropriate for everyone. The "individual" does not exist and is only a fiction, for individuals are always connected with each other. Objectivism also is a fictional and problematic concept. In Charlie's Weekly Incident, I think, first of all, people should not speak out without being sensitive to the feelings of others. It is a perverse freedom that disrespects the values and beliefs of a major segment of the human population. There should not be unlimited freedom of speech. To understand justice, I think we also need to mention another Confucian term, *hexie* that requires us to recognize that we are not homogeneous and to allow others to have their own views. I think Confucianism can make a significant contribution a revised understanding of the concept of "justice." On the one hand, we need to establish some regulative ideals. On the other hand, we also need inclusiveness to reach "harmony without uniformity."

**Yue:** So you think *Charlie's Weekly* should be blamed for its insult towards a religious leader?

**Ames:** The terrorists should be condemned by all, but *Charlie's Weekly* should be blamed for being unnecessarily insulting to the beliefs of Islam.

**Yue:** So both sides in the Incident should assume their own share of responsibility. In that case, how can we reconcile the two sides and bring them to cooperate with each other? As you mentioned just now the most important point is the recognition of diversity and harmony, that is, learning to recognize the fact that different persons have different ideas. But this is not likely to occur given the worsening situation. But the extremists in the Incident are few, aren't they? The use of force is preferred by Islam, isn't it? I have heard it said that Islam missionaries hold the Koran in one hand with a knife in the other.

## **2. The Way Out is to Educate the Youth and to Be Open-minded to Pluralistic Thinking**

**Ames:** Dewey says very clearly that there are two ways to change the world: The first is to educate young people with his emphasis on early childhood education; the second is the acceptance of

pluralism. If people from the United States and China have the opportunity to communicate with each other, they will find that their own ways of being in the world are not the only choice and that there are other real alternatives. For example, we are now making a great effort in eradicating ISIS, but this actually leads ISIS to become more united and to become more and more determined to succeed. The solution lies in looking for other models to resolve the problem, such as economic interventions and perhaps allowing the young people of the region to come to our countries to be educated. In addition, we must maintain an ongoing dialogue with Islam, and its adherents should not be isolated from contact with the outside world. But for more than a decade now, the response of the United States has been in the wrong direction. The more Americans fight, the more terrorists spring up against their common enemy. We need a better strategy.

**Yue:** I agree that education of young people and the acceptance of the coexistence of ideological pluralism are of great importance. What I don't understand is why many European young people who have grown up in an environment of a highly-developed culture joined in this terrorist organization, and have even rushed to the front?

**Ames:** It is perhaps still a problem of multiculturalism. People who immigrate to the immigrant nation of the United States can decide themselves to be a Chinese or an American. Nobody has the right to say American immigrants are not American. For example, I immigrated from Canada to America so I am an American. But Europe is not so open and welcoming. People like me, if I immigrated to Germany, will always be considered a "foreigner." The sense of national identity in these older nations tend to be conservative.

China is pluralistic in its own way. In fact, I think we should not call it "Zhongguo", "the middle country," but rather "Zhongzhou", "the middle continent." More comparable to an Africa or a Europe, China is vast and diverse: Southern Cantonese are like Italians, tall northerners are like Russians. From the south to the north there is so much diversity, and yet they all Chinese. This suggests that China and Chinese people have historically been inclusive.

**Yue:** So many Chinese students studying in the United States feel that it is not difficult for them to integrate into the American society. As long as you are open and easy-going, you can become accepted.

**Ames:** To integrate immigrants is a much more difficult thing in a more traditional country such as the United Kingdom. Even when Americans go to England, some English people would look down upon us on hearing a different accent. Fortunately, because the American economy is still number one in the world, the British would show some respect to Americans. But if we as Canadians go to England, the situation is even worse, for the way some British regard Canadians is as distant relatives from less developed areas. In many areas of the UK, immigrants live in their own communities and have some difficulty assimilating.

**Yue:** Let's move back to our discussion about youth. How to educate the youth successfully, which, I think, is an important issue in China as well as in the United States.

**Ames:** I think it is important to encourage young people to go to study in different countries and give young people more opportunities to receive an open, international education. It is not easy to change something from outside, but it is relatively easier to be changed from inside. When young people study abroad, they will bring new visions back and will bring about changes in their own

homeland. International students also bring new ways of thinking and living to the United States. Although people in countries such as Iran do not like us, many Iranians still send their children to study in the United States. It is much wiser for America to encourage change through internal initiatives rather than to engage in nation building. Iraq is just such an example of the failure of foreign influence. The United States has been present in that country for more than a decade and there still exist many problems—it is getting worse, not better.

**Yue:** The situation there has been deteriorating more and more. President Bush's strategy is in fact a failure. For example, the Iraqi War or the so-called Color Revolution, though with a great sacrifice of money and people, has only served to bring those countries into a more chaotic state and the outcome has been precisely the opposite of the intentions. But why are some European white young people sympathetic to Islam?

**Ames:** In fact, this is not a new phenomenon. If we read the work of Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger, we find that in ancient Rome older people complained bitterly about the problem of young people: bad music, bad manners, bad habits. And young people were invariably dissatisfied with their society. It is a kind of young person's idealism. At present some European young people have their own ideals that challenge consumerism and its nihilism, and are looking for new practices, one of which is to become a hero of Islam.

**Yue:** Do you remember the 2011 attacks in Norway? The first attack was a car bomb explosion within the executive government quarter in Oslo. Less than two hours later the same terrorist opened fire at the participants at a summer camp organized by the youth division of the ruling Norwegian Labor Party on Utoya Island. The attacks claimed a total of 77 lives and injured many. It is the deadliest attack in Norway since World War II. This attack was so shocking to me. From childhood on I have been reading Andersen's fairy tales and Norway has been in my understanding a peaceful and beautiful paradise! In the disaster a white man bombed and shot unarmed people neither out of terrorism nor out of some national issue but for no reason at all! Why is this happening?

**Ames:** This is also a serious problem in the United States. There are mentally ill people with their own idiosyncratic creed in every society. But it is the gun situation that makes the danger much worse. In the United States in Connecticut a few years ago a young man killed 20 children aged around 6 or 7 years old! There were no wounded; only dead. The smallest child was shot with 7 bullets. It is completely crazy. The only use of automatic rifles is to kill people. For the mentally ill people to have the opportunity to get this kind of gun it is madness. Shootings have been happening, and we have no way to effectively curb it.

**Yue:** Don't the Americans want gun control?

**Ames:** Guns should be controlled. But as a nation we do not have the political will. There is a strange and perhaps perverted equation in the minds of many Americans that freedom and a gun are the same thing. The Democratic Party has been advocating for gun control, but with the wealth and power of the gun lobby, we have no way to achieve it.

### 3. The Crisis of the Concept of Pluralism

**Yue:** It can be said that the concept of pluralism has now encountered a great crisis. Especially after the Charlie's Weekly Incident, some political leaders, including some relatively open-minded leaders

such as Angela Merkel, admitted that Pluralism has actually failed. Merkel said if so many immigrants are allowed to enter the country without integrating into it, the battle will be ongoing. The leaders, in other European countries such as in Britain and in France, also acknowledged the failure of pluralism. Due to lack of labor and the problem of aging, these countries are in need of immigrants. How to treat the immigrants in a fair and reasonable way is a serious challenge for them. Their economy could not afford the immigrants the same benefits as their citizens. Many people hold the view that since you come to our country you should accept our culture, life, customs and habits and can't keep your original culture form your homeland at all. When I was once in Paris, there was one thing that left me with a deep impression. There was a little girl who had to wear a turban as in her Islam home school. But the president in the school in Paris insisted that she should be in accordance with the provisions of the French school uniforms, not wearing a turban. This triggered at the time a great controversy and even open protest. Another incident is that according to Islamic custom, men and women cannot swim in the same swimming pool, so they asked the school to arrange a day every week when only girls can enter the swimming pool so that the girls can swim. But the president firmly opposed this and continued to maintain the original French habits rather than to make a change according to Islamic habits. Both sides seem to be justified and nobody knows how to ultimately solve this problem.

**Ames:** From the eighteenth and nineteen centuries on, the European imperialist aggression resulted in the colonization of many of these countries, and now the tide of migration of these colonial countries into Europe constitutes a reversal and a kind of justice. I think one of the reasons for the many problems is the scale of migration. That is, all of a sudden, the migration is overwhelming with too many refugees coming too quickly. If the process were more gradual then the problem of immigration would not be so serious. On the other hand, I see this is as an opportunity for people of different origins to achieve real cultural diversity. For example, what kind of clothes to wear is a personal decision; it has nothing to do with others. Now, in Canada, the largest number of immigrants are Chinese, the second are Indians, so inevitable conflicts will arise. But I think these kinds of contradictions in values and lifestyles are a chance for the country to redefine itself and realize the necessity of modernization and diversification. When I was young, Canada was a relatively pure European country, and to call an Asian or Indian a Canadian seemed strange. Today Canada is cosmopolitan, and celebrates its diversity. It has come of age.

**Yue:** No conflicts?

**Ames:** Conflicts still. Many conflicts. But the country has moved slowly from the mere "variety" of having different peoples living separately to an achieved "diversity" in which the difference among the people is a resource for cultural growth and refinement. As the different people and cultures come to appreciate each other, the country appreciates in value. If there are no conflicts there will be mere "sameness" and uniformity instead of "harmony among difference," where real harmony always entails evolving tensions.

**Yue:** When we speak of "multiculturalism", it involves a theoretical question: When two cultures come into contact, what will happen? The integration with each other and the appearance of something new? Take the production of an alloy for example: When two different metals are melted together to produce a new alloy, this alloy has some new characteristics, without the characteristics of the original metals. If such a fusion takes place in the interaction between Chinese culture and American culture, what will that be like? Is it neither Chinese culture nor the American one, but something new? I think pluralistic ideology should accommodate three aspects: The first aspect is to absorb the

foreign culture, but it primarily still retains the subjectivity; the second one is the unification of the old culture and the new culture as a whole; the third one is the original natural culture without any changes. These three aspects form a relationship of mutual support and mutual evolution for the development of a new culture in the future.

#### 4. “Individuality” and “Objectivity”

**Ames:** Richard Rorty once attended one of our East-West Philosophers’ Conference meetings with philosophers coming from more than 30 countries and regions. Rorty suggested that after 50 years there will be only two languages left in the world: one is English, the other, Chinese. He also said that culture will be like fast food where you can take a little of this, and then take a bit of that, with culture ultimately losing its ethnic characteristics. His presentation aroused a heated discussion and many scholars argued against him. After the meeting he told me he was very sorry that he disrupted the meeting. I assured him that it was very good for the conference, for it was only the heated response to his speech that would provoke scholars to think through this important issue. I personally think that any culture without change and development is a dead and obsolete one. I always say that Confucianism is not some dogma immutable and frozen in the Chinese tradition. *Ru* translated as “Confucian” refers to a social class. We scholars are the “Confucians” of this era. We need to inherit the cultural tradition, understand it thoroughly, expand upon it with our own insights, apply its wisdom to solve the problems of our times, and then pass the tradition on to the next generation, and recommend to them that they continue this intergenerational transmission. In the West we have our own “Confucianism.” The Western tradition is one cultural river while the Chinese tradition is another, and the ecotone (the ecological transition zone) between the two rivers is the most fecund with the most opportunities for further growth and enrichment. So when we look at the evolution of the river of Chinese culture, Buddhism is the first time for the “West” to bring changes to the traditional ideas of China. The health of Confucianism lies in its open and inclusive posture. It is not exclusive and does not claim some objective truth. The reason for the conflicts between Abrahamic religions and other cultures lies in their insistence on some eternal and unchanging objectivity and value that in fact does not exist. So I think our biggest problem in the Western tradition is “objectivism” and “individualism” which are two misleading concepts. In my understanding, “individuality” is inclusive instead of exclusive. The reason why I am an “individual” is because I have a unique and very close and friendly relationship with others. I achieve distinctiveness not exclusive of my relationships, but by virtue of the quality of them. And “objectivity” is actually mutual and inclusive too as it moves toward “consensus.”

**Yue:** What you said is very important. If “individuality” and “objectivity” can be understood in this way, the situation would be much better. Furthermore, this understanding is also a basis for diversification. Without such an understanding, diversification will not be possible to achieve. So, my question is that whether the ecotone—the intermediate zone between two rivers—will become a chaotic situation in the confluence of the two rivers?

**Ames:** Yes, this situation is the positive and productive “*hundun*” or “chaos” of Zhuangzi. Tomorrow will not hold anything novel if there were no “*hundun*.” In order to repay the central Emperor Hundun for his hospitality, the Emperor of the South China Sea and the Emperor of the North Sea decided to drill the seven apertures in Hundun that provide human beings with our physical sensorium. As a result, not only did Hundun die; the Emperors of the North and South effectively committed suicide. If order is not honeycombed with chaos, everything is predictable; life is a done deal. Today and yesterday are continuous yet different as well, and tomorrow will also bring new opportunities. The confluence of Chinese and Western cultures in our historical moment is an exciting opportunity for

mutual growth and enrichment.

**Yue:** What you said is very reasonable and full of philosophical insights.

**Ames:** Dewey once said that a good idea today will become a bad idea tomorrow if it doesn't change. This observation is very important. So "change" is our friend and we should not reject it. In this regard, the biggest problem posed by the Western philosophical tradition is that up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century we have been inclined to pursue eternal truth and thus denigrate "time" and "change". "God" is many guises—irrecusable moral principles, logic, reason, immutable law, and so on— as so conceived is absolute, perfect, static and has no relationship with "time." Since the beginning of the 20th century, the one common feature of the various schools that constitute the internal critique of the tradition such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, pragmatism, poststructuralism, and so on, is to try to think "process."

**Yue:** In Whitehead's process theories, this shift of focus seems to be central?

## 5. David Hall's Interest in Chinese Culture

**Ames:** Whitehead attempted to think process, but he actually failed. Why did I have such a good relationship with David Hall? What drew him to Chinese philosophy was the process cosmology that is the ground of canonical texts such as the *Zhouyi* and *Daodejing*. He studied the theories of Alfred North Whitehead in his dissertation that became his first book, *Civilization of Experience*, and was disappointed. Whitehead, on the one hand, proposes "process," but on the other hand he still holds on to notions such as eternal objects and the primordial nature of God. Whitehead is ultimately incoherent. It was for this reason that I met Hall at the gates of China.

**Yue:** You said just now that Hall came to China in order to try to go beyond Whitehead's understanding of process. I think a very important feature of Chinese culture is its emphasis on uncertainty and indeterminacy. Daoism especially holds that everything is in the process of formation, from nothingness to birth and returning to nothing. What has Hall learned about such indeterminacy and what kind of role will Chinese culture play in the contemporary world?

**Ames:** Hall believed that in this century Western philosophy is developing in the right direction. But when we talk about the West, we must allow that the West before Darwin is in fact in conflict with the one after him. In the 20th century the Western tradition embarked on a process of internal critique. Hermeneutics, pragmatism, existentialism and other philosophical schools are postmodern, rejecting the basic assumptions of the metaphysical realism that had become our common sense. Hall believed that it is productive process thinking rather than truth and certainty that underlies the human experience, and that Chinese philosophy has been trying to understand this from earliest times.

**Yue:** Are these the ideas of Whitehead?

**Ames:** At very beginning Hall was very interested in the ideas of Whitehead, but it was his later judgment that Whitehead failed. He realized that Whitehead talks of "process" on the one hand, and of the absolute and eternal God on the other hand. It is for this reason that in recent years Whitehead has been hijacked by theologians. Hall came to China to try to understand the notion of process as it is developed in the process cosmology of the *Zhouyi* (*Book of Changes*). It was because we shared the same intuitions in our research that we were able to establish a fruitful collaboration. His training

in Western philosophy at Chicago and Yale was very solid, and I learned a great deal from him. I have been his student as well as his academic partner. On the other hand, David did not know the Chinese language, and he relied upon me to access the Chinese texts. We brought very different skills to our joint efforts, and spent much enjoyable time in China together.

**Yue:** Is the Whitehead's combination of certainty and process also there in Chinese philosophy?

**Ames:** No. Hall believed that Whitehead's philosophy is not successful due to his inability to escape from the quest for "certainty." After the first steps taken by Whitehead, Hall hoped to be able to resource Chinese thought to develop process thinking further. I think he succeeded in doing so.

**Yue:** Did he succeed?

## 6. Kant and *Zhouyi*

**Ames:** I think so. If Kant has served the philosophical world as its standard of rigorous philosophical thinking up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps the *Zhouyi* will set the standard for process thinking as we move further in this direction.

**Yue:** Is it Hall's judgment that the weakness of Whitehead lies in his insistence on permanence?

**Ames:** Yes. The term "eternal object" traces back to Aristotle's concept of the "unmoved mover," namely the Aristotelian teleological concept of God: all possibilities lie in front of us, so we just need to move in that direction. It is also Whitehead's "eternal objects" that occupy the mind of God. The concept of "*hundun*" stands in opposition, holding that "possibility" itself is a process. We cannot use the understanding of our present moment to judge the next because of the existence of "*hundun*," "uncertainty" and "indeterminacy." "Something" and "nothing" are inseparable. We have to rely on indeterminacy as our resource to create new possibilities. "Something" and "nothing" are not ontological categories but aspectual, explanatory categories that merely report on experience from different perspectives. The concept of "aspect" is very important. "Something" and "nothing" are the same phenomenon viewed from different perspectives. Zhuangzi's "this and that" is an illustration of this idea. In fact, there are many other aspectual concepts in Chinese philosophy such as the concepts of "form" and "function" (*tiyong*), "world" and "human" (*tianren*). They are not two separate things, but primarily a relationship. From the beginning all things are irreducibly relational and manifest differently from different perspectives. They are not analytically discrete but constituted by their relationships. For example, "*li*" and "*qi*" are not two things that can be separated, but the formal and vital aspects of any particular experience.

(Zhang Jin asked Prof. Ames a question: You just mentioned the internal critique in the 20th century Western philosophical narrative is exemplified by the philosophy of Nietzsche and his opposition to transcendentalism—that is, equating reality with the abstract. I would like to ask, have you and Professor Hall benefited from this contemporary Western ideological and cultural turn when you embrace the philosophy of "process," including Chinese philosophy?)

**Ames:** Absolutely. I personally think that as far as the two traditions are concerned, we do not want to say the Chinese one is right and the Western one is wrong. What we are proposing is to combine these two traditions. From the Western side, the concepts of law, regulative ideals, objectivity

are also of great importance as aspirational goals. On the other hand, as liberating as it might seem, a Chinese cosmology grounded in “intimate relationships” can also lead to corruption when relationships are abused. The concept of “relationship” centered on the family is certainly a value to be affirmed. For example, “filial piety” in Confucianism is very important, but it can be exclusive, favoring those persons closest to one. The world includes different kinds of people. We need an inclusive attitude and regulative ideals to guide us as a world community. Islam contains more conservative elements while our American secular values are relatively freer, but we need to find common ground on which we can reach consensus—regulative ideals—to create our shared future. Both Western thought and Chinese thought have their own strengths. The strength of the Confucianism tradition itself has been its porousness, absorbing foreign ideas and as a kind of comparative philosophy, with both a persistent identity as well as flexibility and an openness to change and development.

**Yue:** Yes. Difficulties lead to change and change leads to development. Do you have confidence in the prospect and future of diversification?

## 7. What are our Prospects?

**Ames:** I’m optimistic and confident about the future. I always tell young people in my lectures that we live in the best times as well as the worst times. After the accelerating development of more than a century, the human achievements in science and technology are quite magnificent. We can land rockets on comets. We have the science so that no child need go to bed hungry or sick. We could do this. What we are lacking is social intelligence and the political will to accomplish it.

**Yue:** How to get along with people is a big problem.

**Ames:** Today we are at the same time facing many problems such as global warming, water and air pollution, resource shortage, pandemics, and international terrorism. Our wealth is more and more concentrated in the hands of a few people. In 1986, in the United States, 1% of the people were in possession of 8% of the wealth of the society and today one generation later they own 25% of it, more than three times the earlier number. In my generation, one parent worked. My father was a farmer. When I went to college, my father gave me 1000 dollars. At that time men worked and women stayed at home with the children. I worked hard and got a scholarship of 500 dollars, and I worked in the summer to earn 300 dollars. The total of 1800 dollars was enough to pay for both the college tuition and the cost of living. Now if I wanted to send my grandchildren to the same university, it would cost more than 60,000 dollars. Even with both husband and wife going out to work and earning a professional salary, the financial burden for children to go to college is still out of reach. 1% of people have amassed great wealth, and they have no use for so much money. We need to figure out a solution. China’s profile is even worse, with the top 1% owning a full third of the national wealth. It is in this sense that we are in the best times and at the same time, in the worst times. I think that the root of our problems at a personal, corporate, and international level lies in the ideology of individualism—single actors playing to win, and leaving losers in their wake. We have to come to understand that we do better when our neighbor does better. A teacher needs a good student to be a good teacher, and the better the student, the better the teacher. We need to understand that we either win together or all lose.

**Yue:** The education of young people in China is very important and the situation is not that opti-



mistic.

**Ames:** I think it is quite simple. We have a predicament in which if we do not change our values, our intentions, and our practices, the human race will not have a future. If we do not change our course as a world community, our young people will not have a 22<sup>nd</sup> century. The 1% are sitting on the deck in first class on the Titanic. Perhaps it will be necessity itself rather than human wisdom that will bring us to our senses. This is the simple truth.

**Yue:** Then how to change it? With a revolution?

**Ames:** Yes and no. Think about the “green” revolution we have experienced over the last generation. Green was a very new and revolutionary idea and has now become widely accepted. I think that the most important contribution of Chinese philosophy lies in its understanding of the primacy of vital relationality in family and community. Human beings are interdependent, and either win together or lose together. Relationality is the starting point in every issue that we must face. Nothing and no one does anything by themselves.

**Yue:** As a resource and a core value, relationality is a very prominent feature of Chinese philosophy.

**Ames:** Yes, this is the most fundamental idea. I personally think that China’s thinking will have a very important contribution to make to the world. For the past 200 years, China has suffered from imperialism to the extent that it has lost confidence in its own way of thinking. But the new China has turned a corner and entered a new era in which it is celebrating its own traditional values. Chinese philosophy with its focus on relationality can now have an impact that is essential to the future of mankind. To quote from *Daxue* by way of conclusion: We must cultivate the moral self, regulate the family, maintain the state properly and bring peace to the cosmos. It is time to apply the Chinese thought to bring peace to the world.

**Yue:** China’s idea of governing the world is not in the same as that of imperialism. Today in China many people still have the misunderstanding of power, and the wrong hope that China is going to become as powerful as the old empires such as the Roman Empire, British Empire and even Japanese Empire.

**Ames:** But expansionist empire is not the traditional Chinese way. President Xi Jinping emphasized cultural diversity and inclusiveness in his speech at the International Conference of Confucianism. Chinese will not follow the imperialist road.

**Yue:** Without strict control there will be no stability. We can’t risk the collapse we saw with the Soviet Union.

**Ames:** Yes, instability is dangerous.

**Ames:** To take an example, with Africa, what China is doing is to encourage them develop in their own way. By contrast, the United States and Europe helps Africa on the condition that they follow Western benchmarks in their development. At the same time, many of the world’s problems are traceable to these same capitalist benchmarks. American democracy has many problems of its own. The relationship between the police and African-Americans, for example, has become a vicious cycle.

And capitalist values are the root cause—economic disparity.

**Yue:** It has become a historical problem.

**Ames:** The process of the urban development in Hawai'i has also been at the expense of the local population and its culture. Some 50% of prisoners are aboriginal people because they have been made desperate in their own home. With limited opportunities, African-Americans are facing the same challenges as well as in the mainland United States.

**Yue:** The United States also have policies that encourage fertility. Welfare can become a way of life. In order to benefit from welfare, poor African-American families grow bigger and bigger without opportunities for good education. The election of Obama as a president was very good turn.

**Ames:** Obama has had a very good education. The problem African-Americans have had has a long and complicated history. The only way to solve this problem is to give this population the same chance at education as everyone else, and enable them to find change for themselves. It is important for philosophy to promote the social intelligence necessary to make such changes. I personally as a pragmatist have no interest in technical philosophy, but I think philosophy as social wisdom plays a decisive role in making the world a better place.

**Yue:** So for the future, is modernization the only way? What is the core value of modernization? Is modernization of diversity?

**Ames:** The concept of modernity and modernization is also invested in progress. On the one hand, we can say, we are now facing more conflicts. On the other hand, if there are no conflicts, there would be no opportunities for diversification. In fact, we can argue that the greatest opportunities for diversification are where the conflicts are most persistent. Therefore, the conflicts should become the opportunities for diversification. We should study more about Islam. If we understand it we will have a chance to communicate with it. But for now, unfortunately there is only misunderstanding, fear, and the opposition that always comes with ignorance.

**Yue:** But now some European leaders, such as the German chancellor, seem to have alternative concerns, especially after the Charlie's Weekly Incident.

**Ames:** Female leaders might be good for mankind. Women are more inclusive, less exclusive and have a greater commitment to family values. There will be an opportunity if Hillary is elected. But perhaps we should not generalize too quickly. Margaret Thatcher is an exception to this rule for she sacrificed culture in order to make money.

**Yue:** People pursuing modernization together is the way to modernization by diversity too?

**Ames:** Yes. We have very good opportunities, though conflicts are inevitable. We can create a new pluralism through conflicts, and I hope we will remain optimistic.

**Yue:** I hope so too. Pessimism is harmful for mankind.

**Ames:** I visited the botanical garden in Singapore when I delivered my lectures in 2013, and

watched a “timeline” documentary that claimed within 50 years on our current trajectory, the earth will have increased in temperature by 3 degrees, killing half of all living species. Within another 50 years with a 5 degree increase, there will be no life on this planet. The beautiful garden city of Singapore tells us clearly: if we human beings do not change our values, intentions, and practices the world as we know it will disappear. We need to change. And we can only do this together by embracing pluralism and diversification, and by using our differences as a resource for growth and human flourishing.

**Yue Daiyun**, Professor of Comparative Literature and of Modern Chinese Literature in the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at Peking University; Distinguished Professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University; Chair of the Center for Cross-cultural Studies (CCS) at Peking University; Editor-in-Chief of *Dialogue Transcultural*. Email: tyjdy@pku.edu.cn.

**Roger T. Ames**, Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy at University of Hawai'i; Co-Director of Asian Studies Development Program and Director of Center for Chinese Studies at University of Hawai'i; Fulbright Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Peking University and Wuhan University; Editor of *Philosophy East & West*. Email: rtames@hawaii.edu.

**Zheng Che**, Lecturer of English Literature in the Department of English Language and Literature at Beijing International Studies University. Her research interests include American and English Literature and Comparative Literature. Email: zhengche@bisu.edu.cn.

# Where is Comparative Literature Going: An Interview with Professor Susan Bassnett

Zhang Cha and Susan Bassnett

## Abstract:

In this interview, Susan Bassnett describes how her views about comparative literature has undergone changes over time, expounds what the cultural turn was, explains why she is dismissive of influence study, responds to accusations of Eurocentrism, analyses where comparative literature is going, and gives advice to the scholars of comparative literature.

**Keywords:** comparative literature, discipline, open-minded

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**Zhang Cha:** How have your views about comparative literature changed over time?

**Susan Bassnett:** The advice I always give to new doctoral students is that research is an organic process, it grows and develops. Students arrive with certain ideas, but if those ideas have not changed by the end of the first year, then they have not developed sufficiently. By the second year, many students are confused, and this too is a necessary stage for growth, because change is always confusing and can sometimes also be painful. But there can be no growth, no forward movement without change.

I believe that comparison is a natural process, since human beings tend to compare x with y all the time. As soon as one begins to study literature, patterns and connections appear. Having been educated in different countries, being taught different languages, literatures and histories, comparing literatures was inevitable.

I wrote my book, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (1993) because I was interested in how the field had developed in the nineteenth century, from its French origins and why there seemed to be so much controversy about it. When appointed to the University of Warwick as The Lecturer in Comparative Literature in the late 1970s I discovered some absurd regulations, such as a ban on comparing texts written in the same language, regardless of cultural context. So an English and an American author were not deemed fit subjects for comparative literature because comparison had to take place across 2 languages. At the same time, in the USA, comparative literature appeared to mean that anything could be compared with anything—a painting with a poem, an opera with a novel, and this also seemed bizarre.

In that book I traced the 2 strands of comparative literature—the French and the American schools and found them both wanting. I noted how many scholars complained about a “crisis” in the subject, how little was being published of any value in the field and I introduced 2 new ideas: 1) that postcolonialism, which was only just starting to have an impact, should be seen as a part of comparative literature and 2) that the emerging field of Translation Studies was more exciting and potentially

more valuable than a moribund comparative literature. Research in Translation Studies in the 1980s and early 1990s was very much concerned with revising literary histories, a task that comparative literature appeared to have abandoned.

1993 is a long time ago and a lot has changed since then. Translation Studies has become a respectable and very diverse field, comparative literature has become revitalized, thanks to such scholars as Haun Saussy, Theo D'Haen, Cesar Dominguez, Harish Trivedi, Bella Brodzki, Emily Apter and many others around the world including Chinese scholars such as Wang Ning. But in my view it has become revitalized by acknowledging both the impact of translation studies and postcolonialism. Right now the issue for comparative literature is its relationship with the expanding field of World Literature, where the impact of translation studies has also been experienced.

However, I do not believe that comparative literature or translation studies are disciplines in their own right; they are methods of approaching literature. There is no point in wasting time trying to argue that these huge, baggy fields of research are distinct disciplines, since they are very diverse and derive from a combination of other disciplines such as linguistics, literary study, history, politics, film, theatre, etc. I don't see this as a problem: we might well ask whether memory studies, another huge field, is a discipline, and again I would say no, for it too draws upon a whole range of established disciplines in the arts, social sciences and medical sciences. I like the idea of fields of study that cannot be fitted into disciplinary boxes. This is the twenty-first century, not the nineteenth.

**Zhang Cha:** What was the cultural turn?

**Susan Bassnett:** The cultural turn was invented by myself and Andre Lefevere back in the early 1990s. Translation studies was establishing itself in a small way, and we felt that it was important to stress the cultural dimensions of producing and receiving translations. We urged that more attention be paid to cultural factors such as the role of editors, publishers, patrons, censors etc. who play a part in the production of translations, alongside the attention to changing aesthetic norms which had been a major focus of attention in the 1980s, thanks to Gideon Toury's important work. The cultural turn was received enthusiastically and further served to build bridges with post-colonialism, leading on to a postcolonial translation studies pathway and a translation and gender pathway. More recently, our work has been taken forward through what has been described as "the sociological turn" in translation studies. We also broadened the scope of research, suggesting that alongside translations as one of the shaping forces in literary history, other practices such as editing, anthologizing, literary criticism and theory, commentaries, historiography should also be considered as significant.

What the cultural turn did was to consolidate the points raised back in 1978 by Itamar Even-Zohar that the study of literary history must take into account the role played by translations and that we need to think about why it is that cultures translate more or less at different stages in their development.

It is also important to remember that when we first founded translation studies, we were doing so in a climate of great excitement when new trends in the humanities were coming into existence and challenging canonical ideas. Alongside translation studies came cultural studies and media studies, then women and gender studies, then postcolonial studies, all of which were to a certain extent fields of study born out of protest that sought to challenge established hierarchies.

Later translation researchers, notably Lawrence Venuti, Michael Cronin, Edwin Gentzler, Sherry Simon and Anthony Pym to name 5 of the best-known all continued to challenge establishment ideas about translation. Venuti stressed the need for translation to be made more visible, Gentzler raised important questions about power relations, Cronin similarly questioned the unequal power relations between majority and minority languages, Pym raised the question of power and ethics, Simon drew attention to gender bias in translation history and more recently has been developing ideas about the multilingual city. I am proud to note that Venuti, Gentzler, Simon and Cronin were all published in the

series I co-edited with the late Andre Lefevere.

**Zhang Cha:** Why are you dismissive of influence study?

**Susan Bassnett:** My undergraduate dissertation was on the influence of James Joyce on Italo Svevo. The more I read, the more tenuous that influence seemed to be. Instead, what emerged was the influence of Svevo on Joyce, though Joyce denied this. So the conundrum I faced was: how to prove influence, especially when the supposedly influenced writer lies about the relationship he had with the other writer?

What I learned is that writers' statements cannot be trusted, they are expressions of opinion and sometimes of deliberate deception. Influence is improvable; what remains is the perception of the reader who discerns similarities. Instead of wasting time trying to prove the improvable, it is surely better to focus on the role of the reader who effectively "creates" a text with each new reading.

**Zhang Cha:** How do you respond to accusations of Eurocentrism?

**Susan Bassnett:** I wrote *Translation Studies* before the term "Eurocentric" existed. Members of the original group came from Israel (Even-Zohar and Toury), Belgium (Lefevere and Lambert), Slovakia (Popovic) and the Netherlands/US (James Holmes). Holmes had expert knowledge of Indonesian, but otherwise our languages were all European. Of course our focus was on Europe—how could it be otherwise given our knowledge base?

Eurocentrism in the 1980s came to be used as an ideological term to condemn research that did not take sufficiently into account non-European cultures, and so was a key term in early postcolonial thought. However, as postcolonial studies and translation studies expanded and developed, the term began to lose much of its strength. Postcolonial models could not be effectively applied everywhere: Brazilian scholars, for example, were far more interested in postmodernist theory and Brazilian translation studies developed the cannibalistic theory which effectively overrode ideas about Eurocentrism. Nor could postcolonialism be very useful for former Eastern European cultures, who were living through post-communism, and it has not seemed to be very useful for Chinese, Korean or Japanese scholarship too which are not cultures living through a postcolonial phase.

In the book I co-edited with the Indian scholar, Harish Trivedi, *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (1999) we included essays by scholars from around the world and it became apparent that there were major differences of perspective. This is not to say, of course, that postcolonialism is not an extremely valuable field of study, only to say that there have been shifts of emphasis over the last 25 years. Today, Trauma studies is a big area, and a lot of work deals with post-Holocaust memory in Europe. Moreover, as I firmly believe that all socio-political events have major epistemological consequences, it has become essential today that European scholars address European issues such as the impact of mass migration, which has led to the emergence of some fascinating literature, written by first or second generation migrants with subsequent linguistic implications. Moreover, in Europe there is a rise of nationalism which appears to contradict trends towards globalization. In the UK, for example, we have seen since 1999 the establishment of a Scottish Parliament and a referendum for independence, and the establishment of an Assembly for Wales. For comparative literature scholars, the point to note here is the rise of bilingual education in both those countries, and its concomitant impact on literature. The same can be said of Northern Ireland, where although there is no bilingual policy, as in Wales and Scotland, a lot of writers work in both English and Irish.

So although I remain committed to the ideals and ethics of postcolonial thought, I am also aware that different areas around the world need also to look more deeply into their own local contexts.

**Zhang Cha:** Where is comparative literature going?

**Susan Bassnett:** In the light of the above, I believe that comparative literature is gaining importance because it offers a means of building bridges between cultures. It also offers the opportunity for us all to engage with different points of view. For example, lecturing recently on Coetzee, Buzzati and Cavafy, I used an essay by Wang Jinghui in a volume edited by Kailash Baral and published in Delhi in 2008 that shed fascinating insight into the reception of Coetzee in China. I had simply not been aware of many of the issues that Wang Jihui discusses.

Comparative literature in India, aided by translation studies methods is increasingly concerned with pan-India, that is with discussing the inter-relationship between the many Indian languages and literatures of the sub-continent. This marks a step change from the endless debates about the relationship between India and the West, which is still ongoing but is no longer dominant. Similarly in Europe, while due consideration must be given to the legacy of colonialism, it is important to engage with the massive changes that the continent is undergoing, physically and culturally.

I note, for example, with fascination, that recent archaeological discoveries in the North of Scotland are changing our knowledge of the early movement of peoples across Europe in the Neolithic period, challenging all our established assumptions.

With regard to Chinese comparative literature surely the same is applicable? On the one hand, the relationship between China and the West and between China and her neighbors is a rich area for further investigation, but one would hope that Chinese comparative literature is also engaging with the multiple languages and traditions within China too.

In terms of the debates around aphasia, I agree that there is a need for China to develop her own literary theories, and am also mindful of the work by the Indian scholar Ganesh Devy who has talked about amnesia in the Indian context, a double amnesia—first the forgetting of Indian traditions with the coming of the British, then an attempt to try and forget the Anglo-Indian era. Obviously China has had an extraordinary series of historical changes and one need only think about the importance of socialist realism, followed by the cultural revolution, followed by the opening up to Western influences — and all in a barely 60 / 70 years. But China has a rich history of literary theory stretching back to the days when we in the West were little more than barbarians, and China also, as I understand it, is not so obsessed with positivism as we have been since the 18th century.

And this is where we have to turn to the developing area known as World Literature, which has been transformed by theorists such as Pascale Casanova who offers a very French perspective on the field, Franco Moretti who focuses more on prose than on poetry and theatre and David Damrosch. As I see it, what is happening today in World Literature, is an extension of what we were proposing with the invention of translation studies: to explore how texts move across cultures, to understand some of the complex aesthetic and socio-political implications of that movement, to see how textual practice differs according to different norms and conventions at different times.

In short, a combination of close reading of texts within contexts and mindful of linguistic and cultural constraints and differences, also taking into account movement through time.

Literary study of any kind, in my view, must involve investigating how a text works, almost like a piece of machinery and, crucially, investigating the historical conditions in which a text was composed and equally crucially, investigating the reception of a text, hence the role of the reader.

**Zhang Cha:** As a world-famous scholar, what advice would you like to give to scholars of comparative literature?

**Susan Bassnett:** Never stop reading as widely as possible, but come to terms with the fact that as a comparative literature scholar you are doomed always feel too ignorant. I have come to terms with feeling perpetually ignorant, because there is so much in the world that I have never read and cannot read.

Be open-minded about texts. If you can understand the context in which a text was written, this

will enable you to come to terms with aspects of a text that you may find unpleasant or even wrong-headed.

But just because you do not like something in a text does not mean that you should reject it. I am thinking here of the debates in the US about a work like *Huckleberry Finn*, which contains language that today we view as racist and unacceptable. Yet Mark Twain deliberately engages readers with distasteful attitudes so that we will think more deeply about the ambiguities of his protagonist and the world from which Huck derives.

Do not only read "great" works, read everything you can: children's books, popular romances, detective fiction, travel books ..... The resurgence of interest in the West in Anglo-Saxon and the Vikings is linked to computer games and TV series such as *Game of Thrones*. Icelandic sagas appear in Japanese manga. Often popular culture touches the heart of what is happening in a society before intellectuals can grasp what is going on.

My project on global news translation opened up vistas of what is happening across the world in terms of the power of electronic media. Look at blogs, look at internet networking sites.

Above all, be fearless. No great art ever came from people who were timid. Change does not come from the centre, it comes from the margins. Revolutions, social and artistic do not come from within the establishment.

Finally, you have been generous enough to describe me as "a world-famous scholar". I do not see myself in that way. I see myself as someone who has had the great privilege of being able to work with brilliant young people and to learn from them, just as I have also learned from my 4 children and their friends, and now also from my grandchildren. That my work is useful around the world gives great satisfaction and pride, but what I have always sought to do is to explore patterns across literatures and cultures with no sense of wanting to pursue a predetermined path.

I conclude with two translated quotes from Confucius, and oh, how I wish I could read the Chinese!

1) A youth is to be regarded with respect / How do we know that his future will not be equal to our present?

2) To study and not think is a waste. To think and not study is dangerous.

**Zhang Cha**, Doctoral student majoring in Comparative Literature and World Literature, School of Literature and Journalism, Sichuan University. Professor of English Literature, School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan Normal University. Direction of research: English and American literature; comparative literature. Email: zhangchasc@163.com

**Susan Bassnett**, Professor of Comparative Literature, Special Advisor in Translation Studies, School of Modern Languages, The University of Warwick and Professor of Comparative Literature, School of Modern Languages, University of Glasgow, Scotland. She has published over 20 books, including monographs, collections, and translations.



## Introducing Comparative literature: New Trends and Applications.

César Domínguez, Haun Saussy and Darío Villanueva (eds):  
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Cao Shunqing

As one of the latest books on Comparative literature, *Introducing Comparative Literature: New Trends and Applications* offers readers a comprehensive view of this discipline both synchronically and diachronically. It addresses the most recently discussed topics of comparative literature, while not neglecting the historical side, that is, the crisis that has confronted this discipline over the years. Covering no more than two hundred pages, the book discusses the most relevant aspects of comparative literature by dividing itself into nine chapters. Additionally, List of Figures and Tables, Preface, Acknowledgement at the beginning of the book and Glossary, Further Reading, Bibliography and Index at the end of the book are also included. The main body of the book is the preface and the nine chapters, presenting to the readers the exciting opportunities and the demanding challenges that comparative literature is facing in current times and also in years to come.

The Preface of the book first reviews the historical changes in definition of the term comparative literature by Van Tieghem, Rene Wellek and H.H. Remak, etc. and also the incapability of the definitions in solving the crisis of the discipline, either in its object or research method. For instance, Susan Bassnett asserted the death of the discipline in the early 1990s from the perspective of the method and suggested the inclusion of comparative literature into translation studies. The authors of the book deny such a death by proposing three factors underlying the excitement and promising future of this discipline, namely, "the common reader's experience, enthusiasm about human diversity, and the allure of risk and crisis" (Domínguez xiv), giving us new insight into the basis of existence for this discipline. A brief introduction of the main content of the book is also included at the end of the Preface.

The following nine chapters could be grouped into three parts in accordance with their content. The first part is Chapter One. In this chapter, the author gives an overall introduction of the historical development of the discipline from the very origin to the current times, surveying issues including the importance of comparative literature in the study of literature, the changes in the definition of the term, the incapability in fulfilling the utopian demands of this discipline, etc. A key point discussed here is the crisis that the discipline has encountered, either historical crisis during the two world wars, the theoretical one referring to the positivism of the discipline by Wellek, or the postmodern crisis as proposed by Bassnett, Spivak, and Claudio Guillen. In response, the “new paradigm” in research in the face of such a crisis from Fokkema to Stephen Tötösy de Zepetnek at the turn of the new century is discussed at the end of this chapter.

Chapter Two to Chapter Nine constitute the second part of the whole book. It surveys the seven aspects in research of comparative literature in the current times. Chapter Two, “Comparative Literature as Interliterary Theory” investigates the relevance of interliterary theory to comparative literature. It addresses the application of this theory in comparative literature, first as a critique of common-sense notions such as the misleading concept of the history of comparative literature being chronologically steeped in the French and American school and the conception of the influence in influence studies. Also the paths of the interliterary theory offer a new mode of literary relation “consisting of genetic contact or typological affinities” (Domínguez 26). Lastly, the explanation of world literature and the adoption of world literature as the ultimate research object are highly relevant to the research in comparative literature.

Chapter Three discusses the relations between decolonial studies and comparative literature and the inspiration drawn from the former to the latter while differentiating the terms post/colonialism and de/coloniality. Proceeding from the similarities between comparative philosophy and comparative literature, it argues for the requirement of “diatopical hermeneutics” in research of comparative literature in colonial conditions and also briefly mentions the contributions by Lu Xing and Cao Shunqing to an imperative comparative literature.

Chapter Four, “World Literature As A Comparative Practice” traces the historical origin of the term by Goethe, Marx and Brandes and its latest development in the west as exemplified by the new explanation and definition of world literature by David Damrosch.

Chapter Five, “Comparing Themes and Images” deals with traditional issues in this discipline, that is, of theme and image in comparative literature. It analyzes Thomas Hardy’s novel *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* to show the effect of contextualized meaning in the misunderstanding of a theme. It also addresses the phenomenon of variation in constructing the national images by way of exploring images of certain countries, thus pointing out the unreliability of such national images being the real indicator of the images of the countries concerned. Based upon this, the author of the book here further explains the necessity of advocating a move from discovering similarities to investigating the differences and the reasons underlying such differences. Lastly, thematization is discussed so as to be used as a defense of thematics as being viewed as simple and superficial.

Chapter Six, “Comparative Literature and Translation” places the issue of translation at the core of discussion, which has increasingly attracted the attention of scholars worldwide in comparative lit-

erature and translation studies. It elaborates the role of the translator and that of translation in studies on world literature and comparative literature as starting from the following aspects. Firstly, the (in)visibility of translation by pondering over the strategy of “foreignizing” and “nativizing” in translation proposed by Lawrence Venuti, the former of which aims at moving the reader to the original author while the latter proceeds in the opposite direction. Second, transduction by discussing the “literary polysystem” by Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury and a translator’s role in filling up indeterminacies of a text. And third, the problem of untranslatability, which refers more to the difficulties in representing the original outer forms of a work in the target culture than carrying across the meanings.

Chapter Seven, “Comparative Literary History” traces itself back to the understanding and explanation of the term by Paul Van Tieghem, Claudio Cuillén and Franca Sinopoli according to its content and organization. It explores the relations between comparative history and comparative literary history and the lessons drawn from the former to the latter, thus considering the possibility of a comparative literary history by way of analyzing five papers published in this regard. The last section of this chapter is devoted to the latest achievements made by AILC and ICLA Committees. But comparative literary history is not free from its challenges, one significant aspect being the abandoning of “the presupposed autarky of literatures in European languages” (Domínguez 103).

Chapter Eight, “Interartistic Comparison” handles comparison between or among the artistic objects other than literature, the validity of which lies in either literature or other forms of art being certain kinds of “semiotics” and having artistic effects on the feelings of human beings. It, in particular, surveys the comparison between literature and music as exemplified by Gioseffo Zarlino’s *Institutioni harmoniche* and the three complementary perspectives thereof, and between literature and cinema in the case of adaptations of Shakespeare’s works in films.

Chapter Nine, “The Return of Literatures” envisages the future of comparative literature in a new historical and social environment and the impact of technological development on literature in the new era. To put it more concretely, the effect of the medium’s evolution such as that of the printing press illustrated by McLuhan in his *Gutenberg Galaxy* and the links between TV and cultural form. It also addresses the possibility of electronic writing replacing printing culture as seen from the three main genres of cyberdrama, hypertextual narration and cyberpoetry. The technological development has a great bearing on the making of canons in the new times and the duality of time in literature lies at the center of people’s rejection or embracing of such new development in medium, which calls for new pedagogical methods in education and a new kind of cosmopolitan ethics, two key elements to the development of comparative literature.

A brief review of the content in this book brings to the front a rather prominent feature of this book, which could be termed as a strong sense of “diversity” and “dialogue” from the following aspects. Firstly, it is at the level of the identity of the authors. It is co-edited by three scholars in this field, two (César Domínguez and Darío Villanueva) from Europe and one (Haun Saussy) from the U.S.A., a rare case in the former handbook on comparative literature. Though there could be inconsistencies in the case of co-editing a book, the benefit counts more in this case, bringing together different inspiring thoughts on this discipline and triggering a dialogue between the two important places for comparative literature: Europe and U.S.A. As is known to all, the French school broke through the boundary of nation in comparative literature featuring insistence on the empirical and positivistic approach, and the American school turned its focus on the literariness and advocated for interdisciplinary dimension in research, both of which have helped a lot in the theoretical development of this discipline and also in its overcoming of the historical crisis. But comparative literature until now is still beset with problems, both theoretically and practically, for instance, the comparison of heterogeneity rather than in similarities: “The comparison is to discover the differences out of similarities and the similarities out of the differences of various literatures”(Cao xxi). It is especially true if seen from a trans-civilizational perspective, for instance, comparison of literatures between the east and west, and scholars from the

east have a rather keen awareness of comparison in differences. Thus, co-editing between the European and American scholars is beneficial in promoting exchange and mutual understanding, and it would be even better and consolidating to bring in the scholars from the east, such as Japan, China, or India, etc., to achieve a real dialogue in the worldwide scale, though the three authors here do mention theories and the latest development in these regions of the world when needed in various degrees.

Such "diversity" is also manifested at the level of its content. It not only addresses conventional issues such as the origin, the definition, the issue of translation, the comparing of themes and images in comparative literature, but also touches upon aspects of comparative literature under the influence of literary theory (such as the decolonial studies) over the past several decades and the scientific and technological development (the Internet) in the new circumstances, the latter part of which is elaborated in the last chapter of the book. The authors here have a keen sense of the transformation of media in bringing about the shift in the paradigm of comparative literature and its existence in a new world, opportunities as well as challenges in a time-space compressed globalized world which gives rise to the unprecedented high frequency and prosperity of cross-cultural communication. Every time the occurrence of the transformation in medium, either from orality to manuscript, from writing to printing, or from printing to cyber writing, triggers people's anxiety and creates new forms of literature, and leads to the adoption of new methodologies in comparative literature. Thus, it is rather insightful to include a discussion of medium of literature in exploring the future orientation of comparative literature, the material constituting the research object and also building up the environment of comparison: "As a privileged locus for cross-cultural reflection, comparative literature should analyze the material possibilities of cultural expression, both phenomenal and discursive, in their different epistemological, economic, and political contexts. This wider focus involves studying not only business and bookmaking but also the cultural place and function of reading and writing and the physical properties of newer communicative media" (Domínguez 129-130).

The last aspect refers to "diversity" at the level of its research perspectives, not only in temporal terms as demonstrated by the adoption of the latest theoretical progress in other fields of literature, but also in the sense of spatial terms by paying attention to achievement made in the parts of the world other than in the Europe and U.S.A. Thus, the accelerating temporal and spatial changes have not eradicated the significance of differences among different cultures. Instead, with much easier access to the Internet, people from many parts of the world are increasingly confronted with, sensitive to and sometimes interested in cultures and literatures of "the other." Literature from the peripheral regions of the world before, such as that of China, other than that of the western countries, begins to show its presence in the arena of world literature by way of translation. So it is the same case with the research focus of world literature by scholars both at home and abroad. This book is no exception against such a backdrop. A good example in this regard is the devotion of Chapter Two to the interliterary theory by Đurišin. Additionally, the Chinese novel *The Story of the Stone* is used in investigation of the comparison about the links of things to their corresponding contexts underlying the meanings and the names of Wang Wei and Su Dongpo are mentioned in discussion of the links between painting and literature. These are rather encouraging aspects of the research since it displays a sense of cross-cultural interpretation, experimenting with use of the literary theory from one culture to explain literature from another one, thus promoting the dialogue between the two cultures, identifying the deficiencies of the theory involved and discovering new meanings generated in this process. At the same time it helps facilitate the introducing of literary works other than the western ones and theoretical endeavors made by scholars in this field to the rest of the world.

Though a new breakthrough in including these theories and works in relevant discussions has occurred, still some room is left for further improvement, that is, to integrate the theory from the peripheral regions into concrete analysis in a more natural way. For instance, in discussion of constructing

national images by “the other,” the unreliability of such images in uncovering the real images of the countries concerned is indicated without further explaining the underlying causes for such unreliability, which could be well justified if seen through the variation theory of comparative literature. The variation theory takes difference as the basis of comparability and sets great store by exploring comparison against a trans-civilizational context and the heterogeneity of cultures: “The paradigm of variation theory offers a new changing and dynamic mode for the study of heterogeneity. It is different from Francois Jullien’s detour since though ‘detour’ constructs a dynamic path that ranges between itself and the other, the path in essence is static for it always follows the pattern of ‘itself—the other—itself’, which could reduce ‘the other’ to a static object of reference. Orientalism can be seen as a product of such a ‘detour’ ” (Zhang 173). It is also enlightening in explaining the variation of images of “the other.” As a branch of influence studies by the French school, imagologie aims to research the image of a foreign land in a literary work. But in practice, the difficulties encountered in research could not be adequately solved by the paradigm of influence studies. Thus, scholars are hesitant in including it within influence studies: “The imagologie of comparative literature surveys the image of the other, that is, the research in the image of a foreign country in a literary work. Thus, it is no longer confined to the scope of national literature, but entails research in a cross-lingual or even interdisciplinary level on the basis of positivist exploration,”(Yang 235) thus raising the issue of the incapability of methods in influence studies in explaining the variation of images, especially in a cross-cultural context. A good way to work out the situation could be the inclusion of imagologie within variation theory. The constructing of an alien image is subject to uncertain elements, be it historical, social, cultural or psychological, thus varied from the real image of the other: “If we survey the alien image from the perspective of variation theory, focusing on the variation of the image, the variation element of the alien image could be identified whether in social collective imagination or cliché. Therefore, variation theory could help solve the problem of the disciplinary affiliation of imagologie, opening up a new vista of research in this regard” (Cao 121).

On the whole, the book presents a quality and comprehensive view of the past and the status quo of comparative literature in such a limited space. It explores the relevant issues of comparative literature with a broad perspective while addressing certain important topics in detail. It is condensed in forms and simple in terms yet profound in exploration. Its rich content, systemized framework, and medium size of the book make it a good and competitive choice for students in this major and also for those cherishing an interest in this discipline.

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