

**Zhang Zhejun. *The Conception of the Third Type of Comparative Literature: Potentialities of Literary Archaeology*. Beijing: Peking University Press. 2016. ISBN 9787301265734. 402 pp.**

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In 2016, Professor Zhang Zhejun (張哲俊) published his seminal work on theory of Comparative Literature, *The Conception of the Third Type of Comparative Literature: Potentialities of Literary Archaeology*, which was published by Peking University Press. Whereas the book's earlier companion volume, *The Image of Willow: Material Interchange and Sino-Japanese Ancient Literature*, is devoted to examining the material exchange and literary communication case by case, Zhang's latest work further builds a general theory of comparative literature which is grounded on Eastern Asian classical poetics. Since the third relationship of comparative literature which the book brings up is rooted in the specific research background and impressive accumulation of preceding findings, its theoretical pattern and methodological significance both merit more attention and closer analysis.

### **1. Proposing the Third Type of Comparative Literature**

Zhang Zhejun who graduated from Beijing University with a degree in Comparative Literature and World Literature, well-trained in Chinese, Japanese and Korean, has always been dedicated to East-Asian comparative literature studies. Exhibiting Zhang's hard work for many years, *The Image of Willow* focuses upon the image of "Yangliu" (楊柳) in Chinese and Japanese literature to restore the factual existence of "Yangliu" and the following effect on the expression of meaning in the context of Sino-Japan literary communication. The idea of the third type of comparative literature had already existed in the book. A special literary phenomenon was actually discovered when Zhang was engaged in empirical studies: the similarities are as striking as the dissimilarities between Chinese and

Japanese specific literary works; the positivistic relations seem as arguable as the aesthetic analogies seem defensible. The fact that it was the historical space or the life-world rather than the textual level in which the literary connections established themselves inspired Zhang to originate the term, the third relationship of comparative literature, quite distinct from the first relationship espoused by the French school in positivistic studies and the second relationship intended by the American school in parallel studies, which indicates the literary relationship mediated by the material exchange within the life-world consisting of different countries.

However, it is worth noting that the third relationship is quite different from the curves, which are employed to delineate multiple links between the releasers and the receivers in the studies of influence. “Authentic Comparative Literature usually works at the binary relationship between any two items only,”<sup>1</sup> declared Paul Van Tieghem, “and the item here can be a volume or an author or a group of each of them: the relationship thereof concerns the substance and content of the artistic works.” Also, Marius-François Guyard reckoned that comparatists “keep their eyes on mutual infiltration of genres, ideas, books and sentiments betwixt two or more types of literature.” Obviously, the study of influence, which the French School undertakes, concentrates on the causal chains of writers and their works. The third relationship, meanwhile, refers to the life-world as medium for connections: for Sino-Japan comparative literature, whilst the evidence for literary influence cannot always be corroborated, the similarities between literary texts can just stem from the affinities between the material circumstances which were indebted to the historical communication between China and Japan.

*The Conception of the Third Type of Comparative Literature* develops and expounds the theoretical system of the third type of Comparative Literature on the basis of Zhang’s previous studies on the image of “Yangliu” in Chinese and Japanese classical literature. Based on East Asian traditional poetics in which the poetry was deemed as historical records, Zhang’s theory distances itself from the discourse of western literary theories and studies, utilizing the rich indigenous theoretical heritage to interpret the classical literary phenomena of East Asia. In this way, Zhang accelerates the modernization of classical oriental poetics and sets up an academic discourse system with Chinese characteristics.

The debate over the relationship between literature and history in Chinese traditional poetics, especially the compelling argument which Zhang Xuecheng

1 Tieghem, Paul Van. *On Comparative Literature* 比較文學論(Bijiao wenxue lun). Translated by Dai Wangshu 戴望舒. Changchun: Jinlin Publishing Group. 2009,138.

(章學誠) put forward, “the six classics were all history” (六經皆史), contributes significantly to the discursive formation of the third type of comparative literature. The differentiation between literature and history, which the modern professional academy takes for granted, may be traced back to Aristotle. Aristotle believed that the poet’s function is to describe, “what is possible as being probable or necessary,” whereas a historian describes “the thing that has happened,” which suggests that imagination and fictionality are essential to the poet’s craft. Nevertheless, the poetics derived from the western classical literature may be challenged by the actual situation of Chinese classical poetry. When Zhang Xuecheng declared that “the six classics were all history,” he meant that *The Book of Songs* (詩經) could be viewed as history as well as poetry. In other words, the ancient Chinese perceived their earliest collection of poems as historical documents as well as literary texts, for in their minds history and literature were one and the same. While, however, it is uncomplicated to explain the relationship between *The Book of Songs* and history in light of Zhang Xuecheng’s framework, there are still several academic issues pending further discussion: How can one defend the identity between classical poetry and history? Was it a common phenomenon? How widespread was the phenomenon?

Chapter 2 of *The Conception of the Third Type of Comparative Literature* deals with the basic pattern of Chinese classical poetics, “poetry as history.” The historization of poetry, as the significant innovative approach of Zhang Zhejun, is the crucial factor in the construction of the third type of comparative literature. As early as ten years ago, Zhang raised the proposition, “journalization as historization,” which met with general approval in classical Chinese academic circles. In the mode of “poetry as history,” the principle of authenticity was an integral part of the writing criterion for the documentation of classical poetry, not to mention the time, space and causes of the events as well as the participants chronicled in the titles, prefaces, postscripts and texts. In fact, since the journal was barely deemed a prevailing genre by the literati of ancient China, poetry partly became the alternative genre to perform the journalizing function, which is not only the rationale behind the historization of poetry, but also the grounds for restoring history or the life-world via poetry. It is therefore well-founded to conclude that the close correspondence between literature and history was a general phenomenon in ancient China, revealing the yawning gap between the occident and the orient along with the conceptual change from ancient to present China. In ancient East Asia, historical writing didn’t exclude the use of rhyme at all; on the contrary, poetry was acknowledged as historical records “filling in blanks of history” (補史闕), reflected



communication is represented and the seemingly separate life-worlds of different countries make up a community of life-worlds together is there the third relationship of comparative literature. Finally, it is no surprise that great significance is attached to the study of the intermediate archaeological stratum in view of the third type of comparative literature since the historical communication between life-worlds by which the literary works of divergent countries were linked is of vital importance.

In his book, Zhang Zhejun diagrams three levels from the intermediate archaeological stratum. The first one is the level of material life, which consists of physical matter and the basic facts of life. In this respect, the transnational identical or similar phenomena resulted from extensive communication: Although the writings of poets from different countries seemed to be parallel cases, there were nevertheless indirect relations between them as physical matter and the basic facts of life were shaped under the influence of comprehensive international exchange. Accordingly, to address the issues in the level of material life, one must tackle the following questions: How did the material exchange happen? How did the material exchange affect literary writing? Which literary image reflected it? How was the literary imagination of physical matter generated? For example, “Song of the Tower of the Prince of Yue” (越王樓歌) by Du Fu (杜甫), “Visiting Chourakuji Temple” (游長樂寺) by Minamoto no Tsunenobu (みなもと の つねのぶ), “Staying Home” (不出門) by Sugawara no Michizane (すがわら の みちざね) and “A Five-character Companion Piece on Springtime” (五言奉和春日作一首) by Ono no Minemori (お の の みねもり) without exception represented “tiles” and hence similar scenery which was the symbol of status. However, the relationship between Du Fu and his Japanese counterparts was not a parallel one despite the impracticality of corroborating any direct literary exchange between them. The fact was, more importantly, that Chinese and Japanese poets witnessed similar physical matter with comparable social significance and therefore composed verses sharing resembling images. In brief, it was the intermediate level of material life that connected Chinese and Japanese poetry.

The second level of the intermediate archaeological stratum is the level of ideas and knowledge. That is to say, universal ideas and common knowledge also constitute the intermedia of the third relationship of comparative literature: If an idea, or a kind of knowledge, traveling abroad, becomes a sort of ubiquitous opinion in daily life, then the opinion as the intermedium is as reliable as the aforementioned physical matter. For example, many Buddhist ideas and Confucian concepts widely disseminated in East Asia had permeated the Chinese and Japanese literary works and facilitated the affinities between the works lacking in

direct literary communication. Nonetheless, the first and the second levels can be transformed to each other, so there is no dichotomy between them. In ancient Japan, willows were always planted at the front entrances of various buildings, which was not only a basic fact of life but also public knowledge, for the willows which were connected to the worship of life in ancient East Asia would bless the family with health and prosperity. In other words, the reason why Chinese and Japanese poets could convey similar meanings by willow imagery was due to the willow's commonness both in a material and epistemological sense. However, it was the second level in which the exchange of material culture such as the significance, imagery, imagination and aesthetics of physical matter occurred.

Lastly, there is the level of literary works that refers to the specific literary works with particular spatial extension and temporal duration, which share similar or identical factors or depict analogous material phenomena. From the point of view of the third type of comparative literature, it doesn't matter whether direct literary exchange existed, for the noteworthy interaction actually took place between the works and two other levels, which consist of physical matter and ideas. Then it is preferable here to restore the life-world, i. e. the first and the second levels, from the literary works, based on which the intermedia and the third relationship can be further explored. Thus, the three levels of archaeological stratum keep a kind of vertical relation: At the top of the stratum is the third level of literary works, with the first and the second levels found below. The literary works whose contents must be checked against historical reality are definitely the most important part among the three levels for the restoration of the life-world.

While the traditional research of comparative literature on direct literary communication has always been carried out in two dimensions, the communication of materials, ideas and knowledge, which is supposed to be the third relationship, should be explored in three dimensions. As previously mentioned, the material exchange and information exchange are always interlocked with each other: If the material exchange can be authenticated in the course of study, probably so is the information exchange, and vice versa. The message that the material takes along would change in the process of communication, and Zhang coined the term, "consistent communication" (同向交流), to refer to the variation whose basic logic hardly ever deviates from the original sense. Interestingly enough, Zhang also created the term, "reverse communication" (逆向交流), to indicate the situation when the signifier moves across the national boundary with the revolutionary mutation of the signified and the connotation. "Yangliu," for instance, initially supposed to be the divine tree, became the symbol of goblins and ghosts in Edo



literature in Japan. The fundamental change actually occurred in the life-world. The custom of planting “Yangliu” in the cemeteries originated in China and was spread to Japan later, but the very same “Yangliu” which signified willows in the context of the Chinese cemeteries denoted the white poplars instead in the Japanese burial sites. So, since the willows and the white poplars shared the same term and the cemeteries were regarded as haunted space, it was no wonder that the willows lost the function of exorcism and were converted into the symbol of ghosts in the Edo era. The simple comparison between Chinese and Japanese texts, confined to the traditional framework of the French and American schools, easily leads to the misjudgment that there was a typical parallel relationship without any concrete contact as both the physical matter and meaning were different. Conversely, if the intermediate life-world could be taken into consideration, it would be much easier to observe the indirect contacts on the level of material life, which gave rise to the radical textual mutation.

### **3. Literary Archaeology: An Approach of the Third Type of Comparative Literature**

Distinct from the recently popular model for literary studies as being centered on ideological themes and artistic characteristics, the third type of comparative literature attaches great importance to the study of material objects, which has been neglected for a long time. Specifically, Zhang’s distinctive study, as his case studies such as *The Image of Willow* show, in consideration of the objectivity of the object of the study, is fully different from the traditional studies of images and motifs. As a result, Zhang has developed a methodological system, literary archaeology (文學考古學), to meet the special requirements of the third type of comparative literature. Literary archaeology, which is an unprecedentedly new academic term, showing the influence of the methodologies of archaeologists and historians, intends to restore historical and life facts by examining the representations of materials in literary texts. In other words, Zhang means to delineate the lost quotidian facts in the historical space and further reinterpret literary works on the basis of historical reality and then carry out the research on international literary relationships as the aim of his study. Taking objectivity and scientific empiricism of his positivistic study seriously, Zhang has renounced the prevailing literary criticism, which in his opinion could be regarded as a sort of self-justification, and for many years, Zhang has always been working towards the establishment of the verifiability and repeatability of literary research.

In some sense, literary archaeology is primarily an interdisciplinary approach

reliant upon the natural affinity between literature, archaeology and history. And again, the theoretical foundation of literary archaeology is based on the tradition of East Asian classical poetics, “poetry as history,” for if the essence of literary works is fictionality instead of authenticity, which means historical reality has not been incorporated into the texts and the foregoing restoration has no grounding, so literary archaeology as a method of literary study is doubtless out of the question. When Zhang gives priority to the historical study of which Zhang makes literary study a special component, the comprehensive model of former research is certainly needed to be replicated in the latter field. So, literary archaeology, as an attempt at comprehensiveness, is not a cheap collage of literature and archaeology. On the contrary, it is all-inclusive research on literary occurrence and development within the historical framework, in which the relationship between literature and other academic sectors can be viewed from the standpoints of divergent disciplines.

Literary archaeology as a methodology for the third type of comparative literature, to cut a long story short, aims to refix the material facts and life-worlds in the course of history by re-examining the poetry and prose from different countries. Then, Zhang provides a pragmatic approach to the delineation of the third relationship in history in his book. That is, to restore the life-worlds from different national literature, one must start from the individual fact within the spatial-temporal continuum, which is the point of departure to restore the general material fact across time and space and demarcate the border of it. For only when the study is promoted to the universal level can one prove the existence of a community of life-worlds and then represent meticulously the communication process in which the intermediate archaeological stratum came into view. Clearly, the isolated occurrence and accidental being can hardly lead to the substantiation of any communities. Moreover, since the concrete facts are always dispersed, the researcher needs to hunt for the “fragments” in different countries and revitalize them in order to conduct the comparative study in which the specific circumstance of communication within the community of life-worlds can be exhibited. For example, the scenery of a Buddhist temple with pine trees had frequently found its way into the classical poetry of China and Japan, and it is especially notable that the image of pine trees at the entrance of Chourakuji temple (ちょうらくじ) in Kyoto constantly recurred in the Chinese poems in the Heian period. For the practice of literary archaeology, the first step is to collect the Heian writings concerning pine trees at the doorway (門松) of Chourakuji temple, which is aimed at the restoration of the individual fact within the spatial-temporal continuum. And the following research can be classified into two aspects: On the one hand, the researcher should



learn the circumstances of pine trees in front of the other Buddhist temples in the other periods of Japan and assess the extent to which the planting of pine trees in front of the temples had become normal, which is the systematic restoration of the general case of the pine trees featured in the Japanese context; on the other hand, the historical situation, appearance and lineage of pine trees at the doorways of Chinese Buddhist Temples should also be explored for the bilateral comparison. Lastly, since the pine trees, as a sort of universal fact, existed in the life-worlds of so many Chinese and Japanese ancient poets and the relevant historical communication could be dated to the Tang Dynasty, the third relationship between the pine trees in front of the Chinese and Japanese Buddhist temples can eventually be confirmed—there was no direct exchange between the literary texts depicting the temples with pine trees, but the indirect communication between life-worlds in the historical level truly contributed to the faithful representations of the pine trees by the Chinese and Japanese poets.

As a whole, *The Conception of the Third Type of Comparative Literature* exhibits a Chinese comparatist's intellectual endeavor to construct a discourse system of comparative literature, which is based on native theoretical resources and linked with the tradition of East Asian poetics. The third type of comparative literature, as a new academic paradigm, manifests the existence of the third relationship which is beyond the field of view of influence and parallel studies, for the kernel of the third relationship is the communication between life-worlds which requires reconstruction in the light of literary representations and other documentation. Thus, literary archaeology, which Zhang has initiated as another theoretical innovation in his book, deserves further attention and debate in academia for its serious reflection and innovation of comparative literature and general literary criticism.

(Translated by Jiang Haitao)

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