

# COMPARATIVE LITERATURE: EAST

WEST  
11

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比较文学：东方与西方

Department of Comparative Literature  
Institute of Comparative Literature  
Sichuan University , China



四川大学出版社  
Sichuan University Press

*Comparative Literature: East & West* is a peer refereed journal. .

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Spring / Summer 2009, Volume 11, Number 1

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特邀编辑:刘 颖  
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责任校对:赵 文  
封面设计:原谋工作室  
责任印制:李 平

### 图书在版编目(CIP)数据

比较文学:东方与西方. 11: 英文 / 曹顺庆主编. —成都: 四川大学出版社, 2009. 6

ISBN 978-7-5614-4433-7

I. 比… II. 曹… III. 比较文化—文集—英文 IV. I0-03

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2009) 第 098875 号

### 书名 比较文学: 东方与西方 (11)

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主 编	曹顺庆
出 版	四川大学出版社
地 址	成都市一环路南一段 24 号 (610065)
发 行	四川大学出版社
书 号	ISBN 978-7-5614-4433-7
印 刷	成都蜀通印务有限责任公司
成品尺寸	165 mm×240 mm
印 张	10
字 数	189 千字
版 次	2009 年 6 月第 1 版
印 次	2009 年 6 月第 1 次印刷
印 数	0 001~1 050 册
定 价	68.00 元

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85408023 邮政编码:610065

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◆ 网址:www.scupress.com.cn

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The *Comparative Literature: East & West*, is published twice a year in Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter by Sichuan University Press, Chengdu, 610064. To be considered for publication, manuscripts should be typewritten in Microsoft Word format and kept in the style accordingly. Manuscripts should also be accompanied by the electronic copy, or through an email attachment. The contributors are expected to include their brief CV in English as well as the abstracts in Chinese, if possible. All manuscripts will be anonymously reviewed for publication. And the editors hold the right to correct or modify the manuscripts for publication.

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## Chinese School: 30 Years of Development, 1978~2008

*CAO Shunqing, WANG Lei*

*Sichuan University*

**中文摘要：**“比较文学中国学派”由美国学者李达三首先提出学术构想，在 20 世纪 70 年代末复苏的大陆比较文学研究中，该学派积极参与了“比较文学中国学派”的理论建设和学科建设。本文将中国学派的发展脉络大致归纳为三个阶段，并在此基础上研究了三十年来的针对建立“比较文学中国学派”的各种观点，围绕着比较文学中国学派出现的各种论争，以及三十年中的学科理论建设，得出结论，比较文学中国学派从最初所关心的中国内部学科建设问题，发展到了关注如何以其特色加入到全球化的文化交流中去，并进一步推进全球性普世理论的建设。以跨文明和变异学为基础的比较文学学科新理论，会在某种程度上弥补欧美比较文学学科理论之不足，有助于推动全世界比较文学学科理论建设。

### **I . Introduction**

During the past three decades “Chinese School of Comparative Literature” is the most controversial topic in the development of comparative literature in China, but then it is also the most beautiful scenery among the researches on theories of this discipline. Therefore, in summing up the 30-year development of comparative literature in china, the concept “Chinese School of Comparative Literature” cannot be easily



neglected.

However, the theoretical self-awareness behind this concept first emerged in Taiwan in 1970s. At that time, many overseas students had access to this discipline and engaged themselves in the comparison of Chinese and west literature, as a result, and they realized the methodological inadequacies of traditional Chinese literary studies. Still, they found it necessary to explore the unique characterization of Chinese literature by means of comparative study of literature, and they believed that it is a way to achieve a breakthrough on research methods. In July, 1976, in the International Comparative Literature Conference, held in Tamkang University, Taiwan, Scholars such as Zhu Liyuan, Yan Yuanshu put forward the concept "Chinese School". At this early stage, John J. Deeney, Chen Pengxiang and Gu Tianhong were all devoted to promoting the idea and constructing the related theories. They rightly pointed out that although the traditional Chinese literary practice is a rich reservoir, it has long suffered from not being studied systematically. Therefore, contemporary scholars trained on western literary theories may adopt the western literary theories as research framework while study traditional Chinese literature, in other words, to use the western theories to explain traditional Chinese literary events. They called it Method of Illumination and took it as the basic approach of Chinese School. From then on, however, the Method of Illumination has widely received attacks and disapprovals. Later, Chen Pengxiang was forced to further interpret and explain his idea of Method of Illumination. It is worth mentioning that the American scholar John J. Deeney had offered a helping hand to Chinese from the very beginning. Taking the research activities of Chinese School as the refreshing of world literature, he even inferred that the comparative literature research in mainland China would be the potential force of Chinese School.

## **II. Opinions and Relating Researches**

With the recovery of the comparative literature studies in mainland China in the late 1970s, the establishment and the development of Chinese School were actively engaged in by the scholars in mainland. Both the unique theories and methods were brought into discussion. Looking back the 30 years of its development, we can roughly divide the course into three phrases: the first phase (1978-1987), which is the creation and foundation stage of the Chinese school; the second phase (1988-1997), which is the construction stage of its basic theoretical features and

methodological systems; the third phase (1998-present), which is a stage of pushing forward and maintaining its development.

From the very beginning, prestigious scholars in mainland China have put forward many constructive suggestions and comments on the idea of Chinese School. Let's start from the first phase mentioned above. As earlier as in 1982, Professor Ji Xianlin clearly argued that with our rich resources of literature and solid, long standing history we can definitely make the Chinese School erected as long as hardworking and careful researches are carried out. It is exactly in the same year that Yan Shaodang revealed the same wish. From then on, scholars, such as Zhu Weizhi, Hu Kuanghua, Sun Jingyao, Fang Zhong, Tang Tao, Yan Zhouhan, Duan Yan all contributed to the establishment of the Chinese School. Their various ideas and opinions focused on the following aspects: the research concentrations, the uniqueness of its methodology and the future development. Among them, Huang Baosheng's article in 1985 made the research on Chinese School into actual operational stage.

In 1988, Yuan Haoyi made it clear that comparative literature studies in China should focus on cross-cultural matters, which is a prospect on the theoretical features and methodological systems of Chinese School. Professor Yang Zhouhan considered Chinese School as a way of breaking through Eurocentrism. Therefore, he did not think that the many issues emerged in comparative literature studies contradicted to the establishment of Chinese School, but thought them helpful to further discussion on theories. From that time until the late 1990s, Chinese Scholars, such as Liu Jiemin, Sun Jingyao, Xie Tianzhen, Chen Chun, Liu Xiangyu, and Du Wei etc., explored into many problems concerning its erections, the uniqueness of its methods and theories, and even the legitimation of the discipline, many scholars were involved in and the hot discussion finally brought the theoretical features and methodological systems of Chinese School come into being. In 1995, I reviewed the fruitful results of comparative literature studies from its recovery and generalized the theoretical features and methodological systems of Chinese School in a paper entitled "A Preliminary Research on the Theoretical Features and Methodological Systems of Chinese School". Later, I wrote a series of papers to nail down the point that the theoretical features and methodological systems of Chinese School should take cross-cultural matters as its core issue. Those papers evoked a lot of strong reactions from the domestic academic circle, which was a sign symbolizing the immaturity of the theoretical features and methodological systems of Chinese

School. The discussion was so hot that two top periodicals of comparative literature studies set up special forums for scholars to provide constructive ideas. And some of the problems were eventually settled in the discussion. At the end of this phase, the term “Chinese School” was roughly accepted among the academic circle, accordingly the phase became a period of excellent development and growth for comparative literature studies in China since its recovery.

At the turn of the millennium, Xiong Muqing firstly pointed out the dynamic force of establishing Chinese School was the internal need of the discipline itself, and the new problem encountered by Chinese comparatists made it possible. Most of all, Chinese comparatists were able to construct their distinctive methodological systems distinguishing from that of French and American. On the other hand, Wang Xiangyuan generalized a different unique feature of Chinese School. Besides, Li Weitao and Wang Feng reconsidered the notion of “Chinese School” from their respective points of view.

### **III. Debates on Chinese School**

From the moment it was coined, the phrase “Chinese School” seemed to lead to some debates. Comparatists from both abroad and domestic have involved in those debates that focus on three main points: 1) Is it necessary to establish a school called “Chinese School of Comparative Literature? 2) Is Illumination Method the unique methodology of it? 3) Is dealing with cross-cultural/cross-civilization matters its outstanding feature?

Shortly after the phrase was coined, Professor Douwe Fokkema attacked the idea from international viewpoints. It seemed to him that the distinction between the so-called French school and American School was useless, let alone to establish another one, therefore, the establishment of Chinese School is to replace one form of isolation with another. However, his standpoint was successfully and convincingly refuted by Sun Jingyao by demonstrating that it was a kind of Eurocentrism. John. J. Deeney also firmly believed that the term should not be abandoned because it indicated a circle of well-informed comparatists discussing and testing alternative ways of reading literature from a Chinese perspective. In domestic academic circle, Yan Shaodang who had previously advocated establishing the school began to show his hesitation. Nevertheless, after the debate on its theoretical features and methodological systems, a consensus was formed. In fact, not only Chinese comparatists but those from other oriental nations have the

similar intention. In India, Amiya Dev also considered it was necessary to establish Indian School. Obviously, regional school is not an instinctive reaction toward the strong western culture, but consistent with the scientific observation approach advocated by Karl Popper. Therefore, it means a circle of well-informed comparatists confronting new research problems, discussing and testing alternative ways of reading literature from a Chinese perspective, which can be taken a part of world literature project.

For the sake of brevity, Illumination Method can be defined as to apply western literary theories to Chinese literature. Both Aldridge and Fokkema questioned the method. Sun Jingyao also argued that it would conceal traditional Chinese literary theories. Later, Ye Shuxian, Wang Xiangyuan expressed the same concern. Another problem with that is by applying this method there is no actual comparison. However strongly the scholars argued against it, this method had erected its foundation with abundant practices. Just as Yan Zhouhan rightly pointed out it had been widely applied by many Chinese scholars, such as Wang Guowei, Wu Mi, and had the similar effect with other comparative literature studies. In accordance with Professor Yang, I further singled out varieties of illumination, then, Chen Chun and Liu Xiangyu changed it into “two-way illumination”, expecting Chinese literary scholars would formulate and explicate their traditional ways of reading works, not only in their application to Chinese Literature but also to non-Chinese literature.

After Yuan Haoyi made it clear that comparative literature studies in China Should focus on cross-cultural matters, I took a further step by claiming that dealing with cross-cultural matters is the basic theoretical feature of Chinese School which distinguished Chinese school from its counterparts, French and American. This was widely agreed by our colleagues such as Yue Daiyun, Chen Chun, Liu Xiangyu, Xie Tianzhen. Though I emphasized frequently here cross-cultural means to cross heterogeneous cultures, misunderstandings emerged. For the sake of clarity, I changed it into “cross-civilization”. Still, voices of disapproval and questioning emerged. All of those clustered into the following three: 1) it would expand the border of comparative literature studies once again; 2) it would be much harder to find the comparability among heterogeneous cultures; 3) it would be no way to study literariness. For the first objection it is a misunderstanding because by civilization we indicate the social community with same cultural conventions (conviction, values, and thought). For the second, it is a shift of paradigm, the research objects changed from literary texts to literary communication, therefore,

the aspects of literary communication or dialogue, instead of the similarities among different cultures, should be focused on. The ones who provided the third objection must have forgotten that literariness can never be parted away from its related social, cultural and historical context.

Chinese School gradually grows up in the constant debates. Evidently, the reason for the debates is that we are in a state of aphasia, which is a metaphor I used to describe the state in the field of Chinese literary theorizing. At the same time, my metaphor of “aphasia” also implies the fact that the Chinese scholarly community on literature has missed the best opportunities to make new achievements in literary theory through the intercultural dialogue (including hybridization) between China and the West. There have been plenty of examples in Chinese history.

#### **IV. Theorizing of Comparative Literature Studies at 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase**

Although many of such cultural rules are alive today and could be reconstructed for the contemporary context, scholars often choose to neglect this traditional Chinese discourse of productive and interpretive rules at the time when Western scholarly influences continue to dominate Chinese academia. While we are talking about romanticism, realism, deconstructionism and so on and so forth, we have almost lost all the sense of traditional Chinese cultural rules. The westernization of terms and discourse as a whole has made innovation in Chinese literary theory and research go downhill. Looking back on the path in which contemporary Chinese literary theorizing has taken, most of the new concepts and ideas from the May 4 Movement are products of imitation and emulation. Nowadays this kind of imitation and emulation has become so rampant that it looks as if Chinese students and scholars have lost faith in Chinese culture.

After acknowledged that we are in the state of aphasia, the next step surely will be academic innovation. In 2001, I further elaborated on the main features of Chinese School, and named the development of comparative literature studies in China as the third stage of comparative literature studies. This was approved shortly after that by professor Yue Daiyun when she was invited to deliver a speech on Phoenix TV and chose to talk about the third stage of comparative literature studies. Literary variation has been noticed and studied for quite a long time, in 2005, I theorized the findings on literary variation as Variation Theory and put forward that literary variations can be studies on four levels: linguistic, imageological, textual and cultural, aiming at studying literary communication from various perspectives.

## **V. Conclusion**

Looking back on the course of development of Chinese School of Comparative Literature, during the 30 years we have inherited the tradition on one hand, and explored new problems and new field, on the other. Still a question haunted us is why we need to develop literary research and comparative literature studies in this globalized world with different cultures communicating and conflicting. To answer this question I would like to quote professor Yue Daiyun, "It is very likely that the future literary theories will be based on mutual recognition, mutual justification and mutual compliments among heterogeneous cultures, only theories of this kind can contribute to the communication of different cultures."

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## Irigaray in the French Feminist Tradition<sup>[1]</sup>

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**中文摘要：**本文对比分析法国女性主义理论家的杰出代表波伏娃和伊里加蕾的女性主义理论，着重审视她们如何揭示女性的从属地位，如何看待女性身体在男性想象中的作用，以及如何展望男女平等的未来。分析清楚显示出两代法国女性主义理论家之间的继承关系和伊里加蕾超越前辈之所在，以及她的理论对当代世界女性主义发展的意义。

Together with Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray has been regarded as one of the leading French feminists in the contemporary feminist scene. The three female philosophers constitute what Lynn Huffer calls “The Holy Trinity”<sup>[2]</sup> of French feminism even though none of them was born in France.<sup>[3]</sup> Each possesses her own intelligence and wisdom to contribute to literary theory and philosophy. In comparison, however, Irigaray has become more and more important than the other two to feminist theory. As Naomi Schor argues,

Whereas in the early stages of the development of French feminisms Irigaray’s writings were almost always invidiously compared to those of Kristeva and Cixous, today, although Kristeva remains a major intellectual presence (especially in the field of psychoanalysis) and Cixous continues to exert her influence through her seminar, her fiction and playwriting, it is becoming apparent that, as the major French theoretician, Irigaray is actually Simone de

Beauvoir's chief successor.<sup>[4]</sup>

Irigaray herself, however, holds a mixed feeling toward this predecessor of hers. On the one hand, she acknowledges de Beauvoir's contribution to feminist history: By ceaselessly telling her life story, "she helped many women—and men?—to be sexually freer, notably by offering them a socio-cultural model ... she also helped them to situate themselves more objectively in the different moments of a life."<sup>[5]</sup> On the other hand, Irigaray complains that de Beauvoir remained silent when she badly needed her support.<sup>[6]</sup> Furthermore, she ardently opposes the suggestion that she is a daughter of Simone de Beauvoir. She makes it clear that "[n]ot a word passed between us about women's liberation"<sup>[7]</sup>. Irigaray clarifies on many different occasions that she never finished reading *The Second Sex*, and that her position is radically different from that of de Beauvoir:

I think my theoretical filiation ... is much more to the tradition of Western philosophy. Now, I'm not saying that Simone de Beauvoir isn't part of that tradition, but hers isn't an oeuvre that I know well nor to which I myself especially refer. It's possible that I've been influenced by her work by means of the ideological climate, but I'm not someone who lives very much in that world.<sup>[8]</sup>

If, more than 30 years ago, Irigaray's theories were believed to be so radical and provocative that it was hard for many scholars to accept, today, almost no scholars can neglect Irigaray who has secured a place in philosophy and feminism with her voluminous works and abundant lectures across the world. This paper, focusing on Irigaray's contribution to feminism, examines the ways in which Irigaray transcends and develops the French feminist tradition established by Simone de Beauvoir. The latter's *The Second Sex* (*Le Deuxième Sexe*, 1949), believed to be the Bible of feminism, affected women's social status and living situations worldwide half a century ago. It is hoped that such discussions will also shed light on the filial relationship between these two famous women.

### **A. Female Roles**

Simone de Beauvoir, in the second book of *The Second Sex*, describes how a woman loses herself in such feminine roles as baby girl, adolescent girl, wife, mother and middle-aged woman. She argues that in all these stages, a woman



subdues to the social roles that man imposes and designs for her and as a result, she exists as the Other: “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; She is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other.”<sup>[9]</sup> On the surface, a family is a place where a woman finds a sense of belonging, since “[m]arriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society.”<sup>[10]</sup> However, she is not treated as an equal in the family. “Woman leans heavily upon man because she is not allowed to rely on herself.”<sup>[11]</sup> As a result, a woman loses her subjectivity and has to identify herself with expected sole roles endowed by patriarchal society. She finally concludes the relationship between man and woman by saying, “The truth is that for man she is an amusement, a pleasure, company, an inessential boon; he is for her the meaning, the justification of her existence. The exchange, therefore, is not of two items of equal value.”<sup>[12]</sup>

The idea that woman is the Other and that marriage is a trade based on the value of woman finds resonance in Irigaray’s works. In Irigaray’s analysis, women are no other but commodities that can be exchanged in the male value system. “Marx’s analysis of commodities as the elementary form of capitalist wealth can thus be understood as an interpretation of the status of woman in so-called patriarchal societies.”<sup>[13]</sup> By using this theory of Karl Marx, Irigaray further elaborates on the point that woman has become commodities among men:

... woman is traditionally a use-value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity. As such, she remains the guardian of material substance, whose price will be established, in terms of the standard of their work and of their need/desire, by “subjects”: workers, merchants, consumers. Women are marked phallicly by their fathers, husbands, procurers. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce. Woman is never anything but the locus of a more or less competitive exchange between two men, including the competition for the possession of mother earth.<sup>[14]</sup>

This exchange is made sometimes “from one man to another”, sometimes “from one group of men to another.”<sup>[15]</sup> It is beyond doubt that the exchange is made between men only because the activity is purely “man’s business”<sup>[16]</sup>. Only in exchange can a woman take on value, which particularly exists in her body: “... the properties of a woman’s body have to be suppressed and subordinated to the exigencies of its transformation into an object of circulation among men”<sup>[17]</sup>.