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Beginning of the New Century: Comparative Literature in the Cross-Cultural Context—Comments

**on the 7th Triennial Conference of Chinese Comparative
Literature Association and the International Conference**

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We are now at the threshold of a new century and a new millennium. The past century has witnessed the contact and communication between Chinese and foreign cultures and literatures. Against this background, the 20th century was the course of the modernization of Chinese culture and literature, as well as the course of the budding, sprouting and growing of Chinese contemporary culture and literature. The occurrence and realization of cultural transformation, together with the development of the entire Chinese modern culture and literature, had been the inevitable consequence of the contact between the cultural and literary current of the world and that of China, the latter thereby being an indispensable part of the modernization of the whole world culture and literature. In order to further develop the Chinese culture and literary in the 21st Century, it is no doubt an urgent and significant task for the field of comparative literature to comb, examine and study the history of cultural and literary exchange between China and foreign countries, to figure out their differences and similarities, and to explore the common rule of human cultural and literary development.

In an age when new and complicated phenomena appear at an unprec-

edented speed, we are challenged by a series of new problems. The arrival of globalization, the imminence of the Internet and digitalization, the increasing frequency and efficiency of international communication, the continuous emergence of new theoretical currents and literary genres, the formation of multiplicity of aesthetic consciousness and value judgment, the rising of pop culture and new cultural generations, provides comparative literature with not only challenges but the vastest developing space as well. Therefore, another inescapable duty of comparative literature study is to estimate carefully the prospect of comparative literature, adjust and improve its strategy and methodology, and take an active part in the contemporary cultural development and its theoretical interpretation.

Based on the two themes, the International Conference *Beginning of the New Century: Comparative Literature in a Cross-Cultural Context* was held along with the 7th triennial congress of Chinese Comparative Literature Association (CCLA) from August 15th to 18th, 2002 in the beautiful city of Nanjing, P. R. China. The conference is co-hosted by Jiangsu Consortium of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Jiangsu Comparative Literature Association, Nanjing University and Nanjing Normal University.

More than 350 people from around 20 countries or regions attended the conference, among whom are Douwe W. Fokkema, Professor of Utrecht University, Netherlands, President Emeritus of ICLA, Koji Kawamoto, Professor of Tokyo University, Japan, President of ICLA, Eugene Eoyang, Professor of Indiana University, USA and Dean of School of Literature, Lingnan University, Yue Daiyun, Professor of Peking University, President of Chinese Comparative Literature Association, Claes Ryn, Professor at George Washington University, USA, Wong Yoohwah, Professor at National University of Singapore, Chang Hanliang, Professor at National Taiwan University, Alex Huges, Professor at the University of Birmingham, England, and Marian Galik, Professor of the Institute of Oriental and African Studies, Slovak Republic. Wang Rongbing, Vice Governor of Jiangsu

Province, Hong Yinxing, President of Jiangsu Consortium of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Vice President of Nanjing University, Song Yongzhong, President of Nanjing Normal University attended the opening session and delivered enthusiastic speeches.

The central concern of this year's conference is where and how comparative literature should go in the new century of globalization and cultural pluralism and how comparative literature should add to literary and cultural studies in both regional and multinational context. Professor Yue Daiyun from Beijing University points out in her keynote speech, entitled "Comparative Literature in the 21 Century—China's Perspective", that confronting the two crises in the 21 century—globalization and cultural hegemony, cultural diversity in the world is being endangered and disappearing, and cultural conflict is leading to cultural isolationism, and even to cultural ossification. The key to the solution of these problems is to increase communication and understanding between different cultures and to enlarge space for negotiation, toleration and co-existence. Comparative literature breaks through the limitation of a certain unitary cultural system and certain literary texts, and opens to a diversity of elements including time, space, sex, race, and class. Therefore, in the 21 century, it will play an important role in accelerating cultural communication and exchange, averting the disastrous cultural conflict and improving the development of multiculturalism.

Disciplinary construction and the future development of comparative literature is another important topic in this conference. Hot debates occur and warm speeches are given from time to time in every panel. Professor Liu Xiangyu from Beijing Normal University remarks on the neglect of disciplinary theory in comparative literature study. He insists that we solve this problem by setting about defining comparative literature clearly, including the way of study, the objects of study and so on. He differentiates the limitation of French and American schools of comparative literature respectively, and calls for the refinement and concision of the study. What's

more, he presents a definition of comparative literature by his own: Comparative literature is a kind of special literary study. It exceeds the boundaries of nations, and adopts the literature from different nations and languages as its object. On the theoretical level, it has the inherent consciousness of comparison. Professor Cao Shunqing from Sichuan University presents the concept of "cross-civilization" so as to differentiate from the concept of "cross-culture", and to emphasize and display the characteristics of the contemporary Chinese comparative literature study. He believes that old theories can no longer meet the needs of the study, and that we are now in a crucial period of starting a new era of developing the disciplinary theory. Professor Chen Yuehong from Beijing University also discusses the problems of comparative literature construction in higher education in China. He points out that after gaining the legitimacy in higher education, comparative literature in China has met new problems such as being short of capable professional researchers, having no clear boundary as to define the discipline, lacking academic criteria, etc.

Upon reflection on the short history of the development of comparative literature in China, Professor Zhu Donglin from Soochow University poses several important questions on how to make Chinese comparative literature study stand out steadily from the shadow of the Western tradition. He especially criticizes the "westernization" tendency in current study in China. Professor Wang Xiangyuan from Beijing Normal University gives retrospection on a series of branches of China's comparative literature study. According to him, the fruitful production of comparative literature explains well what Qian Zhongshu says about the characteristics and achievements of "our own comparative literature". There comes a batch of academic outcomes, e. g. the study on Sino-India literary relation by Ji Xianlin and Zhao Guohua; Sino-Japanese literary study carried out by Yan Shaochang and Wang Xiaoping and so on. Great efforts have been taken to improve and develop our comparative literature study in the past 20 years. Further-

more, Professor Wang gives remarks on the problems remaining in the comparative literature circle in China, which promptly draws attention of all the conference participants.

As one important branch of present-day comparative literature, translation studies become another important topic of discussion among the participants. The discussion mainly focuses on the subjectivity in translation, relationship between ideology and translation mode, as well as the re-examination of the traditional translation studies. Prof. Xu Jun from Nanjing University and Prof. Xie Tianzhen from Shanghai International Studies University both affirmed the significance of creativity of translation and translator in the interpretation of the original text. Prof. Xu, by drawing on research findings in linguistics and literary theories, made an analysis and investigation of the animated process of texts and the dynamic process of translation by discussing the relationship between the translated version and the original texts at the creative level and from the perspective of literary life and cultural communication so as to establish the due status and value of translation. Prof. Xie emphasizes that translation entails many other factors—not only the language competence and knowledge of the translator but also the very political circumstance, ideology, customs and readers' interest in particular historical background and cultural context. He also proposes that translation studies should abandon the traditional text-based way of translation and confirm the contribution of translator toward the interpretation of the source text. In her presentation, Prof. Joanne Gass from California State University discussed the contradiction among different systems of language and culture and the possibility of their hybridization in literary texts, through the analyses of three English novels, *Tripmaster Monkey*, *The Monkey King and Griever* based on the Chinese classic, *Journey to the Interior* by Wu Cheng En.

Today since the economic ramparts as well as cultural bulwarks between nations have been torn down, the marginalized cultures are no longer

contented with their subordinate status but begin to march towards the center. Hence, under this postmodern cultural background, emigrant literature, overseas literature and exiled literature have developed rapidly in the recent decades and brought many sensations into the literary world. In the conference, panels on overseas Chinese literature in Chinese and in other languages have been heated by the participation of many scholars both at home and abroad. Prof. Rao Pengzi from Jinan University has classified ethnic characters in Southeast Asian Chinese literature into three types and given each an excellent cultural interpretation. Prof. Rao's unique perspective provides a new way of thinking to the studies of overseas Chinese literature. Dr. Shen Yichin from California State University discussed the "authentic" Chinese myths and the masculine Chinese American identity in Frank Chin's writing. Ms. Song Lam at the Auckland College of Education, New Zealand concludes that the Maori people are the descendents of Chinese based on similarities found in her research on the Maori and the Chinese in language, mythology, marriage tradition, customs and ethics, supported by genetic studies of both people. Prof. Zhao Yiheng from University of London makes comparative studies of the roaming theme in Chinese diasporic literature and overseas Chinese literature. He suggested that roaming stories that were missing in traditional Chinese literature, however, became the very symbolic outlet for overseas Chinese people struggling for survival to release their nostalgic sentiments. After doing a general survey of the 20th century world exiled literature, Prof. Zhang Deming from Zhejiang University says that exiled writers who had gone through the way from crossing the boundary to losing identity till seeking the root resisted the prevalent hegemonic discourse in the immigrant nation with their pidgin language and wrote autobiography or saga to reflect their thinking on their nation and race. He also discusses features of exiled literature, such as dual perspectives, periphery and marginalized sensitivity. Following Prof. Zhang Deming's presentation, Prof. Wang Jiezhi from Nanjing Normal Uni-

versity, presented his cultural study on 20th century Russian emigrants' literature. Based on a large amount of valuable information, he describes the different cultural backgrounds and situations in forming the three waves of Russian emigration literature and calls for a reevaluation of the abundant cultural values and multiple aesthetic trends in Russian emigration literature. Dr. Li Fengliang from Jinan University focuses on Milan Kundera's literary creations and discusses the alternation of cultural identities of emigrant writers in different cultural circumstances as well as the reception of Chinese readers towards Milan Kundera and his works.

"Travels and Construction of Foreign Images" is a theme of special concern in the panels of this conference. In her speech on the "Function of Travels in the Construction of Foreign Images", Prof. Meng Hua from Peking University indicates that travels as a cross-discipline, cross-cultural writing provided important textual sources for image studies. After defining the category of travels, Prof. Meng discusses the features of travels and its position in comparative literature studies and explains that travels function in construction of foreign images mainly through its reflection of social collective imagination and its creation of new images. "Image of China in Athanasius Kircher's Works" presented by Prof. Zhang Xiping from Beijing Foreign Studies University's and "Image of Beijing in British Travels" given by Prof. Ye Xiangyang, editor of Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, help to illustrate Prof. Meng's opinions. Beus Yifen, an American scholar and Dr. Liu Yang from Nanjing University made analyses of images of China in American and French literature in different perspectives. "Travels" and "Foreign Images" with their significance in the image studies stimulates the interest of many scholars in the conference.

In recent years, ecocriticism, as a critical insurgency, has come onto the stage of literary criticism. It advocates love of nature and environmentalism while against anthropocentrism. Ecocriticism is so essential today to increase people's environmental consciousness in China when sandstorm

sweeps the north of China and pollution gets worse everyday, which have baffled the continuable development of our economy. In the conference, a ground of young scholars led ecocriticism into Chinese comparative literature studies in their roundtable session. Prof. Wang Nuo from Xiamen University indicates that it is very urgent to develop ecocriticism in China, for China has underestimated the damage that natural disasters would cost us. Mr. Zhu Xinfu from Suzhou University gives a systematic introduction to ecocriticism in America, especially its three stages of development. In the first stage, ecocriticism focuses on the representation of nature in literary works; in the second stage, ecocriticism shifts its focus to the recognition of literary works about nature; and in the third stage, ecocriticism aims to establish the ecopoetics (生态诗学) and to enhance its theoretical foundation by emphasizing the ecosystem. Mr. Zhu's introduction would help Chinese scholars to construct our own ecopoetics. Ms. Liu Bei from Shandong Normal University, however, proposes a new concept of ecocriticism, from a more humanistic perspective, that is, to pay attention to the "Inner Nature"—human's spiritual ecosystem, which should be the core of ecocriticism instead of the "outer" nature. Wei Qingqi, Ph. D. candidate from Beijing Language and Culture University points out that ecocriticism adopts a deconstructive strategy from feminism and post-colonialism. It is directed against anthropocentrism by erasing its metaphysical dualism to make human's superiority over the wilderness lose its theoretical basis, and therefore, to help human beings to unite with nature eventually and reconstruct the green ecosystem. Prof. Xu Xinjian from Sichuan University discusses the paradox between the mission of ecocriticism to destroy the anthropocentrism and its ultimate aim to salvage human beings. Meanwhile, he also emphasizes the standpoint of ecocriticism in China that is to advocate Chinese traditional ecoculture (生态文化) and to establish our own ecocritical discourse (生态批评话语).

Just as what Professor Yue Daiyun says in her closing speech: gender

research and gender poetics have entered into Chinese comparative literature and become one important part of it. Many scholars are involved into the heated discussion of “the Study of Feminism and Female Literature”, among whom is Professor Fokkema who listened to each speaker attentively and made very interesting remarks. In the discussion, Dr. Yang Lixin from Nanjing Normal University pointed out that feminism is coincident with postmodern culture in terms of its rebellion against the binary oppositional structure, and its emphasis on the diversification, heterodoxy, and borderlines. However, the critical content of feminism and its humanitarian position place it in sharp disagreement with an empty and anti-political postmodernism. Dr. Luo Ting from Xiangtan University gave a detailed analysis of the influential book *Des Chinoises* by Julis Kristeva, a contemporary French literary theorist from three aspects: the heterogeneity of China and Chinese women, the feminized and popularly sexualized image of China and the criticism of Orientalist discourse. Dr. Zhang Xiaohong from Holland commented on how “body writing theory” represented by French woman writer Hélène Cixous and the poetry by American woman poet Sylvia Plath influenced Chinese contemporary female poetry and why Chinese contemporary women poets step into the dilemma of double silence under the pressure of the male dominating language and culture and the influence of Western feminism. Furthermore, discussion about what the true female literature is, how to define feminist criticism, how to understand the relationship between feminist study and male study and how to interpret female body writing spring up one after another in this group.

In his opening address, Prof. Kawamoto showed his great concern about the domination of theory and technology over literary study; Prof. Douwe Fokkema discussed the special role for literature in cultural and cross-cultural communication in the four respects: conceptions of literature, conception of cultural studies, literary and cultural conventions and the conventions of reading fiction and poetry; Prof. Eugene Eoyang argued the

function and value of comparative literary study in the respect of the prosperous material progress and the permanent human cultural concern; Prof. Yip Wai-lim affirmed the importance of Taoist study on the globalization background; Prof. Claes Ryn spoke highly of Irving Babbitt's emphasis on the moral value of literature; Prof. Zhang Hanliang compared Socrates, Augustin and Chinese ancient philosophers before the Qin Dynasty in their logic of thinking and mode of expression; Prof. Wang Ning from Qinghua University showed the Chinese perspective in studying comparative literature in a global context; Prof. Zhou Xian from Nanjing University analyzed three paradoxes of aesthetic modernity and their influences over modernist art.

In other panels, participants took active part in the speeches and discussions by Prof. Qian Linseng, Prof. Ye Shuxian and others on the relationship between Chinese and foreign literature and culture, world literature in the eyes of Chinese scholars, the 20th century Chinese literature in the context of world literature, etc.

We are greatly impressed by the research of comparative literature since last conference and encouraged by those progresses which more and more researchers take part in and make great efforts to achieve. However, some problems still remain unsolved, such as how to tell the differences between comparative literature and world literature, how to balance the construction of theory and the study of specific questions, how to define the term "comparative literature" itself in spite of the necessity of updating its content. These questions are not totally new but are real challenges in the cross-cultural context of the new century and will set new tasks for Chinese comparativists. We believe that Chinese comparative literature will be enriched and bettered in the course of learning from tradition, from other disciplines and from studies made by our international colleagues, and will make its own unique contribution to the literature and culture of the world.

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