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## The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature (Bijiao Wenxue Bianyixue)

By Shunqing Cao, Chao Wang, etc., Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2021, 313pp.

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BOOK REVIEW 3 OPEN ACCESS

The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature (Bijiao Wenxue Bianyixue). By Shunging Cao, Chao Wang, etc., Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2021, 313pp.

As an international discipline, the discipline of comparative literature should have a cosmopolitan research perspective, which is of great significance to facilitate mutual appreciation and communication between Chinese and foreign civilizations. Neither parallel studies of comparative literature nor influence studies of comparative literature deal with variation, but variation has always existed in the historical practice of comparative literature. In view of this, Professor Shunqing Cao, a leading scholar in the discipline of comparative literature, has creatively proposed the theory of variation. This theory is conducive to the dialogue between different civilizations and also the development of world literature. The first book on variation theory by Professor Shunqing Cao was published in 2015. Then, Shunqing Cao, Chao Wang and others further refined and developed the variation theory of comparative literature, which has provided an opportunity for the book The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature to come out. The book was published by The Commercial Press in 2021. It clearly articulates the theoretical foundations of variation theory of comparative literary, discusses in detail the practical methods and paths for the variation theory of comparative literature, and provides a profound interpretation of the variation theory of comparative literature through several examples. To sum up, the book provides a systematic and comprehensive study of the variation theory of comparative literature through tracing, elucidating, exemplifying, and analyzing.

The book consists of four main parts, including an introduction, chapter contents (nine chapters in total), main references, and an afterword. In the introductory part, the author focuses on the necessity of building Chinese discourse on comparative literature, the development of Chinese discourse on comparative literature, the successful construction of a Chinese discourse on comparative literature (variation theory), and the significance of the variation theory of comparative literary for the construction of Chinese academic theoretical discourse.

The following parts are about the main content of each chapter. Here, the reviewer makes a brief introduction to each chapter. The first chapter, by sorting out the current situation of the research on the variation theory of comparative literature at home and abroad, points out the developmental renewal of the theory of the comparative literature discipline – variation theory. Closely followed by the background information, the second chapter discusses the philosophical foundations of the discipline of variation, with an emphasis on Chinese philosophical foundations, such as "Bianwen Geyi" (变文格义). The third chapter answers questions related to the integration of variation theory with other international comparative literature studies. Chapter 4 explores variation theory from an interdisciplinary perspective, thus enhancing the interdisciplinary value of variation theory as a true theory. Chapters 5 to 9 deal with the integration of theories of comparative literature with variation theory and are complemented by case analyses. Chapter 5 focuses on impact studies, the most traditional research method in comparative literature, and circulative variation theory. The authors clearly explain and scientifically argue for circulative variation as a method by analyzing and interpreting variation theory that focuses on the textual level of circulative variation in literature. Chapter 6 provides an introduction to the phenomenon of variation in parallel studies, followed by an interpretation of the theoretical connotations and mechanisms of hermeneutic variation theory, and finally an interpretation of hermeneutic variation theory through case studies. Chapter 7 focuses on variation theory and the nationalism of literature, mainly providing a systematic discussion and interpretation of the phenomenon of variation theory in the nationalism of literature, its theoretical connotations, innovative mechanisms, and practical paths, and finally discussing the application of nationalism of literature through case studies. Chapter 8 presents an interpretation of the phenomenon of variation theory in image studies, introducing the concept of image variation, followed by an interpretation of its connotations and innovative mechanisms, and concludes with a case study. The final chapter, Chapter 9, focuses on the combination of variation theory and translation studies (or medio-translatology) as proposed by Chinese scholar Tianzhen Xie, and argues for variation in translation studies, highlighting the fact that the variation in translation studies not only brings life and vitality to local literature but also contributes to the development of world literature.

The main references section provides the reader with a number of monographs and journals in English and Chinese for further reading. The main author Shunqing Cao concludes with an afterword that discusses the book's innovations in three main areas: clarifying the theoretical foundations of variation theory of comparative literature; clarifying the practical methods and paths of the variation theory of comparative literature, and strengthening the case interpretations of the variation theory of comparative literature.

According to the introduction to the book, the book is objective in its understanding of the theoretical shortcomings of the previous theories of comparative literature, and its theoretical framework of variation theory is clear and well-reasoned. The book is not only a powerful contribution to the renewal of the discipline's theory and the enhancement of its methodology but is also significant in terms of breaking through the narrow definition of world literature and constructing a theoretical framework for the discipline of comparative literature. Its main significance includes the following two points. First, the variation theory of comparative literature has effectively avoided the crisis theory of comparative literature (extinction theory) and successfully developed the theory of comparative literature, becoming a Chinese school in addition to the French school and the American school. It has brought the study of comparative literature into a new stage. Secondly, the book closely combines theory and practice, giving the reader an understanding of theoretical connotations through conceptual introductions, guidance on how to use them through methodological guidance, and how to put them into practice through case studies.

However, every book has its own shortcomings, and this one is no exception. There are a number of details that should be explored, such as the laws and degrees of variation theory, fewer case studies, and so on. More case studies would have been useful for the reader to understand and apply the variation theory of comparative literature. Nevertheless, *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature* is a highly innovative scholarly monograph. It is not only a book that develops the theory of comparative literature and world literature but also provides researchers with materials and insights into research ideas. Hence, it should be highly recommended.

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