

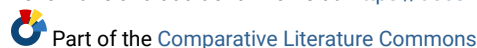


## Another Argument on the "Crisis Said" of Comparative Literature

Ping Du

*Guangdong University of Finance & Economics, Guangzhou; Sichuan University, Chengdu*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <[clcweb@purdue.edu](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)>

### Recommended Citation

Du, Ping. "Another Argument on the "Crisis Said" of Comparative Literature." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 19.5 (2017): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3110>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 142 times as of 11/07/19.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

**CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture**ISSN 1481-4374 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>>  
Purdue University Press ©Purdue University

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <[clcweb@purdue.edu](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)>

---

**Volume 19 Issue 5 (December 2017) Article 4****Ping Du,****"Another Argument on the Crisis Said' of Comparative Literature"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol19/iss5/4>>

---

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 19.5 (2017)**  
Special Issue **Against the "Death" of the Discipline of Comparative Literature**  
Ed. Shunqing Cao

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol19/iss5/>>

---

**Abstract:** In her article "Another Argument on the 'Crisis Said' of Comparative Literature" Ping Du discusses "Crisis Said", the long-lasting topic since the birth of Comparative Literature. She argues that after every crisis comes an opportunity of a new development of Comparative Literature. Du claims that comparative literature is experiencing a rebirth in the Age of Multiculturalism. She, firstly, reviews the first wave of "Crisis Said", its solution and the progress of Comparative Literature, then she analyses the prevailing second wave of "Crisis Said" or even "Death Said", and finally points out that the way-out is not merely world literature but the Chinese School and its Variation Studies which represent the future of Comparative Literature.

**Ping DU**

### **Another Argument on the "Crisis Said" of Comparative Literature**

The word "crisis" has shadowed Comparative Literature during the course of the development of the discipline for the past hundred years since its birth. Many scholars expressed this view towards Comparative literature including Rene Wellek's famous "the Crisis of Comparative Literature" in 1990s, Bernheimer's "anxiogenic" Comparative Literature in 1990s, English scholar Bassnett's "comparative literature is a dying subject", American critic Miller's "the (Language ) Crisis of Comparative Literature" in this early century, American scholar Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* and Haun Saussy's "Exquisite Cadavers", and Bassnett's idea that Comparative Literature should give up setting a limit to its research objects in 2006.

In Chinese Literature, the word "crisis" ("危机" also written as "危几" in ancient Chinese) originally appeared in the Three Kingdoms period in Wei Lv' an's article (魏吕安) "The Letter from Zhao Jingzhen to Ji Maoqi": "常恐风波潜骇, 危机密发" ("We often fear that the storm is latent which will lead to the secret happening of crisis" ("与嵇茂齐书"), and then in *Fan Tai's Biography of Song Dynasty* (宋书·范泰传): "In this way, the foundation is solid and there is no sign for crisis ("如此, 则苞桑可系, 危几无兆") as well as in Liu Yan's poetry at Tang Dynasty "Watching Acrobatics of Rope" ("观绳伎"): "There are crisis everywhere, and being upside down is like a willow" ("危机险势无不有, 倒挂纤腰学垂柳"). The word-building is a kind of noun + noun structure with the former one as the centre, so its main meaning is danger ("危") referring to a potential disaster or latent risk. However, if "危机" is split into two separate characters, the two layers of the connotation emerge: one is "危" (danger) while another is "机" (opportunity). "机" was explained *Interpretation of Chinese Characters* (说文解字): "The trigger of machine means opportunity ("主发谓之机"). President Kennedy, in one of his presidential election speeches, mentioned the inspiration which the two characters of the Chinese word "crisis" had given him. Kennedy said this in the context in which the Soviet Union had just launched a man-made satellite, which made Americans feel extremely threatened. Thus, Kennedy used "危机" to encourage US-Americans, and meanwhile, to split the word to analyze the trend U.S. was then confronting with: The Soviet Unions' rapid rise threatens U.S.'s dominant power but at the same time an opportunity existed in the crisis. Similarly, the phenomenon "危机" is always lying in Comparative Literature. "Opportunity" in Comparative Literature refers to the chance of development of the discipline. In fact, every crisis that Comparative Literature experienced has always been accompanied with a new development or expansion of the discipline, resulting with one essential breakthrough of the disciplinary theory of Comparative Literature after another. At present, in the flooding of Eurocentrist articulations of crisis whether Bernheimer's comparative anxiety, Bassnett's Comparative Literature is "dead," Spivak's "Death of a Discipline," or Saussy's "Exquisite Cadavers" could we assert that there is an opportunity hidden behind these crises? Could this crisis bring about great changes for Comparative Literature? In other words, what is the way-out for the current crisis? Let's trace back the history and try to find out the answer.

From the perspective of the history of world Comparative Literature, the crisis has reached two climaxes, or two waves of high tide. The crisis of Comparative Literature originated from the American scholar Wellek. In 1985, in his book *The Crisis of Comparative Literature*, he pointed out "the long lasting permanent crisis" (132). In essence, the crisis refers to the crisis of the theory of the discipline. To be more specific, Comparative Literature has not formed its own set of convincing, legitimate, scrutinized or even attack-withstanding disciplinary theory since its birth. The original French School had no choice but to give up "Comparing", resulting in narrowing down of its research scope of Comparative Literature by firstly setting a certain field and focusing on the study of the literary "relationships" among different nations, when it was confronted with both the challenges from the outsiders like Croce as their representative and the insiders' scientific reflections and explorations. Thus the French School's idea of viewing Comparative Literature as one of the branches of literary history and emphasizing the so-called "factual relations", placed great restrictions on the study horizon. Meanwhile, its empirical method was criticized because it is not unique for Comparative Literature. Based on the above reasons, Wellek finally presented his talk "The Crisis of Comparative Literature" at the second meeting of the ICLA. This speech was an important event in the history of Comparative Literature, or we may say that it is a thorough account-settling with Comparative Literature of the previous more than a half century of the French School. Wellek, first, thought highly of the French School's achievements of strongly rejecting isolated research of national literary history. He then sharply criticized the research solely focusing on "origin and influence" and "causes and

results" conducted by some French scholars who largely reduced Comparative Literature to "foreign trade", enmeshed in "positivism" which totally neglected the aesthetical perspective of literature as a whole entity. Based on Wellek's speech, Chinese scholar Huang Yuanshen concluded Wellek's crisis into the following three points: "1. Comparative Literature lacks definite research scope and special methodology; 2. Its research is mechanically set in the limitations of origins and influences, which descends the discipline to a subsidiary discipline; 3. The motive of cultural nationalism in Comparative Literature research makes itself lose the objectivity it should have, and became the verbal fight for their own national culture reputation" (Huang 135). However, in fact, the scholars who pointed out the existence of crisis like Wellek, did not completely feel hopeless for Comparative Literature because they were also thinking about the way-out while they were pointing out the problems. For example, Wellek brought forward the new horizon of re-examining literariness and literary general aesthetic research from the parallel perspective when he criticized the French School's narrow nationalistic trend. If we regard this speech as "to destroy", his following publication *The Name and Nature of Comparative Literature* (*比较文学的名称与性质*) (1968) is "to establish," aiming to raise his own solution to "Crisis" from the angles of Comparative Literature's nature, research subject, paradigm and method.

Wellek's appeal of "the Crisis of Comparative Literature" symbolizes the American School's appearance on the stage of world Comparative Literature. According to the classic definition made by US-American School scholar Remak, "Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the (fine) arts, philosophy, history, the social sciences, and religion on the other hand (Remark 1)." Remak uses the new horizons of Parallel Study and Interdisciplinary Study to compensate the French School's shortcomings and starts the US-American School's 30-year new prosperity of Comparative Literature. By the co-efforts of a group of US-American scholars Friederich, Remak, Weisstein, and Robert J. Clements, Comparative Literature rapidly developed at all prestigious American universities. With the department of Comparative Literature, master and doctor sections of Comparative Literature are built up and many disciplinary theoretical books were published, Comparative Literature has obviously become a formal discipline of liberal arts; in the meantime, world Comparative Literature also steps into a new developing phase, making the discipline develop into a famous discipline east and west.

In 1993, Bernheimer led a group of experts to write the third decade report for the ICLA with an obvious tone of comparative worries. In the same year, Susan Bassnett in her book *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* proclaimed that Comparative Literature "has already been dead in one sense". In 2003, American critic J-Hillis Miller also raised "the (Language) Crisis of Comparative Literature" in an academic report held by Comparative Literature Research Center at Suzhou University. At the same time, Spivak clearly predicted that Comparative Literature is "a dying discipline" in her book *Death of A Discipline*. Similarly, Saussy named his fourth decade report as "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmare," a metaphor for Comparative Literature in its death.

Now let us view the American School in retrospect. The American School got Comparative Literature out of the "quagmire" of studying "foreign trade", and led to a wide field of Parallel Study and Interdisciplinary Study. If we say the French School's "Crisis" is a crisis resulting in a disciplinary reduction or a crisis caused by "man-made restriction", the US-American School bred the crisis of expansion from its birth, or the crisis of indefinite expansion without any limitation. Just as Chinese scholar Cao Shunqing pointed out, "In the concrete practice of comparative research, the American School's disciplinary boundary is always relatively vague: On the one hand, it seems include almost everything; on the other hand, it excludes the oriental civilizations such as China. It is this contradiction between the extension and constriction that stores up potential problems for Comparative Literature's new round of crises. When people carry on Comparative Literature research in the American School's way, especially when the worldwide cultural research becomes a new trend, the disciplinary theories of the American School face big challenges, and the crisis will undoubtedly happen again" (Cao 12). Remak, was aware of this crisis from the very beginning. Although he had a very strong attitude towards breaking through the French School's man-made limitations, he still had some worry that Comparative Literature would become meaningless if it became a term including almost everything. Therefore, he did not agree to adopt too slack standards to demarcate the border of Comparative Literature. Two decades ago he said that Comparative Literature was at the crossroad, and now he said so once again. Weisstein, who even pointed to "permanent crisis" of Comparative Literature in 1984, also shared the same idea with Remak (Weisstein 25). After a great development

and prosperity from 1950s to 1980s, Comparative Literature in U.S. has already come to an end with obvious signs of decline. The US-American scholars' Parallel Study gave place to various theoretical exploration of Postmodernism and culture studies. Bernheimer believed Comparative Literature was a constantly "anxiogenic" subject: unclear subject goal, uncertain direction, dim employment future for students and urgent to find a way out. All his feelings of confusion and anxieties can be read from his book *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*. In 1993, Bassnet, in her book *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, says that Comparative Literature is already dead. In one sense her book can be regarded as the manifesto of the second wave of crisis of Comparative Literature.

However, is US-American Comparative Literature really almost or has been already "dead"? Bernheimer held the idea that Comparative Literature's "anxiogenic" nature has run through the development history of temporary US-American Comparative Literature, but anxiety became the inner motivation to promote the development of Comparative Literature (Bernheimer 3). In the background of the anxiety from the attacks by various Postmodernism theories, Bernheimer raised two ways to get out of the dilemma in the third decade report: One is to expand literary research into cultural study while the other is to release Comparative Literature from western centrism and step into a stage of the global "multicultural" Comparative Literature study of western and eastern cultures. Similarly, those who also think about the death of Comparative Literature do not think it is really dead. It is more accurate to say that the traditional Comparative Literature such as Influence Study and Parallel Study, has already been dead while a brand new Comparative Literature is going to be born. The new baby, in Bassnet's view, is "translation studies" while, according to Spivak, is "planetary area studies" in the context of globalization beyond Euro or US- American centrism. Bassnet did not show much sorrow when she put forward the death of Comparative Literature as a discipline in 1993 because she then had a complete faith that translation studies could take the place of it. However, over a decade, she found her plan backfired on him—translation studies have not developed so fast and comparison is still the core of it. She no longer believed translation studies could take the place of Comparative Literature to be an independent discipline, but only serve as a major power of literary innovation. Therefore, she published the article named "Reflections on Comparative Literature in the Twenty-First Century" in 2006, diagnosing and rethinking the problem of Comparative Literature. According to her, the problem lies in the excessive regulation of research scope and study objects, setting man-made restrictions and holding back the development of Comparative Literature. Based on this, she put forward that the solution to the crisis should lie in giving up any regulative method to confine research objects, focus on the literary conception in a widest sense and acknowledge the inevitable mutual relations of literary travel. The concrete measures are as follows: emphasizing reader's functions and conducting a comparison of reading courses themselves instead of setting a limitation in advance and choosing certain texts to compare, giving up the meaningless dispute about terms and definitions and more effectively focusing on the research of the text itself, writing history of sketching cross culture and cross time and space boundaries and reading history. In 2003, Spivak, using Post-colonial perspective, predicted the death of the traditional Comparative Literature established on the basis of Eurocentrism. Thus, she thinks the way out is firstly to acknowledge a definitive future anteriority, a "to comeness" and a "will have happened" quality. *Death of a Discipline* is not a manifesto to really announce the death of Comparative Literature, but clearing the way for "a new Comparative Literature," which also means to deconstruct Euro and US-American centrism and build a "planetary" thinking mode without hegemony and hegemonic discourse power, combined with area studies. Hence we can see that even in the heart of those people who sing loudly "Crisis Said" or "Death Said," Comparative Literature is still prospective and promising. Nevertheless, what is the prospect? What is the promise? Is it Bernheimer's "diversions of globalization and cultural studies" or Bassnet's abolishing disciplinary limit, or Spivak's "planetary area studies"? How should we view the status quo or the future of Comparative Literature?

In the West, world literature is regarded as the future of Comparative Literature studies. World literature is in fact an old topic. According to western scholars, the concept of "world literature" originated from Plato's Utopia, which put forward the "dream" to build a world unity beyond the boundaries of nations, politics and so on. It aims to establish research on the social relations and identity among different civilizations of human beings. Later on, this idea was accepted and developed into "Cosmopolitanism" in a variety of fields by some western scholars such as Croce, De De Sanctis, William von Humboldt, Herder and Hegel. These people, with different ways of thinking and research fields, make their co-contribution to the concept of "world history". Among them the most influential must be Goethe and Karl Marx. As early as 1827, Goethe pointed that the age of world literature was coming. He became the first scholar who explicitly put forward the concept of "world literature" in the

German language. In a conversation with his secretary Eckermann after giving praise to the Chinese novel *好逑传* (The Pleasing History) which inspired his first thought on world literature, Goethe initially used the expression "Weltliteratur" in his famous pronouncement: "National literature does not have much meaning nowadays. The epoch of Weltliteratur is at hand, and each of us must work to hasten its coming" (Goethe 165). Later in the July of the same year, he mentioned it again when talking with Eckermann about Thomas Carlyle. Goethe's idea of world literature is not a thing, but primarily a goal of enlightenment. In Goethe's mind, world literature was still an ideal and an anticipation of literature's future, so Goethe did not clearly define "world literature". Karl Marx reduced world literature to the works of the global marketplace which abolished regional and local barriers of human society. However, neither of them explained any specific definition of it. World literature becomes debatable because many scholars have their different views. What is world literature? Actually, it is a very complicated problem. Some scholars think it is a collection of worldwide literary works, others believe it sometimes refers to those invaluable great literary works with world significance; others hold the idea that it is a collection of works selected and collected according to a certain standard. All in all, world literature is always at the dynamic state of being continuously defined. What's more increasing globalization makes the concept of world literature more complicated, and entails a re-examination of the concept. In 2003, US-American scholar Damrosch interpreted three layers of meaning of "world literature" in his book *What is World Literature?* "World literature is an elliptical of national literature," "world literature is writing that gains in translation," and "world literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time" (Damrosch 281). Damrosch's definition of world literature is representative, but it also has the following defects like other definitions: World literature lacks systematic theories and methodologies; world literature focuses on homogeneity and ignores heterogeneity.

In the East, the Chinese School has been regarded as the third stage of development of Comparative Literature. Different from western scholars who give much consideration to world literature, the Chinese School pays much more attention to the exploration of the travelling between Chinese literary works and foreign literary works. The theoretical awareness of the Chinese School originated from 1970s. In July 1971, some scholars such as Zhu Liyuan, Yan Yuanshu, Wai-Lim Yip and so on put forward the disciplinary configuration during the meeting of the first ICLC in Danjiang, Taiwan. Gu Tianhong and Chen Huihua published *Taiwanese collected essays of Comparative Literature* (1976), who explicitly wrote in the preface that it was the feature of the Chinese School that western literary theories and methodologies are tested, adjusted and adopted to Chinese literary research. This is the earliest written description of the Chinese School. This book firstly narrates the history of world Comparative Literature's development from the French School's Influence Study to the US-American School's Parallel Study and finally to the rising of "the Chinese School" advocated by scholars in Taiwan and Hong Kong in 1970s, and then explains three major changes of methodological directions from cross-national boundaries, Interdisciplinary Studies to cross-cultural studies. It is the research of cross-western and eastern cultures that features the Chinese School of Comparative Literature. The characteristics and methodology of the Chinese School fall into five categories: cross-cultural "two-way interpretative" approach, Chinese and Western complementary "difference comparing" approach, "searching ethnic characteristics and cultural roots" approach, Chinese and Western communication promotional "dialogue mechanism," and "integration and Construction method," aiming to pursue theoretical reconstruction (Gu 7).

Li Dasan's essay "The Chinese School of Comparative Literature" ("比较文学中国学派") (1977) further proclaimed and strengthened the formal establishment of the Chinese School, and pointed out three targets that the Chinese School would strive for: 1) enriching world literature with Chinese theory and literature; 2) popularizing non-western regional literature and fostering a belief that western literature is merely one of expressions of numerous literatures; and 3) acting as a spokesman of non-western nations but not posing oneself as the representative of all other non-western nations. Later, Li Dasan wrote an essay that analyses the research condition of the scholars in Chinese mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong, zealously pushing forward the theoretical construction of the Chinese School. In 1990s, the Chinese School once again became a concern and hot topic of young and established comparatists. In China, Comparative Literature theory entered a stage of maturity with disciplinary theory and the schools fast development. Yue Daiyun, Rao Pengzi, Chen Dun, Sun Jingyao, Cao Shunqing, and Xie Tianzhen are the most outstanding representatives. In a recent decade, Chinese Comparative Literature research has showed a multidimensional and multilevel development mode, and the focus of the exploration is sorting out the disciplinary history of Comparative Literature and creating its theoretical paradigm. It is to be observed that the scholars,

with Cao Shunqing as one of the most important representatives, reinvented Comparative Literature's theories with Chinese and Western Comparative Poetics, cross-civilizations studies and Variation theory as their core, which directly promote the disciplinary theoretical frontier construction of Chinese Comparative Literature (Cao 166-171). Can the Chinese scholars' disciplinary theoretical system be a way out of the crisis? In fact, the answer is positive. When Comparative Literature in the West develops slowly or remains stagnant, Comparative Literature in China grows flourishing and prosperous in the recent decade. Since its revival more than twenty years ago, Chinese comparative Literature has instilled powerful vitality into the academic circle with a remarkable number of scholars and abundant achievements.

The problem of comparability is at the core of the crisis of Comparative Literature. The French School regarded "homology" as the comparability but failed to have a further research. Wellek questioned the French School for its ignorance of literariness by only focusing on origin and influence, resulting in the confinement of the research scope leading to the crisis of Comparative Literature. The US-American School added "similarity" as one of comparabilities in addition to "homology" and made Interdisciplinary Study the new research scope of Comparative Literature. From then on, Comparative Literature has faced the crisis of unclear research objects and definition. Thus, what to compare and how to compare become a problem which haunts the US-American School. In 1995, Culler articulated the significance of discussing comparability because comparability is the inner power which necessarily leads to the great changes in Comparative Literature. Chinese scholars have been attaching great importance to comparability. Among them, the most representative is Cao Shunqing who believes that besides "homology" and "similarity", the Chinese School also regards "heterogeneity" and "variability" as comparabilities. Based on this basic idea, he as the representative of the Chinese School invented Variation Theory as a new Chinese School's disciplinary theory of Comparative Literature.

First the proposal of Variation Theory aims at the status quo of the theoretical anomie of Comparative Literature. The so-called "anomie" refers to the uncertainty of range and object of study in Comparative Literature research. Not only is Western Comparative Literature theory at a loss and in disorder, but some of the present Chinese theoretical exposition and textbook compilations are at a state of chaos. The French School's Influence Study advocates positivistic research of history of international literary relations because they believe that a discipline should stress a scientific and positivistic spirit. The US-American School advocates Parallel Study focusing on literary aesthetics because they question the French School's scientific and positivistic research. They think that Comparative Literature must face the issue of literariness squarely and only literariness is the central topic for discussion. Thus literariness should be introduced into the disciplinary theoretical structure of Comparative Literature. As soon as literary aesthetics is involved in the research practice of Comparative Literature, new problems emerge in the study of Comparative Literature. Compared with Parallel Study emphasizing aesthetics, Influence Study examines the history of international literature relations with the feature of positivism as its subject orientation. However, positivistic research has some serious defects mainly because "positivism can be used to prove the factual and scientific laws, but cannot be applied to explain artistic creation and aesthetics of reception of literature" (Chen 18). Influence Study mainly concerns external literary research while Parallel Study examines internal literary research. Obviously, it is hard to reveal the interior from the exterior. Therefore, Influence Study is also regarded as "elusive and mysterious mechanism, through which a work generates influence on another work" (Brunel 53). Carré who has been stressing positivistic research also believes, "Perhaps there has been too great a proclivity toward influence studies. They are difficult to manage and often deceptive, since one sometimes deals with imponderables" (Guyard 6).

Secondly, Variation Theory accommodates the actual situation of historical development of literature. From the perspective of the process of literary history different cultures are undergoing blending, the variation and the generating of new materials when heterogeneous civilizations have collisions. One of the typical examples is the literature in Chinese Northern and Southern Dynasties. At that time the situation of social instability and frequent wars accelerated the exchange and integration of the Northern literature and the Southern literature unexpectedly, and it is during that period of time that Indian Buddhist culture is introduced into China. The touch and clash of heterogeneous civilizations make the literary creation and literary theory in Chinese Northern and Southern Dynasties reach an unprecedented peak. The reason for this phenomenon is that the communication and clash can activate the intrinsic elements of literature of both conflicting parties and activate them. The interior of the culture system undergoes a series of "variations", not matter if the purpose is to expand or maintain its culture. The variations in the internal literary system and cultural system are creative factors that promote literary development. The complicated process of outside heterogeneous literary

elements function in native literature conventions and generate the variation phenomena that boosts the development of local literature to become canonical literature for later generations. Therefore, the research of literary variation phenomena should be included into one of the primary perspectives of Comparative Literature.

Finally, the proposal of Variation Theory of Comparative Literature converts the original "seeking the same" into the present stage of "seeking the differences". Both the French School and the US-American School conduct their Comparative Literature studies in a single civilization system based on the research paradigm of "seeking the same" and fail to make comparisons among different heterogeneous civilization systems, so the researches of both of schools adopt the paradigm emphasizing practice in a single civilization system. However, when we cast our vision into a different civilization system, we may find out more variations in the conception of literary phenomenon than similar literary principles. As for variation phenomena in heterogeneous civilizations, we should forget the thinking mode of "seeking the same" and redefine the research scope of Comparative Literature from the perspective of heterogeneity and variability.

On the basis of the above considerations, Cao Shunqing initially put forward Variation Theory of Comparative Literature at the Eighth Annual Conference of Chinese Comparative Literature in 2005. From then on it triggers heated discussions and studies of Variation Theory of Comparative Literature among the academic field. Of course, literary Variation Theory should have its own definite research objects and scope.

The first aspect is cross-language variation study. It mainly refers to the processes in which literary phenomena go across the boundary of languages and are accepted by target-language environment via translation, namely translation study or Medio-translatology. Most domestic textbooks of Comparative Literature follow the French School's viewpoint to group Medio-translatology into the research area of Mesologie, which is not an appropriate categorization in that Medio-translatology contains lots of variation elements of cross-language and cross-culture while Mesologie belongs to positivist Influence Study. That's to say, though Medio-translatology stems from the study of Mesologie, it nowadays focuses more and more on the studies of translation (especially literary translation) and translating literature from the perspective of cultural comparison (Xie 1). The current study of Medio-translatology has already gone beyond the scope of conventional translation of words, focusing on "creative treason", rather our concern should turn to the variations of words and literature themselves in the translation process, which means regarding literary variation phenomena as a prior research objective.

The second aspect is the Variation Study of national image, also known as "Imagology". Imagology originates in France at the middle of the twentieth century. It is first included by Guyard in a chapter "Other Countries in Our Eyes" in his *La Littérature Comparée* and is referred to as "opening a new research direction" (Guyard 107) by him. Later, Wellek views it as a "social psychology and cultural history" (Wellek 285), which denies both Carré's and Guyard's trial efforts. With the presence of social and scientific new theories, Imagology gradually becomes a branch of Comparative Literature. Of course, it has already stepped into the scope of literary and cultural studies from the initial pessimistic study of relations. Imagology mainly focuses on the study of the images of foreign countries manifested in literature of one country, actually a kind of "social collective national illusion" of source language literature. It is just this illusion that naturally makes variation an inevitable result. The emphasis of Imagology should be included in the process of generating variations and analysis of the possible principles from deeper cultural or literary patterns.

The third aspect is variation study on the level of literary texts. The foundations of Comparative Literature are literariness and texts themselves, so the variations likely to take place between literary texts are naturally included into the scope of Comparative Literature. Literary reception becomes a hot research field nowadays and "reception" has become one of key terms of literary research for the past fifteen years. Although some textbooks in China have already started to list certain chapters to focus on this issue, reception study has so far no clear theoretical position yet. As a variant of Influence Study, it differs from the new research mode of Influence Study, but what are the similarities and differences between the two? As a matter of fact, the question is crystal clear when viewed from the angle of Variation Study and literary relation. Different from positivistic research of literary relations, literary reception is mingled with elements of aesthetics and psychological factors which are hardly positivistic, thus belonging to the scope of literary variation. The scope of this research also includes Thematology and Typology belonging to previous Parallel Study.

The fourth aspect is variation on the level of culture. Literature is doomed to be confronted with different literature frameworks when it travels across different cultural systems. That is to say, "the



heterogeneity of cultural molds and the heterogeneity of literature resulting from it" (Yip 39), the thing comparatists have no choice but to face. It is evitable to generate variation due to the different cultural molds. And among them, the most typical example is cultural filtering. Culture filtering refers to such phenomena such as the intentional or unintentional change, selection, deletion and filtering of source literary information by recipient, based on its own cultural background and conventions in the process of literary communications and dialogues.

The fifth aspect is the variation across civilizations and the variation of discourses. Most contemporary theories have travelled from the West to the East. And as soon as the Western theories arrive in China, they undergo two kinds of variations: one is that China borrows completely the lineage of knowledge of Western literary theories while the other is the variation of Western literary theories on their own, namely, Sinicization of Western literary theories (Cao and Tan 5). Many scholars contend that when Chinese scholars are introducing and applying Western literary theories, they should put the theoretical appeals of Chinese native circumstances into consideration, selectively adopt and innovate Western literary theories on the premise of the inheritance of its own cultural spirit and promote the development of Chinese literary theories to provide a fundamental solution to "Aphasia" of Chinese literary theories.

All these five aspects jointly consist of the research scope of literary Variation Theory of Comparative Literature. Certainly, as a brand-new perspective of the discipline, there are still many problems to be explored, but there is no doubt that the proposal of the scope of Variation Theory is essential to the clarification and identification of content and research objects of the discipline as well as providing an effective solution to the crisis of the discipline.

The "Crisis Said" or "Death Said" of Comparative Literature is not just a shocking statement to attract attentions or something complete wrong, but it is reasonable in some sense. We comparatists west or east should directly face the disciplinary problems resulting from its inner logic dilemma and an inadequate natural endowment, and make appropriate changes to convert "danger" ("危") into "opportunity" (机) in the context of globalization. The rising of The Chinese School with the appearance of Variation Theory in the multicultural age which represents the future of Comparative Literature in some sense is just one of the excellent typical examples.

### Works Cited

- Basnett, Susan. *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993.
- Bernheimer Charles. *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 1-17.
- Bernheimer, Charles. "The Bernheimer Report, 1993: Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century." *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*. Ed. Charles Bernheimer. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 39-48.
- Brunel, Pierre, Claude Pichois, and André Michael Rousseau, ed. *Qu'es-Ce Que La Littérature Comparée?* Paris: Armand Colin, 1983.
- Cao, Shunqing (曹顺庆). "比较文学的三个阶段" ("Three Stages in the development of Comparative literary theories"). *Comparative Literature in China*, 3, 12 (2001): 1-17.
- Cao, Shunqing (曹顺庆) and Li Bing (李斌). "近年中国比较文学研究概述" ("Review on the Research of Chinese Comparative Literature for Recent Years"). *中州学刊 (Academic Journal of Zhongzhou)* No.8. (2013): 166-71.
- Cao, Shunqing (曹顺庆) and Tan jia (谭佳). "重建中国文论的又一条途径——论西方文论中国化" ("Another Effective Way of the Reconstruction of Chinese discourses for Literary Criticism: Sinicization of Western Literary Theories"). *外国文学研究 (Foreign Literature Studies)* (2004): 120-127.
- Chen, Sihe (陈思和). "20世纪中外文学关系研究中的\_世界性因素\_的几点思考" ("Viewpoints toward 'Global Elements' in the Study of China/Foreign Literary Relations of 20th Century"). *中国比较文学 (Comparative Literature in China)*. (2001): 9-15.
- Culler, Jonathan. "Comparability." *World Literature Today* 2 vol 69 (1995): 268-270.
- Damrosch, David. *What is Comparative Literature?* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.
- Gayatri, C. Spivak. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia UP, 2003.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang Von and Johann Perter Eckermann. *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co, 1930.
- Gu Tianhong (古添洪) and Chen Huihua (陈慧桦). *比较文学的垦拓在台湾 (The Development of Comparative Literature in Taiwan)*. Taibei: Dong Da Pub. House, 1976.
- Guyard, Marius-Francois. *La Littérature Comparée*. Trans. Yan Bao. Beijing: Peking UP, 1983.
- Henry H. H. Remark. "Comparative Literature: Its Definition and Function." *Comparative Literature: Method & Perspective* (revised edition). Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1971.
- Huang Yuanshen (黄源深). "译者后记" ("Translation Afterwards"). *比较文学翻译作品选集 (Collected Translational Works of Comparative Literature)*. Ed. Gan Yongchang. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Pub. House, 1985. 135-136.

- J. Hillis Miller, "The (Language) Crisis of Comparative Literature". *The Contemporary Form of Comparative Literature Theory*. Suzhou University. (12 September 2003).
- Li, Dasan (李达三). "比较文学中国学派" ("The Chinese School of Comparative Literature"). *中外文学 (Chinese and Foreign Literature)* 5 (1977): 78-83.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.
- Saussy, Haun. "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares: Of Memes, Hives, and Self Genes". *Comparative Literature in An Age of Globalization*. Ed. Haun Saussy. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2006. 3-42.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Death of A Discipline*. New York: Columbia UP, 2003.
- Weisstein, Ulrich. *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory*. Indiana: Indiana UP, 1987.
- Wellek, René. "The Crisis of Comparative Literature." Trans. Huang Yuanshen (黄源深). *比较文学翻译作品选集 (Collected Translational Works of Comparative Literature)*. Ed. Gan Yongchang. Shanghai Translation, 1985.
- Wellek, René. *Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1970.
- Wellek, René. "The Crisis of Comparative Literature." Trans. Huang Yuanshen (黄源深). *比较文学翻译作品选集 (Collected Translational Works of Comparative Literature)*. Ed. Gan Yongchang. Shanghai Translation, 1985.
- Yip, Wai-lim. *In Search of Common Poetics Between Chinese and Western Cultures—Selected Comparative Literature Studies of Wai-lim Yip*. Beijing: Peking UP, 1986.
- Yves, Chevrel. *La Littérature Comparée*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991.
- Xie, Tianzhen (谢天振). *译介学 (Medio-translatology)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Publishing House, 1999.

Author's profile: Ping Du teaches English literature and translation at Guangdong University of Finance & Economics and studies towards her Ph.D. in comparative literature at Sichuan University. Her interests in scholarship include comparative literature, literary translation and cultural criticism. Du's publications include comparative literature, literary translation and cultural criticism. Du's recent article publications include "论 '跨文化' 下的变异学研究" ("On Variation Theory in the Context of 'Cross-culture'"), *Cultural Studies and Literary Theory* (2014) and "Rewriting, Ideology, and Poetics in Goldblatt's Translation of Mo Yan's 天堂蒜薹之歌 (*The Garlic Ballads*)," *Comparative Literature and Culture (CLCWeb)* (2015). E-mail: <[duping@gdufe.edu.cn](mailto:duping@gdufe.edu.cn)>