



## Reflections on the Crisis of Comparative Literature in the Contemporary West

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**Abstract:** In their Article "Reflections on the Crisis of Comparative Literature in the Contemporary West" Zhoukun Han and Wen Quan review the challenges met during the evolution of comparative literature as a discipline between the turn of nineteenth century and 1958. They maintain that comparative literature in the contemporary West is indeed experiencing a crisis, explicate the reasons for this. Apart from the pursuit of sameness inherent in conventional comparative studies and the position of western-centrism, the shift from literary comparison to cultural study has exacerbated the crisis. In view of this situation, some western scholars call for a return to comparison and literature. Furthermore, they resuscitate the conception of world literature and give it new meanings to address the crisis. Meanwhile Chinese scholars have responded with cross-civilization studies and variation theory, which promises of a new theoretical construction for comparative literature.

## Zhoukun HAN and Wen QUAN

### Reflections on the Crisis of Comparative Literature in the Contemporary West

The construction of a discipline needs a clear research object and a rigorous methodology. Therefore, if a discipline has no clear purpose, no well-defined objective of research, no effective methodology, it will inevitably be questioned or criticized by insiders and outsiders of the academic circle. Comparative literature with a history of over a century is such a discipline that has been criticized many times, each wave of attack resulted in a crisis for the discipline. Generally speaking, there are three discipline crises for comparative literature. The first one occurred from the 1890s to the beginning of the twentieth Century, when the Italian scholar Benedetto Croce, German scholar Wilhelm Dilthey, Ernst Elster and Hans Daffis questioned the legitimacy of the discipline identity of comparative literature. They argued that comparison as a commonly used research method can't be claimed by comparative literature. Furthermore, method cannot define the scope of research. Besides, there is hardly a difference between comparative literary history and history of literature in a real sense. Therefore, comparative literature is a term without a substantive content. This targeted attack was so persuasive that comparative literature scholars could not refute it. Under this tremendous pressure, comparative literature in European countries except France had quieted and faded in its infancy. The second critique originated in René Wellek's famous speech that challenged the basis of the French school. The title of the speech was "the Crisis of Comparative Literature". It was delivered at Chapel Hill in the 1958 annual conference of Comparative Literature in San Francisco. Wellek pointed out that comparative literature research at that time showed a "sign of the precarious state", because of "the fact that it has not been able to establish a distinct subject matter and a specific methodology" (162). He criticized the French School that confined "'comparative literature' to the study of the foreign trade of two literatures limits it to a concern with externals" (163). French scholars were in fact igniting "warfare of cultural *prestige*", conceiving of literature as "indicator of national psychology". The situation of this discipline has become "a stagnant backwater."

The crisis of comparative literature in the contemporary West is in its third crisis, this paper would like to focus on it especially. The statements of the third crisis are mainly from the well-known British translation theorist and comparatist Susan Bassnett, and the Indian scholar Gayatri C. Spivak. In the monograph, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (1993), Bassnett overtly claims that comparative literature has entered a new stage where problems continue to emerge at the end of the twenty-century. "That the subject is in crisis in the West is no doubt", and it "has lost its way" (9). In the book, she has sought to show that "the crisis of comparative literature derives from a legacy of nineteenth-century Eurocentric positivism and from a refusal to consider the political implications of intercultural transfer, which are fundamental to any comparative activity" (159). In other words, Bassnett asserts that the narrowness of the binary distinction, the unhelpfulness of the ahistorical approach, the complacent shortsightedness of the Literature-as-universal-civilizing-force approach have all contributed to its demise. In order to solve the crisis, her prescription is that comparative literature should break through the old mode of binary research on two writers or texts from two different cultural systems, and expand the research scope in order to adapt to the trend of intercultural transfer. She also found a place for the declining comparative literature: "we should look upon translation studies as the principal discipline from now on, with comparative literature as a valued but subsidiary subject area" (161).

While 13 years later, Bassnett realized that comparative literature was not devoured by translation studies, and on the contrary, has flourished in some eastern countries as China, India and South Korea etc. Thus she had to admit that her "deliberately provocative statement" in 1993 intends to belittle comparative literature and look upon translation as the principal discipline. Even so, she did not give up struggling with comparative literature, and still denied it is qualified enough to be a discipline. The crisis in comparative literature, in her opinion, "derived from excessive prescriptivism combined with distinctive culturally specific methodologies that could not be universally applicable or relevant" (7). As usual, Bassnett did not forget to show her concern towards the future of comparative literature: she suggested foregrounding the role of the reader, and valuing the act of comparing during the reading process itself; moreover, literary scholars should "abandon pointless debates about terminology and definition, to focus more productively on the study of texts themselves, mapping the history of writing and reading across cultural and temporal boundaries" (11).

Spivak is another significant scholar who puts forward the theory that comparative literature is dying. In *Death of a Discipline*, on one hand, she proposes three steps of crossing borders,

collectivities, and planetarity to save the discipline from dying. On the other hand, her solution implies the plight of the current study of comparative literature. By expounding that the scheme is not easy to be implemented, Spivak suggests the hopeless situation of the discipline. In Spivak's discourse, the discipline's dilemma can be exemplified in the following: first, the current study of comparative literature in the West is the product of political science, the development of comparative literature is a way of political manipulation and political service. The U.S. one of the leaders in current comparative literature research, is a typical example: "if the 'origin' of Area Studies was the aftermath of the Cold War, the 'origin' of U.S. Comparative Literature had something of a relationship with the events that secured it" (8). Political influence leads to the second dilemma. Those countries (such as the United States) and the regions (mainly North America and Europe) with strong political and cultural influence are self-centered, and they view other countries and regions as "the other". Literature from those countries and regions will naturally be regarded as the main literature, while the literature of "the other" is regarded as the secondary literature; and the latter cannot be compared with the former, the latter hasn't been justly included in the scope of the western scholars' comparative study. Though "Comparative Literature must always cross borders, and crossing borders, as Derrida never ceases reminding us via Kant, is a problematic affair" (16). Third, because comparative literature in regional studies has constituted the differences between self and other, this prejudice of alterity hinders the construction of planetarity literature. Planetarity literature is close to the conception of world literature; it includes "but not identical with the whole range of human universals" (73), and the literature in different countries or regions has its particularity. At the same time, different kinds of literature can be viewed as living beings with numerous similarities. "Perhaps the foothold for planetarity be located in the texts of these spread-out sectors of the world's literatures and cultures". "This drastic epistemic change must be imagined by Comparative Literature. But I cannot will everyone to think so" (87). As can be seen from the three progressive steps above, power relations and inequality make comparative literature lose its purity and justice, and the self-centered stereotypes in the West make the ideal of world literature become out of reach. In *Death of a Discipline*, the whole book is pessimistic. Even though Spivak has been watching and expecting the development of the discipline, she is still pessimistic and lacking in confidence towards the gloomy prospects of comparative literature in general. As she said, "I have changed nothing of the urgency of my call for 'a new comparative literature'. I hope the book (*Death of A Discipline*) will be read as the last gasp of a dying discipline" (XII).

It is an indisputable fact that comparative literature in contemporary West are confronting with a crisis, but not all western scholars are aware of what causes this crisis. If we reflect on the development of comparative literature in the West, we may find that there are reasons which come from the deficiencies of current paradigms in France and US-America, and from the prejudice of western-centrism. Besides, the shift of the discipline's central task seems to have been the last straw.

Comparability is closely related to comparative literature as it refers to what is worthy of comparison between different civilizations and nations' literature. In other words, comparability is "a fundamental question in the course of comparative literary theory and a key element in pushing forward comparative theories" (Cao, "Comparability" 1). The focus of the former two crises debate is an exploration of comparability: French scholars abandoned "comparison", and defined comparative literature as "international relationship of literature" though, they still had comparability named sameness of source; while US-American scholars picked up "comparison", and strived to seek for sameness in literature type, theme, genre, literary theory etc., and similarities between literature and other subjects. French scholars and American scholars, based on comparability, have come up with their own specific paradigm, and thus built two schools of comparative literature.

As comparative literature in the West has been limited to the circle of western civilization where there are more similarities than differences, scholars from Europe and North America have yielded substantial results in seeking for similarities in literary relationship between different nations. However, in the globalization age, literature from different civilizations are in unavoidable exchange. In this trend, the West has recognized heterogeneous civilizations. Because of the distinction in cultural tradition, the literary heterogeneity in different civilizations is highlighted, which brings us to the problem: if scholars continue following the comparability standard of pursuing sameness, there will be many difficulties. We have got used to putting writers and works from various literature together and find out similarities on the surface, however, we are not able to dig into the heterogeneity beneath in this shallow "X and Y" or "X in Y" comparison. Many western scholars have realized this problem; thus they cannot reach an agreement when delving into literary comparison with other civilizations. For example, Weisstein once thought that "as comparatists we are not a

people lacking space but rather one having too much of it" (27). Besides, the literary tradition in the West is quite different from the Middle East or the Far East, thus the attempt to seek for similar poetic mode between them might be labored. While Wellek, who firmly thinks highly of general literature, believes that there should be interrelationship between western literature and literature from other civilizations, and even without the relations, they are included in general literature. But on reflection, it is obvious that both Weisstein and Wellek stand on a same footing, namely, only when similarities are found will comparison be possible. We do agree that it is worthy of comparison as there are lots of similarities between different civilizations. While comparison of differences seems more valuable in view of the fact that differences are much more than similarities. Imagine that we doggedly pursue sameness, then is there any significance to perform a partial comparison of literature with other civilizations?

Bassnett realizes that new research projects of comparative literature have emerged in many Asian countries and regions, and that comparative literature in these places has changed its courses. However, the crisis of comparative literature in the West is still continuing. She thinks that the reason for the difference between the East and the West is that the projects of comparative literature in the East are "based not on any ideal of universalism but on the very aspect of literary study that many western comparatists had sought to deny: the specificity of national literatures" (*Comparative* 5). For a long time, the West has always been scrutinizing others from its own viewpoint, which inevitably caused a variety of assumptions. As Edward W. Said pointed out, westerners have misunderstood the East. "The Orient was a word which later accrued to it a wide field of meanings, associations and connotations, and that these did not necessarily refer to the real Orient but to the field surrounding the word" (203). Oriental comparative literature is associated with the problem of national culture and national identity. Therefore, it obtains a new research perspective. But the West still sticks to the old concepts, and it rarely objectively looks at oriental literature, let alone learns the theory construction experience of comparative literature from other countries such as China and India.

Bassnett claimed that comparative literature was dying. Spivak and many other western scholars also have the same anxiety. In a sense, they commented on Western comparative literature. We can say that the crisis they point out is that of Western Centralism and their fears are self-contradictory. On one hand, they have seen the development of comparative literature outside Europe and North America. On the other hand, they assert that the subject has no future, and even regard it as a dead discipline. Why? Because the eastern prosperity can't inspire the Western decline. Instead, western scholars regard their own decadence as a general situation of the whole discipline. They seclude themselves and ignore eastern progress. Maybe if Bassnett recognized the discipline theoretical construction by the Chinese school, she might think it not necessary that comparative literature be subordinated to translation studies. And she wouldn't doubt that comparative literature is only suitable as a method of the literary research, but not enough to become a subject.

The manifestation of western centralism has two sides: on one hand, some western scholars doubt the comparability of literature in different civilizations, and even neglect some literary classics in developing areas. For example, Hegel considers the African culture weak and thinks that it can't be compared with the advanced culture. On the other hand, contemporary western scholars deliberately disregard the new trend of the eastern comparative literature. They turn a deaf ear to innovative theoretical ideas from eastern countries including China. And this just indicates that the western academy has been aware of its plight but refused to learn the ways to solve the crisis from others.

If the above two are deep reasons, the last straw which caused the crisis of western comparative literature is its deviation from the central task of comparison and literature. As Richard Rorty said, "so-called 'crises' move the apparently peripheral to the center and the apparently central to outer darkness" (66).

In the West, for example, many famous colleges and universities with Departments of comparative literature don't have introduction classes of comparative literature, so students cannot grasp the history, object and methodology of discipline as a whole. Apart from the course of literary history and literary theory, a large number of projects could be linked to literature, but actually they have no direct connections. They work in the comparative literature but they do interdisciplinary research. Various projects like gender Studies, post-colonial studies, film studies, and mass cultural studies all join in the courses of comparative literature. And the relationship between literature and contemporary culture has become a trend. Teachers also use their positions to do other kinds of research in the organization. Jonathan Culler has mentioned a typical phenomenon, that is, there is a wide range of topics in the field of comparative literature in the West, which has attracted many Ph. D. candidates who are engaged in postcolonial studies. But their doctoral dissertations mostly focus on

social or political issues which are not related to literature. Even so, they can also be teachers in comparative literature departments (Culler 2006: 241). Another example is Professor Richard Rorty also a beneficiary of "literary theory". His title also changed with his work, from a philosophy professor in Princeton University to a humanities professor in University of Virginia, and then the comparative literature professor in Stanford University in the 90's. In this education system, teachers' focuses are rarely on literature and comparison, and students may also vaguely listen to many courses from different fields. Then we could feel that the scope of comparative literature is unlimitedly broad, but that its central task is unknown.

We can see that the project of comparative literature in colleges and universities is based on the research direction and academic interest of the professors in the departments of comparative literature. On the whole, the academic circles have not given enough attention to "comparison" in the study of literary theory, interdisciplinary research, the research on the relationship of Literature and psychoanalysis and the relationship of literature and film. Why is there such a trend? It is related to cultural studies in the 90's and the cultural turn in comparative literature. Although cultural studies have introduced a lot of new theories and enriched the methodology of this discipline, they lead to a pan-culture phenomenon. And a serious consequence of the pan-culture phenomenon is that many comparative literature scholars have analyzed it beyond the text, such as the post-colonialism in the political study and feminism in gender studies. But the pan-culture tide does have some remarkable achievements. The powerful discourse which Said brought attention to has made great contributions to post-colonial studies. But in a strict sense, it does not belong to comparative literature because its center is not on literature and comparison. Furthermore, Bassnett has connected translation studies with cultural studies and found some factors like politics, discourse power, gender and class struggle in the translation. Furthermore, she thinks that translation studies have greater vitality than comparative literature. In fact, they have unconsciously ignored the "literariness" of the translation under the influence of the discourse, gender and ethnic groups, and other factors.

The trend of subject expansion is a result of the impact of various cultural theories in the multicultural era, and it is also related to the organization of the field. The most direct manifestation is the report of "Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century" in 1993 by the president of the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) Charles Bernheimer. The report suggests the role of comparative literature be turned and become cultural, and emphasizes the interaction between traditional comparative literature and the emerging cultural studies. Owing to the authority of the report and "those of us who defended literature, or opined that the study of literature ought to retain a central place in comparative literature, were belittled by Charlie Bernheimer" (Culler, "Comparative Literature" 2006: 240). The report has an important impact on the development of the discipline in over ten years and has aroused extensive and heated discussion in international comparative literature. After that, the themes of the following international conferences on comparative literature are all about culture. For example, themes from the 14th to the 17th conference are: "Literature in Multicultural Context: Language, Culture and Society" 1994, "Literature as Cultural Memory" 1997, "Transitions and Transgressions in an Age of Multiculturalism" 2000, "'At the Edge': Margins, Frontiers, Initiatives in Literature and Culture" 2004. We can see that every theme that involves culture is closely related with literature. Although it's useful to study the external cultural context of literature, it is wrong to concentrate more on external factors. These factors will cause the discipline to lose its way in the expansion of the border. Therefore, the pan-culture of comparative literature will lead the discipline the wrong way.

Fortunately, this wrong orientation also brought about the opposition of many western scholars, especially the first statement in the graduate program in Bernheimer's report: "literary phenomena are no longer the exclusive focus of our discipline". We recommend to "broaden the field" (43), which many scholars questioned. Peter Brooks said, "Far from believing with the ACLA report that 'the term "literature" may no longer adequately describe our object of study,' I would hence urge that literature must very much remain our focus" (104). Roland Greene also agrees that, "it (literature) is still our intellectual basis, the type of discourse by which we measure all others, the object of our most successful practices" (151). Even Haun Saussy also thought about advantages and disadvantages of the "interdisciplinary" in comparative literature through reviewing the history of comparative literature in 2004. After all, "interdisciplinarity" is not a random mix between disciplines, but a result of literature naturally seeking for ways out in its internal demand. However, all in all comparative literature scholars have paid more attention to theories and methods rather than literature and comparison.

Some western scholars have admitted that comparative literature in the West is faced with a crisis. And recently more and more scholars have been aware of the reasons and begun to explore effective methods to reverse the situation. They were surprised to find the rise of Chinese comparative literature in the 1980's in Taiwan and Hong Kong. These places were following the West, but in recent years they also have set their sights to mainland China. In contrast, comparative literature in mainland China is developing in full flourish. More and more colleges and universities have set up the department of comparative literature, the master and doctoral programs of comparative literature have been increasing, and the Chinese Comparative Literature Association has organized a number of influential comparative literature conferences. What's more, a series of achievements made by the Chinese scholars in the disciplines theory have advanced the subject. Without doubt, the development of comparative literature in China must be beneficial to the western scholars to comprehensively understand their crisis and to find solutions.

In consideration of the discipline's crisis, we need to make a choice and find a way out. As it is known to us, World literature is constructed from literature of all the nations, so the crisis of comparative literature in the contemporary West is not a problem that only puzzles western scholars, it is a common issue to comparatists all over the world. Discipline crisis in the West is a warning to the East as well, meanwhile experience from the East will offer inspirations for the recovery from crisis in the West. Both western scholars and Eastern scholars have been striving to think out a solution.

Bassnett and Spivak have realized that comparative literature as a discipline is experiencing a life-or-death moment. Nevertheless, they have failed to provide an effective prescription, and that's why they show a pessimistic sentiment. We appreciate Spivak's conception on crossing borders and deconstructing western centrism with the application of feminism and post-colonialism, and value Bassnett's suggestion on enriching content of comparative literature through referring to translation studies and cultural studies, and giving a priority for reader and text, allowing readers to compare in a historical context. But these do not work to help the discipline get out of its crisis.

Some scholars, such as Jonathan Culler, Haun Saussy, David Damrosch have caught the key point of the crisis. By virtue of acute academic sense, they are aware of the origin of the crisis. They admit that the shift of discipline's central task and western centrism both contributed to the crisis, and have come up with some effective proposals and conceptions.

Jonathan Culler wrote two articles both titled "Comparative Literature, at Last!": one of them (selected in *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*) is a response to Bernheimer's report "Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century" 1993; another one is selected in *Comparative Literature in An Age of Globalization*, which is responds to Haun Saussy's report "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares: of Memes, Hives, and Selfish Genes" 2004. The former essay calls for the return of literature as a central task in comparative literature. Culler agrees with Bernheimer's advice that comparatists need to pay more attention to literature from other parts of the world instead of sticking to traditional western centrism. But he takes a skeptical attitude towards the proposal that the focus of study turned to cultural products and other discourses, for the result of the move "would be a discipline of overwhelming scope, charged with the study of discourses and cultural productions of all sorts throughout the entire world" (117). Culler points out that, "if it resists the rush into cultural studies, comparative literature will find itself with a new identity, as the site of literary study in its broadest dimensions—the study of literature as a transnational phenomenon. The devolution of other fields will have left it with a distinctive and valuable identity at last" (119). The right way, in Culler's eyes, is holding literature as core of the study, while enriching method and widening angle by consulting other discourses. Moreover, national literature should be taken as an essential part of general literature and be studied from the perspective of world literature. In the latter essay, apart from emphasizing again the central task, he demonstrates comparability, another important factor influencing the legitimacy of comparative literature as a discipline. Culler said, comparability "serves to structure and, in principle, to justify comparative literature as a discipline" (242), but "what sort of comparability, then, could guide transformation of comparative literature from a Eurocentric discipline to a more global one? There is a difficult problem here" (244). Comparative literature involves comparison, and literary horizontal linkage should not be ignored. In the global age, if we want to solve the crisis, we not only have to go back to comparison, but also seek for an appropriate comparability to match the progress of time.

In addition, Damrosch compares the age of multiculturalism to an elliptical age, in which each culture is an elliptical, and all the cultures share literature with this common focus. The common focus represents the communication between literature and other discourses, and the communication provides an opportunity for comparison (Damrosch, "Literary Study" 122-133). Haun Saussy claims

that, "it makes perfect sense for a cosmopolitan discipline like comparative literature to search out and describe it (literariness) in all its contexts" (16). In other words, literariness varies among different cultural context, and the central task of comparative literature is catching and comparing it.

Another exploration by western scholars takes world literature as the foreground. The most influential one is David Damrosch's *What is World Literature?* Damrosch, professor of comparative literature at Harvard University, expounds his viewpoint that the new dynamic of comparative literature will be world literature. It seems confusing why putting aside comparative literature and talking about world literature. After all, Goethe had put forward Weltliteratur more than a hundred years ago, then what is its special meaning today? The answer is world literature mentioned today is not a repetition of an outdated subject, but new conception with breakthrough in perception. In the past, quite a lot of westerners held that world literature is literature in the West, or more accurately, literature in West Europe and North America. They mistakenly thought there's no literature in the East, and even if there is, it is not significant.

For instance, in the 1980s, courses on world literature in the West were still concentrating on their own spiritual legacy, and the "world" in *Norton Anthology of World Literature* refers to West Europe and North America. This situation did not change until 1990s when the sixth edition added a small amount of literature from other parts of the world. Damrosch's world literature has really looked past westerners' pride and prejudice, and broadened the field of comparative literature "to a dimension of the whole world literature. It means, by maintaining the basic paradigms we already have, the particular emphasis will not be put merely on the West Europe, where played the primary role for a long time in the past" (Damrosch, "Preface" I). Through a double process: "first, by being read as literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin" (Damrosch, *What Is* 6), non-western literature is allowed to construct world literature equally. Under this circumstance, local literature is engaged in a dialogue with literature from other cultural context. Some foreign literary works may resonate inside our mind, and world literature is activated at the moment rightly. Thus, "world literature is not an immense body of material that must somehow, impossibly, be mastered; it is a mode of reading that can be experienced intensively with a few works just as effectively as it can be explored extensively with a large number." (299). To summarize, Damrosch draws the conclusion that world literature is dynamically formed in the process of circulation, translation, and production. Its threefold definition focused on the world, the text, and the reader: "1. World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures. 2. World literature is writing that gains in translation. 3. 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" (281). True, the conception of world literature in this definition is endowed with rich meaning. Damrosch not only reactively refreshes the conception of world literature, pioneers a new study method, and breathes new life into related studies, but also brings about enlightened thinking to both comparative literature and translation studies.

Comparison is an essential part of comparative literature and world literature, so methods of comparison and theoretical innovation are urgently required in developing the process of this discipline. Culler and Damrosch did come up with some beneficial proposals and conceptions, but their contribution to the theoretical rejuvenation of this discipline is limited. If Goethe's Weltliteratur is a vision which has not been put into practice, then Damrosch and Haun Saussy's world literature is a brand-new conception starting from cross-civilization angle. Damrosch and Saussy's idea gives direction to the future of world literature, that is to build a discipline of comparative literature with the whole world in mind. Based on this, some Chinese scholars have actively responded to the new concept of world literature, and come up with some constructive ideas. For instance, Wang Ning, with an eye on the current situation of modern Chinese literature, emphasized that during the process of literary globalization, "translation has been vital not only in building up national and cultural identities but also in constructing a literature with the potential to cross the boundaries of languages and nations as well as those of literary and cultural traditions" ("World Literature" 1). That is to say, translation plays an important role in constructing world literature. But "the reason why Chinese literature is little known to the world is largely for lack of excellent translation" ("Weltliteratur" 295), hence it is urgent to translate canonical modern Chinese literary works to the major world languages, which will enable Chinese literature to participate more in the formation of the new frame work of global culture. Apart from this, Chinese scholars further proposed the paradigm "cross-civilization study", which adds a more profound meaning to comparative literature's crossing nature. Because cross-civilization study mainly focuses on the comparability of difference in various civilizations, it helps push the boundaries of comparability. In the past, many western scholars argued that the



comparability of literature in different civilizations lies in similarity that they share. However, just like Weisstein's doubt that it is tough to make a comparison of literature between the East and the West, there are far more differences than sameness among heterogeneous civilizations. Western scholars used to regard heterogeneity as an obstacle to influence study and analogy study, while Chinese scholars appealed to look at it and try to look for complementary values through comparing differences. In Chinese scholars' view, the comparability of heterogeneity offers a chance for an inclusive development of comparative literature in the global age.

Heterogeneity becomes a distinguished feature in literary comparison between civilizations, and it reveals that variation is unavoidable in the process of literature spreading and literature interpretation among different nations and civilizations. After raising "cross-civilization study", Chinese scholar Shunqing Cao further proposed the variation theory of comparative literature. Actually, influence study should also be classified within the scope of the variations, and variation is a feature which has long been ignored by western scholars. Because of cultural filtration caused by time and space, national psychology, belief etc., when a literature travels from one country to another, variation inevitably arises in the process of translation. Besides, when applying literary theory from one country to the elucidation of literary text from another, misreadings and misinterpretations are widely seen. The elucidation failure, virtually, is a representation of discourse variation. By analyzing the phenomenon of variation in the travel and elucidation of literature, the paradigm of variation study aims to determine cultural causes behind and thus explores the patterns of intrinsic differences and variability. From this, we can see that variation is an innovative paradigm raised by integrating into account the past, present, and future of comparative literature. It might be a possible to eliminate worries from fuzzy boundaries and unclear objectives of the discipline, and hence the central task of comparative literature would be fixed on the comparison of literature. Variation theory on the one hand pursues sameness in different literature, on the other side focus more on the value of difference, which makes comparative literature transit from the stage of pursuing sameness to the stage of pursuing difference. Unlike some scholars who expand boundaries of the discipline by assimilating a good deal of cultural discourse in the pan-culture trend in the West, Chinese scholars moderately take advantage of other cultural discourse and fulfill the subject by putting more emphasis on heterogeneity and variability within literature. Variation theory is the result of the developing history of comparative literature. In a word, "the proposal of the scope of Variation Theory will be of great significance to the clarification of the content and scope of Comparative Literature and the solution of the crisis of the discipline" (Cao, *The Variation* xxxvi).

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