

The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature

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Foreword

Without the Western world being aware of it, the comparative study of literature has been flourishing in China for several decades. In 1985 the first Congress of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association in Shenzhen was a major event in this development. As newly elected President of the International Comparative Literature Association, I attended the Congress and saw the energy and high expectations in the eyes of the young participants. However, even before that inaugural Congress, the international study of literature was practiced by outstanding scholars such as Qian Zhongshu and Yang Zhouhan, both notable for their impeccable knowledge of English and European traditions as well as the history of Chinese literature and philosophy. Another name to mention here is Yue Daiyun, of Beijing University, who has been a powerful organizer of congresses and symposia. A generation of highly gifted younger scholars has kept the flame of comparative studies burning with their journals, both in Chinese and English, and with conferences and local associations—among them Shunqing Cao, Xie Tianzhen, Wang Ning, Zhang Longxi, and many others.

As said, all these activities are virtually unknown outside China. Therefore, Professor Shunqing Cao's book on *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature*, appearing now in English, is a welcome attempt to break through the linguistic barrier that keeps most comparatists in China enclosed within their own cultural domain. Cao's book aims to open a dialogue with scholars abroad, in Europe and North and South America, India, Russia, South Africa, and the Arab world. (The world is already a multipolar system longer than most of us have realized.) It would be a gross mistake not to take up the challenge of Cao's erudite exposition. Shunqing Cao's argument contains many pertinent observations and, where we have reason to disagree, we must express our own views so as to continue the discussion.

The Variation Theory is an answer to the one-sided emphasis on influence studies by the former "French school" as well as to the American focus on aesthetic interpretation, inspired by New Criticism, which regrettably ignored literature in non-European languages. Our Chinese colleagues are right in seeing the restrictions of former comparative studies and are fully entitled to amend these deficiencies.

However, it is important to view the rise and interaction of the various schools which Cao describes in their historical context. Much of the misunderstanding between the French and the Americans was during the years of World War II, when intellectual communication across the Atlantic Ocean was virtually impossible. The fate of Russian formalism in the 1920s was determined by political persecution and suppression, and its valuable results were almost lost, also because few international scholars were able to read Russian in the original. Thanks to Roman Jakobson, who managed to flee from the Soviet Union to Czechoslovakia, where he met the structuralist Jan Mukarovsky and the comparatist René Wellek, and later escaped Nazi persecution by settling in the United States, the legacy of Russian formalism was saved from oblivion. At present it is German translations of the work of the Russian Formalists which most accurately, sometimes in bilingual editions, preserve the main ideas of Shklovsky, Eikhenbaum, Tynyanov, Jakobson, and others, without which a modern study of literature seems impossible. To judge the traveling of theories, knowledge of German, next to French and English, is indispensable, as Qian Zhongshu already asserted when I visited him in 1980. And now, at the suggestion of René Étiemble, European students of Comparative Literature are advised to study also at least one non-European language. The burden of comparatists has become heavy indeed...on the other hand, knowledge of various languages is an enormous enrichment as it opens the world of other cultures and is a major component of cultural consumption which, according to the French-Libaneser writer Amin Maalouf, must gradually replace the obsession with material consumption, if our world's resources are not to be exhausted within a foreseeable future and life on earth is to be preserved.

Returning to Variation Theory, precisely those scholars who acquired knowledge of languages outside their own cultural domain seem to have applied it, focusing on difference as well as similarity, on crossing cultural boundaries as well as the potential aesthetic experience. Shunqing Cao's characterizations of the "French school" and of American Comparative Literature studies may strike us as quick abstractions from a complex reality. In fact, there were also excellent cross-cultural studies, such as those by the American Japanologist Earl Miner or by the Chinese James J. Y. Liu teaching in the United States, by the Japanese Yoshikawa Kojiro on Song poetry, or by the American sinologist Stephen Owen on Tang poetry. They all discuss phenomena of both homogeneity and heterogeneity, of sameness and difference, and they had a keen eye for the Variation which Shunqing Cao provides with a theoretical framework.

Shunqing Cao and his team in Sichuan University do not claim to have solved the foundational problems of Comparative Literature. The Variation Theory recognizes sameness as well as differences, but how to identify sameness? Cao rightly assumes that the aesthetic experience is a constant factor in cross-cultural literary studies, but it may be necessary to be more specific about the aesthetic response to texts. Literariness—or *literariness*, a term first used by the Russian Formalists—is not an exclusively textual phenomenon but results from a transaction (Rosenblatt) between a given text and a rather unpredictable reader. The quality of the text is an important but not decisive factor in this process. We know on the basis of empirical research

that certain texts are more likely to trigger a literary or aesthetic response among particular readers than other texts, but the aesthetic response remains a fragile and volatile thing that differs from individual to individual and is even inconstant in the cognitive and emotional reaction of one particular individual: a text I find beautiful today may pale when I reread it tomorrow.

There are two scholars who in recent years have substantially contributed to the study of the aesthetic production and reception of literature. One is Yury Lotman, the Russian semiotician who introduced the distinction between the aesthetics of identity and the aesthetics of opposition. Thus he could include oral literature, which aims at recognition and identification, into his argument. Focusing on textual properties rather than readers' or listeners' reactions, Lotman did of course not solve all problems of aesthetics. Another step forward was made by the German scholar Siegfried J. Schmidt who introduced the notion of the aesthetic convention. With some minor amendments and specifications, I discussed the concept of the aesthetic convention in *Knowledge and Commitment: A Problem-Oriented Approach to Literary Studies* (2000, coauthored with Elrud Ibsch), and I will not repeat that argument here. Suffice it to say that a convention is a rather loose social agreement to solve a coordination problem. Individuals are free to join the aesthetic convention to interpret a particular text as literature: the aesthetic intention of a writer can be recognized and endorsed by the recipients, but it can also be ignored, as we know, for instance, from the case of political authorities who deliberately ignored the fictional nature of a text and interpreted the words spoken by a character as if they expressed the opinion of the author. Although I assume that all major cultures, at least those with a script, have some space for the aesthetic convention, many of them have known episodes during which the aesthetic reading of texts stood under pressure from a religion or other dominant worldview. The aesthetic response to texts has also remained beyond most people with little education or those taken up by the dire struggle for life, such as migrant workers or peasants living in extreme poverty.

The aesthetic response to particular texts is something that is taught and can be learned in school or from family and friends. Together with other readers, we may agree that certain texts are more worthwhile than others because they allow for an aesthetic reading; thus, we are in fact enacting the aesthetic convention. However, as mentioned, the potential aesthetic response can also be forfeited. In the latter case, a precious aspect of cultural communication is lost.

Rather optimistically, the Variation Theory argues that we may discover literariness in texts of a different culture. This appears a valid assumption, confirmed by our own reading experience. My advice is to try to understand Professor Cao's Variation Theory; try to apply it; and, if you believe that it does not work, publish your doubts or contact Professor Cao so that the cross-cultural dialogue he is hoping for will materialize.

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This book is my first academic work written in English. It is one of the major milestones of my career. I would like to express my gratitude to all those who helped me during the writing of this book. My deepest gratitude goes first and foremost to Professor Douwe W. Fokkema, the ex-president of the International Comparative Literature Society and the distinguished professor of Utrecht University, for his continuous support to Chinese Comparative Literature and my study. He wrote the foreword of this book for me and introduced it to the international circles earnestly. I hope this book could comfort his soul and remind us of his great support for he has passed away before it is published.

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Beijing, China
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Shunqing Cao

A Brief Introduction of Shunqing Cao

Dr. Shunqing Cao, who was born in 1954 and graduated in Fudan University in 1980 and was awarded his Ph.D. degree in Sichuan University in 1987, is a visiting scholar of Harvard University and Cornell University in the United States (1992–1994); he was also invited to be guest professor at Nanhua University, Tamkang University, and Fo Guang University (1999, 2001) in Taiwan; now he is a professor and Ph.D. candidate supervisor at Beijing Normal University. He is also an eminence professor (enjoying the treatment of Research Fellow of Chinese Academy of Social Science) of Sichuan University and the dean of the college of literature and journalism at Sichuan University. In addition, he is the winner of Huo Yingdong Education Funds, the specially invited professor of Changjiang Scholar Awarding Program for Comparative Literature by the Ministry of Education of China, and a national distinguished teacher. Additionally, he has been distinguished as one of the remarkable scholars with a Ph.D. degree who has made a special contribution and therefore is the expert enjoying the special government allowance. Meanwhile, he is a counselor of the Academic Degree Commission under the State Council, the evaluation committee of The National Social Science Foundation. At the same time, he is also vice-president of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association, vice-president of the Chinese Ancient Literary Theory Association, and vice-president of the Chinese-Foreign Literary Theory Association.

He has published several books and articles including *The Comparison of Chinese and Western Poetics*, *Anthology of East Literary Theories*, *Discourse of Literary Theories of Ancient Chinese*, *A Comparative History of World Literature: An Evolution*, *Theories on Comparative Literature*, *The Course of Comparative Literature*, and *The History of Chinese-Foreign Literary Theories: A Comparative Study* and academic papers such as “The Discourse of Chinese Literary Theory and the Dialogue Between Western and Chinese Literary Theories” *Journal of Multicultural Discourse*, UK, 2008(3:1); “Reconstructing Chinese Literary Discourse” Wild Peony Press, Australia, 1997(6); and “Chinese School: 30 Years of Development 1978–2008” *Comparative Literature: East and West*, China, 2009(11).

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Introduction

Variation Theory: An Important Breakthrough in Comparative Literature

Comparative Literature, as an independent academic discipline of literary scholarship, has undergone three major stages of development so far¹: The first is the French school with its insistence on influence studies; the second is the American school with its emphasis on studies of analogy (parallel studies) and interdisciplinary research; and the third is the practice of Chinese scholars who put forward cross-civilization studies and the Variation Theory. The introduction mainly discusses the major theoretical significance and academic value of Variation Theory in the course of development of Comparative Literature in the world [2].

The Defects of Contemporary Theories of Comparative Literature

As the first stage of Comparative Literature, the basic feature of the French school is to insist on the empirical and positivistic approach. They believe that in the study of comparative literature, importance should be attached to empiricism and positivism and all studies should center on the history of international literary relations. Many theoreticians of this school express similar opinions towards this assertion. In the programmatic article introducing the first number of the “Revue de littérature compare” (1921), Baldensperger, the recognized founder of the school, makes comments: “No explicatory clarity results from comparisons restricting themselves to a glance cast simultaneously at two different objects, to that recollection, conditioned

¹The three stages and the rippling pattern of the development of Comparative Literature was first proposed by Shunqing Cao [1].

by the play of memories and impressions, of similarities which may well be erratic points furtively linked by the mind's caprice" [3]. Paul Van Tieghem, another founder of the school, thinks "the characteristic of comparative literature, as the nature of the historical science, is to embrace a great number of possible facts of different origins, then explain each of them, then enlarge the basis of knowledge as to discover the causes of most effects. In brief, the word 'comparative' should avoid its aesthetic value to get a scientific one" [4]. Marius-Francois Guyard, the prominent French comparatist, claims that comparative literature is not a comparison of literatures. It is in fact a scientific method misunderstood. The right definition for it should be the history of international literary relations [5]. Jean-Marie Carré, in his foreword to Guyard's *La Littérature Comparée*, regards Comparative Literature as "a branch of literary history; it is the study of spiritual international relations, of factual contacts which took place between Byron and Pushkin, Goethe and Carlyle, Walter Scott and Vigny, between the works, the inspirations and even the lives of writers belonging to several literatures" [6]. René Étiemble also points out that there is a tendency to insist that this discipline should be essentially along the same lines with historical study. It can only be and must be a branch of literary history in the sense of being "événementiel" [7].

The French school's standpoint is to use positivistic method to study the history of international literary relations, including Doxologie, Mesologie, and Crenologie, which are all based on the study of homogeneity. Doxologie studies the travel and influence of a literary phenomenon to foreign literature. Mesologie studies the function of intermediaries and transmitters, such as translators, reviewers, critics, scholars, travelers, or vehicles like books and journals. Crenologie regards writers as recipients and then explores the source of the influences they received. It is a kind of research whose starting point is not clear. Simply, "The French are inclined to favor questions which can be solved on basis of factual evidence" [8]. Therefore the focus of the French school is "scientism" [9] rather than "analogies" [8] of the American school.

The American school with its advocacy of parallel studies and interdisciplinary approach is the second phase of the theoretical development of the discipline. Different from "historical relativism" and "factualism" [9] advocated by the French school, the American school advocates "artistic interpretation and evaluation" [8], which is "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 arts, philosophy, history, the social sciences, the sciences, religion, etc., on the other" [10]. It is a type of transnational and interdisciplinary comparison. Therefore the American school promotes studies of analogy; it is in fact more concerned about the internal study of literature, namely, the study of the literariness.

Up till now, most scholars of Comparative Literature believe that the French school with its influence studies and the American school with its studies of analogy (parallel studies) provide a solid theoretical foundation for Comparative Literature.

This is not true. Our practice shows that even with these theories of these two schools, there are still serious theoretical defects as well as problems to be solved in the theoretical aspects of this discipline.

The major theoretical defect of the contemporary theories of Comparative Literature lies in the following fact: the issue of the heterogeneity of the comparison is completely ignored. It is quite common for a person without theoretical training of Comparative Literature to believe that both homogeneity and heterogeneity of different literatures are to be sought in the study of Comparative Literature; the comparison is to discover the differences out of similarities and the similarities out of the differences of various literatures. This intuition is actually correct. However, the truth is that homogeneity instead of heterogeneity is sought under the provision of the theories of Comparative Literature both in Europe and America. No matter influence studies or analogy (parallel studies) studies, their purpose is to “seek commonness.” Homogeneity, the identity of the same origin, and analogy, the similarities among literatures of different countries, or between literatures and other subjects, are the respective focus of influence studies and analogy studies.

The heterogeneity in literature of different countries did not and could not escape the attention of European and American scholars, for it only requires common sense and intuition to be conscious of the issue. But from the viewpoint of the theory of Comparative Literature, they believe that differences are not comparable, and it is not meaningful to compare differences. Baldensperger once wrote “no use for comparisons which do not involve ‘a real encounter’ that has ‘created a dependence’” [11]. Weisstein also hesitates to extend the study of parallels to phenomena pertaining to two different civilizations. For it seems to him that “only within a single civilization can one find those common elements of a consciously or unconsciously upheld tradition in thought, feeling, and imagination” [12]. In other words, only within the same civilization, literature in different countries can be compared. Nevertheless, the theoretical model of “seeking commonness” is defective, because in the study of influences by French school and the study of analogy by the American school, there are many heterogeneous factors, which are often more influential than the factors of “homogeneity” and “analogy.”

We must clearly recognize that the basic standpoint of comparability is “homogeneity” and “analogy,” but they are not the only bases of comparability; “Variation” and “heterogeneity” can be compared as well, the comparability of which is the basic standpoint of Variation Theory. Variation is a common fact in the process of communication between different literatures and cultures. What’s more, it is also the basic law for the interaction, integration, and development of culture and civilization. The French school’s greatest defect should be the neglect of the research on Variation in the study of influence. In fact, “seeking Variation” is ignored not only by the French school but by the American school as well, and therefore it is impossible for it to be summarized by either school from the disciplinary perspective. Thus the proposal and emphasis on Variation is the innovation and the point where Variation Theory surpasses its predecessors.

Characteristics of the Study of Influence and Its Dead Ends

The French school advocates using a positivistic approach to study the history of international literary relations, but when a literature travels from one country to another, Variation inevitably arises, which shows there are variations in positivistic relations among international literatures too.

We hold the view that the method of the French school should include two pillars: positivism and Variation. That is to say, the study of influences should include the international literary relations studied from two perspectives: positivisms as well as Variation. For the former, the objects of study include poetry, novels, dramas, as well as other literary forms of different nations. For the latter, the objects of study include translation, linguistic and cultural filtering, and so on. However, the French school paid too much attention to the positivistic research. What is ignored by the French school is not only the possible existence of Variation but also the aesthetic value of literature. Those are the two defects of it. The American school has made up for the absence of literary aesthetics; however, the neglect of Variation has not yet been resolved.

In fact, the issue of “other country’s image” has already been included by the French school, whose essence is the study of the Variation of images. Therefore, the French school has touched upon the study of Variation without being aware of it, not to speak of making theoretical summary.

We can say that early studies of images have already exceeded the scope of positivistic research. The most typical examples are the studies made by Jean-Marie Carré and Marius-Francois Guyard. Carré published *Les écrivains français et le mirage allemand, 1800–1940* in 1947. Guyard’s *La littérature comparée* was the first theoretical study of images. In the book he included a chapter “other countries in our eyes” to discuss the issues of images. Actually, Guyard and Carré started a new direction for research—Imagology. Although the non-positivism of Imagology is not admitted by them, it is obvious that it cannot be carried out with positivistic methods only. In fact, the French school is engaged in non-positivistic studies with the so-called scientific methods. So Imagology studies should not be classified into influence studies of the French school.

In fact, Imagology should be classified within the scope of the study of variations. Its object is another country’s image in one national literature, since another country’s image is a kind of “national illusion” [13], which can only be a thing of Variation instead of being positivistic. For example, Chinese people used to refer to foreigners as “Yang Ren” (people from overseas) and refer to the Japanese as “Guizi” (japs), which constitute nationwide illusions of Chinese people towards foreigners and the Japanese. As Imagology is related to factors of illusions, it is bound to generate variations. From the perspective of Variation, the illusions of the image have also undergone a fundamental change, that is, from the “reproductive imagination” up to “creative imagination,” which is a blend of reproduction both subjective and objective, both emotional and rational. The image of “otherness,” which has undergone a series of reproduction and recreation, is certain to be

changed. It is impossible to apply the scientific and positivistic methods to the research on the complex process of Variation.

Obviously, due to historical, cultural, psychological, and many other factors, literature in the process of communication and exchange is bound to change. The pursuit of influence studies is for “homogeneity,” while the pursuit of Variation studies is “heterogeneity,” which determines the academic significance and historical value of the Variation studies in Comparative Literature.

Characteristics of the Study of Analogy and Its Dead Ends

Many scholars of Comparative Literature thought that the study of analogy was initiated by the American school, but actually it was restored by the American school. We are going to discuss it from the following three aspects:

The first is the negation of the French school to analogy studies. The French school thought that only the research involving “relationship” can be regarded as Comparative Literature; therefore, the study of analogy is excluded from the domain of the discipline. As Marius-Francois Guyard said, “My teacher Jean-Marie Carré, following P. Hazard, and F. Baldensperger, finds where the link disappeared—someone with an article, a work with an environment, a country with a tourist and so on, then the comparison ceased to exist and was replaced by either rhetoric or criticism” [14]. Obviously, the French school excluded analogy studies, which was later restored by the American school.

The second is the reason why the American school advocated the study of analogy. The American school thought that the aesthetic value should be the focus of the study of literature, while the French school failed to do so. Instead, it put too much emphasis on positivism. The study of analogy just rectifies the neglect of the French school towards literary aesthetics. It emphasizes the transnational and interdisciplinary nature of Comparative Literature: comparing the products of different national literatures, comparing between literatures and other subjects, and sorting out the common aesthetic values and the universal laws in literature and literary development.

Finally, the focus of the American school is the study of thematology, typology, stylistics, and so on. Among them, thematology is the study of writers of different countries and their different treatment on the same subject, which includes the research on motif, situation, and image. Moreover, the study of theme is not only included in parallel studies but also in influence studies. Then, which does thematology belong to? Parallel studies or influence studies? In fact, influence studies focuses on external relations of the texts, while analogy studies focuses on the aesthetic nature of the texts. Thematology actually covers the study of these two aspects and is therefore the subject of analogy studies as well as influence studies.

In fact, the American school doesn't exclude influence studies completely, arguing that positivistic studies should be combined with the aesthetic studies, rather than only emphasizing the former as the French school, because the two kinds of

research at some point are not completely separate. This is why the two schools' representatives are involved in each other's studies. For example, both Ulrich Weisstein and Henry H. H. Remak included influence studies in their writings, while French scholar René Etiemble claimed a preference for the combination of influence and analogy studies.

Although analogy studies have made up for some defects of influence studies, there are still some confusions to be clarified. Whether there is a boundary or not in the scope of Comparative Literature is an issue of great importance. René Wellek believed "Comparative Literature can and will flourish only if it shakes off artificial limitations and becomes simply the study of literature" [15]. It is clear that Wellek is inclined to the theory that there is no boundary in Comparative Literature. Remak also proposed a definition that deliberately transgressed boundaries: "Following Remak and the American school, anything could be compared with anything else, regardless even of whether it was literature or not" [16]. On the contrary other scholars have different understandings, such as Ulrich Weisstein. He did not think we should expand the boundaries of discipline, because this will undoubtedly make our object of study too complicated and will not help us develop the comparison of the analogy. His own explanation is such, "carrying colonization that far means, in my opinion, dissipating the very forces that require consolidation; for as comparatists we are not a people lacking space but rather one having too much of it" [17]. Although the scholars of the American school have different opinions, the basic point of their study is to "seek commonness," which is the fundamental foothold of analogy studies. At the same time we must also clearly realize that they failed to recognize the Variation of Comparative Literature. Scholars with conflicting views show that the source of the constant crisis of the discipline is their failure to recognize the fact that heterogeneous civilizations are also comparable.

The differences among American scholars reflect two issues: one is that they can't get out of their usual mode of thinking, that is, "seeking commonness"; the other is that some theoretical problems have aroused the attention of the European and American academia, such as Said's concept of "Orientalism," which involves the perspectives of Variation. Said proposed a greatly sensational notion in the West, which stated that "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" [18]. Obviously, Said thought the hegemony of the West has led the West to stand on its own point of view to see the East, but he did not understand that the root of this practice is caused by the heterogeneity of Eastern and Western civilizations. This shows that when American scholars conduct analogy studies, they also ignore the issue of Variation, which is another reason for the absence of Variation Theory in Comparative Literature.

Usually scholars of Comparative Literature think that Variation only exists in influence studies but not in analogy studies. The issue of Variation in analogy studies refers to the variable factors created in the researchers' explication towards the two completely different research objects. Therefore, we believe that in the collision of different civilizations, the heterogeneity of different civilizations will inevitably lead to Variation, which lies in the intersections of the two parties. This is the most

fundamental characteristic of analogy studies. The Variation of discourses is the most typical example in analogy studies, for there is its unique set of discourse respectively in Eastern and Western civilizations. Take Romanticism, for example; the poems of the Lake Poets in the romantic period focus on the spontaneous overflow of emotion, as William Wordsworth put it, "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility" [19]. Coleridge, in his "Hymn before Sun-Rise, in the Vale of Chamouni" praises: O sovran Blanc!/The Arve and Arveiron at thy base/Rave ceaselessly;/but thou, most awful form!/Risest from forth thy silent sea of pines,/How silently! Around thee and above [20]. This poem expresses Coleridge's joy and admiration for nature. We can see that expressing personal emotions freely is the focus of Western Romanticism. If it is used as the standard to measure ancient Chinese poetry which also "focuses on emotions," then all ancient Chinese poetry fall into the category of Romanticism. There is a similar definition of poetry given by Bai Juyi: the thing to move one's heart begins with emotion; forms with language; develops with sound; deepens with meaning [21]. In fact, we cannot really apply the theories of Romanticism to the analysis of all Chinese poetry. The reason is explained clearly by Qian Zhongshu: "In contrast to Western poetry, Chinese classical poetry in general is characterized by emotional restraint. When judged by Western principles, Chinese poetry considered to be 'most romantic' is still 'classic.' This is similar to the exchange rates of international currency that different countries' monetary currency does not have the same value. One dollar in A country can only be equal to half a dollar in B country. Westerners are not very familiar with Chinese classical poems, so when making comments they are outsiders only capable of viewing approximation, the similarity but not the difference" [22]. Therefore, we cannot use the Western concept of "Romanticism" to make generalizations about Chinese classical poetry. When we are using the Western theories to explain Chinese literature, though the tools we adopt belong to Western discourse, once it is used to illustrate Chinese literature, it is no longer entirely Western and will certainly generate new things. This is a kind of Variation. This is most exemplified in the method of "illustration" proposed by scholars of Taiwan (discussed more in detailed later).

Cultural Context for Variation Theory

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to differences, which has become the cutting-edge issue of contemporary scholarship. Therefore the presentation of the Variation Theory of Comparative Literature coincides with this academic trend in the world. At present, Western academia is concerned with the study of differences, and deconstruction is the most typical representative of it. Many scholars believe that deconstruction is a continuation and development of structuralism, but they do not know there is an essential distinction between them. Structuralism is to "seek the common ground," and deconstruction is to "seek the differences." The overall purpose of construction is to pursue common laws, while deconstruction

holds the view that the structure is not what is common and central; it comes from the differences and is determined by the differences. From Derrida's own term of "Difference" (*différance*), we can see that deconstruction demands for differences. Besides deconstruction, feminism, postcolonialism, post-modernism, and other contemporary Western literary theories are all characterized by deconstruction of the center, highlighting the differences and embracing diversity. In this postmodern context, many Western theoreticians are using deconstruction to interpret contemporary culture. For example, Kristeva, Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and other feminist scholars often conduct the research of Comparative Literature from the perspective of deconstruction. The elucidation on power, discourse, and interpretation of history of poststructuralist Foucault reflects his emphasis on deconstruction too.

All in all, the aim of the cultural theory of post-modernism is no longer the ultimate pursuit of eternal truths, but great importance is attached to a kind of hermeneutics in order to explore the road towards the theory of difference through the collapse of integrity. And the concern about difference has been reflected in Comparative Literature. The shift is mainly reflected in two aspects. One is the Variation on translation issues. Spivak and Susan Bassnett have noted the variations that exist in translation. The second is the Variation in Imagology. Therefore our proposal of Variation Theory is not only in keeping with the tendency of today's academic development, but also constitutes a major breakthrough in theoretical research of Comparative Literature.

In addition, in recent years there has arisen an interest in cross-civilization studies. Samuel Huntington, the director of the Harvard Institute for Political Studies, put forward the theory of "clash of civilizations" and thought it as the decisive force of the post-Cold War world. As Huntington said, "the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics" "The next world war, if there is one, will be a war between civilizations" [23]. His ideas led to a lot of controversy: some scholars believe that only economic interests and national interests are decisive factors to determine the pattern of the world; some other scholars believe that Huntington's view only puts China and the Islamic world in the opposing position to the Western world, seeking certain political interests and economic interests for the United States. Later, the "9/11" incident confirmed to people the correctness of the theory of "clash of civilizations," thus making people begin to attach importance to Huntington's theory.

From the above discussion, we can see today's cutting-edge issues of the academic world are the difference and conflicts between civilizations. In response to the Huntington's theory of "clash of civilizations," Tu Weiming, a scholar of Harvard University wrote *Clash of Civilizations and Dialogue*, which advocates dialogues between different civilizations and proposes that "Confucian ethics can provide resources for global dialogues between civilizations" [24]. Said's postcolonial theory also touched upon the differences among civilizations. He believed that the Orient in the eyes of the Westerners is not really the East, but the distortion and misunderstanding of the East from their own standpoint, which is a result of Western cultural hegemony. The theoretical research of Huntington, Tu Weiming, Said, or

other Western literary theoreticians all touch upon the heterogeneity and the clash of civilizations: “One of the most challenging opportunities for the practice of Comparative Literature lies in the joint consideration and contrast of the several Oriental and Western traditions” [25]. To face today’s cultural trend which is gradually more pluralistic and integrated, the study of Comparative Literature in China should face the conflict between heterogeneous civilizations and conduct the comparison between the West and China, India and China, and the Middle East and China.

We can see that differences have become a core issue in today’s academic research. There are multiplied understandings towards this concept according to different theories, such as structuralism, deconstruction, hermeneutics, translation studies, etc. This can be illustrated by the transition appearing in translation study. The traditional theories of translation stress the process of translation as faithful to the original as possible even if there exist variations of mistranslation and misreading in this process. Nevertheless, the “creative treason” emphasized by Medio-translatology refers to the generation of the new meaning during the process of translation. In fact the development from the traditional theories of translation to Medio-translatology reflects the change of the thinking from “seeking the same” to “seeking the difference,” which is also a new tendency of today’s academia.

Driven by the two trends of deconstruction and cross-civilization studies, theories of Comparative Literature have been developing, and the new theoretical meaning is created at the intersection of the these two trends. It can be said that a focus on difference will be the new trend for future academic interest, which is also the academic background that we put forward in the new theory of Comparative Literature—the Variation Theory.

The Reason for the Shaping of Variation Theory

Our proposal of Variation Theory as a new approach to further study is based on the comprehensive consideration of history, the status quo, and the future of Comparative Literature. First, the proposal of Variation Theory is to solve the problem that there is no definite scope and objectives of Comparative Literature. There is chaos and confusion not only in the Western theories of this discipline but also consequently in some Chinese monographs and textbooks. For example, Mesologie is sometimes completely removed from some Chinese textbooks on Comparative Literature and replaced by Medio-translatology; thematology is grouped either into the scope of influence studies or analogy studies. Moreover, under close scrutiny, there are also variations in the positivistic influence studies, which further highlight the lack of definite scope and objectives of this discipline.

The French school proposes influence studies and promotes the positivistic study of the history of international literary relations, because it is believed that a scientific spirit should be embodied in this discipline. Out of questioning of the positivistic research of the French school, the American school advocates aesthetic elements in analogy studies and believes that Comparative Literature should “face up

to the problem of literariness” [26]. Literariness is the central issue of literary study and aesthetics should be introduced to the construction of the theory of this discipline.

But once literariness and aesthetics integrate into the practice of Comparative Literature, there will appear new problems. The primary approach of the study of the history of international literary relations conducted by the French school is positivism, which is in fact regarded by the American school as a serious defect for it fails to analyze aesthetics. The reason is that “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” [27]. Since influence studies and analogy studies focus on external and internal research of literature, respectively, the attempts of influence studies to reveal the inside from the outside are certainly in vain. Therefore, influence studies is considered to discover an “elusive and mysterious mechanism, through which a work generates influence on another work” [28]. Even Carré who has been stressing positivistic studies also admits, “Perhaps there has been too great a proclivity toward influence studies. These are difficult to manage and often deceptive, since one sometimes deals with imponderables” [29].

Therefore, once there is the involvement of literary aesthetics, influence studies cannot be limited to a simple historical relationship between different literatures. However, at present in a number of textbooks on Comparative Literature, the relationship between the historical study and the aesthetic study has not yet been sorted out. In fact we should divide positivistic study and aesthetic study as two independent fields: the former is the external study on the history of the relationship of different literatures and the latter is the internal study on the aesthetic values in the field of Variation Theory.

Secondly, our proposal of Variation Theory is based on our observation of the history of the development of literature. From the historical point of view, whenever there is a collision of heterogeneous civilizations, in the literary scene there will appear interaction, Variation, and integration among different literatures and even a generation of a new kind of literature. Consequently, literature of this period generally assumes a diversified outlook. The most typical example is the Chinese literature during the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties. Although this period is characterized by social unrest and frequent wars, the social turmoil actually hastens the exchange and integration of the literatures between the South and the North of China. Moreover, the entry of Buddhist culture from India also stimulates the creativity of China’s native literature. Therefore in the long history of Chinese literature, the literary creation and literary theories of Southern and Northern Dynasties have reached an unprecedented peak. The reason is that the exchange of heterogeneous cultures can activate the intrinsic factors of the two conflicting parties so that in certain conditions these factors can be stimulated to either extend or maintain their own culture, and there will be a series of variations within the cultural mechanism. The variations within the literary or cultural system will be the creative factors to promote literary development. The Variation in literary tradition caused by external heterogeneous factors is a rather complex process, but it can give a strong push to the development of the local literature to become a model for future literature. In this sense the study on the phenomenon of literary variations should be one of the primary perspectives of Comparative Literature.

Finally, the last reason for our proposal of Variation Theory is that our current study of Comparative Literature has changed from the stage of “seeking the same” to “seeking the difference.” The comparative study carried out by the French school and the American school is within the same circle of civilization and from the old mode of thinking without contrast of difference among heterogeneous civilizations. Both schools emphasize the positivistic paradigm within single civilization. However, when we project our vision to different civilizations we will discover there are more variations in expressions or concepts than some common fundamental literary rules. As for the Variation among heterogeneous civilizations, we should jump out of the paradigm of “seeking the same” and redefine the scope and objectives of Comparative Literature using heterogeneity and Variation as the starting point. In this regard the proposal of Variation Theory can be said to be undoubtedly a good embodiment of the shift of the research paradigm.

Based on the above three aspects, the proposal of Variation Theory is not only to regulate the scope and the objectives of Comparative Literature but also is in agreement with the paradigm of cross-civilization. Therefore Variation Theory is initiated with solid theoretical and practical basis.

Based on the above thinking, I first proposed Variation Theory at the Eighth Annual Conference of Chinese Comparative Literature in 2005. There have been hot discussions among scholars after my proposal. In *The Study of Comparative Literature* published by Sichuan University Press, I made a new structure of the theory of Comparative Literature, different from the popular way of the combination of the French school and the American school as two parallel theoretical models. Literary Crossing, Literary Relationship, Literary Variation, and General Literature are included as the four main categories to describe the scope and the objectives of Comparative Literature. Positivistic study is grouped into Literary Relationship. Mesologie, Imagology, and Reception are grouped into Literary Variation [30].

Prior to this, some Chinese scholars have noticed the phenomena of variations in literary study. For example, Yan Shaodang, a professor at Peking University, proposed the study on “variants” in Japanese literature. Xie Tianzhen, a professor at Fudan University, raised a new branch of Comparative Literature—Medio-translatology. Both scholars paid attention to the variations in the spread of literature, but they didn’t make further analysis and summary to this phenomenon. It is from the perspective of construction of the discipline that we first proposed Variation Theory with a detailed description of its scope and objectives. In this sense it is also of great significance to the further development and construction of the theory of Comparative Literature.

Heterogeneity: The Core Concept of Variation Theory and the Basis of Comparability

As we all know, focus and concern on the difference has become the prevailing way of academic thinking at present. However, there is so far not a timely response from the discipline of Comparative Literature to this trend. So Variation Theory might be a possible remedy for this defect.

Variation Theory is an area to be developed in the future study of Comparative Literature. Although the French school has repeatedly stressed the positivism of influence studies, in the process of the “travel” of literature and literary theory, there is inevitable loss and distortion of information. This kind of positivistic study failed to take the variations into account, which is therefore unscientific. In this sense the theoretical defect of the French school must be addressed first.

For scholars who are engaged in theoretical research of Comparative Literature, it will be inevitable for them to face conflicts between heterogeneous civilizations of the East and the West. Though Chinese scholars have been advocating the research on different cultures, some of them have still not grasped the rule of the comparison among heterogeneous cultures and sought only “the sameness,” ignorant of the “difference.” Moreover, some Chinese scholars take the Western theories as universal truth and apply them blindly to interpret Chinese literature. This neglect of the heterogeneity between Chinese culture and western culture leads to the occurrence of the phenomenon of the pattern of X + Y (the random and superficial comparison without consideration of the comparability of the two) and becomes therefore the biggest problem of Chinese comparative studies.

The above discussion tells us that the study of Comparative Literature should not only concern the common rules behind literary phenomena, but also needs to discover the heterogeneity of civilizations. Some French, American, and Chinese scholars only focus on the former instead of paying sufficient attention to the latter. In fact, if we want to promote the study of Comparative Literature further, we should pay more attention to difference and do more research on heterogeneity raised by Variation Theory.

The proposal of Variation Theory is a conceptual change in terms of the construction of the discipline, which enables the study of Comparative Literature to transform from seeking homogeneity to seeking heterogeneity. In other words, not only homogeneity and affinity but also Variation and heterogeneity should be the focus of the Variation Theory. Only when these four aspects are systematically combined together will the discipline of Comparative Literature be satisfactorily constructed. Today, we propose that heterogeneity is the basis of comparability of Comparative Literature, which is undoubtedly an important shift in the construction of the discipline.

Why would heterogeneity become the basis for the comparability of Comparative literature? This is the first issue that needs to be addressed. In the past all the comparisons are made to seek the “commonness.” Are things of heterogeneity comparable? What is the basis for the comparison? These are some questions that need to be answered too.

With the popularity of research on cross-civilization as the general current context of Comparative Literature, the study of analogy studies is still confined in the same circle of one civilization. The heterogeneous factors of different civilizations are not explored, for it is believed that the gap of the difference among the heterogeneous civilizations is too big, and it is impossible for such a kind of comparison to be done. This is a quite common assertion held by many Western scholars including Weisstein. However, in practice such a kind of comparison has always been in

existence. The only problem is that we are not in full awareness of the comparability of differences and fail to offer the appropriate solution to it.

Chinese scholars are used to applying Western theories and viewing it as universally applicable truth without knowing what their “roots” are in the West, and problems are inevitably arising if they are not combined with the “soil” of Chinese culture. When we are introducing Western theories, they should not be treated as absolute truth, the heterogeneity of which with our Chinese culture cannot be ignored. As we all know, the practical meaning of the interaction among heterogeneous civilizations lies in the fact that they are complementary and in reference to each other. Therefore the highlighting of heterogeneity is conducive to communication and integration between different civilizations and more conducive for us in constructing a “harmonious world without uniformity,” which is the ultimate goal of the study of Variation Theory. Of course, the connotation of this theory and from what perspective we should learn about it will be further illustrated in the following parts.

Variation Theory: Reintegration of Contemporary Theories of Comparative Literature

Since Variation Theory is one of the indispensable areas of Comparative Literature, it is necessary to clarify its status and its relationship to other research areas within the whole theoretical framework of the discipline.

First, we need to make a further clarification of the main features of Comparative Literature. For the French school with its initiation of influence studies, the scope and objective of Comparative Literature is the study of the history of international literary relations, which undoubtedly narrows down the research area of Comparative Literature. For the American school with its analogy studies, the scope and content of the discipline has been expanded into Comparative Literature which transgresses “boundaries” [16] and becomes “the study of the literary or of literary scholarship” [31]. As for Chinese scholars who proposed cross-civilization studies, the scope and objective of the discipline is with a clearer sense of cultural consciousness compared with the previous two schools. So we can see, in every stage, different scholars have different perceptions towards the features of Comparative Literature. On this basis, at present most comparatists in China try to put all these three opinions together to build up their theory of Comparative Literature, but they fail to address the issue of the main features of the discipline, which are still left to be specified.

So, how should we define the main features of Comparative Literature? Taking the comprehensive views of the three stages of development into account, we can summarize the features as crossing and literariness.

The first feature is the core of Comparative Literature—crossing. It refers to the comparative study that is crossing different civilizations in order to sort out “the core poetics” of human culture. Not only as a broad view and perspective, crossing also embodies the features commonly highlighted by the transnational research of the French school, the interdisciplinary research of the American school, and the

cross-cultural research advocated by the Chinese scholars. With the embodiment of Comparative Literature's characteristics such as openness, interdiscipline, and pioneering, crossing also exemplifies the ideal of Comparative Literature to explore and pursue "the core" of human literature with a worldwide vision.

The second feature is literariness. This shows the study of Comparative Literature is inseparable from literary studies. The American school criticized the French school for its positivistic studies and lack of focusing on literariness. However, with the development of the discipline and the rise of cultural studies, Comparative Literature has tended to move closer to cultural studies and has even been threatened to be replaced. With this tendency, as Jonathan Culler puts it, Comparative Literature is becoming "the study of cultural productions or discourses of all sorts" [32]. If this trend continued, Comparative Literature would slip to the boundless literary study, whose study objects would cover all disciplines, thus leading to a loss of specific content and scope of itself. However, without the emphasis on literariness, the study of Comparative Literature is also bound to lack aesthetic value.

Thus, crossing and literariness are not only the main features of Comparative Literature, they also decide the scope of this discipline. Variation Theory is established on the basis of these two features and is the combination of the studies on crossing and aesthetics. Because it effectively combines these two basic features, it has become the stable field of research. Compared with the emphasis put on the history of international literary relations by the French school, Variation Theory pays attention not only to the literary Variation of factual contact but to the literary Variation without an actual link. Compared with analogy studies of the American school, Variation Theory focuses more on heterogeneity of aesthetics. Therefore, with a broader view Variation Theory is the further integration of all contemporary theories of this discipline.

Based on the previous discussion, we can define the Variation Theory of Comparative Literature like this: on the basis of crossing and literariness, the Variation Theory of Comparative Literature is the study on variations of the literary phenomena of different countries with or without factual contact as well as the comparative study on the heterogeneity and variability of different literary expressions in the same subject area so as to achieve the goal of exploring the patterns of intrinsic differences and variability.

On this basis, we can re-regulate the contemporary theories of Comparative Literature. The study of the influences is divided into the positivistic study on influence and the study on Variation of influence. Meanwhile, the study of the parallels is divided into the research on parallels of homogeneity and heterogeneity, respectively. And on the basis of this we can re-construct the theoretical system of Comparative Literature. *The Course of Comparative Literature* (Shunqing Cao as editor-in-chief) published by China Higher Education Press in 2006, was an attempt at such. Since this book is available to interested readers, I will not make any further elaboration on it here.

The Scope and Objectives of Variation Theory

After explaining the reasons for initiating Variation Theory, we should have a clear definition of the research scope of Comparative Literature according to this theory. This will be explained in the following five aspects.

The first aspect is the Variation of literary phenomena across different nations. The typical example is the study on the Variation of image, also known as Imagology. The study of image was first included by Guyard as a chapter in his *La Littérature Comparée*. Guyard holds the view that Imagology “opens a new research direction” [33]. Wellek, however, views Imagology as a “social psychology and cultural history” [34], whose opinion thus denies Guyard’s efforts. Later, Imagology has gradually become a branch of Comparative Literature. Imagology focuses on the study of the images of foreign countries—the “national illusion” [35], images of another country in the literary form. Because it is just a kind of illusion, so it naturally undergoes a series of variations. The focus of Imagology should be on the variations generated in the process of imagination and the analysis of the possible rules from deeper cultural patterns.

The second aspect is the Variation of literary phenomena across different languages. It mainly refers to the whole process of the travel of literary phenomena by means of translation, across the language barriers and the eventual reception by the recipients. The typical example of it is Medio-translatology. Nowadays Medio-translatology is grouped into the research area of Mesologie in many Chinese textbooks on Comparative Literature, but actually it involves many linguistic and cultural variations; therefore, this classification is not appropriate: “Though Medio-translatology originally uses the method of Mesologie as its basis, nowadays it focuses more and more on the study of translation (especially literary translation) from the perspective of cultural comparison” [36]. The study of Medio-translatology has shifted from the traditional emphasis on “Faithfulness, Smoothness, and Elegance” to the present foregrounding of “Creative Treason.” Furthermore, there is another transformation in Medio-translatology: from the previous positivism to the study of literary variations under the perspective of culture. In other words, the present Medio-translatology has gone beyond the traditional Mesologie; therefore, we should be more concerned about the variations of words and literature in the process of translation instead of the initial focus on the accuracy of the translation of words.

The third aspect is the Variation on the level of literary texts. The typical example is cultural misreading and literary reception. Since literary texts are the starting point of Comparative Literature, the possible variations of the literary texts in circulation may become the object of the discipline. The Variation of the literary texts refers first to the phenomenon of literary reception in the actual interaction. Literary reception is nowadays a hot research field, as Yves Cherel puts it, “At the moment this study is of great development with privilege in the literary system” [37]. Although some textbooks in China have started to address the issue of literary reception, reception study has up to now no clear theoretical position. So far there is no answer to the questions like how to understand the relationship between

literary reception and influence studies and what are the similarities and differences between them. In order to understand what literary reception is, we can start from the perspective of Variation Theory and the theory of Cultural Reception. Different from the positivistic research of literary relationship, literary reception is mixed with elements of aesthetics and psychological factors, thus belonging to the scope of literary Variation. Secondly, the scope of this research also includes thematology and typology, which initially belong to analogy studies. Though the scope of these two sub-branches of Comparative Literature is different, they do share one common feature: “homogeneity” and “affinities”—the real pursuit of both the French and the American schools. But actually in the traditional research of these two fields, the Variation of themes and types has been inevitably involved. Especially in the study across heterogeneous civilizations, there are more differences than similarities of themes and types. Therefore, our target is changed to “discover the differences as well as the similarities” [38]. Through the study on literary themes and types of different civilizations, we can carry out much more effectively the dialogues between heterogeneous civilizations and draw out the universal rules of human literature.

The fourth aspect is the Variation on the level of culture. The typical example is cultural filtering. Literature has to face the different frameworks when it travels through different cultural systems, which is, as Wai-Lim Yip put it, “the heterogeneity of cultural molds and the heterogeneity of literature resulting from it” [39]. It is the issue comparatists have to face, and it is inevitable for the Variation caused by heterogeneous cultural molds to appear, among which cultural filtering is most typical. In the process of literature’s travel from its origin to the recipient, cultural filtering refers to the changes such as selection, deletion, and innovation made by the recipient, based on its own cultural background, towards the original literature. It is easy for us to confuse the cultural filtering and cultural reception. In order to distinguish these two concepts, we need to understand that the key point is the fact that cultural filtering refers to the phenomena of Variation caused by different “molds” instead of simple reception of the subject. At the same time, cultural filtering results in another obvious literary Variation—literary misreading, which refers to the phenomena that appear when literary phenomena travel across heterogeneous cultural circles after cultural filtering. So what is the relationship between cultural filtering and literary misreading? What are the rules of the literary variations? These questions are supposed to be the main issue to be addressed.

The last aspect is the Variation on the level of civilization. The typical example is the dialogues among civilizations and the Variation of discourses. To literary works the “theory” is a “discourse,” and literary theory is the discourse of literary works. Therefore, we can apply the “Traveling Theories” to the interpretation of “Variation of Discourse.” When one theory travels from one country to another, the theoretical discourse is bound to undergo Variation. Contemporary theories have mostly traveled from the West to the East. Once one theory arrives in China, it usually undergoes two kinds of Variation. On the one hand, China borrows completely the lineage of knowledge from the western theories. In other words, modern Chinese literary theories are westernized, which eventually leads to the state of “aphasia.” On the other hand, many western theories have undergone variations too, namely,

Sinicization [40]. As for the tendency of the Sinicization of western theories, many scholars believe that when Chinese scholars are introducing and applying western theories, they should combine the needs of Chinese circumstances with the inheritance of our cultural tradition, adopt, and select the western theories from the perspective of Chinese traditional literary theories, on the basis of which to promote the development of Chinese literary theories to provide a fundamental solution to the problem of “aphasia.”

In addition, in order to understand “Western Literary Theory in China,” we should first understand the law of “domestic appropriation” of literary theories. In the context of different civilizations, when one culture encounters another one, the culture at the receiving side of communication will adopt, select, and filter the culture at the source, which is inevitably marked with the imprint of the recipient culture. This means that when western theories spread to China, Chinese culture will be certainly imprinted on them. Second, to achieve the real Sinicization, Western theories need to be combined with our Chinese traditional culture and the indigenous way of Chinese literary discourses. We need to discover the valuable aspects of those western theories in order to promote the self-construction of Chinese literary theories.

Now we move back to the issue of the Variation of discourse across civilizations. When we mention the Variation of discourse, the typical example is Illumination Method proposed by Chinese scholars. Chinese scholars used to apply western theories to interpret works of Chinese literature, which to some extent resulted in the Variation of both western theories and Chinese literary works. In this regard, we could understand this issue from two aspects: On the one hand, the application of western literary theories enables us to arrive at a new interpretation of Chinese literary works. For example, the theories of Romanticism have been applied to explain Li Bai and Qu Yuan, while the theories of Realism have been used to interpret Du Fu and Bai Juyi. The application of western theories in understanding Chinese literary works generates Variation in Chinese literature. On the other hand, when western theories are employed in the understanding of Chinese literature, they themselves undergo inevitable changes too. For example, when we apply Romantic theories to the analysis of the poems of Li Bai and Qu Yuan, these theories have undergone changes. Before being introduced into China, the Lake Poets, who are the representative writers of Romanticism, proposed the spontaneous overflow of strong feelings in poetry writing. But when Romanticism is applied to analyze Chinese literature, imagination and exaggeration are highlighted. Therefore, there was Variation on both sides when western theories encountered Chinese literature. The Method of Illumination was proposed on the basis of the observation of the appearance of variations in the process of using western theories to interpret Chinese literature. This method argues that we can also use Chinese literature to test the western literary theories. This process shows that Chinese scholars have recognized the heterogeneity among different civilizations, and there is the possibility for heterogeneous civilizations to interpret each other. This is the breakthrough of Variation Theory of Chinese Comparative Literature towards the research of cross-civilization.

All the five aspects jointly form the applicability of Variation Theory. Of course, as a totally new perspective of this discipline, a lot of questions require further inquiry and exploration. But what is certain is that 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.

Variation Theory: The Important Breakthrough of Comparative Literature

Although the French school proposed influence studies, the American school proposed analogy studies, it is still obvious to us that the whole theoretical system of Comparative Literature is far from complete. As a new perspective and method, the proposal of the Variation Theory of Comparative Literature will be therefore a major breakthrough. It opens a new stage in the course of the development of comparative theory—the research focusing on heterogeneity and Variation. This theory not only highlights the differences among various civilizations but also promotes the dialogues and exchanges of civilizations, giving rise to a new era of human history of literature.

From the homogeneity to heterogeneity to Variation, the theoretical exploration goes deeper and further. The Variation Theory is not only the most valuable branch of Comparative Literature but an innovative approach to study the whole human culture. Therefore the Variation Theory proposed by a Chinese scholar is a great innovation and push to Chinese comparative theories and will exert great influence and add value to the development of Comparative Literature in the world.

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