

REPORTS/OPINIONS

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A REPORT FROM THE 10th CONFERENCE OF THE CHINESE COMPARATIVE LITERATURE ASSOCIATION

From 8 – 12 August 2011 I participated in the 10th Triennial Conference of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association (CCLA) on the campuses of Fudan University and Shanghai Normal University, both in Shanghai. Gracious support came from the Shanghai Comparative Literature Association (ShCLA), Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai Jiaotong University, Shanghai University and East China Normal University. With about 430 Chinese, Far Eastern and South-East Asia participants and more than 10 participants from the US and Europe, it was a relatively small gathering compared with conferences of this kind from previous years. I do not know why because at the last conference in 2008 there were more than 40 participants from abroad.

The theme of the international conference was “Comparative Literature Today and Methodological Rethinking”. The conference was divided into a number of parallel panels and roundtables:

1. Reinstating “Literariness”: Comparative Literature as Literary Study
2. Comparative Poetics: China and the World Beyond
3. Chinese-Foreign Literary Relationships
4. Comparative Literature and Translation Studies
5. Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics of Literary Canons
6. Diaspora Literature and Overseas Chinese Literature
7. Overseas Sinology and its Comparative Implications
8. Literature and Religion: Pros and Cons (in the *Conference Manual* Pros and Cons were cancelled!)
9. Literature and Anthropology: Pros and Cons (the same as in 8)

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- 10. Research and Pedagogy of Comparative Studies on China: Appraisals of the Past Three Decades
 - 11. Literary Relations in East Asia
 - 12. Chinese Literature: Multilingual and Multiethnic Perspectives
 - 13. New Media and the Production of Literature
 - 14. Cities: Conceptions, Histories and Literary Representations
 - 10. Classical Studies and Comparative Literature.

Two other panels were added to these regular sessions: one concerned with the “Functions and the Status Quo of Literary Periodicals Today” and a “Specialized Forum for Young Scholars”.

The conference started with a short speech by Professor Chen Sihe 陈思和, the main organizer of the conference, followed by Professor Yue Daiyun 乐黛云, Chairman of the CCLA. In her contribution entitled “The Transformation of Postmodernism and the New Platform of Literary Study” she tried to characterize the ways and possibilities leading from “deconstructive” to “constructive” postmodernism using the arguments of the American philosopher and theologian John Cobb and his idea about universal values in different cultures developing in harmony. Our spiritual world has to be changed. “All literary scholars in the world are supposed to work hard side by side in order to reconsider the values and ways of human life and create a new spiritual world.”

A new return to the old values of Comparative Literature and its theories from the end of the 1950s to the 1990s was one of the aims of the 10th Congress of the CCLA. In my humble opinion, its first panel “Reinstating ‘Literariness’: Comparative Literature as Literary Study” should have become its main purpose and objective. I must say that it was not. After about twenty years of encouraging the study of “comparative literature and culture”, students of Comparative Literature have forgotten that literature should be the main object of their endeavours, and for many of them “a garbage of cultural criticism” (Harold Bloom) has become a platform where they try to persuade the readers of their own “truth”. CCLA is a good “fellow” of the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) and follows its overall literary policy and is not very willing to return to Comparative Literature theory the practices of René Wellek, Henry H. H. Remak, Ulrich Weisstein and other pre-1990s theoreticians. Only two important papers among hundreds were connected directly to this question: Zhang Hanliang’s 张汉良 “*Literariness* and Comparative Poetics: Retrospect and Prospect” read as the 2nd Plenary Speech and Su Min’s 苏敏 “Studying Literariness from Literary Method and Literary Style”. My paper “Interliterariness and the Interliterary Communities” was also a part of this panel. It highlighted the concept of “interliterariness” which is literariness when works of literature transcend the purely ethnic or national aspects of single literatures and focus on the transethnic, transnational, and recently on geoliterary developments as a whole. My remarks at the opening ceremony of the conference entitled “Back to Literariness? And What about Interliterariness?” could be regarded as a

part of this panel. This panel was one of the most neglected in the whole conference. Another comparably unnoticed one was the 12th panel: “Chinese Literature: Multilingual and Multiethnic Perspectives”. Although China has more than 55 small nationalities, little attention is devoted to their literature. At this conference only Uighur, Tibetan, Naxi, Korean and probably by mistake even a contribution concerning Taiwanese literature was put on the programme.

Similarly to the 9th CCLA conference in Peking in 2008, the greatest attention was devoted to literary translation. This was one result of the ICLA policy highlighting the role of translation in Comparative Literature; even the attempt to abolish it with the help of translatology on one side, and on the other to help to educate many thousands of translators of literary works to transplant them into Chinese. The majority of the Chinese translators are not good; at least the greater part of the older Chinese comparatists are able to read only in Chinese, therefore such a situation is understandable. It seems to me that this panel with another one on poetics was the best in the whole conference. The young Chinese translato­logists carefully followed and developed the ideas of my friend Xie Tianzhen 谢天振 described in his book *Medio-Translatology* 译介学 *Yijiexue* from the year 1999, which although published in a relatively small number of copies (2000 for the whole of China), attracted a great number of Chinese scholars and helped to create a variety of publications and initiate state-level research projects. The stress of Xie Tianzhen’s book is put on literary translation in the history of Western countries, Russia and China. As a former student of Russian literature he had identified with and had knowledge of Russian, Soviet, Czech, Slovak and East German translatology. He devoted relatively a lot of attention to Anton Popovič and briefly introduced to the Chinese readers Dionýz Ďurišin’s Russian version of *Teoria srovnatelo­go izučenia literatury*, 1979 [A Theory of Comparative Study of Literature]. There are analyses in his book of nearly all the famous theoreticians of translation from the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages, the first translators of Bible into Latin and later into other European languages, Martin Luther, Alexander Pope, Wilhelm von Humboldt and V.A. Žukovskij; however, the book deals mostly with those from 20th century like Eugene A. Nida, George Steiner, James S. Holmes, Itamar Even-Zohar, Gideon Toury, André Lefevre, José Lambert and of course Chinese translators and theoreticians from all ages. Some of the contributions in this panel were concerned with the translations of Chinese literatures by foreign Sinologists or Chinese living abroad like David Hawkes and François Cheng. One of the participants even dared to point to the mistakes by Arthur Waley in his translation of *The Analects of Confucius*.

In the years of foreign Sinology-*Fieber* it is understandable that much attention to the 10th conference of CCLA was devoted to the 7th panel: Overseas Sinology and its Comparative Implications. For some reason Xie Miao’s 谢淼 paper “The Ideological Tradition from Goethe to Kubin – Vision of “World Literature” and Cross-Cultural Dialogue” was read as the last. In contrast to many of her countrymen, she defended Kubin and asserted that he and his “Bonn School” was directed against “Eurocentrism” and inherited the tradition of Goethe’s “World Literature” theory at the starting point, methods and destination of cross-cultural dialogue. As in nearly all the branches of Sinology and Comparative Literature, American scholarship is highlighted: e.g. the studies of *Chuci*, of modern Chinese literature, Jonathan Spence, James J.Y. Liu, Pauline

Yu and Haun Saussy (the President of the American Comparative Literature Association). Europeans, except for Kubin and William Frederick Meyers (the second half of the 19th century), were neglected and the works of some Japanese like Aoki Masaru 青木正儿 and Nagai Kafu 永井荷风 were analysed.

In the panel Literature and Religion there were no papers with critical attitudes to religion. The feminist reading of the images of “virtuous wives” in the Bible by Ma Yuelan 马月兰 was one of the papers that one had to agree with. The paper by Li Xinde 李新德 on the “images of the Other” in the translation and interpretation of the Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist canonical works by the Western missionaries during the Ming and Qing Dynasties was also useful for understanding their strategies and their beliefs. Li Sher-shiueh’s 李爽学 paper connected with his longer work *Transwriting: Catholic Translated Literature in Late-Ming China* shows how the Protestant missionaries used the earlier Jesuit translations from the late Qing Dynasty. Tze Ka Ho’s 谢家浩 paper pondered over Xu Dishan’s 徐地山 religiosity, which is quite complicated since as a Christian he stood under the influence at least of Buddhism and Daoism. Wang Peng’s 王鹏 paper briefly informed the audience about Christianity and its impact on modern Korean literature.

The panel “Diaspora Literature and Overseas Chinese Literature” found many contributors, too. In comparison with the First World Cultural Forum, Taihu, Suzhou, also held in 2011, where the whole Chinese culture, not only overseas literature, was nearly completely neglected, the CCLA conferences (not only this one) have done a good job. Both these two kinds are part of the interliterary community of modern and contemporary Chinese literature and its study is important for the wholesale knowledge of this literature. My contribution to this CCLA conference could be read just in this panel. If I could criticize just the contributions to this panel, I would point out that they could be written in a more “interliterary” way with more “interliterariness” in them, showing more of the common features and differences in the literatures of the mainland, Taiwan and other overseas literatures.

A deeper interest in Asian literatures in Comparative Literature is relatively recent. For the first time it was put on the programme in 1991 at the 13th ICLA Congress in Tokyo. The whole volume of ICLA’91 Tokyo was devoted to Inter-Asian Comparative Literature and was published in 1995. Most of the essays of the 11th panel of the Shanghai conference were concerned with Japanese and South Korean literatures. I devoted more attention to the last literature than to others due to my friend Professor Park Jae Wu 朴宰雨 from the Korean University of Foreign Languages, and I was astonished by the zeal of the South Koreans in following the study and translations of modern and contemporary Chinese literature.

This appraisal of mine due to its shortness cannot point out all the best or weaker sides of all panels. The second one in particular, “Comparative Poetics and the Word Beyond”, could be worthy of consideration after publishing. Europeans should carefully study European poetics more than the Chinese. On the other hand, the Chinese should not just

follow European poetics (which they often do) so they do not lose their “Chineseness” and their own identity.

The general frame of the conference from January 2011 and the invitation to participate does not mention the panel “Retrospect and Prospect: Thirty Years of Chinese Comparative Literature”. I was not invited to participate, but I took part in the session. The old Chinese literary comparatists and some foreigners took part in the discussion lasting for a whole four hours with a short coffee break. Nearly all of them were known to me, namely John J. Deeney 李达三 with his spouse Cecile Chu-chin Sun 孙筑瑾, Yuan Heh-hsiang 袁鹤翔 and Zhou Ying-hsiung 周英雄 from the foreigners, Cao Shunqing 曹顺庆, Chen Sihe, Liao Hongjun 廖鸿钧, Liu Xiangyu 刘象愚, Meng Zhaoyi 孟昭毅, Qian Linsen 钱林森, Wang Ning 王宁, Sun Jingyao 孙景尧, Yue Daiyun and Zhang Wending 张文定. Ni Ruiqin 倪蕊琴 and her spouse came from Australia. Lu Kanghua 卢康华, Sun Jingyao’s colleague in writing the first Chinese theory of Comparative Literature from 1984, did not participate due to serious illness. Sun Jingyao read his long letter from the United States. Liao Hongjun mentioned his translation of Dionýz Ďurišin’s book *Teoria srovnávacího izučenia literatury* into Chinese. It is a pity that the translation was never published. Ni Ruiqin briefly presented to the audience her latest book, where she mentioned her friendship with Elena Hidvéghyová-Yung and me from the end of the 1980s and the 1990s. Cao Shunqing spoke about the beginning of the CCLA before its first conference in Shenzhen in 1985. I received an invitational letter undersigned by Professor Yang Zhouhan 杨周翰, the first Chairman of the CCLA, but I was not allowed to participate due to the political situation in both countries. Only after more than ten years after the Cultural Revolution were two Czechoslovak Sinologists, Dr. Dana Kalvodová and myself, allowed to visit the PRC and meet our colleagues there. I participated with some difficulty in the 2nd conference of CCLA in Xi’an where I met Lu Kanghua and Sun Jingyao, Yue Daiyun and Wang Ning, Xie Tianzhen, Liao Hongjun and Ni Ruiqin. Xie Tianzhen informed me of his attempt to introduce Russian and Slovak theories of comparative literature to China without great success. The Chinese opted for the American School and later John J. Deeney, the Taiwanese Ku Tim-hung 古添洪 and Chen Peng-hsiang 陈鹏翔 began propagating the Chinese School, later followed and theoretically enriched by Cao Shunqing. Some scholars like the late Douwe W. Fokkema (1931 – 2011) and Zhang Hanliang were vehemently against this, but it has its *raison d’être* if developed properly in emphasizing the Chinese elements, for instance in the field of Chinese poetics. There is a lot to be done in this respect.

In relation to this last panel it is necessary to mention a book by Liu Jiemin 刘介民 provi 的 for Chinese readers with his correspondence with John J. Deeney entitled *Jianzheng Zhongguo bijiao wenxue 30 nian (1979 – 2009)* 见证中国比较文学 30 年 1979 – 2009 (*Testimonies to Thirty Years of Chinese Comparative Literature (1979 – 2009)*), Guangzhou: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe 2010. “Jack” as he is called by his best friends, made a great contribution to the founding and development of

Chinese Comparative Literature in Hong Kong, PRC and in Taiwan with his books, often in collaboration with Liu Jiemin and with his bibliographical works.

There were few changes at the top of the organization of the CCLA after the 10th Congress. Prof. Yue Daiyun was re-elected as Chairman and Prof Yang Huilin 杨慧林, People's University of China, Peking, was elected as Vice-Chairman.