A Review of the First Issue of *Comparative Literature in China* (中國比較文學)

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Comparative Literature in China, a journal in Chinese edited mainly by members of the Shanghai Foreign Languages Institute, published its first issue in October, 1984. It is the latest newcomer to the field and the first Chinese periodical published in Mainland China that deals exclusively with comparative literature. The scope of this journal, in the words of the editors, "is focused on China." That is to say, it aims to provide a forum for comparatists interested in Chinese literature and reflects the characteristics of comparative literature studies in Mainland China. The journal is quite comprehensive in coverage. It is divided into a thirty-page introductory section followed by a variety of materials listed under eight topics (including a bibliography), and an afterword on editorial policy.

The introductory section contains a speech by Ch'ien Chung-shu 錢鍾書 in Chinese and English, delivered on the occasion of the Sino-American Conference of Comparative Literature held in Peking (August, 1983); and congratulatory messages from various eminent literary figures. These writers were also asked to comment on the comparative literature scene in China and their views are fairly representative of current opinions howsoever sketchy. In this section, however, one might question how the compilation of *Shih Ching* 詩經 by Confucius can aptly be considered the work of a comparatist (p. 7).

I. Articles

In the first section, there are seven articles, each devoted to a different aspect of comparative literature studies. One of the most convenient features

about this section – for those who do not read Chinese – is that each article is preceded by an abstract in English. The following are the abstracts of the seven articles (obvious typographical errors have been silently corrected).

1. Chu Kuang-ch'ien 朱光潛. "A Comparison of Chinese and Western Poetry" 中西詩在情趣上的比較. This article compares Chinese and Western poetry, focusing on aspects related to religion, morality, philosophy and views of nature. It asserts that whereas Chinese poets emphasize suggestiveness, subtlety and simplicity, Western poets prefer directness, profundity and elaboration. Several other questions are discussed, for example, why love poetry is not as prominent in China as in the West and why Chinese poets view nature differently from Western poets.

2. Roland C. Fang 方重. "China in Eighteenth-century English Literature" 十八世紀的英國文學與中國. A surge of admiration for China resulted in a flourishing of Chinese themes in eighteenth century English literature. Steele and Addison were among the first in this movement. In drama, Chinese influences travelled to England from France. Murphy, for example, based his play, *The Chinese Orphan,* on Voltaire's adaptation of the Yüan drama, *The Chao's Orphan*. The major work of this period, Oliver Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the World*, adapted ideas from such Chinese classics as *Chuang Tzu* and *Tao Te Ching* to suit an English audience.

3. Chang Lung-hsi 張隆溪. "The Metamorphosis of Shakespeare: From Text to Performance" 莎士比亞的變形：從劇本到演出. A basic controversy is implicit in the plainly factual statement that Shakespeare *wrote* for the *stage*. His text can be regarded either as dramatic poetry with independent literary value or as the "seed of play" which grows into full splendor only in actual performance. The nineteenth century romantic apotheosis of Shakespeare led to the divorce of his text from performance and to the view that his works were unsuitable for stage representation. Actors and producers in other periods have been more free in their interpretations, causing a metamorphosis in their attempts to "improve" him. When Shakespeare's plays are performed in China, such a metamorphosis may be more complicated, with some distorting factors derived from the conventions of a totally different culture. The author suggests that the emphasis on explicitly didactic purposes and on neat, morally defined characters are two main obstacles to the understanding of Shakespeare in China, and calls for a more flexible attitude towards the multi-dimensional nature of Shakespearean characterization through a

discussion of the 1980 production of *The Merchant of Venice* in Peking.

4. Ts'ao Shun-ch'ing 曹順慶 . "Plato's Theory of Mania and Yen Yu's Theory of Inspiration" 迷狂說與妙悟說 . This article compares two theories of inspiration: Plato's theory of Mania and Yen Yu's theory of Inspiration. In examining the similarities between the two, the author notes that both were influenced by religious ideas. But, whereas Plato's theory emphasized the importance of the irrational, Yen Yu emphasized the rational. While Plato believed that inspiration was derived from the influence of the gods, Yen Yu ascribed it to the accumulation of knowledge.

5. Wang Hsiao-p'ing 王曉平 . "Ancient Chinese Tales in *Kanjaku-Monogatari* (The Once-upon-A-Time Stories)" 論《今昔物語集》中的中國物語 . *Kanjaku-Monogatari*, one of the most influential collections of Buddhist stories, contains 180 Chinese tales. These ancient Chinese tales, adapted to fit Japanese taste, play an important role in the development of Japanese literature. This study examines these adaptations and compares them with the originals, providing an aid to the understanding of the history of the cultural exchange between the two countries.

6. Hsiung Yü-p'eng熊玉鵬 . "Lu Xun's *Wild Grass* and Symbolism" 將彼俘來，自由驅使－《野草》與象徵主義 . Early in 1925, Lu Hsün established certain principles for ways of learning from foreign literary methods and movements such as Realism, Romanticism and Symbolism. His own work exemplifies the application of these principles. *Wild Grass*, as a representative Symbolist work, is characterized by its innovative form. By combining Symbolist literary methods with his own, Lu Hsün established a new form, namely, Chinese poetic prose. *Wild Grass* therefore serves as an example of the successful adaptation of foreign literary techniques to the Chinese.

7. Yü Ming 俞鳴 . "Turgenev and Shakespeare" 屠格涅夫與莎士比亞 . In analyzing the fictional style and content of Turgenev's novels, this article asserts that the Russian novelist was greatly influenced by Shakespeare. Like the work of British novelists who borrowed from the playwright, Turgenev's novels reveal pronounced dramatic tendencies. Their emphasis on the inner life of characters, their attitude towards nature and their concern with social significance are examples of Shakespeare's influence. Many of Turgenev's characters, moreover, are modelled after Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Five out of the seven articles can be classified as influence studies (i.e., articles 2, 3, 6 and 7). Article 2 indicates the influence of Chinese literature

on English literature and article 6 the reverse. Articles 3 and 7 present studies of Shakespeare; the former describing the reception of Shakespearean drama by the Chinese audience and the latter tracing the influence of the English playwright on Turgenev, the Russian novelist. Article 5 tries to explore the influence of Chinese literature on Japanese literature. On the other hand, article 1 points out aesthetical parallelisms when comparing Chinese and Western poetry. Article 4 compares theories of inspiration, focusing on Plato's theory of Mania and Yen Yu's theory of Inspiration.

This first issue is an indication that influence studies still receive the greatest attention by the Chinese comparatists. Most of the articles on influence studies are well grounded. Chu Kuang-ch'ien's article (1) is an effort to lay an aesthetic foundation for comparative studies of Chinese and Western poetry. Chu succeeds largely by pointing out the important differences in religion, morality, philosophy and views of nature, through references to Chinese and Western poetry.

Fang's article (2) is among the most substantial ones in the issue. In tracing the influence of Chinese themes in Eighteenth Century English literature, the author brings in a great deal of historical evidence to substantiate his conclusions.

Chang's article (3) points out the universal problem of a metamorphosis of Shakespearean plays because of some distorting factors derived from the conventions of a totally different culture. After a careful survey of the performance of Shakespearean plays in different nations and different periods, this original study suggests that this phenomenon is truly universal. By systematically raising certain basic questions – the translation of Shakespearean poetic plays into Chinese prose, the stylization of performance for the Chinese audience and simplification of the original text by deleting the religious and national characteristics – he demonstrates that the metamorphosis of Shakespearean plays is universal. His vivid analysis of the metamorphorical process in Chinese theatre brings the reader to a fuller understanding of one of the most fundamental adaptations of Shakespearean plays. This article is an intellectually absorbing commentary written with power and originality. Its exposition of the complicated process of the theatrical metamorphosis in different nations and periods is systematic and lucid.

Among the two papers (1 and 4) which could be classified as "parallel" studies, the one written by Ts'ao Shun-ch'ing (4) is, perhaps, the most fascinating and best handled. Although he limits his analysis to Plato's

theory of Mania and Yen Yu's theory of Inspiration, the article manifests considerable insight and thoroughness.

Wang's article (5), tracing the influence of certain Chinese tales on Japanese literature, is very convincing. He succeeds in tracing one important phase of the history of cultural exchange between the two countries. In assessing the adaptations, the author presents a copious amount of evidence and convinces us with closely reasoned arguments.

Hsiang's article (6) about Lu Hsün's early exposure to Western symbolism is also well handled. It brings about a better understanding of the successful adaptation of foreign literary techniques to Chinese literature.

Yu's article (7) describing the influence of Shakespeare on Turgenev seems rather far-fetched. His assumptions are based on mere plot affinities and his conclusions seem too hasty and problematic. The most obvious fault with this paper is the lack of *rapports de fait* evidence between the literatures involved.

II. Chinese Writers and Foreign Literature

Both articles in this section are biographical. Chen Po-ch'ui 陳伯吹 traces, out of his own reading experience, the introduction of foreign juvenile literature (perhaps, "children's literature" would be more accurate) to China during the May-Fourth Movement. He recounts how he started using storybooks in the classroom during his teaching career. In the other article, Wang Hsiao-ming 王曉明 has researched the influence of foreign literary works on the poet, Ai Wu 艾蕪. Having observed that Ai Wu started his career by imitating foreign masters and ended up with his own distinctive style, the writer concludes intelligently that "true influence is a release of [the imitator's] potential" 眞正的影響是潛力的解放 (p. 148).

III. Chinese Literature Abroad

In this section, there are three articles translated from foreign languages. They are "Hsu Chih-mo Indebted [sic] to Thomas Hardy"托馬斯哈代對徐志摩的影響 by Cyril Birch; "Lao She's Career and Works" 老舍和他的創作 by the Russian scholar, N. T. Federenko; and "R. Rolland and Lu Xun"羅曼・羅蘭和魯迅 by Michelle Loi. No introductory notes or commentary are provided in the translations. For a section that aims to introduce the Western scene to Chinese readers who are not familiar with

the originals, this is quite disappointing. Another thing that adds to the disappointment is the lack of publication information concerning the articles translated, making it difficult to track down the items in question. This reminds one of an unscholarly practice in this journal: the original titles of the works mentioned or quoted in a discussion are not usually given.

IV. On Translation

Ko Po-ch'uan's "Ricci Matteo's [sic] Introduction to the Ming Dynasty Version of *Aesop's Fables*" is the lone article here. It is an interesting piece of historical research on the introduction of the famous work of fables by the equally well-known Jesuit missionary in his *Chi-jen Shih-ch'uan* 畸人十傳 . Abundant examples from the Ricci's work are cited to substantiate the argument. However, the title, "On Translation," is a misnomer for this section since it suggests discussions on the theories of translation, whereas nothing more than an anecdotal account of the introduction of the *Fables* to China is contained in it.

V. Comparative Literature Studies Abroad

Attention is once more drawn to the West in this section in which one article and three translated works are presented, again without any kind of introduction. Wang Chien-liang 王堅良 introduces the once influential French School of Comparative Literature. This article requires no prior knowledge of the field and does not seem to encourage further reading on the subject since it does not include a selected reading list at the end. The three translated pieces included here are, "Some Theoretical and Methodological Topics for Comparative Literature" 比較詩學：比較文學理論和方法論上的幾個問題 by Earl Miner; "On Analogy Studies" 關於對比研究 by Tomita Hisashi; and "Saltykov and Swift" 謝德林與斯威夫特 by A:S. Butchmin. No comments are made on the three works.

VI. The Teaching of Comparative Literature

This section is most interesting for those readers who seek information about the pedagogy of comparative literature studies, namely, its textbooks, methodologies and problems as they are now occurring in Chinese colleges and universities.

VII & VIII. Correspondence and Bulletin Board

In fact, these last two sections should be combined into one because of the thin content of the former and the miscellaneous nature of the latter. Yüan Hao-yi 遠浩— gives us a statistical survey on comparative literature publications in Mainland China in 1977-1983 and it becomes quite obvious that influence studies and "parallel" studies are still the most popular roads trod by Chinese comparatists. The rest of the Bulletin Board section contains Wei Mao-p'ing's account of the history of the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, the first comparative literature journal (published in Hungarian); Wang Ling's biographical sketch of the comparatists, F. Baldensperger and Jean-Marie Carré; reports on The Peking Sino-American Symposium in Comparative Literature (August, 1983) and The T'ien-chin Comparative Literature Conference (June, 1983); a brief description of the Comparative Literature Courses in Kuang-hsi University; and finally, a fairly comprehensive bibliography of Chinese comparative literature papers published in 1983 arranged chronologically. Unfortunately, the compilers of the bibliography did not indicate their criteria of inclusion and exclusion.

This inaugural issue of *Comparative Literature in China* is the first step towards filling a long neglected need in comparative literature studies in China. The aim of the journal is to give a comprehensive report on developments of the field in China by publishing representative essays and recent translated articles as well as introducing theoretical works in comparative literature.

One of the distinct features of the journal is that it has a great deal of variety. The arrangement is intended to introduce the readers to comparative literature in China through several perspectives. Overall, the journal primarily provides an informative reading for professional scholars but it can also be enjoyed by students and people who are interested in the field.

However, the arrangement of the materials is problematic. For instance, it is strange to put the articles by Wei Mao-p'ing and Wang Ling in the Bulletin Board section instead of placing them logically under the heading Comparative Literature Studies Abroad because both articles concern the field of comparative literature in the West. Also, the Bulletin Board section seems to be taken as the home of everything not wanted by other sections.

The lay-out of the book could be improved as well. One often has to flip through a few hundred pages at the end of an article to locate the last few lines. To cite an example of this troublesome phenomenon, readers

have to go from p. 101 to p. 318 to locate the last eight lines of the essay on *Konjaku-Monogatari*. This practice, according to one Chinese scholar, is to save paper. But in the case just quoted, only a quarter of a page is saved.

Another feature which would improve this journal considerably is to include a book review section. In our opinion, book reviewing is the most needed service to be rendered to Chinese readers in Mainland China since books of comparative literature, both in Chinese and English, are not readily available to the reading public.

All in all, despite these minor misgivings, the first issue of *Comparative Literature in China* is a substantial and exciting documentation of the continuing development of East-West Comparative Literature studies in China. At least, it indicates the beginning of comparative literature as an academic discipline on the Chinese literary scene. Further issues of the journal will certainly be welcome.