NEW ORIENTATIONS FOR COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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Pre-note: The article which follows is adapted from a forthcoming book in Chinese by the author called 比較文學研究之新方向 *(New Orientations for Comparative Literature)*. The author outlines some of the key areas in East-West literary relations and concludes with a manifesto-like call for a "Chinese School of Comparative Literature."

The origin of these essays was to meet particular needs that paralleled the development of Comparative Literature in Taiwan. Since my colleagues have been kind enough to suggest that gathering them together in book form would serve a wider need, I have revised, expanded and rearranged them so that they form a more coherent whole. I believe this is the first full-scale book on the theory and methodology of Comparative Literature by a single author appearing in Chinese. It is introductory and rudimentary by design, but my fond hope is that it will serve to stimulate both mature scholars and beginners to explore this enormously exciting and challenging field.

Although schooled in British and American literature, I date my own professional interest in Comparative Literature studies from the time I started studying Chinese in Taiwan in 1956. But it was not until eight years later that I began formulating my ideas on the subject with special reference to China. It was about then that I had occasion to write a review article which I entitled, "East-West Literary and Cultural Relations,"[1] and which contained many of the seminal ideas I have developed in this book. In that article, I had occasion to quote Dr. Mahmoud Manzalaoui of Alexandria University, Egypt; in referring to the "double traffic of responsibility" which falls upon one who is trying to act as a creative intermediary between two cultures, he said: "You can't act as a bridge and not expect to be trampled over rather heavily."[2]

A collection of essays of this type is, by its very nature, a personal stock-

taking of my twelve years' teaching experience (from which I have learned far more than I taught) and distillation of my research-publishing activity. Since I am a product of my own culture, it is not easy to achieve a balance between frank objectivity and a certain Yankee bias. Consequently, I have to beg the reader's indulgence not to misunderstand honest exhortation for condescending insensitivity.

I have entitled this book, *New Orientations for Comparative Literature,* and I say "New Orientations" because I believe East-West Comparative Literature Studies are at a critical crossroads in both time and space. Either the East follows the theory and methodology of the West, or we take up courage and strike out, seeking new orientations from a distinctively Chinese perspective. This is not to say we disregard the wisdom of the past (be it Chinese or Western), but that we overcome the temptation to resist change (in the name of whatever security or stability), in order to gain a whole new world of experience. Hence, the general thematic thread which ties all of these essays together is the attempt to consider Comparative Literature from the point of view of modern scholarship as well as in the context of China's long, literary tradition. In other words, there is a conscious effort to understand Comparative Literature in its 20th century, international dimension and to challenge the assumptions of Western comparativists who tend to ignore or neglect the valuable insights of the Chinese literary experience.

No one is more aware than myself that I as a foreigner am the last one to implement this vast undertaking. I have to work within the area of my own limited competence, and can only point to areas of possible discussion and pose some problems. Consequently, the reader will notice the lack of all but the most commonplace examples from Chinese Literature. The choosing of apt illustrations for comparison or contrast from China's own literary experience I leave to experts in Chinese Literature. I view my task as simply gathering together in convenient form, Comparative Literature scholarship from the West (this explains my frequent quotations and heavy bibliographical documentation), in order to provoke a response from Chinese scholars. Although I am more familiar with citing examples and approaches from the Anglo-American literary tradition, analogously speaking, much practical Comparative Literature research can be done on similar Chinese topics. Hopefully, out of the effort to do systematic research on specific topics from the Chinese literary experience, there will eventually emerge a clearly articulated theory and methodology for Comparative Literature that is consistent with the Chinese literary sensibility.

Although the first step in serious scholarship is to find out what has already been done on an international level in one's chosen field, this in no way means that Chinese scholars will indiscriminately imitate the West's achievements. On the other hand, the world of knowledge is too vast and the time too short, to allow us to afford making the same mistakes or duplicating what is already done. But in order to challenge Western assumptions, we must first know what they are and how they have developed; namely, through a thorough-going investigation of those cultural presuppositions and critical ideas out of which Comparative Literature has developed in the West. Without pretending to be definitive, these essays map out some directions, old and new, and caution the scholar to be wary of pitfalls as he advances the cause of Comparative Literature studies. Two fundamental aids are added to the comparativist's equipment as he sets out on this long, difficult journey: descriptive definitions in Chinese of 200 basic terms (mostly from English, French, and German sources) and an annotated bibliography of important books and articles (all in Chinese).

The order in which these essays appear is not chronological but ideological. The pattern follows a unity which begins with two background chapters, the first of which places Chinese-Western Comparative Literature studies in the larger context of Chinese Studies in general on the one hand, and shows how the comparative method can, perhaps, enrich Chinese Studies, on the other. The second chapter traces the development of the very important and distinctive achievement of America's China experts on both the qualitative and quantitative levels. The next section is historical, naming some of the important "schools" and scholars from both the West and the East (Chapter 3) and then reflecting on this and making recommendations from China's literary experience (Chapter 4). The following section is the heart of the book and is mostly theoretical and methodological. Chapter 5 provides the philosophy of education, the correct attitude, and some practical applications to Chinese-English literary relations. Chapter 6 is more "practical" inasmuch as it systematically traces all the key concepts involved in the practice of Comparative Literature studies. The last two chapters illustrate the interdisciplinary approach in relation to Comparative Literature on the level of Myth Studies (Chapter 7) and the History of Ideas (Chapter 8). The final section serves as epilogue. A more detailed summary of each chapter follows:

1. CHINESE STUDIES AND THE COMPARATIVE METHOD. This initial chapter begins with a description of the nature and scope of Chinese Studies in general as an essential context out of which Comparative Literature

must develop. A subordinate but nonetheless important aim is to utilize a comparative methodology in order to provide a fresh perspective on Chinese Literature in the context of world letters. Finally, after a brief historical sketch of Chinese Studies and Comparative Literature Studies, it explores some areas of fruitful research. The 'synthetic" attitude enables one to cross-fertilize the two fields. By inviting both Chinese and non-Chinese scholars to cooperate according to a comprehensive and flexible methodology, solidly based on the traditional research of Chinese scholarship, the comparative approach enhances while it challenges one's understanding and appreciation of Chinese Literature.

2. AMERICAN CONTRIBUTION TO CHINESE STUDIES. This chapter is both historical and ideological inasmuch as it first of all documents the development of sinology in America from its earliest period (1830) to the present, and then attempts to point out the distinctively American contribution to Chinese Studies. The American contribution is not singled out as chauvinistic posturing, but as an important and objective breakthrough in the whole approach to Chinese Studies. Essentially, this contribution lies in such features as American scholarship's emphasis on the following: inviting Chinese scholars to actively participate in America's many sinological programs; fostering systematic research and publishing basic reference sources; institutionalizing the efforts of isolated individuals; and utilizing an interdisciplinary approach based on a specific methodology.

3. HISTORY OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE: WEST AND EAST. This long chapter traces the development of Comparative Literature Studies first through the major contributions of Western countries and then the Eastern countries. The general purpose of this chapter is to provide points of reference from which the successes of other nations may be noted and emulated as well as their mistakes and failures avoided. A summary is also provided in order to serve as a transition to the reflections found in the following chapter.

4. COMPARATIVE LITERATURE HISTORY IN THE CHINESE CONTEXT: RECAPITULATION, REFLECTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS. Whereas the previous chapter chronologically traced the History of Comparative Literature and presented the facts, this chapter attempts to treat of the main trends on an ideological level. In light of the increasing (though still inadequate) interest about Asia among Western scholars, the chapter also tries to draw out some practical implications for the advancement of Comparative Literature studies in China *vis-à-vis* the West. Some hard questions are asked (e.g., What is the distinctively Chinese approach to

Comparative Literature?) and practical recommendations made (e.g., Promotion of intra-Asian Comparative Literature studies).

5. COMPARATIVIZATION: THE HABIT OF THINKING COMPARATIVELY. This chapter stresses the importance of cultivating the proper habit of mind before embarking on the study of Comparative Literature. It then summarizes this disposition by calling for a "habitual and active attitude of mind which reads literatures from a perspective that is relationally multidimensional." The rest of the chapter provides a brief speculative discussion of the philosophy of education underlying this habit-of-thinking approach, and then gives a practical application of these principles to Comparative Literature, with special emphasis on Chinese-English literary relations, particularly in terms of translation. Many of the seminal ideas enunciated in this chapter (e.g., Integralist Approach, Contrastive Literature, Bi-culturalism, "Stereophonic Mind," Interdisciplinary Method, Process Thinking, etc.) are reiterated throughout this book for emphasis. The chapter concludes with an exhortation to utilize Comparative Literature as a way towards greater humanization and internationalization of modern society.

6. BASIC CONCEPTS OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE. This chapter attempts to make some precise distinctions about what Comparative Literature is and is not. It is intended to equip the serious scholar interested in Comparative Literature, so that he may profitably pursue a specific direction in his area of personal Comparative Literature reading and research. In order to present as comprehensive a picture as possible, some of the ideas of previous chapters are included as well as some new ideas under five headings: 1) Definitions, Distinctions, and Functions of Comparative Literature; 2) Approaches to the Study of Comparative Literature; 3) Attitude and Scholarship about Comparative Literature; 4) The Crises in Comparative Literature: West and East; 5) Some Challenging Questions about Comparative Literature.

7. LITERATURE AND MYTH. The present chapter is an example of the "extrinsic" and "interdisciplinary" approach to Comparative Literature; that is, it draws upon other areas of study in order to throw fresh light on literature. In particular, these pages introduce the mythological method of literary criticism, and although this approach developed in the West, it should be tested by Chinese scholars against China's world of literary experience. This chapter asks two fundamental questions; namely, "What is myth?" and "Why use myth?" In answering these questions, the intellectual and literary backgrounds of myth development are explored in the light of important

disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, and the philosophy of language.
8. LITERATURE AND THE HISTORY OF IDEAS. This brief chapter takes for granted that any Comparative Literature studies worthy of the name will be based on a solid knowledge of the cultural background of the target country or countries. It is at the same time very concrete and very idealistic. It is concrete inasmuch as it takes as its point of reference a successful publication in English called, *Great Books of the Western World,* collection of classics spanning 30 centuries of Western culture covering 443 major works by 74 authors (plus 77 books of the Bible) from Homer to Freud. The collection is indexed thematically according to over a hundred topics important in the development of Western thought. This chapter is idealistic in the sense that it proposes that a similar collection of China's great classics be edited and published in a similar way and, eventually, the great classics of Japan, India, etc. to serve as a counterpart to the *Great Books of the Western World.* Could the community of scholars in China ever render a greater collective service to international understanding than this challenging enterprise?
9. EPILOGUE. THE CHINESE SCHOOL OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE. This final section serves as both epilogue and manifesto for the future. It is the most explicit appeal for a move towards "New Orientations for Comparative Literature" and is given in full here.

We make bold to suggest an ideological alternative to predominantly Western thinking about Comparative Literature and, since the ideas originate from scholars interested in Chinese and Comparative Literature, we call it the "Chinese" School of Comparative Literature. This Chinese School might be better termed, the "Middle-of-the-Road" School, but the national nomenclature better fits the already established pattern of French and American Schools. In fact, this Chinese School of thought is still in the process of being established, so that what follows is more a tentative setting forth of an ideological manifesto of goals and guidelines rather than a neat set of declarations formulated by experience and tested by history. Consequently, comments and criticisms are earnestly invited from comparativists throughout the world. In this way, these sketchy remarks may be expanded and modified in order to give focus to what might otherwise remain scattered and ineffectual efforts.

Taking its cue from the ancient Chinese philosophy of avoiding extremes, this school of thought is a counter-alternative to the two prevailing schools of comparative literature thinking which developed in the West; namely, the

French School and the American School. Fully aware of the historical development of Comparative Literature in the West, the Chinese School acknowledges and utilizes the good points of both schools while it eschews their aberrations. In a typical Oriental compromise, it travels down the middle of the road, gaining what it can from both sides while not being deterred from its own fixed direction according to the important goals it has set for itself. It moves progressively from *national* self-identification, to a broader *regional* cultural awareness, to a *"Third World"* association with neglected or emerging literatures, to a *world-wide* comprehensiveness in scope and, finally—howsoever idealistically—to a *universal* integration of all literatures in their complex relationships. The Chinese School is not trying to assume a leadership role and set up a rival camp by enticing disillusioned members out of the French or American Schools into an Eastern literary bloc; neither is it suggesting a proliferation of more Comparative Literature schools under their respective national flags. On the contrary, the Chinese School is simply offering its experience and insights as a possible paradigm or alternative way of evolving one's Comparative Literature thinking. Thus the goals[3] it sets out to achieve may be provisionally formulated thus:

1) To discern and disseminate what is distinctively *national* in one's own literature—both in theory and in practice—in order to enrich world literature. In the case of China, while trying to avoid a narrow Sino-centrism, there are several areas which merit attention from the literary world. a) On the level of *language,* the pictographic-ideographic structure of China's ancient script has made unexpected contributions to modern poetics and cinema: the Chinese character summed up many of the goals Ezra Pound was trying to attain in his poetry (namely, simultaneity, montage, and visual perspicuity),[4] and also inspired Sergei Eisenstein's brilliant "image-collision" explanation of montage in movie-making. b) On the level of *genre,* we can only say that China has no epic, for instance, if we restrict our definition to the Western model—as if it came from Plato's world of unchanging, ideal forms. In fact, according to one explanation,[5] China's "epic" form repudiates the characteristic martial heroism of Western epics and adopts cultural heroism as the sustaining force of its so-called *Weniad.* Wen (B.C. 1231-1135) was the name of the virtuous king who embodied this spirit in his people-centered governance, and is also the same root from which words like culture, civilization, and literature are derived in Chinese. The *Weniad* is basically an anti-war epic perception of reality which is characterized by the ellipsis of battles and takes the ideal human type to be more the sage of wise counsel and cultured elegance

rather than the hero of armed exploits and unfettered individualism. c) On the level of *culture,* the Taoist concept of man's absorption into nature, for example, is peculiarly Chinese and can act as a catalyst in making the West more aware of colorings and shades of man-in-nature. This identification with nature through calm contemplation is a traditional way of attaining a kind of immortality. Such different perceptions of nature should also modify and enrich so-called universal archetypes from the West, for what archetypal circle, for instance, can be complete without reference to the *yin-yang* of Chinese cosmology? On the other hand, each national literature should honestly acknowledge what is lacking in its own tradition. But even when the differences seem to outweigh the similarities between literatures, there may still be room for fruitful studies in "Contrastive Literature." In any case, it is important to promote an open-minded tolerance towards other literatures and a testing for the possibilities of assimilation into one's own literature in order to revitalize the native tradition.

2) Another goal is to promote non-Western *regional* movements (e.g., China-Japan-Korea) which view the Western experience as just one of many literary expressions. While welcoming what is truly great and universal from Western literary history and theory, the Chinese School will not be intimidated by the virtually exclusive monopoly the West has exerted on evaluating world literature. Rather, practical comparative studies on a regional intra-Asian basis will help to surface a more independent series of literary standards. For instance, it is important to distinguish between the Western approach to literature through *mimesis* and the more Eastern approach through *ecstasis;* that is, literature which produces a kind of transport, a transcending of time and place, but not dissociated from the concrete particular. While the West tends to place greatest significance upon the fullness of being that completes the vast process of becoming that is the history of man, both as individual and as race, the East places greatest significance upon the fullness of being that is ever present in each specific moment of time and that can be discovered in each individual phenomenon. For the band of the spectrum of reality that the Eastern artist often represents is deliberately narrow, and the arc of the circle of human experience that he orders and interprets can be very limited. But it is this kind of approach which enables the Eastern artist to intuit, capture, and express the reality of the present moment in an unique and remarkable way.[6] It is also this kind of theory which may help to explain the dominance of the lyric form in China's 5000-year-old literary tradition.

3) A third goal of the Chinese School is to act as one of many non-

Western spokesmen (without claiming to represent all other non-Western nations) in articulating and championing the contributions of the literary *"Third World"* (on the analogy that the French School and the American School are the "First World" and "Second World" respectively). The Chinese School is a conceptual issue of universal significance rather than a national one (just as there are some Frenchmen who conceptually belong to the American School of Comparative Literature and vice-versa) and voices in and on its own terms the neglected riches of non-Western literatures. For, before thorough-going comparisons or contrasts can be made, the national literature in question has to be understood in its own way by total immersion in its cultural-literary-linguistic matrix. In short, this "Third World" is trying to suggest to the Occident that it needs a new *Orient*-ation, so that non-Western countries may take their rightful place as equal partners with the West in Comparative Literature studies.

4) The fourth goal may be formulated very briefly: when scholars from the non-Western literatures have learned about themselves and each other through the comparative approach to literature, they will gradually formulate and articulate some alternative ways of viewing literature from those conventionally followed in the Western tradition. The Western experience will be included as something quite important, to be sure, but not exaggerated out of proportion. Only in this way, may there emerge an authentic expression of Comparative Literature which is truly *world-wide.*

5) The final goal is to dispel much of the ignorance (and, unfortunately, a still lingering literary arrogance) of many—both Easterners and Westerners—about overly-circumscribed attitudes of what constitutes literature. In order to truly internationalize one's concept of what constitutes Comparative Literature, one must take a more pluralistic approach to the subject, not debating so much over which approach is better, but recognizing that each approach has certain merits of its own and may need the others to complete itself. The comparativist of the future wishes to break the strangle-hold grip of any one school on the nature of literature by challenging such schools' preconceived ideas about the definition, scope, theory, and method of Comparative Literature. Thus, all nations—East and West—must swallow their pride and objectively merge their literary legacies so that there can evolve a Comparative Literature which is nationally based but genuinely *universal.*

Notes

1. Book Review of *The Teaching of English Literature Overseas.* Edited by John Press. Extracts from the Proceedings of a Conference held at King's College, Cambridge, 16-18 July 1962 under the auspices of the British Council. London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1963. 181 pp. In *Philippine Studies,* 12, No. 4 (1964), 727-742.
2. In Deeney, Book Review, p. 741.
3. I wish to gratefully acknowledge the part my friend and colleague, Yuan Heh-hsiang, has played in formulating many of these goals.
4. See Wai-lim Yip's *Ezra Pound's "Cathay"* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), passim.
5. See C. H. Wang's "Towards Defining a Chinese Heroism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 95, No. 1 (January-March, 1975), 25-35.
6. This *mimesis-ecstasis* juxtaposition originates, I believe, with Francis Mathy, S.J., a comparativist in Japan. See his book on the Japanese author, *Shiga Naoya* (Boston: Twayne's World Author Series, Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974), passim.