The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature and the Cross-Civilization Studies

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I. Cultural Background and Shaping of the Variation Theory

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the difference, which has become the cutting-edge of contemporary academic circles. Therefore the presentation of the Variation Theory of Comparative Literature coincides with this academic trend in the world. At present, the Western academia is concerning about the study on difference, and deconstruction is the most typical representative of this tendency. Many scholars believe that deconstruction is 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 difference”. The overall purpose of construction is to pursue the common law, while the deconstruction holds the thought that the structure is not what in common and central; it comes from the difference and is also determined by the difference. From Derrida’s own term—“Difference” (differance), we can see that deconstruction demands for difference. Besides deconstruction, feminism, post-colonialism, post-modernism and other contemporary Western literary theories are all characterized by deconstruction of the center, highlighting the difference and embracing the diversity. In this post-modern context, many Western theoreticians are using deconstruction to interpret the contemporary culture. For example, Kristeva, Spivak, Homi Bhabha and other feminist scholars, as well as the post-structuralist Foucault often conduct the research of Comparative Literature from the perspective of deconstruction.

In addition, there has recently arisen an interest in the cross-civilization studies. Samuel Huntington, the director of Harvard Institute for Political Studies put forward the theory of “clash of civilizations”, which has been regarded as the decisive force of 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”.\[1\] His thought has led to a lot of controversy: some scholars believe that only economic and national interests are decisive factors that could determine the pattern of the world; some other scholars believe that Huntington’s view just put China and the Islamic world on the opposing position to the Western world, which attempts to seek a certain political and economic interests for the United States. Later, the “9.11” incident confirmed the correctness of the theory of “clash of civilizations”, which made people begin to attach importance to Huntington’s theory.

From the historical point of view, whenever there is a collision of heterogeneous civilizations, in 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 the period will 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 society of unrest and war of frequency, the social turmoil actually hastened the exchange and integration of the literatures between the South and the North of China. Moreover the entry of the Buddhist culture from India also stimulated the creativity of
Chinese native literature. Therefore in the long history of Chinese literature the literary creation as well as theories of Southern and Northern Dynasties have reached to 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 its 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 the literary development. The variation in literary tradition caused by external heterogeneous factors is a pretty 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.

Our current study of Comparative Literature has changed from the stage of "seeking the sameness" 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 comparison of differences among heterogeneous civilizations. Both schools emphasize the positivistic paradigm within the single civilization. However, when we project our vision on different civilizations we will discover there are more variations in expressions or concepts than sameness in fundamental literary rules. As for the variations among heterogeneous civilizations, we should jump out of the paradigm of "seeking the sameness" and redefine the scope and objectives of Comparative Literature using heterogeneity and variation as the starting point. In this regard the proposal of the Variation Theory can be regarded to be no-doubtedly a good embodiment of the shift of research paradigm.

From the above discussion, we can see that today's cutting-edge issues of the academic world are the differences and conflicts between civilizations. In response to Huntington's theory of "clash of civilizations", Tu Wei-ming, a scholar of Harvard University wrote *Clash of Civilizations and Dialogue*, which advocates dialogues between different civilizations, and proposes: "Confucian ethics can provide resources for global dialogue between civilizations."[2] Said's post-colonial theory also touched the differences among civilizations. He believed that the Orient in the views of the Westerners is not really the East, but the distortion and misunderstanding of the East from their own standpoint, which results from the Western cultural hegemony. Huntington, Tu Wei-ming, Said, and 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." To face today's cultural trend which is gradually more pluralistic and integrated, the study of Comparative Literature in China should solve the conflicts between heterogeneous civilizations and conduct the comparison between West and China, India and China, and Arab and China.

Driven by the two trends of difference and cross-civilization studies, theories of Comparative Literature have been developed and the new theoretical meaning has been created at the intersection of these two trends. It could be said that focusing on difference will be the new trend for future academia, which could also be the academic background that we put forward the new theory of Comparative Literature—the Variation Theory. Based on the above thinking, I first proposed the Variation Theory at the Eighth Annual Conference and International Symposium of Chinese Comparative Literature in 2005; after my proposal, there have been heated discussions among scholars. In The Study of Comparative Literature published by Sichuan University Press I made a new arrangement of the structure of the theories of Comparative Literature. It distinguished itself 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 and Mesology, Imagology and Reception are grouped into Literary Variation.

Prior to this, some Chinese scholars have noticed the phenomena of variations in literary study. For example, Yan Shaodang, a Professor of Peking University, proposed the study on "variants" in Japanese literature. Xie Tianzhen, a Professor of Fudan University raised a new branch of Comparative Literature—Medio-translology. 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 when we first proposed the Variation Theory with detailed description of its scope and objectives. In this regard, it is also of great significance to the further development and construction of the theories of Comparative Literature.
II. Heterogeneity: The Core Concept of the Variation Theory and the Basis of Comparability

As we all know, focusing on the difference has become the prevailing way of academic thinking at present. However, there is not a timely response to it from the discipline of Comparative Literature, while the Variation Theory might be a possible remedy to its defect, and the Variation Theory will be developed in further study of Comparative Literature.

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 not grasped the rule of the comparison among heterogeneous cultures yet, and only sought the “sameness”, with the ignorance of the “difference”. Moreover, some Chinese scholars regard 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. It was a proposal of abandoning Chinese literary and artistic theories and treating Western ones as universal theories, which with no doubt would result in the cultural hegemony of the West. The illustrative study couldn’t be viewed as an equal dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures. In the early phase of development, Chinese comparative literature studies would spontaneously adopt the unidirectional illustrative method, and did promote the spread of Western literary and artistic theories in China. However, we should keep in mind that there are unique cultural background and pattern in Western culture. It owned its unique mindset, discourse rules as well as language context and its effects on Chinese studies were not decided. Mr Cao Shunqing once doubted, “Are there no theoretic limits and applicability of Western theoretic criticism, which after all was born in its own culture? Are they universal? Despite the heterogeneity between the two cultures, can the Western theories still suit Chinese literature perfectly and properly to interpret its features and connotations?”[5] The simplified study pattern of “X+Y” in comparative literature studies has its problems lying in the fact that the ignorance of the different literary experience and theories can only be fully understood when being put into their respective cultural backgrounds. It simply cuts the connections
between literary works and theories with their cultural backgrounds, and tries to compare two “similar” or “heterogeneous” cultural phenomena derived from different cultural patterns. The “X+Y” study was shortly criticized. More vigorous criticism lost their voices in the field of comparative literature studies concerning the pattern. The reason for such a situation was that our introspections on such a theory were not deep enough to touch the level of heterogeneity on “cultural modes”.

The above discussion tells us that the study of Comparative Literature should not only concern the common rules behind literary phenomena, but also discover the heterogeneity of civilizations. Some French, American and Chinese scholars only focus on the former instead of paying enough 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 the Variation Theory.

The proposal of the Variation Theory is a conceptual change in terms of the building of the discipline, which enables the study of Comparative Literature to transform from seeking homology to heterogeneity. In other words, it is not only homology and affinity but also variation and heterogeneity that should be the focus of the Variation Theory. Only when these four aspects are organically combined together, will the discipline of Comparative Literature be built satisfactorily. 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? It is the first issue that needs to be solved. In the past all the comparisons are made to seek for the “commonness”. Are things of heterogeneity comparable? What is the basis for comparison? These are some questions that need answering, too.

With the popularity of research on cross-civilization as the general current context of Comparative Literature, the study on the parallel research 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 heterogeneous civilizations is too large, and it is impossible for such kind of comparison to be done. This is a quite common assertion held by many Western scholars including Weisstein. However, in practice such kind of comparison has always been in existence. The only problem is that we are not fully aware of the comparability of differences and fail to offer the appropriate solution to it.

Chinese scholars are used to applying Western theories to their own research and
viewing them as universally applicable truths without knowing that their “roots” are in the West and problems are inevitable if they are not combined with the “soil” of Chinese culture. When we are introducing Western theories, they should not be treated as the absolute truths. The heterogeneity between Western and 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 in complement and reference of each other. Therefore the highlighting of heterogeneity is conducive to communication and integration between different civilizations, and could be more conducive for us to construct a “harmonious world without uniformity”, which is the ultimate goal of the Variation Theory.

III. From Cross-culture to Cross-civilization

Cross-culture is always a hot topic in most literary teaching materials and monographs, which make cross-culture another footstone of comparative literature. However, there are different understandings of cross-culture in different teaching materials. Sometimes cross-culture is referred to as the cross-culture in homogeneous circle of civilization, while it is cross-heterogeneous-culture between heterogeneous civilizations in other cases. It is very important to distinguish the two kinds of cross-cultures. However, it is essential to emphasize that the cross-cultural variation studies in homogeneous circle of civilization and the cross-civilization variation studies between heterogeneous civilizations are usually mixed together in practical researches on Comparative Literature. To elaborate the theory clearly and expediently, it is necessary to discuss cross-culture and cross-civilization separately.

What’s more, I have pointed out that cross-culture is the basic feature of Chinese Comparative Literature School in 1995. “While the French School connected the influences among different countries by crossing the borderlines of countries, and the American School further crossed the borderlines of subjects and connected the literatures of different countries which didn’t have any connections before, then the rising Chinese School will certainly connect Eastern and Western literature and reconstruct the concept of “world literature” by crossing the huge wall between Eastern culture and Western culture, as well as breaking through the barrier formed by different cultures with thousand-of-year history”.[6] Since the positioning of “cross-culture” of comparative literature was presented, it has been drawing much attention. However, because the connotation of the word “culture” is too broad, it is unavoidable to come across misunderstandings. It is not right for some people to
interpret cross-heterogeneous-culture as common cross-culture research—the cross-culture research in homogeneous circle of civilization. In fact, the "cross-heterogeneous-culture" research and the "cross-culture" research of some scholars are not the same. The research in this paper emphasizes the heterogeneity between Chinese and Western cultural systems, which is referred to as cross-civilization research. As a result, I came up with the "cross-civilization" research afterwards, which better corresponds with my original intention.

It can be noted that almost all Chinese Comparative Literature studies in the past hundred years couldn’t avoid the convergences of Eastern and Western cultures, and they have also been struggling with the challenges of the clashes, communications, misunderstandings and comparatives between the two cultures, as well as the influences that the two cultures have been imposing on each other. We cannot simply impose Western theories on China’s Comparative Literature studies directly, but implementation of variation from Eastern civilization to Western civilization is proper.

As I mentioned in my work of “Cross-Civilization Study of Comparative Literature”, published in Chinese Comparative Literature, 2003, 1, “Comparative literature deals with literature studies crossing various countries, various civilizations as well as trans-sciences with a global vision. It mainly studies the homologies, similarities, heterogeneities as well as the complementarities among various cross cultures with the basic methods of impact studies, parallel studies, trans-science studies and cross-civilization studies. The academic purposes of comparative literature studies are to discover developing rules and features of different literatures, to promote the understandings and integrations of world’s literature, and finally to promote the development of it. The differences of my definition from those of French School as well as American School are that I added cross-civilization studies and paid particular attentions to heterogeneities and complementarities among various cross cultures. My definition emphasizes the three elements, which are the basic features of the third phase of Comparative Literature studies.”[7]

The history of human being is also the history of civilization, which has multiple connotations. First of all, there are two sorts of civilizations: single civilization and multiple civilization. However, it is actually rather non-civilizational if the single civilization is talked about based on the multiple one. Second, the content that civilization contains is extremely wide-ranging. Only if civilization is interpreted as
a comprehensive one, can the various elements that constitute civilization be fully understood. Third, in terms of the definition of civilization, scholars have mainly started with the aspects of subjectivity and objectivity—the subjective factors consist of language, history, religion, custom, institution, etc.; the objective factor is the self-identity of people. But still, people have never come up with a clear definition of civilization, because it does not have definite boundary, origin and destination. Fourth, the connotation and extension of civilization change in accordance with the changes of time and space. In general, scholars view civilization from diverse perspectives. Finally, it should be noted that the existence of civilization is long-lasting but civilization is also constantly being evolved and adjusted. The uniqueness of civilization lies in its historical continuity, which makes it the longest historical story in all history of human beings. The perspective of the superiority of Western civilizations, especially that of the European civilizations, can be seen everywhere. Nevertheless, not all scholars believe so. The American historian Edwin Reischauer holds the perspective of Western self-criticism; his attitude towards Western civilizations is skeptical. When speaking of Eastern civilizations, Reischauer pays special attention to Chinese civilization. He once used “All—Self-Contention—Domination” to summarize the basic characteristics of Western civilizations; he used “Tolerance—Friendship” to summarize the basic characteristics of Chinese civilization. Reischauer believes that in terms of the understanding and practice of science, Western civilizations occupy distinct advantages; but in terms of questioning, probing and speculating the ultimate meaning and goals of life, Chinese civilization is even better.

IV. The Cross-Civilization Studies in Chinese Comparative Literature

Comparative literature demands not only similarities but also heterogeneities. We’ve been living in a multicultural and interdependent world, and the trend of diversified cultures is inevitable for every region and country. Therefore, in order to promote cross-civilization communications, we have to admit that all kinds of civilizations are equal and coexistent. Under such a circumstance, neither Impact Studies advocated by French scholars nor Parallel Studies advocated by American scholars can explain the more and more complicated issues of diversified cultures. Cross-civilization Comparative Literature studies should treat the heterogeneities among civilizations as the main subject. It compares literary phenomena, concepts as well as theoretic forms from different civilization circles, which changes the
traditional mindset of seeking for similarities. The new way of seeking for diversities based on similarities can be more effective in analyzing current complicated multicultural situation. There is no doubt a strategic change in comparative literature which has been acknowledged.

The understanding of the clashes and convergences of heterogeneous cultures comes from a century long history of misunderstanding. The inevitable "misunderstanding" of heterogeneous culture has been haunting Chinese Comparative Literature field since the time of Wang Guowei and Zhu Guangqian, during which Western literary and critical theories have been treated as bible and caused the aphasia of Chinese Comparative Literature as well as the dominance of Western ones. "What is the pivotal problem in our literary and critical theory studies? My answer would be the ‘the aphasia’ of Chinese Comparative Literature... the so called aphasia does not mean that we don’t have a set of discourse rules in this field; it means that we don’t have our own set of discourse rules. The overflowed Western terminologies like Realism, Romanticism, Expressionism, Aestheticism, Symbolism as well as phrases including ‘decadence sentimental’ make Chinese Comparative Literature silent. We don’t have a set of unique terminologies in this field, and what we have are inherited from Western system.”¹⁸¹ Regarding such a situation, we have to pay attention to the heterogeneities among civilizations and promote an equal chance to have dialogue and communication between civilizations. In this way, we can promote the development of Chinese comparative literature.

Along with the imports of commodities from the Capitalist West, Western culture started to penetrate into Chinese society when times went into the late 19th century and the early 20th century, which aroused dramatic conflicts between Confucian and Christian civilizations and their counter influences on each other. On the one hand, Confucian culture had been integrated into Chinese autocratic political system, which triggered its crisis when it failed in saving China out of the troubles coming from both home and abroad. On the other hand, the economic development of Western countries and the importance they attached to culture had helped in promoting the modern convergence of Western and Chinese culture. During the process of their counter influencing, Western culture had promoted the modern convergence of Chinese culture to a certain extent. That was the chance that China seized to change itself and Chinese comparative literature was born at the same time.

China’s early Comparative Literature was firstly born from those translations and introductions of foreign literary works. Students once studied abroad had made full
use of their capacity in foreign languages and translated many foreign literary works into Chinese.

The early achievements in Comparative Literature were mainly about Western literature and the method adopted was a one-way illustrative study, which was to interpret Chinese literature with Western theories. Such a mindset led to the single-directional development of Chinese culture. Our culture did not only lack its diversity, but also acquired variations and distortions during the process of learning from the West. The slogan of “Down with Confucius and Sons”, the dominance of Russian culture in China after the founding of PRC as well as the situation that Western languages have been penetrating Chinese culture and arts were all caused by the ignorance or abandonment of our national culture. The underpinning reason for such an ignorance or abandonment was that we didn’t realize the heterogeneity between Eastern and Western cultures.

As a matter of fact, Chinese traditional culture had great impact on Western culture after the missionaries brought home the Westernized Chinese culture and attracted Westerners’ attentions. The once arrogant Germans were quite proud of their remarkable achievements in philosophy, music, science as well as arts. After the two failures of the two World Wars, they realized the flaws in their civilization and learned from Lao Tse to make them up.

The second aspect was the advocation of a total Westernization. The advanced Western cultural ideas brought strong impact on traditional Chinese culture at that time. As for how to face such an impact, intellectuals mainly held two different attitudes. One was to examine the deep-rooted backwards in Chinese traditional culture according to the standards of advanced Western culture. The intention was to gradually abandon, transform and develop the traditional culture, hoping that ultimately we could form a New Culture that could adapt to the requirements of the May Fourth Movement. The New Culture was supposed to surpass the traditional one and to be capable of saving the endangered China. The other attitude was to blindly believe that Western culture was superior to that of China. By totally denying traditional culture, they made a mistake of not seeing the integration of cultural inheriting and creating.

The third aspect was the dominance of Russian critic theories. After the founding of PRC, under the influence of Marxism, Chinese cultural circles turned to the USSR. Through ways of translation and transmission, many theoretic books of early Russian Marxist’s, speeches and critiques on literature and arts of the early leaders
of USSR as well as lots of arts policies, trends of thoughts in literature and art had been imported into China.

The fourth aspect was the hegemony of Western literary and criticism theories. After the dominance of Soviet Union, Western literary and criticism theories replaced Soviet and Russian ones and dominated Chinese literary and criticism circles. Since we entered the new literature era, Western literary theories including Symbolism, Russian Formalism, Existentialism, Anglo-American “New Criticism”, Structuralism, and Deconstructionism had been successively introduced into China. Some scholars treated those introduced theories as bible. However, they failed in combing Western theories with Chinese realities when using them to interpret Chinese literature in ways of arbitrarily citing Western terminologies without a thorough understanding.

We can see from the above analysis that the essential problem in Chinese early Comparative Literature and its denial and overall adopting of Western culture as well as in the slow development of Chinese comparative literature and its aphasia lies in the fact that we failed to realize the existence of heterogeneities between Chinese and Western cultures.

However, with the emergence of heterogeneous and contradictory factors among different cultures and civilizations, cultural comparison cannot cover all the domains of comparison, so the comparison between heterogeneous civilizations is inevitable. As a result, Professor Cao Shunqing raised the transformation from “cross-culture” to “cross-civilization”, whose inherent significance lies in the expansion of comparative domains and the emphasis of the importance of “difference”. “Difference” is not only limited among different cultures or within the discourse of the same civilization, it can be further developed based on civilization. In short, the largest propulsion of cross-civilization is that it repeatedly emphasizes the principle of the respect for differences.

When the perspective of cross-analysis of comparability has been shifted from culture to civilization, another issue has emerged, which is the universality and heterogeneity of civilization (or the commensurability and incommensurability of civilization). In other words, why can “cross-civilization” be regarded as the realm of cross-analysis of Comparative Literature? Is it reasonable? How should we deal with the issue of the commensurability and incommensurability of civilization? The key to the issue here lies in the sameness (universality) and otherness (heterogeneity) of civilization. It should be realized that the universality of civilization is actually
the commensurability and sameness among civilizations. Without such commensurability, there is no way for anyone to compare, just as the comparison between two completely irrelevant domains which would be chaotic if being done. Commensurability and universality are the premise for any kind of dialogs and communications.

Therefore, the current studies of Comparative Literature should start from the logic of Chinese literary theories and adhere to its own discourse norms and values. The notion of “compare” should not be used to blindly deny the heterogeneity among civilizations. What is the ultimate purpose of restructuring the discourse of China’s literary theories? That is, to rethink the theoretical framework of Comparative Literature and to re-illustrate the issue of “comparability”. The researching model of the comparability based on the concept of seeking for “sameness” while putting aside differences should be abandoned; the researching model of seeking for heterogeneity and irrelevance among civilizations should be adopted. Researchers should take the initiative to seek for “otherness”, through which to restore the original images of civilization. Only in this way can these independent and autonomous civilizations be interpreted via their own discourse norms so as to be complemented by each others’ advantages and be integrated via exchanges with each other. This is the basic idea of Variation of Comparative Literature and also a major theoretical breakthrough at the current stage of development.

V. The Heterogeneity of Cross-Civilization Literary Theories and the Studies of Variation

The Variation of Comparative Literature was first brought up by Professor Cao Shunqing in his work The Study of Comparative Literature, published in 2005. Its third chapter is named as “Literary Variation”, which is further divided into six sections respectively concerning Translatology, Imagology, Thematology, Genology, Cultural Filter and Literature Misreading.

It can be seen from the statement that the key word of Variation of Comparative Literature is “otherness”, which has already broken away from the limitations of the comparability of “sameness” proposed by Influence Study and Parallel Study. Therefore, another kind of comparability can be constructed through heterogeneity.

The seeking for sameness means to subjectively identify a model at first, which is also a standardized system. Behind that model and system lie the original
destruction, distortion and variation of heterogeneous civilization. In this way, theoretical post-colonialism can be achieved in the name of comparison.

Take Jullien’s research about Chinese thoughts as an example. He hasn’t used a set of Western discourse to conduct the illustration, but has always been concerning about such domains as “wisdom”, “ordinary”, “process”, “relations”, “conscience”, and “fictive versus actual condition”. He has not apparently conducted the comparison; but actually during the research process and theoretical illustrations, he has given much thought in his sublime words with deep meanings. His comparison is neither to explore the counterparts in the East and the West under the “same” framework nor to explore the relations among civilizations, but to “discover” all those things that haven’t been touched upon, which is exactly what has been mentioned—the “otherness”. Thus, the factors concerning “otherness” can be used to restructure the civilization system. However, Jullien’s research also contains a serious problem: he has been excessively pursuing irrelevance and heterogeneity therefore has been heading towards the antithesis of “sameness” and “homogeneity”.

Professor Cao Shunqing believes that neither one-sided convergent thinking nor one-sided divergent thinking can comprehensively solve the current problem of Comparative Literature. “Divergent thinking” can only be considered as the method and strategy of Variation in Comparative Literature. The essence of variation actually lies in the “harmony of both”.

In order to restore the heterogeneity of Chinese civilization, Professor Cao Shunqing has proposed a new way of thinking as discourse restructuring—“To restructure Chinese literary theory discourse is actually to restructure the rules; only when the discourse and cultural rules of Chinese literary theories are mastered, can one not only ‘follow them’ but also ‘make use of and develop them’; whereas the implementation of Western rules will only result in distortions. Therefore, we should start from the heterogeneity of Chinese literary theories and restructure Chinese literary theories using Chinese own traditional discourse and its principles.”[9]

Therefore, a specific operational model of irrelevance is to Sinicize Chinese thoughts and Chinese literary theories and to restore China’s heterogeneity. Comparison should not be conducted for the sake of itself.

In brief, the comparison of irrelevance is a major breakthrough in the contemporary fields of Comparative Literature and Comparative Philosophy. It has constructed another particular relevant domain, in which the “self” can be observed
and restructured via the analysis of otherness, which contains distinct cultural and ideological patterns. While comparing, “self” and “otherness” can achieve mutual inspiration, complementation and dialogs, and finally help to form the ideological state of “harmonious yet different”.

In this way, the inherent relationship between the heterogeneity of civilization and the variability of Comparative Literature can be mainly reflected in the following aspects.

First of all, the heterogeneity of civilization is an inherent core of variability. “Whether it is ‘the study of change’ or ‘the study of difference’, the variation study of Comparative Literature will take ‘difference’, dissimilarity, as its groundwork. As is suggested by its name, what it seeks are the elements of ‘heterogeneity’.”[10]

The heterogeneity of cross-civilization and the Variation of Comparative Literature share the theoretical way of thinking. They both hold the end of “returning” by circuitous “going away”. Such returning implies the integration, complementation and dialog among heterogeneous civilization so as to restructure and develop one’s own civilization, which has provided the poetics and philosophy of China and the West with important methodology.

Second, if cross-civilizational comparison is bound to lead to the variation of text and meaning, the objective fact of such variation should not be neglected or even forgotten like the French School does, because as long as there are cross-language transformation, time-space transfer and the reference to diverse civilizations, variation is definitely in existence; the empirical convergent thinking is only a kind of theoretical illusion and Utopia.

Comparison should not only be conducted in accordance with the exact boundaries of “sameness”; the analyses and illustrations of “otherness” is actually also a kind of comparison. And the heterogeneity has made diverse civilizations worthy of comparing. And the objective fact of such variation should not be unacquainted like the Chinese scholars do.

In a word, the Variation of Comparative Literature cannot be simply concluded as “seeking for sameness while reserving differences” or “seeking for differences while reserving sameness”, but should be established to seek for the “otherness” of China, compared with that of the West. All such “otherness” should be used to establish and recognize Chinese discourse identity, which should not be blindly considered as the emphasis on the heterogeneity, irrelevance, incommensurability and the inherent structural differences of Chinese culture and Chinese literary
theories. Chinese and Western cultural ideologies surely share the commonalities that are commensurable. Meanwhile, the “comparability” should not only be based on commensurability, but also refer to the incommensurability, heterogeneity and irrelevance. Only in this way can the new discourse principles and academic paradigms of Comparative Literature and Comparative Philosophy be restructured.

During exchanges and dialogs, the heterogeneous discourse of literary theories can shape the Heteroglossia interdependence through mutual understanding, mutual testifying and mutual complementing; and those theories will further lead to the emergence of new literary theory discourse. If the heterogeneity of cross-civilization literary theories cannot be clearly recognized and dealt with, it is very likely to get mutually covered, which will finally lead to the decline and loss of certain aspect of heterogeneity. As for the Chinese literary theories ever since the ancient times, the academic circle has ignored its heterogeneity, which can be considered as one reason for its modern destiny. Western literary theories are always applied whereas the heterogeneity of Chinese literary theories is ignored and covered under the Western discourse of literary theories, which has finally led to the decline and loss of Chinese discourse of literary theories. Therefore, the studies of Variation should be centered on the studies of heterogeneity of cross-civilization literary theories. The variability of cross-civilization literary theories refers to the theoretical variation during the theoretical travelling process from one heterogeneous literary theory to another heterogeneous culture.

The exchanges and fusions among heterogeneous literary theories require feasible ways and methods, which should be based on the general principles of the cultural exchanges of all human beings and the developing principles of literary theories of diverse countries, rather than dreamed up. In Chinese history of thousands of years, there were actually several “fusions” between Chinese and Western cultures, during which Chinese culture was “transformed” and “restructured”. The premise to understand the principle of the “foreignization of literary theories” is that—when under different cultural contexts and being cross-linguistically interpreted and disseminated, a theory will definitely be “foreignized” to some extent, which is determined by the characteristics of cultural diffusion and language translation. According to cultural diffusion, when a culture is disseminated into another culture of a different civilization system, because of the differences among civilizations it will definitely experience recreation after being misread and interpreted. As an important carrier of culture, literary theories, while being
translated and interpreted, also possess the characteristics of “foreignization”. No matter it is the original theory or the target theory, it will certainly take along the qualities of different cultures; the inherent differences among cultures cannot be simply eliminated through translation.

As a result, first of all, after being translated into Chinese, the Western literary theories have been filtered and misread due to Chinese culture and Chinese language therefore are differ from the original ones, which is actually the superficial reflection of the “Chinization” of Western literary theories. Second, the thorough reflection is the introduction of Western literary theories mainly on the basis of the academic principles of China. Cultural diffusion and theoretical translation is definitely not only language transformation, but discourse transformation among different academic principles. Once a theory deviates from its own academic disciplines, it is hard to find its original meaning; therefore, the introduction and transformation of Western literary theories should be mainly on the basis of Chinese academic principles.

Under the context in which Western poetics have completely replaced Chinese traditional poetics, which has led to the crisis of “aphasia”, the academic principles of traditional poetics should be considered as a platform to introduce and integrate, on which foreign theories and modern poetics can complement and inspire Chinese discourse system and Chinese academic principles.[12]

To restructure Chinese literary theories mainly on the basis of Chinese culture and Chinese literary theories themselves is not only feasible but has been proved to be feasible.

And the essence lies in that: firstly, the approach of accepting and imitating the West blindly should be transformed and Western literary theories should be placed in the practice of Chinese literature, and their universal values should be identified and tested on the basis of Chinese literary composition and specific literary phenomena; secondly, the achievement of Western literary theories should be creatively transformed on the basis of Chinese academic principles and the fusion between the two will be achieved on the basis of such dialog and mutual illustration thereafter the general laws of literary development and evolution will be revealed. Thus, the key of “Chinization” is “to adhere to China-oriented, based on which to digest and absorb Western literary theories and to proceed deepened principle integration in terms of discourse; in this way, a new academic discourse principle will be shaped.”[13]
The “Chinization” of Western literary theories needs certain conditions, which can be concluded as the following two points at least. The first one is the cultural adaptability.

Besides the dialogs among heterogeneous literary theories and the activation of the new qualities of literary theories (see the illustrations in The Dialog and Activation among Heterogeneous Literary Theories), there are at least two feasible approaches concerning the “Chinization” of Western literary theories.

First of all, those heterogeneous literary theories, which are similar to each other, could be inspired and illustrated by each other. Second, those heterogeneous literary theories can be creatively misread. The conclusions of such “misreading” may not be approved by all. However, to serve for the construction of China’s own theories via the creative misreading of heterogeneous literary theories is truly an effective approach to “Sinicize” Western literary theories.[14]

The so-called “dialog” is actually the consciousness of perspective taking. In the world of life, both the addresser and addressee are involved in the participation of certain domains. Although different people may perceive differently towards certain issues, both two sides rather than only one of them should be considered as the subject. Such idea towards dialog has a fairly prominent significance in the restructuring of the discourse of contemporary Chinese literary theories, which is reflected in the following aspects. In terms of the relationship between Chinese and Western literary theories, on one hand, to blindly proceed academic construction like the old time close-door policy should no longer be accepted and although there are still defects, such transformation in the new era has basically been completed; on the other hand, during the process of learning from and introducing the Western literary theories and academic thoughts, Chinese people usually lack the problematics that are generated from their own, which has led to the impact in commercial culture and modern society from the European and American literary theorists. And it is actually necessary to demonstrate the applicability of such criticism in China first. While following the West, it is a common phenomenon that Chinese people lack the sensitivity towards the reality around themselves, which is abnormal in the development of Humanities.

How to carry out the dialog among heterogeneous literary theories? Professor Cao Shunqing suggests that the key is to master two basic principles and three specific approaches. The two basic principles refer to “discourse independence” and “equal dialog”. The “discourse independence” means that the dialog among
heterogeneous literary theories requires the recognition of their differences, based on which the basic principles for mutual understanding and consensus can be reached. The “discourse” here refers to the basic domains and principles of certain cultural ideology and speech. Thus, the dialog among heterogeneous literary theories is actually the dialog among different discourses. The neglect of the aspect of discourse and the neglect of the construction pattern and speech principle of the basic meaning of culture may lead to two possible results—the superficial comparison among cultural phenomena, or the monologue from a dominant literary theory. The second basic principle is “equal dialog”, which is not easy to achieve. But without such a principle, there will emerge the hegemony of a certain dominant culture. In the twentieth century, during the communication in terms of culture and literary theories between China and the dominant West, the equality between the two was not highlighted. As a result, the phenomenon of “aphasia” emerged in the domains of Chinese culture and literary theories.

Chinese people may have learnt from other theoretical discourses, but have lost that of their own. They did not take advantages of other literary theories to enrich those of their own, but entirely transplanted and replaced their own cultural discourse. History has shown that the dialog among heterogeneous literary theories can be effectively carried out only under the context of equality of discourse. Otherwise, “dialog” would again be turned into “monologue”. Besides, there are mainly three specific approaches to carry out such a dialog among heterogeneous literary theories—“different discourses but common topics”, “different discourses under the same context” and the “dialog while being translated into other discourses”. The “different discourses but common topics” means that such dialogs should be based on common topics, which are the foundations of dialogs. For example, “the nature of literature” can be set as the common topic so that multi-dimensional dialogs can be carried out among the ancient Chinese literary theories, Western literary theories, ancient Indian poetics and even ancient Japanese literary theories. Moreover, “different discourses under the same context” means that even without common topics they can be set under the same context. And the same context refers to the same or similar situation or circumstance under which different discourses once encountered in their respectively different social and historical conditions. Under such same or similar situation or circumstance, different discourses will respond in their respectively different ways thus will form their own patterns of discourse expressions and meaning constructions. Though
different in terms of content, function and topic, those discourses are the results of the same context or situation, based on which the dialogs among those discourses can be preceded. The third approach, “dialog while being translated into other discourses”, means that comprehensive discourse dialog can be carried out while being mutually translated in terms of literature and literary theory. With the development of language psychology and the Translatology of Comparative Literature, the nature of translation has been increasingly understood and be attached importance to. Translation is no longer simply the issue of linguistics, because any kind of two texts or languages are usually backed by two disparate heterogeneous cultures and discourse systems, which respectively contain unique conceptual domains and expressing principles. They may have certain transcendence, intersections and counterparts, but it is impossible that they are just the same. That is to say, such superficial translation actually reflects the tensions of the discourses at a deeper level. Translation itself is the latent dialog among heterogeneous cultures and discourses.¹⁵

Heterogeneous literary theories can be mutually activated and inspired through dialogs, which will initiate the emergence of new qualities of literary theories. For instance, while being Sinicized, Indian Buddhism was gradually transformed into a Buddhism with Chinese characteristics, Zen Buddhism. Based on such new cultural quality, many creative concepts with Chinese characteristics emerged in the ancient Chinese literary theories, such as “realization to truth” and “artistic conception”. Take the former one as an example to further illustrate the issue. In the poetics of the Tang and Song Dynasties and thereafter, the notion of “realization to truth” was widely used. Ever since the conception of “realization to truth” was raised by Zeng Chao, Zenists began to develop and widely spread the notion from mouth to mouth, which greatly influenced literary theories and poetic compositions during those dynasties.

While mutually inspired, heterogeneous literary theories should accept the influences of exotic literary theories based on their respective local cultures. That is to say, their local cultural traditions should play the leading role. And the starting and ending points should also be their local cultures. As explained by Chen Yinque that “the formation of theoretical system and the obtaining of new quality require both the intake of exotic theories and the emphasis on national theories. Such seemingly contradictory whereas actually complementary perspective is in accordance with the true essence of Taoism as well as the long-lasting approach of
new Confucianism, which has also been demonstrated in the 2000-year history of theoretical communications between Chinese and other nations." The inspirations in the dialogs among heterogeneous literary theories are just about the intake of exotic literary theories on one hand, and the emphasis of national qualities on the other hand. In his article of "Translation Art of Kumarajiva", Chen supposed that Translation of Kumarajiva, "has wiped off the varieties and heaviness of the original text, and has stepped out of the structure of the original text, and has transformed the original text." The "transformation of the original text" mentioned here refers to the acceptance of exotic cultures on the basis of local culture. And variation is the inevitable course for the mutual dialogs and inspirations among heterogeneous cultures and literary theories.

**Conclusion**

As a new perspective and method, the proposal of the Variation Theory of Comparative Literature opens a new stage in the process of the development of comparative theory: the research focusing on heterogeneity and variation. This theory not only highlights the difference among various civilizations, but also promotes the dialogue and exchanges of civilizations, opening 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 also an innovative approach to study the whole human culture. Therefore the Variation Theory proposed by Chinese scholar is a great innovation and propulsion to Chinese comparative theories and will exert great influence and value on the development of the world Comparative Literature.

Notes:

[1] Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003).

[2] Tu Wei-ming *Clash of Civilizations and Dialogue*, eds. Hanmin Zhu and Yongming Xiao. (Changsha: Hunan University Press 2001) 13-15.

[3] Newton P. Stallknecht and Horst Frenz, eds. *Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1971) xi.

[4] Cao Shunqing, *The Study of Comparative Literature*, (Chengdu: Sichuan University Press,
[5] Cao Shunqing, *Discussion on Chinese Comparative Literature*, (Chengdu: Sichuan Education Press, 2002) 339.

[6] Cao Shunqing, “Comparative Literature Chinese School System of The Basic Theory and Its Methodology”, *Chinese Comparative Literature*, 1995, 1.

[7] Cao Shunqing, “Cross-Civilization Study of Comparative Literature”, *Chinese Comparative Literature*, 2003, 1.

[8] Cao Shunqing, “Aphasia of Literary Theories and Cultural Pathosis”, *Literature and Art Forum*, Vol.2, 1996.

[9] Cao Shunqing, Wang Qing, “The Discourse Reconstruction of Chinese Literary Theory”, *Literature, History and Philosophy*, 2008, 5.

[10] Ren Xiaojuan, “The Variation Study of Comparative Literature in the Context of Post-Colonialism”, *Cultural Studies and Literary Theory*, Ser. 15. Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 2007.

[11] Cao Shunqing, “Why to Study the Heterogeneity of Chinese Literary Theory”, *Literary Review*, (2000) 6.

[12] Cao Shunqing, TanJia, “Sinicization of Western Literary Theories: Another Effective Way to Reconstruct Chinese Discourses”, *Foreign Literature Studies*, 2004, 5.

[13] Cao Shunqing, ZouTao, “From Aphasia to the Localization of Western Literary Criticism in China Reconsideration on Rebuilding the Chinese Literary Theory”, *Journal of China Three Gorges University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 2005, 5.

[14] Jin Yizeng, “The Basic Roads of Sinicization of Literary Theories from the View of Variation”, *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art*, 2006, 5.

[15] Cao Shunqing, ZhiYu, “Basic Principles and Concrete Ways to Construct Discourse of Chinese Literary Theory”, *Social Science Research*, 2003, 4.

[16] Chen Yinque, *Selection Works in Jin Ming*, 2nd ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1990) 252.

[17] Chen Yinque, *Translation Art of Kumarajiva, Hu Shi, History of Vernacular Literary*, (Tianjin: Bihua Literature and Art Publishing House, 2002) 115.

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