Hua MENG（孟华）

Prof. Hua Meng was born in Funing of Jiangsu province on November 4th, 1944. In 1967, she acquired her bachelor’s degree of Arts from Peking University of International Relations majoring in French language and culture. At the age of forty, she got the chance to pursue doctoral degree in France. At the advice of her supervisor, she chose “Voltaire and China” as the title of her doctoral dissertation. As a great enlightenment thinker and literature giant of the 18th century, Voltaire possessed 52 volumes of complete works and 107 volumes of letter collections. Among them, about 80 works and over 200 letters were discussions of Chinese literature, history and politics. Faced with the huge task of reading so many relevant materials, Hua Meng bravely accepted the topic without any fear. Cherishing the precious opportunity of study, she overcame various difficulties and finally won the doctoral degree of French literature and comparative literature from Sorbonne University (Paris IV) in 1988.

Hua Meng’s doctoral dissertation Voltaire and China is bound in two large volumes. This is the first systematic study of the subject conducted by Chinese scholars. On the basis of 18th century’s westward transmission history of Chinese culture, her dissertation makes a thorough exploration of Voltaire’s acceptance of Chinese culture. For the first time, she proposed that Voltaire’s passion for China stemmed from his identification with Confucian idea of “Humanity-oriented Principle”. Due to its unique perspective, rich materials, novel ideas and strict persuasion, the dissertation obtained the rejoin committee’s consistent high praise and was later successively cited or referenced by famous contemporary scholars and members of the French Institute of Ethical Politics like Pomona and Peyrefite.

Hua Meng is currently professor, doctoral supervisor and vice president of Research Institute of Comparative Literature and Comparative Culture in Peking University as well as director of International Association for French Studies (AIEF). In 2009, she retired as head of the French Culture Research Center of Peking University. She was once director of International Comparative Literature
Association (ICLA) and vice president of Chinese Comparative Literature Association. She has been honored with the academic medal of palm leaves three times (respectively knight, officer, and commander in chief) by the French government. Her academic achievements in the field of Chinese comparative literature are mainly embodied in the following three aspects:

1. Study on the relationship between Chinese and French literature.

For Hua Meng, successfully passing the doctoral thesis defense is just the beginning of her academic career in comparative literature. After returning home, she continued conducting research on the relationship between Chinese and French literature. Her research style was deeply influenced by the discipline training of comparative literature received in France. In the study of international literary relations, she mainly adopts the method of positivism which attaches great importance to contact among different facts. This method has a high requirement on researchers’ possession of material in detail and exploration of internal logic. Being the first to start the course of Research on the Relation between Chinese and French Literature in Peking University, Hua Meng successively published a series of relevant works and articles, such as Voltaire and Confucius (published by Xinhua Press, 1993), French Cultural History (co-author, published by Peking University Press, 1997), “Criticism on Criticism of Chinese Orphan” (Journal of Tianjin Normal University, No. 5, 1990) and “The Translation and Acceptance of Confucian School in France before the Year 1740” (Journal of Learning People, No. 4, 1993). In 1990, she translated the famous drama Chinese Orphan adapted by Voltaire on the basis of The Orphan of Zhao Family and successfully had it performed on the stage. Its performance finally made the presence of the popularly accepted drama in the history of Chinese and Western cultural exchanges possible to Chinese scholars, thus providing live and exact research evidence for Chinese scholars on comparative literature. In 2011, Hua Meng published her book Study on the relationship between Chinese and French Literature, which was the fruitful works of her years of dedicated research work. Taking the relationship between Chinese and French literature as the main research object, she carried out comprehensive research from multiple perspectives including influence, acceptance, translation, media and image. Most of the papers included in the book belong to case study. In addition to empirical study on contact among different facts, she also applies other suitable methods. Some of the papers involve discussion on relevant theories and methodologies concerning international literary relation study.
As for Chinese contemporary field of comparative study, Prof. Hua Meng believes that the current trend should enter into a more pragmatic phase after experiencing the periods of “Renaissance” and “development” in the eighties and nineties. On the one hand, we should continue borrowing new research findings and methods from Western countries with an open mind. On the other hand, we should not follow the West blindly but cultivate the root of Chinese comparative literature. In an interview, she mentioned the following view: springing from the cracks of national literatures, comparative literature will always face the crisis of indefinite identity. Chinese comparative literature couldn’t take root in China without a series of Chinese reform since it was originally borrowed from the West. At this point, Hua Meng proposes that French scholars’ style is well worth our reference and learning, because they never blindly chase fashion nor discard their own roots. No matter what the fashion of the outside world is, they do not vaguely follow nor get restless. Instead, they always know how to draw nutrients from new concepts and theories to cultivate their own roots.

Actually, Chinese scholars on comparative study could inherit much from our country’s rich cultural heritage, such as the sound philosophical tradition of stressing comprehensibility and harmony. Taking an open mind towards foreign study, we should incessantly make explorations and grope for a set of theory and methodology with Chinese cultural characteristics. Studying all kinds of problems with unique vision and perspectives of China, we can surely cultivate a sound root for Chinese comparative literature and make due contribution to the international comparative literature. With the improving of cognitive understanding over exotic culture and literature as well as more frequent exchanges between China and the West, comparative literature in China in the 21st century should pay more attention to differentiation study, not only differences between Chinese and the Western study, but also those within Western field. Since “West” is a general term which includes Europe and North America, differences are bound to exist among different regions. Their cultural communication with China hence exhibit different presentations, which requires detailed and in-depth research.

2. Image study.

Image study is an area which professor Hua Meng recently endeavors to explore. She is also an authoritative scholar who is the most qualified in domestic field. In fact, she has begun the study of image as early as the time she wrote her doctoral thesis. The second part of her dissertation was titled as “Voltaire’s Image of China”. In that part, she not only depicted Voltaire’s ways of shaping China’s image, but also
noticed the study of image-maker. Through detailed textual analysis and study on the historical and cultural context of the works, she thoroughly illustrated the internal cause why Voltaire created the image of China in that way. The method she adopted at that time was traditional and her research on image creator was totally unconscious. Since she returned home and took up teaching in Peking University, Prof. Daiyun Yue assigned her with the task of introducing domestic academic circles new foreign theories and methods. Under Yue's encouragement and support, Hua Meng started the introduction and research on contemporary theories and methodologies of image study in 1993. To begin with, she selectively translated several representative works concerning the relevant topic, such as Moha's *Research History and Methodology of Literature Image* and Bayeux's *Image Study in the Sense of Comparative Literature*. Based on the above theoretical accumulation, she then started a series of relevant courses either in Chinese or French. In her courses, she systematically introduced the theories and methods of image study to the students and impelled them to read original works. Students are encouraged to accurately grasp the meaning of the original on the basis of independent thinking instead of being a slave of theory.

Professor Hua Meng believes that contemporary image theories and methodologies are still in the stage of development rather than perfect stage. Chinese scholars of comparative study have the responsibility to assess their utility, complement and optimize them in the process of research. Based on such an understanding, she put forward her own interpretation of the definition, research scope and the characteristics of contemporary image study in the chapter of "Image Study" included in the book *Comparative Literature* compiled by editor Dun Chen in 1997. Concerning overemphasis on creation subject of contemporary Western image study, she clearly suggested that the Chinese tradition of stressing comprehensibility and acculturation could and should give image study a comprehensive and panoramic attention as well as a concern different from Western scholars. Her scientific attitude that neither subjectively excludes nor take a blind faith in Western theory can be fully illustrated in her research on conventional phraseology. As a basic composition unit of image, conventional phraseology is one of the focuses upon which French comparative literature expert Bayeux constructed his theory. Hua Meng wrote this article "The Etymological Study on 'Foreign Devils'" utilizing the reasonable part of Bayeux's theory. In this article, the evolvement and usage of the term "Foreign Devils" since Ming and Qing dynasties were explored in detail. Moreover, the social background and psychological mechanism that yields the occurrence of this conventional
phraseology were analyzed. Her article is regarded as a model for students to follow.

But as for the timing of conventional phraseology, she put forward different views from professor Bayeux. In her own specific study, Hua Meng found that conventional phraseology cannot be used at any moment as Bayeux said. To further illustrate this point, she wrote another paper “Discussion on the Timing of Conventional Phraseology”, which was respectively published in French periodical Cultural Dialogue and Misreading and Chinese monograph Cultural Transmission and Literature Image. In the two editions of the paper, she put forward three thoughtful proposals with strong evidence of practical examples: Conventional phraseology among nations of different origins is closely related to cultural misreading which actively participates in the production and transmission of the phraseologies; Conventional phraseology among heterogeneous cultures has stronger timeliness but shortage lift span, which must be considered in light of the complicated process of cognition, space distance and understanding deviation; Conventional phraseology will not necessarily disappear with intercultural dialogue. To make effective dialogues, both parties must be really in equal status. This equality needs a long time of establishment and depends on the promotion of insightful people.

In order to promote the study of image and expand relevant international academic exchanges, Prof. Hua Meng actively advocated the holding of academic conferences and she has presided over several ones herself. In August 1997, the annual meeting of the 15th International Comparative Literature Association was convened in Leiden. Hua Meng, together with Japanese scholar Hirakawa Yuhiro, co-chaired the roundtable discussion of “Western Images in East Asian Literature”. In that discussion, dozens of papers written by scholars from China, Japan and Europe were received. In the draft outline prepared for the roundtable discussion, Hua Meng again raised questions about the function of image according to her own actual research. In her view, image is indeed a symbolic language of self-narration as identified by European scholars. Chinese literature has written a lot of notes and travelogues about the image of Westerners. These travelogues don’t belong to the category of pure fiction since both imagination and on-site narration are included in them. They are evidence of writers’ effort to record facts. It is with the help of the recordings that Chinese people gradually changed the understanding of the outside world. From this, we can see the role of others-narration in building images of other countries and cultures. That roundtable discussion won the praise of conference holders and scholars. The collection of papers edited by Prof. Hirakawa Yuhiro and
Meny was then translated into English and got published in Holland with the title of “The Image of Westerners in Chinese and Japanese Literature” in the year 2000. The collection became another great contribution to international comparative literature made by East Asian scholars.

In 2011, China held an international conference “Literature and Religion; Christianity in the Context of Chinese during the Late Qing Dynasty”. At the conference, Hua Meng made a vivid speech giving an introduction to image study in comparative literature with the title of “The Everlasting Old Summer Palace; Garden of Gardens in the Eye of French People”. Concerning the nature of comparative literature, Hua Meng summarized as follows: comparative literature should not be limited to pure comparison and contrast of literal sense between two texts; instead, it should be mutual communication of two literatures and cultures. She also expressed the idea that image study is a key topic in comparative literature. In answering the questions like “what’s image and why”, researchers should put emphasis on image-maker and the creation subject. To deepen the study, she put forward the concepts of “social overall imagination” and “image study”. She pointed out that image study should pay attention to the text as well as the relation among image, writer and social overall imagination. Meanwhile she took the related entries of Robl Terminology Dictionary as the guide and linked the relevant narrations of missionaries and writers since the 18th century with the recalling words of joint army officers involved in the burning of Summer Palace. In the form of pictures and words, she adopted the mutual proving of culture and history to illustrate how Summer Palace gradually evolved into a symbol of Chinese culture, a symbol and a myth in the national psychology of France. She narrated the reflection and summary of French people on cultural relations between China and France.

3. Study on the 18th century French literature plus French sinology study.

In China, Prof. Hua Meng is known as a scholar engaged in the relation study of French and Chinese culture. In the international field, however, she is better known as an expert on 18th century research. For this reason, she was employed as honorary member of France’s 18th Century Research Board and French Literature History Research Association as well as communication member of French magazines. Unluckily, few people know this point. Actually we would be fully fascinated by her great familiarity with 18th Century French literature and pertinent comments as long as we have chances to read the book The 18th Century French Literature she wrote.

In addition, Prof. Hua Meng also has strong interest in the study of French
Sinology. She not only participated in the “international sinology project” hosted by Prof. Shaodang Yan but also acted as the editor in chief on French literatures. Having been concerned about the development of French sinology for many years, Hua Meng points out that Chinese scholars of comparative study should focus on sinology study, for sinology could provide us with a unique perspective of others to reflect on the Chinese culture. Consequently, she often refers to their achievements in the research and translates their related papers. Meanwhile she has acted as editors in several international journals like French Sinology and International Sinology. Reflecting on Hua Meng’s research career in comparative literature, we could see that she has made fruitful academic achievements and always stood in the forefront of comparative literature studies. In her particular field, she has written a brilliant chapter with humane spirits.

Prof. Meng’s Major Works

Voltaire et la Chine, en microfiche, Centre de thèses, 1989.

The Chinese Orphans, Voltaire, adapted drama staged in Tianjin People’s Art Theatre, 1990.

Voltaire and Confucius, Xinhua Publishing House, 1993.

The French Cultural History (co-author), Beijing University Press, 1997; Asia-Pacific Books Publishing House, 1998.

The History of European Literature (the first volume, The 18th Century French Literature), Commercial Press, 1999.

Visons de l’autre: Chine France—Textes extraits des conférences et des séminaires prononcés à l’étranger, Beijing University Press, 2004.

The Myth and Epic: George Dumay Zyl Review, Didier heriban, Beijing University Press, 2005.

Study on the Relations between Chinese and French Literature, Fudan University Press, 2011.

The Chinese Translation of Bibliography on French Works in Humanities and Social Science (co-compiled), World Books Publishing Company, 1996.

Image Study of Comparative Literature (editor in chief), Beijing University Press, 2001.

The Image of Westerners in the Chinese Literature (editor in chief), Anhui Education Publishing House, 2006.

(Trans. by Lili ZHANG, Proofread by Yi CHEN)