

※ Review Essay ※

# Whither East-West Comparative Literature? Two Recent Answers from the U.S.

James ST. ANDRÉ

Assistant Professor, Department of Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore

*Configurations of Comparative Poetics: Three Perspectives on Western and Chinese Literary Criticism.* By Cai Zong-qi. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002. Pp. xii + 361.

*Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China.* By Haun Saussy. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 2001. Pp. xi + 289.

Comparative Literature as a discipline seems doomed to perpetual self-doubt and crisis. Since René Wellek's famous address "The Crisis in Comparative Literature" in 1958,<sup>1</sup> every generation of scholars in the field has had to wrestle with various "crises," some internal to the discipline, some external. In 1984 Weisstein went so far as to talk of a "Permanent Crisis of Comparative Literature,"<sup>2</sup> and in the 90s the Bernheimer report led to long and heated debates about the nature and direction of the field.<sup>3</sup> After sketching the broad outline of some recent trends, this review article will concentrate on two recent works, Cai Zong-qi's *Configurations of Comparative Poetics: Three Perspectives on Western and Chinese Literary Criticism* and Haun Saussy's *Great Walls of*

---

<sup>1</sup> René Wellek, "The Crisis of Comparative Literature," in Werner Friederich, ed., *Proceedings of the Second Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association* (1958), University of North Carolina Studies in Comparative Literature, no. 23 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), pp. 149-159.

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Weisstein, "D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Oú allons-nous? The Permanent Crisis of Comparative Literature," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 11.2 (June 1984): 167-192.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Bernheimer, ed., *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

*Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China*, both of which have something to say about where the field might move. (I will make only passing mention here of another important recent publication, Zhang Longxi's *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China*, because I have already reviewed it separately last year for this journal).<sup>4</sup> The number and scope of recent publications in Chinese is so great that they deserve separate treatment, and I will not deal with them here.

In the 90s, Comparative Literature was seen as a flat or contracting field after the enthusiasm and growth of the 60s and 70s. Besides the problem of the general crisis in the Humanities, there were three main reasons for this contraction: the rise or expansion of rival disciplines (cultural studies, translation studies, and English), and challenges to the values espoused by a Euro-centric discipline in the wake of post-colonialism and the rise of multiculturalism.

Susan Bassnett, for example, published *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*,<sup>5</sup> in which (curiously, given the title) she announced the death of Comparative Literature and her own defection to Translation Studies. Reception studies, once the mainstay of the "French" school, are now often carried out by members of translation studies departments, usually with the polysystems theory developed by Evan-Zohar and Toury.<sup>6</sup> Bernheimer's *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (1995), which contains "The Bernheimer Report 1993: Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century" and then sixteen responses by various scholars, deals extensively with the "threat" posed by Cultural Studies. Tobin Siebers's essay in that volume, "Sincerely Yours," for example, says that Comparative Literature will always lose out to cultural studies because the latter discipline is monolingual and therefore "easier." Finally, English departments had become much more receptive to continental theory since the 70s, a field which had in many universities been the mainstay of Comparative Literature programs.

The response to this latest "crisis" has been an attempt to redefine Comparative Literature as a "multi-cultural/multi-lingual" discipline (witness the title of Bernheimer's book). This has entailed expanding the discipline beyond the boundaries of Europe and the Americas, and emphasizing difference (or *différance* if you're a Derridean) rather than universality. As early as 1963, Etiemble critiqued the Eurocentric nature of the discipline and called for a

---

<sup>4</sup> Zhang Longxi, *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 158-161.

<sup>6</sup> Itamar Evan-Zohar, *Polysystem Studies*, a special issue of *Poetics Today* 11.1 (Spring 1990). See also Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995).

correction of this tendency,<sup>7</sup> and the Bernheimer report is also clear in calling for an expansion of the scope of texts studied to include all literatures. Since the late 80s, it has become increasingly common for handbooks/general studies of the field to discuss and call for expansion outside of Europe,<sup>8</sup> and in 1991 the 13<sup>th</sup> International Comparative Literature Association Congress was held in Tokyo, the first time that the Congress had been held outside of Europe and the Americas.

One result of all of this hand-wringing and soul-searching has been the growth of East-West comparative studies in the United States in the 90s. Such studies have in fact been conducted for decades, but they have had little influence on the mainstream of Comparative Literature. Vincent A. McCrossen's early "What Comparative Literature Might Be and Seldom Is,"<sup>9</sup> the East-West comparative conferences at Indiana University in the 60s, Anthony Yu's 1974 article "Problems and Prospects in Chinese-Western Literary Relations"<sup>10</sup> and Alfred Aldrich Owen's *The Reemergence of World Literature: A Study of Asia and the West*<sup>11</sup> all make recommendations similar to those in the 90s, but passed mainly unheeded in their time. More concretely, almost no faculty positions were created for the teaching of non-European literatures in Comparative Literature programs. After having received training in the United States, then, scholars often went (back) to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and China to teach after graduation instead of getting hired to teach in Comparative Literature departments in the United States. Partially as a result of this hiring tendency, Comparative Literature has grown rapidly in East Asia. From the first conference on Comparative Literature held in Taiwan in 1971 and the founding of *Tamkang Review*; followed by similar moves in Hong Kong and China in the 80s, Comparative Literature became a burgeoning field. This growth of the discipline in terms of positions and publications has not gone

---

<sup>7</sup> René Etiemble, *Comparaison n'est pas raison: La crise de la littérature comparée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963). English version: *The Crisis in Comparative Literature*, trans. by George Joyaux and Herbert Weisinger (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1966).

<sup>8</sup> Yves Chevrel, *La Littérature comparée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989). English Version: *Comparative Literature Today: Methods and Perspectives*, trans. by Farida Elizabeth Dahab (Kirksville, Missouri: The Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1995); Claudio Guillén, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*, trans. by Cola Franzen (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application* (Studies in Comparative Literature 18) (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998) are just three examples.

<sup>9</sup> Vincent A. McCrossen, "What Comparative Literature Might Be and Seldom Is," in Werner Friederich, ed., *Proceedings of the Second Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, pp. 204-215.

<sup>10</sup> Anthony Yu, "Problems and Prospects in Chinese-Western Literary Relations," *Yearbook of General and Comparative Literature* 23 (1974): 47-53.

<sup>11</sup> Alfred Aldrich Owen, *The Reemergence of World Literature: A Study of Asia and the West* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986).

unnoticed in the “center”; both Bassnett and Tötösy discuss the rise of Comparative Literature outside of the three traditional strongholds of Germany, France, and the United States.

This growth of Comparative Literature in East Asia also led to the emergence of a “Chinese” school of Comparative Literature (see inter alia Chen Peng-hsiang).<sup>12</sup> In opposition to the “French” school of influence studies and the “American” school of parallel studies (to be extremely simplistic), the “Chinese” school proposed its own methodology: the application of Western theory to Chinese texts. As with the United States in the 60s and 70s, then, Comparative Literature became the vehicle for the introduction of continental theory (often via America) to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China. Just as English departments proved resistant to the “theoretical turn” of literary studies in the U.S., departments of Chinese language and literature in Taiwan and Hong Kong often were suspicious of such imports.

This methodology, at its best, proved both a new way of reading Chinese texts and a way of examining the claim to universality by Western theory. At its worst, it became the mechanical application of a set of operations on a new text (“and thus we can see that Chinese writers also exhibit an ‘anxiety of influence’” sort of thing). In the wake of Said’s *Orientalism*, this latter type of study led eventually to the critique of all East-West studies as a new form of colonialism: Western “theory” as the colonizer, Chinese literature as the colonized/controlled. The most sustained critique of East-West Comparative Literature to date is probably Takayuki Yokota Murakami’s *Don Juan East/West: On the Problematics of Comparative Literature*.<sup>13</sup> The basic premise of this book is that all East-West comparisons are always already fatally flawed, because the terms of comparison are always Western concepts. These European concepts pose as universal values, resulting in non-European texts and traditions being colonized, appropriated, distorted, or done violence to. In the end, Yokota Murakami dismisses the entire project of East-West comparison. Moreover, the issue of the colonization of non-European textual traditions by Western theory was not limited to literature: almost all branches of the Humanities and many of the social sciences have begun to debate these issues. How East-West comparisons are to be made, then, remains an as-yet unresolved problem, and anyone venturing into East-West comparisons runs the risk of being labeled an orientalist, a colonialist, a possessor of false

---

<sup>12</sup> See inter alia Heh-hsiang Yuan, “East-West Comparative Literature: An Inquiry into Possibilities,” in John Deeney, ed., *Chinese-Western Comparative Literature: Theory and Strategy* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1980) and Chen Peng-hsiang, “Theory and Practice in the Development of Chinese-Western Comparative Literature,” *Asian Culture* 17 (1993): 14-31.

<sup>13</sup> Takayuki Yokota Murakami, *Don Juan East/West: On the Problematics of Comparative Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

consciousness, politically incorrect, or worse.

The field of East-West comparative studies, then, is perceived to be an up-and-coming subfield of Comparative Literature. At the same time, it is full of pitfalls, methodological problems still abound, and practitioners are open to attack for a variety of reasons. Writing in 1996, Yang Xiaoshan begins his comparative study of Chinese and English nature imagery with a discussion of these dangers and how he hopes to avoid them.<sup>14</sup>

Of the two books under review here, Cai Zong-qi's is the more explicit in dealing with methodological concerns in Comparative Literature, and so I would like to begin by discussing his work.

The scope of this book is quite ambitious: an overview and comparison of both Chinese and Western poetics in the first four chapters, followed by four "case" studies of specific thinkers in the chapters 5-8, and then a conclusion. In general, I found the second half of the book much more interesting than the first half, for reasons which will become clear below.

Both China and the West have long and rich traditions of poetics. These long and rich traditions are what make them so tempting to compare, yet at the same time make such comparisons a formidable task. In the first two chapters of his book, Cai gives an overview of first Western and then Chinese poetics. In these chapters he seeks to make the point that both traditions have an overarching, central concern over more than 2000 years: in the West, it is always a question of literature's relation to truth, and in China it is always a question of harmony. It is not possible, obviously, to go into detail concerning every major work of poetics in both traditions in the space of one chapter, let alone all the lesser ones. Accordingly, Cai concentrates on a few key examples and relies on them to carry the weight of his argument. Since the book is targeted toward Western readers, he adds a chapter on the Chinese philosophical underpinnings of Chinese poetics, and then in the last chapter he draws out the parallels and differences between China and the West.

My major criticism of this half of the book is that, in the process of presenting his argument in this tiny space, he is forced to make frequent and sweeping generalizations about "China" and "The West." This leads to a reification of these two entities and a dangerous tendency to reductionism, which Pauline Yu<sup>15</sup> and, more recently, Zhang Longxi (*Mighty Opposites*) have critiqued.

Let us look first at this "West" that Cai constructs as part of his model.

---

<sup>14</sup> Yang Xiaoshan, *To Perceive and To Represent: A Comparative Study of Chinese and English Poetics of Nature Imagery* (Asian Thought and Culture, Vol. 24) (New York: Peter Lang, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Pauline Yu, "Alienation Effects: Comparative Literature and the Chinese Tradition," in Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes, eds., *The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

There are five major figures discussed in Chapter 1: Plato, Aristotle, Wordsworth, Arnold, and T. S. Eliot. He also discusses more or less briefly a host of other twentieth-century critics from various countries, but a glance at the bibliography will tell you that they have all been read in English translation. This is no great sin in itself; however, if we notice further that Ingarden and various other continental theorists are discussed, not in their proper historical chronological order, but in the order in which they were translated into English and introduced into American academia, it becomes clear that he is constructing the “West” out of ancient Greek and 19th-20th century Anglo-American criticism, far from the whole picture.

His desire to see both traditions as having one over-riding concern, the key theme for which all later writers are but variations, leads further to certain thinkers being swept under the rug because they do not fit nicely into this scheme. In the West, whose tradition I am more familiar with, the Canadian critic Northrop Frye immediately came to mind as I was reading this book. Frye’s system of literature as revolving around various sets of complimentary opposites (mythic and ironic; tragic and comic) which alternately are in ascendance looks suspiciously as if it might fit very well into “Chinese” poetics as Cai defines it: an interest in harmony rather than truth, complimentary rather than polar opposites, and process-oriented.<sup>16</sup> On page 51, for example, he states: “ [T] he mimetic tendency itself, the tendency to verisimilitude and accuracy of description, is one of two poles of literature. At the other pole is something that seems to be connected both with Aristotle’s word *mythos* and with the usual meaning of myth.” So Frye is even willing to question mimesis as the basis of all art forms, an assumption that Cai finds axiomatic in Western poetics. Such cases, which would complicate and “problematize” the issues he discusses, are ignored. This is a pity, because in the context of Cai’s book, the question of Frye’s standing in “Western” criticism becomes very interesting. Is it possible that the reason Frye, who was well-respected in his lifetime and enjoyed a certain following, never became really influential was due to the fact that his system of thought was too *different* from mainstream “Western” preoccupations? Has Frye been translated into Chinese and, if so, has he been well-received? There are many other questions that could be explored from here, just as there are many other examples of “Western” poetics which, because they do not fit Cai’s model, are left aside.

I also think that Cai’s model becomes a bit of a Procrustean bed when he reaches Derrida. Having decided that Western poetics is all about truth, Derrida is introduced as a thinker who, because he is anti-truth, is still centrally concerned with the question of truth in literature. This is essentially a Hegelian

---

<sup>16</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957).

dialectic structure: by engaging in combat against the system, Derrida is in fact showing how strong it is, and his work will ultimately be co-opted by that system.

A more nuanced and, I believe, more accurate account of Derrida's philosophy can be found in, among other writings, Wlad Godzich's *The Culture of Literacy*.<sup>17</sup> In his introduction, Godzich maintains that Derrida and other post-structuralist thinkers work very hard precisely to avoid being "anti-truth" because of the dangers of Hegelian dialectic (18-33). That Derrida should wish to avoid getting trapped in this manner, however, throws a monkey wrench into Cai's theory; he thus conveniently "misreads" Derrida. He also quietly fails to discuss Derrida's infinite deferral of meaning along the chain of signification as being process-oriented.

On the Chinese side, where I must confess I am less qualified to comment, I found it interesting that while discussing Liu Xie's *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, Cai mentions that Liu was interested in the origins of poetry in the Dao. Interesting because, according to Cai, it is the "West" that is interested in origins, not "China." Also, in the second half of the book (Chapter 5), Cai has this to say when discussing the famous passage in the Confucian *Analects* on the rectification of names: "Unless language is rectified and made to represent reality truthfully, Confucius believes, there cannot be order and harmony in human relationships, let alone stable social and political institutions" (135). Confucius's preoccupation with the need "to represent reality truthfully" sounds suspiciously Platonic. But according to Cai's schematics in the first half of the book, Confucius is not supposed to be interested in notions of truth or representation. Again, these Chinese examples raise interesting avenues to explore if we are willing to tolerate dissension. Is Liu the only Chinese critic interested in the origins of poetry? What about the famous passage in the Great Preface? How does Liu's inquiry into the origins of poetry affect the structure of his poetics? How do later writers interpret this section, or do they ignore it? What is Confucius's notion of truth, and how is it represented?

Tellingly, the one other recent attempt at Chinese-English poetics written in English, Yang Xiaoshan's *To Perceive and To Represent*, is nowhere alluded to in Cai's text and is missing from the bibliography. If Cai had consulted this work, he might have learned that debates on the representation of nature in poetry in China and England shared certain similar preoccupations, including concerns with the *truth* of poetic representation of nature. This became a major concern for Six Dynasties critics of rhyme-prose and poets were criticized for unrealistic description. From discussions of rhyme-prose these issues entered the

---

<sup>17</sup> Wlad Godzich, *The Culture of Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

mainstream discussion of *shi*-poetry, where they most often crop up in “practical criticism” (Yang’s term), a genre of poetics which Cai does not deal with in his book.

I do not bring up these exceptions to disprove Cai’s assertion that, overall, China and Greek/Anglo-American poetics have had different orientations. It is impossible to disprove a tendency by a few exceptions. Rather, what is at stake is an attitude: is difference going to be allowed, studied, and contextualized *within* those two “systems” of thought, not just between them? Why must East-West Comparative Literature rely on monolithic structures? Can 2000 years of poetics be summed up in one word, “truth” or “harmony”? Pauline Yu’s warning from 1988 is still apposite today: “Significant differences over time and space evaporate in the hypostasis of forms and genres: all Chinese poetry is presented as concrete, mystical, personal, impersonal, static, cinematic, or whatever. And finally, entire richly varied traditions become unqualified monoliths in the face-off of ‘East-West’ Comparative Literature.”<sup>18</sup>

The second half of his book, as I mentioned earlier, is much more stimulating. Here he gives us four interesting studies, three of which are “paired” East-West, while the remaining chapter on Fenollosa and Pound I will return to when I discuss Saussy’s book. Although Plato and Confucius have often been paired before, his chapter on these two thinkers’ poetics contains some interesting insights. His comment that both thinkers were willing to censor art in the interests of education, for example, suggests a monograph that could be written on the history of censorship in different cultures and its influence on the literature of various periods. The pairing of Wordsworth and Liu Xie leads to some astute observations and, although he is not the first to suggest the relationship between Derrida and Mādhyamiki Buddhism, his discussion yields insightful results. It is interesting, however, that after claiming in the first half of his book that Buddhism had no great influence on the development of theoretical poetics in China, he here devotes an entire chapter to a comparison of Buddhist thought and Deconstruction.

In his epilogue, Cai turns to the methodological questions I noted plague the field of East-West comparison and proposes the “three perspectives” of the subtitle to his book. Here he has some salutary advice to offer. First, he insists that comparatists must have a thorough understanding of the cultures they wish to compare (this is the “intra-cultural” perspective). Then he calls on comparatists to cross geographical boundaries and avoid polemics (“cross-cultural” perspective). Here he gives a good, succinct overview of the history of polemical comparisons based both on similitude and difference in China and the West. Finally, the comparatist should rise above the two cultures being studied,

---

<sup>18</sup> Pauline Yu, “Alienation Effect: Comparative Literature and the Chinese Tradition,” p. 163.



seeing them as equal (the “trans-cultural” perspective). Much of this advice is sound and his example of Chad Hansen being labeled as “orientalist” because he was not more careful is well taken.

I have a few reservations regarding this program, however. First, it assumes that cultures are separate, independent entities. This relates back to my critique of the first half of the book, where I note that Cai must first reify China and the West before he does his comparisons. We are perilously close to the stereotype of Chinese culture as having developed independently behind a Great Wall for 2000 years. Significantly, Cai rejects the idea that Buddhism was influential in the development of Chinese poetics; such a notion would upset his neat construct “China” and betray foreign influence, especially if it turned out that the Buddhists did not fit well into his “harmonious” scheme. And here again we must pose the question of his choice of examples: he has avoided looking at any Chinese writings on poetics after the Opium War, but many of his Western examples are from 1900 or later. “China” is thus “traditional China” before it could be contaminated by the West, while the “West” has no such strictures placed upon it. Have no Chinese thinkers in the 20th century made contributions to poetics in that country? Is “Chinese” poetics dead? We cannot tell from Cai’s book.

Finally, I have a philosophical question to pose regarding his transcultural perspective: if Westerners are trapped in a Hegelian dialectic of truth, and the Chinese are all interested in harmony, where and how does the ground arise that Cai stands on to see this? Is he a “Chinese” or “Western” critic? Significantly, there are no thinkers in his book that are both (the most conspicuous absence being Qian Zhongshu on the Chinese side), and there is no discussion of how these two traditions may be reconciled in one individual. This may sound trivial, but in fact is a much deeper critique, because the first half of his book is built on the premise that there are two separate and independent systems of thought that, in a Whorfian manner, give completely different views of the universe. What, however, is the view of the universe of someone who is bilingual, or knows two different poetic traditions? Although he does not answer this question directly, in one of his diagrams, adapted from Alfred Aldridge Owen, *The Reemergence of World Literature*, he posits this space as (D): the area surrounding the two circles representing Chinese culture (A), Western culture (B) and the areas where they overlap (C). Cai thus imagines himself as being outside/above both cultures; given that I have demonstrated that his view of the “West” to be firmly from the vantage of late 20th-century American Academia, and his “China” ceased to exist after the Opium War, I do not see how he gets there.

It is precisely this question of the engagement between Chinese and Western culture, of what happens when any two cultures meet, which is at the heart of Haun Saussy’s *Great Walls of Discourse*. This work does not at first

glance appear to be a work concerned with Comparative Literature, strictly speaking; his is an exploration of the field of Sinology as one of the main sites of interaction between China and the West, from the Jesuits to post-structuralism, and is published by Harvard's East Asian Institute. Most Sinologists would strenuously object to their work being characterized as comparative, Sinology's basic premise being that one must devote one's entire life and energy to the study of all facets of Chinese culture if one wishes to understand it. But Saussy's situation of Sinology at the cross-roads puts his work within the purview of Comparative Literature as it is now writ large to include cross-culturalism.

Most of the book is taken up with a series of examples or vignettes of past interactions between these two cultures in an attempt to discover how far it is possible to understand another culture. Unfortunately, the answer in this book is rather depressing: again and again, Saussy traces out how one side or the other has misread its "Other" in the mirror of the self, putting that "Other" to use in its own best interests. Chapter Two, on the Jesuits and their Ming counterparts, addresses the question of translation as a means of cultural exchange, but the result is far from ideal. Conservative Chinese elements misread what the Jesuits said about Europe and dreamt of a land where censorship was absolute in the crushing of heterodoxy, while the Jesuits penned their fictions about the Chinese for European eyes. In Chapter Three, a very interesting discussion of the much-maligned Fenollosa leads to the conclusion that Westerners have consistently perceived Chinese as an ideographic language so that it can serve as a foil to their own linguistic system. This chapter in Saussy's book should be read before the corresponding chapter on Fenollosa and Pound in Cai's work; Saussy's discussion of Fenollosa informs Cai's work (he had read an earlier form of this chapter as a journal article) and will make Cai's discussion of Pound's poetics clearer. Chapter Six discusses how post-modernism has been adopted as a conservative weapon in the hands of certain modern Chinese intellectuals (a particularly strong "mis-reading"), and in Chapter Seven, again, China is all that the West is not for various contemporary critics (Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva). Perhaps because these thinkers have already taken a beating from others on their misunderstanding of China,<sup>19</sup> Saussy treats them rather gently, given the kind of "mistakes" they have perpetrated. He also avoids the more pressing moral question posed by Zhang Longxi in *Mighty Opposites*: if post-structuralism can so easily be turned into a conservative weapon in the Chinese context, should this give us pause as to the nature of post-structuralism itself? I think that here and elsewhere Saussy lets post-modernism off too lightly.

---

<sup>19</sup> See inter alia Zhang Longxi, *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).

Chapters Four and Five are the most interesting sections in terms of methodology. In Chapter Four Saussy is explicit about what should already be clear to the reader by this time: he eschews the type of similarity/difference comparisons that Cai pursues, preferring instead to look at the interaction of the two cultures. This is a welcome and salutary path, one which might help to avoid the “polemical comparisons” which Cai warns against. Moreover, he is not doing influence studies warmed over; he manages to look at translation and cultural transfer not just as passive reflection, but as a deliberate strategy by individuals and groups to be used for their own ends. Unfortunately, although this may be seen as empowering in the case of colonial studies, here both China and the West come off looking like deluded and self-centered thieves. But it is precisely these kinds of questions that need to be asked.

In the last section of Chapter Five, he discusses the question of the missing middle in East-West studies: Central Asian history and culture. Here his example of Frederick Teggart’s *Rome and China: A Study of Correlations in Historical Events*, published in 1938, explodes the myth of an isolated China, arguing that affairs in Western China and in the Eastern Roman Empire had a direct affect on each other. Despite the continued call by scholars such as Victor Mair for more work on the interaction between Chinese and various cultures to the North, West, and South, this field is still woefully understudied in the U.S. While it was common in the nineteenth century for Sinologists to know Manchurian (after all, it was the court language), and many were interested in Tibetan and Sanskrit, most Sinologists today choose Japanese as their second Asian language, if indeed they learn one at all. (I must confess to being one of these.)

Structurally this book is rather loose, as is often the case with volumes of individual papers collected together with an introduction and conclusion added on. Saussy fails to lay out clearly the correspondences between different chapters in his book at times. It seems obvious to me, for example, that there is a clear link between Chapters Four and Five, one discussing China as having no history and one discussing Chinese as having no grammar in Western eyes. Yet Saussy never does anything with this line of enquiry. His concluding chapter is, accordingly, rather tame and general; we are advised to seek the middle way and look for reciprocity rather than antithesis. We are also advised to look for third parties, but none are forthcoming, unless we include the excluded middle he discussed in Chapter Five.

I had a few nagging questions after I had finished this book. First, in the introduction he uses the analogy of psychoanalysis. I couldn’t help wondering whether Saussy saw himself as the analyst or the patient, and what implications the difference might have for his work. Again and again he says that he wants to resist using China to think about the West; but in Chapter Seven he doesn’t seem to mind it when Roland Barthes does this with Japan. He also has a

warning on page 38 concerning his discussion of Fenollosa, which seems to be rather excessive. Do I hear Lady Macbeth in the background protesting too much, or is he following Barthes and playing with the text?

All in all, however, this is an important collection of essays for anyone who might still call him or herself a Sinologist or China expert, as well as for anyone in the field of Comparative Literature wondering what kind of East-West studies might be done in the wake of Yokota Murakami's rather devastating critique. It forms almost an antithetical contrast to Cai's book, which looks in a quite different direction for the field. Taken together with Yang Xiaoshan's study and Zhang Longxi's book, as well as Zhang's short essay "The Challenge of East-West Comparative Literature"<sup>20</sup> and Pauline Yu's paper, one has a sense that there are two or three directions in which East-West studies might be fruitfully pursued, despite the various pitfalls which too many scholars have fallen into formerly. Whether anyone will dare to tread these paths given the methodological difficulties and attacks from other disciplines remains to be seen. But if the challenge is not taken up, then Comparative Literature as a discipline may be forced to acknowledge its failure to be comparative in a truly global sense, and should change its name to studies in European literature.

Many years ago, I was told by Michael Murrin that a colleague at another university had warned him that if the University of Chicago's Comparative Literature program were expanded outside of European and American literature it would "kill the discipline." This anecdote was recounted, not to prevent me from doing East-West comparative work, but as a warning to me that choosing to do so was still dangerous in terms of job placement and career development. Today I would argue precisely the reverse: if Comparative Literature as a discipline does not successfully answer the challenge posed to it by literatures outside of the Euro-American system (and here let me hasten to add that I am not speaking exclusively of East Asia), then the discipline will, in fact, as Susan Bassnett argues, die. The question of how to proceed in East-West studies is thus a vital one for the entire field.

---

<sup>20</sup> Zhang Longxi, "The Challenge of East-West Comparative Literature," in *China in a Polycentric World: Essays in Chinese Comparative Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

If Western theory suits Chinese practice perfectly well, Western literatures (which beget the theory) can naturally be said to be like Chinese literature. If Western theory somehow has to be adjusted before its application to Chinese practice, then Western literatures must somehow be different from Chinese literature. However, our comparatists' work of testing and adjusting can hardly be called comparative if Western theory is understood as a body of knowledge other than the knowledge of literature. For instance, when Roman Jakobson's ideas of. Facing a case like this, a comparatist has always two easy ways to escape trouble arising from the question: Is it comparative literature? One way is simply to say No. The other way is to try to tell people that the word. Comparative Literature Career Forum: Introduction. The decision to major in Comparative Literature may well involve asking yourself what fruits the concentration might bear for your life after Brown. In the fall of 2010, the Department of Comparative Literature gathered information and ideas from our alumni on this important question. We decided to contact our concentrators from the classes of 2004 through 2008, under the assumption that they have had sufficient time to develop their after-Brown lives significantly yet had graduated recently enough to be launching their careers in the present ... 3) Comparative Literature emphasizes above all else the depths of meaning that can be found in the unobserved and overlooked details of life. Definition Comparative literature can be simply defined as the study of texts across cultures. It's said to be interdisciplinary. It's concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space. We think you have liked this presentation. If you wish to download it, please recommend it to your friends in any social system. Share buttons are a little bit lower. The student of comparative literature cannot ignore the relationship of literature to the vast body of "unlettered" myths, epics, and tales studied by the folklorist. From the time of Aristotle to the present decade, European students have found the interpretation of tragedy one of the most fascinating problems both in the history and the philosophy of literature. He examines in some detail the blending of history and fiction which is as apparent in the Romance epic as in the modern historical novel. In a second contribution to this volume, Professor Remak invites us to consider the problem involved in isolating and defining a broad literary movement such as that of European Romanticism.